

Ethnic Identity, Social Inequality, and Land Disputes in the Kpandai District of Ghana

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Abstract

This paper analysed social identity and inequality among ethnic groups in Kpandai, in the Northern Region of Ghana. Employing descriptive research design, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data for the study. The finding reveals that ownership of land is conceived to be synonymous with ethnic identity and traditional authority while the inability to own land leads to social inequality and conflict amongst the two ethnic groups. In this respect, the Nawuris who are unable to own land conceive themselves as suffering identity crises and socially disadvantaged. Accordingly, while the Nawuris are craving for redistribution of land in order to establish their identity and subsequently achieve sovereignty; the Gonjas want to maintain the status quo. It is recommended that inter ethnic marriages and government intervention can resolve the conflict and pave the way for peaceful coexistence in the area.

Key Words: Conflict theory, East Gonja, Ethnic identity, Land dispute, Social inequality.

1.0 Introduction

Ghana like other African countries consists of numerous ethnic groups living together with diversity in history, culture, religion, polity and languages. Even though this cultural diversity has several advantages and contributes immensely towards nation building, it equally poses serious challenges to social integration. Despite the challenges of ethnic multiplicity in Ghana, the country has enjoyed relative peace since independence unlike other African countries. Even so, it is evident that ethnic, religious, economic and political violence do occur intermittently across the country (Kendie, Osei-Kufour and Boakye, 2014; Agyeman, 2008). Nonetheless, it is important to note that much of these sporadic conflicts have been regionally in their nature rather than national. One of such regions that have been home of intermittent conflicts is the Northern Region. The Northern Region of Ghana had been in a state of turmoil and atrophy due to sporadic conflicts among the ethnic groups. For instance, Awedoba (2011) and Brukum (2007) noted that the Nanumba fought Konkombas in 1980, 1981, and 1994 and in 1995. The Dagomba also went to war against Konkombas in 1995. Bimobas and Konkombas fought each other in 1988 and in 1994. The Gonja ethnic group was also engaged in a series of wars with their neighbours.

The Kpandai District which was carved out of East Gonja District in 2008 was enmeshed in protracted and intractable inter-ethnic conflicts between the Gonja and Nawuri ethnic groups over allodial land rights (Kendie et al 2014, M'bowura 2014, Awedoba 2011, Tonah 2007). For instance, they fought in 1935, 1990, 1992 and 1994. In the view of Kendie et al (2014), Gonjas and Nawuris each claim indigene status and regard their respective ethnic group as the indigenous owners of the land in the Kpandai District. M'bowura (2012) affirms that the question of who owns Alfae (Kpandai and its environs) (whether Nawuri or Gonja) was the fundamental cause of all the series of violence that broke out between the two ethnic groups during the pre-colonial era to present times. Other ethnic groups in Kpandai like the Konkomba, Bassare, Kotokoli and Ntwumuru joined the conflict in support of the Nawuris for the reason that the rule of the Gonja was tyrannical and unbearable. The struggles among the ethnic groups are violent in nature and the definition of conflict made by Coser could be used as a working definition to describe the conflicts. Coser (1956: 10) defines social conflict or violence as "a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Such conflicts may take place between individuals, between collectivities, or between individuals and collectivities".

M'bowura (2014) opines that the Nawuri trace their origin to the Afram Plains. From this place, they migrated to Larteh Akuapem together with other Guan speaking groups such as Lateh, Anum, Nkonya, Krachi, Nchumuru, and Achode in about 14th century. The Nawuri moved through Anum and then to Dwan in present day Brong Ahafo region and Otisu in Kete territory and crossed the River Oti. They settled in the adjoining lands and founded settlements in present day Kpandai district in the Northern Region. Some of the settlements of the Nawuri are Balai, Nkanchina, Bayim, Dodai, Ketejali, Buya, Kabonwule, Bladjia and Kitari.

Amenumey (2011) explains that the oral narration of the Gonja affirms that a group of invaders comprising Wangara, Bambara, Sonnike and others, riding horses under the leadership of the legendary Ndewura Jakpa migrated from Mande in Mali a Western Sudanese state with well organized disciplined army and superior weapons. These horsemen ruthlessly invaded the aboriginal people and established the present day Gonja Kingdom in the mid seventeenth century (Brammah, 1997). However, Amenumey (2011) holds the view that "it was during the second half of the sixteenth century that the Gonja Kingdom was created by Mande invaders. From a base at Yagbun, Ndewura Jakpa created an empire that stretched across the confluence of the Black and White Voltas and straddled the trade routes to Hausa land in the east, Mossi in the south and Mande in the west" (Amenumey, 2011, p. 25).

