

Citizenship, Politics of Exclusion and Ethnic Conflicts in the Post Colonial State

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ABSTRACT

After nearly 50 years of independence as a nation-state, fierce inter-ethnic competitions for political and economic space in the modern state have led to the redefinition of ethno-political spaces and citizenship rights of whole ethnic groups in Ghana. As a result, the recurrent ethnic conflicts represent fights for the right to political participation in the modern state system. Why is ethnicity the fault line for games of exclusion? This article argues that the failure of the post-independence state has failed to permeate the socioeconomic and political lives of the ordinary citizen. Its failure to address issues of internal democracy and/or regulate imbalances in the interethnic relationships that pre-colonial and colonial factors created are fundamental to the perpetuation of enclaves of ethnic states within the modern state structure. The interethnic competition for ethnic spheres of influence within the modern state has exacerbated the ethnicization of politics, which in turn reinforces ethnic citizenship among members of the amalgam of ethnic groups that now constitute the population of Ghana. In the process, ethnic citizenship provides a firmer basis for self-identification in the postcolonial state than citizenship of the postcolonial nation-state. Total deconstruction of the current set up of the nation-state is a prerequisite for the recreation of national citizens in the postcolonial state.

I. Introduction

Things Fall Apart

The banner slogan that heralded Ghana's independence has been "one nation, one people, one destiny," and the adoption of the one-party state system shortly after independence was marketed on the grounds that it would provide an umbrella that would de-ethnicize politics and move the nation to greater integration and unity. Contrary to this expectation, violent inter and intraethnic conflicts have been the bane to peace and development in most parts of Ghana since independence. The scale, frequency, spread, and intensity of these conflicts have increased in recent times. The northern parts of the country, comprising the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions in particular have been home to some of the most violent and protracted conflicts. Since 1980, the three regions have recorded at least twenty-six violent encounters between and among the ethnic groups in this part of the country. The worse ever interethnic violence in the history of Ghana, in terms of scale, duration and extent of destruction of life and property came between February 1994 and March of 1995 in what has become known as the Guinea Fowl War. The first two months of fighting in the first year of this war left at least 2000 people dead, and more than 200,000 others internally displaced and 441 villages destroyed.

Elsewhere in the country, similar protracted and violent interethnic conflicts have been on the rise in terms of frequency, intensity of the fights, as well as, the extent of destruction. For instance, the Ningos and Shais in the Greater Accra Region, the Pekis and Tsitos in one pair, as well as, the Alavanyos and Nkonyas in another, all in the Volta Region, all have long-standing disputes that have periodically erupted into bloody fights. Similarly, the dispute between the people of Tuobodom and Techiman in the Brong Ahafo region in 1996 led to the exile of whole families from their homes and the destruction of life and property.

Although the trigger events of all the ethnic conflicts in the country differed widely, in all cases the ultimate reasons revolved around chieftaincy succession and/or equitable access of all ethnic groups to political offices within the state-recognized traditional authority structures at the sub

national and national levels. As the weekly *Ghanaian Chronicle* newspaper noted in an editorial comment in 2002:

Chieftaincy disputes are multiplying by the day as factions clash around this time of the year. From Teshie to Nungua and from Peki Adidome to Tsito there appears to be no end to these clashes occurring among our "revered" traditional heads.¹

In all cases, "intrinsically tied to this nagging chieftaincy problem is also the issue of land administration and appropriation of revenue for purposes of development [which] is also another area of a countless number of litigations at our courts of law."² For instance, land ownership has been a core issue in the Konkomba-Dagomba wars dating back to the 1940s; the Konkomba-Gonja wars of more recent times, as well as the Kusasi-Mamprusi wars and the Bimoba-Konkomba wars of northern Ghana. Similarly, "[T]he causes of the numerous conflicts involving the communities of Nkonya and Alavanyo, Peki and Tsito, Abutia Kpota and Abutia Agordeke, and at Nkwanta in the Volta Region have for the past 50 to 80 years remained substantially the result of dispute or conflicting boundary claims,³ as one writer notes. Claims to land were also at stake in the Tuobodom conflicts in the Brong Ahafo region in the center of the country.