2. The Controversy Surrounding the Ownership of Kpandai Land

Awedoba (2009, p.179) argues that "the Gonja (Ngbanya) claim to ownership of the land is based on the Gonja position that they brought the Nawuris to the area and settled them there". They therefore, consider Nawuris to be their subjects hence do not possess land (Kendie et al., 2014). During the wars of expansion embarked upon by Ndewura Jakpa, he did not fight everywhere and every group his conquering army encountered. There were situations where he had to establish alliances and collaborations with some ethnic groups to form formidable warriors after those groups accepted his authority over them before they fought others and conquered them. The obscure issue is where the Nawuris collaborators or mercenaries rewarded with land for settlement, or were they indigenes who preceded the Gonja and who may not have welcomed them without a fight?.....room exists for differences and contestations today, several centuries after the events (Awedoba, 2009, p. 180).

According to Dixon (2005), the Nawuris had already accepted the overlordship of Gonjas before arriving in the (Alfai: Kpandai) area and had gone ahead of the main Gonja invading army to drive out the Konkomba inhabitants who sparsely inhabited the area. Brammah and Goody (1967) confirmed the argument of Dixon that during the civil wars among the Gonjas in Kpembe (the royal village of east Gonja) between 1892 to 1893 about 500 Nawuris lost their lives on the battlefield when they fought in support of the Lepo Gate against other Gates (a Gate in traditional Ghanaian parlance refers to section of royal families who qualify to ascend skins or stools. The traditional council has three Gates: Lepo, Kanyase and Singbum and the chieftaincy rotates among them). This collaboration took place before the colonial administration. M'bowura (2014) argues that both ethnic groups have not been able to establish that they had been engaged in conflict against each other in the pre-colonial era. This will suggest that perhaps they are collaborators.

M'bowura (2012) advances contrary views to that of Gonjas in explaining the allodial right of the Nawuris over the land. The first is that the history of Nawuris does not make any reference to the fact that they had been engaged in any wars with any ethnic group in northern Ghana when they arrived at Kpandai to settle. Secondly, Nawuris did not come to Kpandai to meet any ethnic group domiciled there, suggesting that it was a virgin land. Thirdly, names of all the settlements of Nawuris are etymologically derived from Nawuri names and not in any other language including Gonja. These include Kpandai, Balai, Dodoi, and Bladjai. Others include Nchachina, Mmofokayin, Buya, Kabonwule, Beyim, and Kitare. Brukum (2007) further asserts that each of the settlement of the Nawuris had a political head known as Eblissa with juridical office Wirabu under him. The Wirabu was a traditional council responsible for the dispensation of social justice. This implies that Nawuris were not an acephalous ethnic group as the term refers to people who do not have chiefs and are ruled mainly by an Earth Priest. Deities in Alfai are named in the Nawuri language and also owned by them but not Gonjas. These are Nanjulo, Boala, Kachilenten, Nana Esuwele, Kankpe, and Buiya.

Brukum (2007) advances an argument to buttress the standpoint of M'banwura that a survey and search on the etymology of names and settlements, rivers, streams and shrines in both the Nchumuru and Nawuri areas reveal that all are in the Nawuri language. In the same way, names of streams such as Jachani, Kunyono, Sapeti and Dobun, Wullibon, Wassawasa are in the Nchumuru and Nawuri languages.

If the land belongs to Gonjas, the villages would have been named in the Gonja language. In furtherance of Brukum's argument, he states that the colonial officials acknowledged the fact that the Nawuris are an autochthonous ethnic group. For example, David Asante who was a missionary and visited Salaga in the 1870s proclaims that all the tribal lands lying within the Northern section belong to the Oware of Nchumuru or belong to the Nawuri tribe and subject to the Wurubu of Kpandai. By making this pronouncement, David Asante asserts that the land belongs to Nawuri (Brukum, 2007).

Brukum further posits that ownership of land is by three principal sources; settlement, conquest and by lease. He advances his argument to substantiate that there is no substantial argument validating the claim that Ndewura Jakpa crossed the river Darka to conquer tribes. In addition, the Gonjas did not arrive at Kpandai before the Nawuri and Nchumuru. The Gonjas established their kingdom in the 16th century whereas the Nawuri settled in Kpandai in 14th century. According to Brukum all these evidences imply that the land belongs to the Nawuri and not Gonjas (Brukum 2006).