The Search for Answers

Although the available literature on the ethnic conflicts in Ghana have recognized the centrality of the chieftaincy and land ownership questions as instigating factors, the treatment of these factors as the ultimate, rather than proxy reasons for the protracted conflicts tends to obscure the more profound significance that these factors have for the feuding ethnic groups. This is because the superficial treatment of these causes of war diverts attention of the researchers from asking deeper questions that can otherwise reveal why chieftaincy and land ownership have such potency for instigating ethnic conflicts. As Horowitz (2000:15) cautions, it is essential that explanations of ethnic conflicts "...specify what the groups are fighting

1. "A Fresh Look Into Our Chieftaincy Institutions" Editorial, *Ghanaian Chronicle* (Accra), March 27, 2002, Posted to the web March 27, 2002

2. Ibid.

3. Ghana.co.uk News, Social "Parliament Causes Conflict - Long standing chieftaincy, land disputes, bane of conflicts in V/R" available at www.ghana.co.uk-news

over – which is not as obvious as it seems – and why ethnic lines of conflict are so important.” For instance, although chiefs and the institution they represent have been cited as the major sources of conflicts, the explanations to date fail to provide answers on: Why should chieftaincy succession be an issue of conflict when this institution has virtually no role in the post-independence state structure? Access to the chieftaincy institution has been central to the grievances that culminated in most of the ethnic wars between the Konkombas and other acephalous ethnic groups in Northern Ghana against their chiefly counterparts. However, the historical evidence indicates that the Konkombas and other acephalous ethnic groups that were involved in these wars had little or no respect for the chieftaincy institution as currently defined by national laws and the practice and customs representative of the cephalous societies (Dagombas, Nanumbas, Mamprusis and Gonjas). As Tait (1961) notes, even when, during the colonial era Dagomba chiefs appointed subchiefs for the Konkombas with the support of the British under the system of indirect rule, these sub-chiefs were, to the Konkombas:

*...of very little importance for the most part, unless they are also elders. Such chiefs ...are of no consequence. A Konkomba chief is known as such only to the Dagomba royal chief in whose chieftaindom he holds office... he has little authority among his people: the important men are still the elders.*⁴

So the question that requires answers is: Why are ethnic groups that once had no regard for the chieftaincy institution now ready to sacrifice lives and limbs to claim entitlement to having their own chiefs?

On the issue of land ownership as a source of conflicts, both Christopher Timura (2001) and Okwudiba Nnoli (2001) have suggested in separate explanations of conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana that competition for land as a resource has been the cause of the conflicts. While it is true that since the 1980s the Northern Region of Ghana is home to 17 out of the 26 violent ethnic conflicts, all of which are related to the chieftaincy and land tenure question, it is equally true that this region is spatially the largest region in the country (covering 29.5% of the total surface area of Ghana). Incidentally it is also the least populated in the country, having only 25.7

4. Tait, David The Konkomba of Northern Ghana, Oxford University Press, 1961, p.11.

persons per kilometer square as compared to 31.2 people per kilometer square for the Upper West Region, 104 for the Upper East Region, and the national average of 78.9 persons/km². So, why should competition for land be the source of conflict? Why should land be an issue of conflict in other parts of the country, when the customary laws and those of the modern state system that govern ownership of land are unambiguous as to who has title to lands? And why should the disputes over land and chieftaincy be fought along ethnic lines?

Abayie Boaten (1999) hinged his alternate explanation of the 1994/95 Guinea Fowl war on the fact that one of the combatant groups, the Konkombas were migrants or aliens who are not playing by the rules of acknowledging and accepting the authority of their hosts. He asserts that:

*The wild Konkomba who lived in villages were supposed to pay allegiance to the Ya-Na and the Dagomba sub-chiefs who were the original owners of the land. Though the Konkomba have lived among the Dagomba for a long time, the latter had never regarded them as owners of the land". [He asserts further that] "the Konkomba who lived in the Togo (French) territory made a safe haven of the Gold Coast, whenever they committed an offence in Togo. Therefore the Konkomba of Ghana and their compatriots from Togo who were regarded as criminals and landless had lived in Ghana unhindered."*⁵

Horowitz (2001:413) gave credence to the migrant theory of the Guinea Fowl War when he repeated the view that:

*Konkomba, originally migrants from Togo are landless laborers who work in a clientage relationship, contributing crops and services to their Nanumba, Gonja, and Dagomba hosts. Controlled by their hosts' traditional authorities, Konkomba began to demand their own chieftaincy.*⁶