According to M'bowura (2002) the Gonja army conquered Eastern Gonja in the 16th century and established their rule over the autochthones excluding Kpandai. Some of the Gonjas arrived in Kpandai as immigrants in the 17th century. M'bowura argues that it is difficult to show any evidence of how the Gonjas entered Kpandai whether as warriors or as migrants but evidence confirms the existence of the Nawuris in Alfai long before the coming of the Gonjas. "The Gonjas met a sizeable number of the Nawuris where the latter ethnic group now lives. Although, the Gonjas claim that the Nawuris are subjects to them, it has not been clearly indicated how the overlordship was established" (M' bowura, 2002, p. 24). He further explains that when the first Gonja immigrants arrived in Alfai, the Nawuri helped them to establish their farms and houses; that the Nawuris also assisted the Gonja when the Asante invaded Eastern Gonja in the 1744-45 and that the early relations between the two ethnic groups were cordial as there were intermarriages and mutual collaborations among them (M'bowura, 2014).

Mahama (2003, p. 200) argues that "the Konkomba who came to Gonja land accepted their settler status and adhered to the custom and traditional laws of their hosts (Gonjas)".

The Konkombas were asked by the Gonja chiefs to emulate their counterparts who were earlier settlers in the annual payment of tribute and taxes for the maintenance of the palace and for the upkeep of visitors during annual festivals. The relationship between the Gonjas and migrant Konkombas demonstrated that the land belonged to the Gonjas. This explains why the Konkombas sought permission from Gonja chiefs to settle on the land and also to pay homage to the Gonjas and not to the Nawuris. This is to continuously and constantly remind the Konkombas that they are non-indigenes and their landlords are the Gonjas. Other settlers in Kpandai are the Bassare, Kotokoli, Ewes and traders. All these tribes have been paying homage to the Gonjas since pre-colonial times implying that the land belongs to the Gonjas.

3. African concept of land ownership

Mahama (2003, p. 207) opines that "there is no land in Ghana without an owner. Every inch of land in Ghana is owned by someone, or a group or skin or stool". This implies that new ownership of land without proper procedure will induce conflict in society. Beyond the visible adoration of land, in Africa, land is associated with spirituality. Thus, Africans perceive that land is a birth right of every male child in patriarchal society as it determines the socio-political status of man (Obiaha, 1992). It serves as a source of social glue that binds the generations; past, present, and the future together. It is also considered as sacred in the sense that Africans share a common belief that land is an ancestral property handed down to them by the dead, in trust for generations yet to be born. Kendie and Akudugu (2010) note that rural communities do not only extract their socio-economic livelihood from natural resources in general but specifically land; the land also proffers them their cultural and spiritual identity. In view of this any individual who tempers with their land is perceived to be making an attempt to rob them of their identity. Darkwa, Attuquayefio and Yakohene (2012, p. 55) state the significance of land in the following words:

the premium put on land by the average Ghanaian is high and usually uncompromising...land is revered as an ancestral legacy, seen as a source of livelihood or revenue generation, used for farming and mining activities, leasing, real estate development, a territory or jurisdiction that provide communal protection and belonging....land is acquired through lineage, inheritance or by contractual arrangements. About 80 per cent of Ghana's land is held under customary land tenure system.

Politically, ownership of land determines measure of power or political strength of ethnic groups in the past and present. The loss of land was perceived to be the worst deprivation that could happen to any individual and groups. People therefore compete for acquisition of land or fight to defend what they have in order to actualize political relevance and existence in Africa. According to Kendie and Akudugu (2010, p. 67), this high dependence on land breeds conflict on daily basis and at various levels; among farmers in accessing land, between ethnic groups with respect to territorial domination, between farmers and herders, farmers and fishermen, loggers and farmers, and host communities and settlers among others.

Land is seen as sacred entity and a bond between the past, present and future generation. Land has political, economic and social significance. According to Awedoba (2009), while the Nawuris claim ownership of land because their oral tradition informed them that they were the first to settle in Kpandai area before Gonjas, the latter claim ownership maintaining that they conquered the first settlers and that Nawuris were their mercenaries who had been settled there by the Gonjas and thus Nawuri do not have land.

4. Traditional power and social inequality

The source of the war between Nawuris and Gonjas has something to do with chieftaincy and its 'twin brother' land. Gonjas claim that Nawuris are not only their subjects, but that they have no land and therefore cannot have chiefs of their own. The claim of Gonjas is based on their alleged conquest of Nawuris (Brukum, 1992). To reemphasise the standpoint of Brukum (1992) and Amenumey (2011), the Gonja hold the belief that their ancestor and founder, the legendary Ndewura Jakpa conquered the land and bequeathed it to them in the mid-sixteenth century. Furthermore, the Nawuris were often requested to pay homage to their Gonja masters (Brukum 1992). In addition, the claim of Gonja to own land is based on the Gonja position that they had brought the Nawuris to the Kpandai area and settled them there. These social arrangements accounted for the source of traditional power and sovereignty enjoyed by the Gonjas and also defines the nature social structure in the area.

The social structure in Kpandai created social inequality in the area with the Gonjas constituting the upper class or assuming a superordinate position and all other ethnic groups including Nawuris being their subjects. The social arrangement also forbade the Nawuris from having paramount chiefs as they do not have land. This is because chieftaincy title is tied to ownership of land in northern Ghana (Brukum 2007). Lack of land questions the true identity of the Nawuri as the true citizens of the traditional area. This kind of arrangement did not satisfy the Nawuris as they protested on several occasions which led them to conflict in order to correct what they considered to be an anomaly. This kind of social structure and land disputes require theories of conflict that factor in power relations in their interpretation. In view of this, structural and psycho-cultural theories of conflict are utilized in this article.

5. Theoretical Frameworks

5.1 Structural conflict theory

According to Ademola (1996) structural conflict is defined as an outcome of incompatible interests based on competition for scarce resources; it is objective because it is defined as largely independent of the perceptions of participants and emanates from power structures and institutions. Ademola (2006) further argues that the orientation of this theory is that conflict is built in particular ways into how society is built, structured and organized. The theory looks at societal problems like social, political and economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequity etcetera as causes of conflict. The main argument of the Protagonists of this theory is centered on social problems such as exclusion of people from ownership or accessing resources such as economic, social, political injustice, exploitation, and extortion of people through denial of leverages in society.

Ademola (2006), notes that the scarcity of these social goods and competition among individuals to obtain them or when they are tilted towards the advantage of some people against others will lead to conflict among groups in society. Thus, people tend to resort to antagonistic approaches when they realize that the social, political, economic and cultural processes are monopolised by some group to their disadvantage (Best, 2006). According to Best (2006) resources have been critical among the causes of conflict among individuals and groups as well as the international communities. Best further notes that, in the political arena where cultures are seen as exclusive; where power holders are unwilling to acknowledge other people's right; or where people find it difficult to identify with the political and economic ideas of a political regime resulting in poverty, scarcity and deprivation, conflicts are likely to arise if nothing is done about such anomalies.

5.2 Psycho-cultural theory

According to Ademola (2006) this theory emphasises the role of culture in inducing conflict; Identity is seen as the reasons for social conflicts that take long to resolve. These are identities that are based on people's ethnic origin and the culture that are learnt on the basis of that origin. This is because enemy images are created from deep seated attitudes about human actions that are learned from early stages of growth in the explanation of conflicts. Conflict caused by stripping of one's identity becomes intractable and prolonged. These conflicts are difficult to resolve because identity explains the meaning of one's existence.

Psycho-cultural theorists argue that social conflicts that take long time to resolve happens when some groups are discriminated against or deprived of satisfaction of their basic (material) and psychological (non material) needs on the basis of their identity (Enu-Kwesi and Tufour 2010). To prevent or resolve identity conflicts, recognition of and protection of identity is significant as it is a human need. People fight endlessly for fear of future, fear of extinction or fear of dying off making such conflicts intractable and protracted.

6. Methodology

6.1 Study area

The Nawuri settlement approximately lies between latitude $8^{\circ} 28'$ and about $8^{\circ} 28'$ North, and stretches from longitude $0^{\circ} 05'W$ to $0^{\circ} 15'E$. It is the second largest town in East Gonja after Salaga and it is about 48 miles from Salaga. Kpandai has a total population of 108, 816 with 65, 729 being females and 54, 997 males (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The Nawuri settlement consists of many villages (Awedoba, 2011). Kpandai shares borders with the northern part of the Volta Region, to the east, with the Achode/Chanla to the west with the Nchumuru ethnic group, to the south with the Krachi and to the north with Nanumba District. Kpandai is farming and commercial town as its market attracts traders from near and far places. There is a clinic to take care of the health issues of the people as well as educational facilities such as Junior High Schools and Senior High Schools to enhance the seeking of knowledge and acquisition of skills. The area is an abode of ethnic groups like the Gonja, Nawuri, Konkomba, Kotokoli, Ewe, Bassare and the Nchumuru with each of them speaking diverse dialects. There was a high incidence of migration to the area in the 1920s making the place heterogeneous (Kendie et al. 2014).

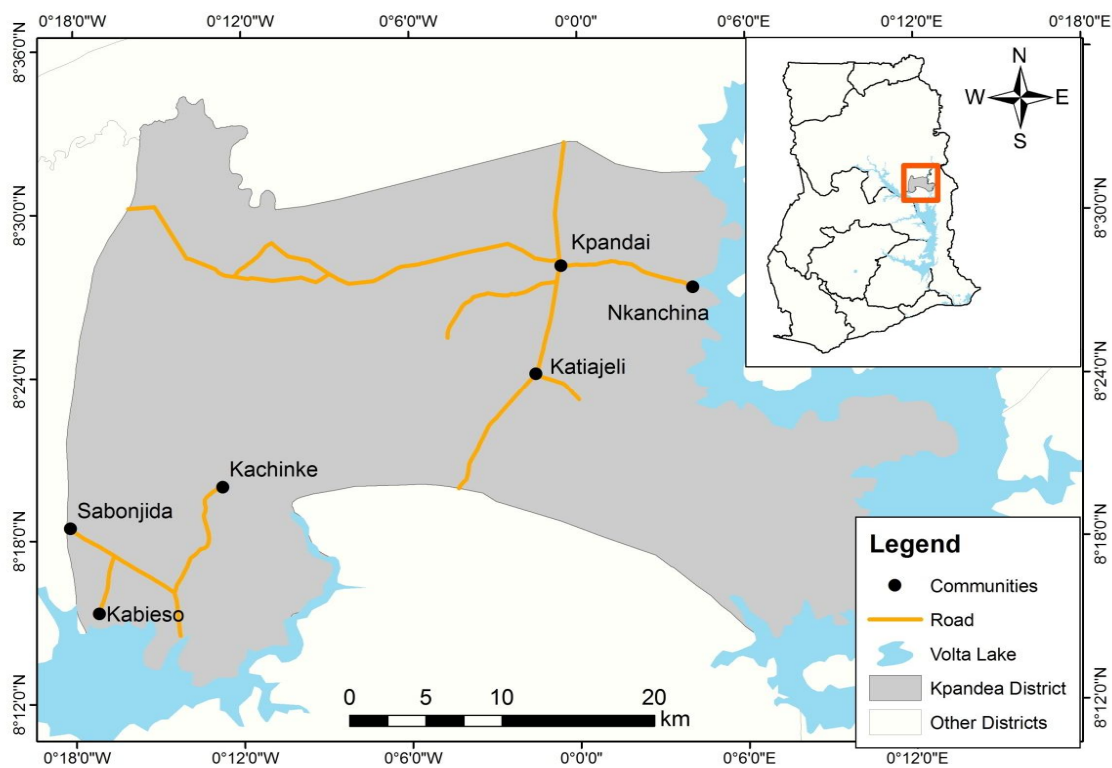


Figure 1: Map of Kpandai District in Northern Ghana.

Source: Cartography Unit, UCC (2015).

The Gonja land emerged in the area to the west and south-west of the Mole-Dagbani states. The Gonja kingdom include the Western Gonja (Bole and Damango), Central Gonja (Buipe and Yapei) and Eastern Gonja (Salaga) which stretched further east to encompass Kpandai as depicted in figure 1, which is the focus of this study. Gonjaland is heterogeneous in nature. It is a home of numerous peoples including Safalba, Hanga, Nawuri, Konkomba, Vagala, Tampulma, Nchuburu and the Zongo communities (a Zongo in Ghana refers to a settlement of non-indigenous people, mostly from the Sahel regions of West Africa and Nigeria and who are mostly Muslims) who differ from the indigene ethnic groups on accounts of language, social organization and cultural norms.

6.2 Data Collection

This is a descriptive study that employs a qualitative method of data collection and data analyses. Both primary and secondary data were gathered. The primary data was obtained from the study area. A field survey was conducted during which visits were paid to Kpandai and Salaga. Secondary data was also obtained through the use of documented materials such as review of books related to the topic. Though the conflict was pervasive, it was not all the villages which were involved. Thus, purposive sampling was conducted to target only Kpandai and Salaga which were the communities engaged in the conflict. This is also because the settler ethnic groups were all found in Kpandai at the time data was collected. However, the Gonjas were found in Salaga as they migrated to the place during the conflict as a result of insecurity in Kpandai. Respondents who were present in Kpandai and witnessed the conflicts and were ready and willing to be interviewed were those who participated in the study.

Personal in-depth interviews were conducted using opened-ended questions to solicit for primary data. The personal interview was found to be the most appropriate for the study areas as almost all respondents were illiterates or semi-literates and could not read questionnaires and write their responses independently. According to Bamberg (2000) quality of information is needed to conduct a descriptive study and to obtain significant findings rather than using huge number of respondents. In view of this a total number of thirty respondents consisting of both women and men were selected to make the sample and findings of the study gender balanced and sensitive. This approach was used in order to give women an opportunity to share their experiences with regard to the conflict in order to address the concern of Rehn and Sirleaf (2002) that women are social partners of men including times of conflict but women's voices are not heard during deliberations of armed conflict. Two separate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted for men and women in Kpandai and Salaga, with eight respondents in each group. The selection of participants for the FGDs and the in- depth interviews was purposive. An interaction took place between the researcher and the conflict parties in order to select those who were ready and willing to share their views with regard to the conflict. A tape recorder was used to record the interviews after which the responses were transcribed with the help of research assistants. Varieties of local languages like Nawuri, Gonja and Hausa in addition to English were used to solicit information.

7.1 Discussion of Findings

Respondents were asked to explain the sources of the conflict. Respondents from the Nawuri ethnic group narrated that the conflict was necessary because prior to the conflict no one knew the true owners of Kpandai land, but now it is clear that the land belonged to the Nawuris. The following are the voices of the respondents during in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): "We could not avoid the conflict because it was a land issue. Our men and their women would have to fight and protect the land. If it had been a different issue rather than land we would have done everything possible to prevent it".

"Prior to the conflict, the Gonja and Nawuri did not know the right owners of the land. But now we have expelled the Gonjas from Kpandai to their land and we are living peacefully on our land. Despite the fact that we lost lives and properties, it was an advantageous incident because we now have our land".

With regard to ownership of land, the Konkomba ethnic group did not agree with the Nawuri respondents that the land belongs to the latter. According to the Konkombas it was the chief of Gonja who permitted them to settle on the land and farm to take care of them. However, they joined the war against Gonjas because they felt the Gonjas were fighting them as some Konkombas were killed during the start of the war. The respondents made the following statements:

“Our grand fathers migrated from Saboba village which is under the chief of Yendi. We came to Kpandai to settle and the chief of Gonja allowed us. We pay respect to the chief and give him some food when we harvest our farm millet, yam and others. We also help the chief to farm sometimes and our relationships were good”. Another respondent reported that; “But we fought against Gonjas because some Konkomba men were killed during the war and some were injured. Later, we realized that the Gonjas did not kill us intentionally but it was a mistake. We the Konkomba apologized to the Gonja Chiefs after the wars and we live peacefully with them. We know that the land is for the Gonjas. We don’t want war again with them”. The Gonjas respondents narrated that all ethnic groups in Kpandai area are under their jurisdiction. The responses revealed that;

“The land of Kpandai is ours. Ndewura Jakpa our father conquered the land for us and we allowed the Nawuri to live there with our knowledge and permission. They are aware of this fact but they are pretending and always argue that the land is for them. How can that happen? We cannot leave the land for them. They used to pay homage and tribute to us, now they stop. They used to farm for our chiefs, now they stop. They fought us several times because of the land. There is no way they can get the land; they also know that. Government can give them District but Government cannot give them land. We are ok with the Konkombas, they still respect us as the owners of the land”.

The responses of the conflicting parties affirm the literature reviewed on the question of land ownership of Kpandai. The postulation of Maasole (2005) was confirmed by the Gonja respondents that the land belonged to the Gonjas. The literature revealed that the Nawuris accepted the rule of the Gonja in the pre-colonial era and that was the reason why the Gonjas allowed them to live in Kpandai. Mahama’s (2003) view was affirmed by the Konkombas that they are settlers in Kpandai under the hegemony of the Gonja Chiefs. However, the Nawuri respondents corroborated the standpoint of Brukum (2006) and M’bowura (2012) that the land of Kpandai belonged to the Nawuris. They assert that there is no documentary proof establishing that, Gonjas fought and conquered Nawuris during the ancient times; neither in the oral tradition of the Nawuris, nor that of Gonjas could one find such evidence. Therefore, the land is owned by the Nawuris. There seems to be an extreme and entrenched position by both the secondary and primary data on the issue of ownership of the Kpandai land. The Gonja took an entrenched position that the land is for them and were supported by Konkomba respondents. The Nawuri, on the contrary, claimed that they are justified for fighting the Gonjas as land is a basic need which they must obtain.

7.2 Social exclusion

Respondents narrated that there is inequality in the area tilted towards the advantage of the Gonjas. They lamented the way they paid homage to the Gonja Chief. According to the Nawuri respondents; “We have to seek permission from the chief before we use any piece of land to build our houses, and to farm in the bush. We also give a hind leg of any game we catch in the bush to the chief. Some portion of farm produce is also given to the chief to feed his family when farming season comes to an end. Sometimes, we make money contribution for the chief to feed his guest and also give present to guests, the chief cherishes, especially during the Damba festival every year. Our Gonja neighbours do not pay tax heavily like us. We feel that this social injustice against us should stop and we used force against the Gonjas, I mean we fight them”. There is unanimous expression of social inequality in Kpandai by all the respondents including Gonja and Konkomba. The responses correspond to the standpoint of Awedoba (2011) that Gonja chief gained advantage from the subjects due to the homage they pay to him as articulated by the respondents. The Gonja respondents said that;

“The land belonged to the Gonjas. All other ethnic groups on the land must pay homage to our chief in Kpandai known as Kanainkulewura and the paramount chief in Kpembe. The people need to help our chief to farm and take care of his family and guest because they also benefit from our land”. The structural and psycho-cultural conflict theories are appropriate for this study in the sense that the conflict between the Gonja and Nawuri ethnic groups has to do with imbalance of traditional power in favour of Gonjas. The power is used to request the Nawuris and other settlers on the land to execute the will of the Gonjas who are known and believed to be the aboriginal people. The settlers pay taxes and offered services to the Kanankulaiwura, the then chief of Kpandai. The theory considers the outbreak of conflict to be an offshoot of myriads of societal problems like exclusion of people from ownership of land or assessing resources such as economic, social and political. Other social issues the theory interprets include social injustice, exploitation, and extortion of people through denial of leverages in society. The psycho-cultural theory espouses that conflict will breakout between two opposing groups if one of the groups is denied their basic needs on the basis of their identity by other opposing groups.

The conflict will be protracted without having a solution if the denied needs are basic or fundamental in nature which the group must have. Respondents among the Nawuri ethnic group perceive ownership of land to be a basic need and are ready and willing to fight until they obtain it regardless of the negative consequences. This explains why the conflict has been intractable and prolonged because it started since 1935 and it is not yet over. The land defines their identity and citizenship in the cultural sense. The Nawuris argued that ownership of land establishes their identity. The Gonja also argue that Nawuris cannot have chiefs of their own without the blessing of the Gonja paramount chief in Salaga as the Nawuris do not possess land. This phenomenon is interpreted by the psycho-cultural theory that war will breakout among people if one group is denied opportunities on the basis of their ethnic origin and identity. Such wars are endless until their basic need, thus, their identity is restored.

The Nawuri respondents maintained that they have not been able to excise their traditional authority in Kpandai because of the Gonja claim of allodial right over land of Kpandai and its environs. It gave the Gonja the opportunity to overlord the Nawuris through sale of land to them and other settlers in the area. The Nawuris argue that Chiefship office in the area is determined by ownership of land. They also explained that all sub chiefs including Nawuris were appointed by the Gonja chiefs and paid homage to the latter on a weekly basis and during festivals. The respondents further explained that the coercion of Nawuris to recognise and accept the Gonjas as their overlord was caused by the colonial administrative system (M'bowura, 2014). A respondent explained that "we used to have our chiefs before the white man came to Kpandai. The white cancelled our chief and make us pay respect to Gonja chief as our chief and the thing remain like that for many years, I cannot imagine". Contrary to this response, Maasole (2005) and Ladouceur (1974) argue that Nawuris were under the rule of the Gonjas before indirect rule was introduced in northern Ghana. The amalgamation of the Nawuris and the Gonjas was for administrative convenience and entrenchment of the social structure that already existed in the pre-colonial era. According to the Nawuri respondents claiming land of Kpandai will grant them an opportunity to establish their paramouncy separate from the Gonjas. They exclaimed "we have to get land so that we can rule ourselves"

8. The way forward

Respondents were asked to express their views on possible solutions to the conflict. They have categorised sources of possible solutions to the conflict into social and political. Socially, Konkombas expressed the following views; "The conflict is unnecessary and the reasons are that it is a disgrace and shame to us. We could not look at each other's faces with love and respect. We lost trust and confidence in each other and our relationship is now full of suspicions. We also lost lives and properties and our social networks are broken. The conflict inflicted untold hardships on us. We have never experienced such chaotic situations since we were born". FGDs revealed that;

"Our children, husbands, brothers and neighbours have been killed. This was a very big community but it contracted and became very small. The conflict was not necessary because it was full of destruction. We need to ask for God's guidance to settle any misunderstanding among us amicably. We should tolerate one another. Inter-marriage can also help us. Gonjas and Konkomba should marry each other. We should eat from each other's houses. We should involve our opinion leaders in inter-tribal discussions". The respondents among the Nawuris also suggest possible political solutions to the conflict so that future reoccurrence could be prevented. A respondent says that "the Government could intervene to stop future conflicts". A woman among the Nawuris who is also a teacher expressed the following opinion;

"We will advise our men that conflict is not good and therefore the men should stop fighting and take care of their children. However, our men do not take women's advice, but they may listen to us". Socially, the Konkombas suggested that there should be social interaction among the ethnic groups involved in the conflict. They also recommended intermarriage among the conflicting parties. Culturally, when a couple is joined in marriage, their respective lineages and families automatically become affinal relatives while the children of the union are kin to all those mentioned above. It is therefore the institution through which kinship ties are both established and extended (Nukunya, 2003). According to the respondents the political solution to the problem is that Government should deploy peacekeeping forces permanently in the conflict areas to maintain peace, order and prevent future occurrence. Another political solution to the conflict is taking precise and concise decisions on the land issues and issuing a White Paper for the conflicting parties to appreciate the right owners of the land. A respondent among the Nawuris explained the following; "The problem can only be solved if government issues a White Paper to tell us the right owner of the land. We cannot co-exist with the Gonjas on the same land unless we are all aware of the right owner of the land".

Respondents unanimously expressed that it is only Government who is capable of resolving the conflict. A respondent exclaimed “If not Government, who can solve this problem?” It can be deduced from the interviews of the respondents that, the possible solutions to the problem can be categorized into social and political. Socially, there should be social interaction among the ethnic groups involved in the conflict. For instance, according to respondents inter – ethnic marriage should be encouraged because culturally, one becomes a member of a family of a different ethnic group if one marries a man or woman of the different ethnic group in question. Political solution of the deadlock involves deployment of peacekeeping forces permanently in the conflict zone to manage any future occurrence of violence. Another political solution to the conflict is taking precise and concise decisions on the land issue and issue a white paper to tell the combatants the right owner of the land. The disturbing question is, which of the opposing groups will accept the decision of government in good faith to surrender the land to the other if the White Paper is proclaimed. The land, pivot around which the conflict revolves is a basic need (source of identity and power in the area) and no conflict party stops fighting until the basic need is restored. However, the conflict cannot also be allowed to continue threatening the lives of people and property in the area. Therefore, the suggestions given by the respondents ought to be tried.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the question of whether it is the Nawuris or the Gonjas who are the aboriginal people of Kpandia in the East Gonja is still a matter of contention. Indeed, this contention is at the heart of the Gonja-Nawuri conflicts. It is gathered from the empirical evidence that a possible solution to the deadlock may be to encourage inter-ethnic marriages between the Gonja and Nawuris. This has the tendency to supplant the deep differences among them in the long run. Children out of the marriages become siblings, nephews, nieces and in-laws and therefore cannot fight each other any longer. In addition, government interventions in an unbiased and impartial manner can help resolve the Nawuri-Gonja conflicts.

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