⁵ Abayie Boaten's article on "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: Ghana's Example" (*Anthropology of Africa and the Challenges of the Third Millennium – Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts, PAAA/APA, 199*)

⁶ Horowitz, Donald, L. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001 p. 413

As we shall adduce shortly, both oral and written records do not support the migrant theory. But even if we assume a shred of truth in the migrant explanation of the 1994/95 conflict, how would we explain other major inter-ethnic clashes in the Northern Region, such as the Gonja-Vagla war of 1980; the Mamprusi-Kusasi war of 1982; the Komba-Bimoba War of 1986/87; the Konkomba-Nawuri war of 1990, the Gonja-Nawuri War of 1991, the Mamprusi-Kusasi Wars of 2000 and 2002 among others?⁷ Besides, the incident at the market in Bimbilla that triggered the 1994/95 war was between two men from the Konkomba and Nanumba ethnic groups. So, why did the Gonjas and Dagombas spontaneously join the fight on the side of the Nanumbas? And why did other acephalous tribes such as the Basares, the Nawuris and the Nchumburung reportedly join the fight on the side of the Konkombas? How come all these parties were ready to go to war at the spark of an unforeseen event in a market place?

At any rate, why is the alien/migrant argument used mainly in the conflicts of northern Ghana, when the same accident of history, which split the ethnic groups along the eastern flank of the Northern Region into different countries, affected other ethnic groups along the frontiers of the country? As can be observed from table 1 below, at least 20 out of the 52+ ethnic groups in Ghana are split across the borders with neighboring countries. Of the 20, only three groups with cross-border relations -the Bassare (Ntcham), Deg and Konkomba - are in the Northern Region. So why is the migrant argument so strongly made in the Northern Region when members of the other ethnic groups split along the frontiers of Ghana are not using the same lines of demarcation to redefine who belongs and who does not as a citizen of Ghana?

7. The issues involved in these conflicts (namely chieftaincy and land rights), are the same as those of other intra and interethnic conflicts the Northern Region and other parts of the north. For instance, Kandiga-Mirigu war of 1991 was about title to land, while the long-standing intra-Dagbon Chieftaincy succession disputes, as well as, the Wala Chieftaincy disputes in the Upper West Region relate to right of access to political authority, which is the same as the demands of the Konkombas?

Table 1: Ethnic Groups in Ghana having Cross-border Relations in Neighboring Countries

No.	Language	Ghana	Elsewhere	Total All Countries	Elsewhere, Where?
1	Abron	606,600	131,700	738,300	Côte d'Ivoire
2	Adangbe	No estimate available	No estimate available	No estimate available	Togo
3	Adele	9,000	12,000	21,000	Togo
4	Akposo	5,400	94,900	100,300	Togo
5	Anufo	53,000	51,800	105,000	Benin (10,000) Togo (41,800)
6	Anyin	200,000	610,000	810,000	Côte d'Ivoire
7	Birifor, Southern	100,000	4,308	104,308	Côte d'Ivoire
8	Bissa	119,100	350,000	535,000	Burkina Faso (535,000); Togo (3,000)
9	Dagaare, Southern	1,200,000	300,000	1,500,000	Burkina Faso
10	Deg	20,000	1,100	21,000	Côte d'Ivoire
11	Delo	6,000	5,400	11,400	Togo
12	Éwé	1,615,700	861,900	2,477,600	Togo
13	Frafra	526,300	25,100	551,400	Burkina Faso
14	Kasem	220,000	120,000	340,000	Burkina Faso
15	Konkomba	400,000	50,100	450,100	Togo
16	Kusaal	500,000	17,000	517,000	Burkina Faso
17	Ligbi	10,000	4,000	14,000	Côte d'Ivoire
18	Ntcham Bassarii)	47,700	100,000	150,000	Togo
19	Nzema	285,800	66,700	352,500	Côte d'Ivoire
20	Tem	53,000	247,100	300,000	Togo (204,100) Benin (43,000)

Source: Data compiled from "Languages of Ghana" Ethnologue, available at <http://www.ethnologue.com>. All population figures compiled between 1991 and 1997.

Finally, we also know that Ethnic Youth Associations (EYAs), namely the Konkomba Youth Association, Dagomba Youth Association, Gonja Youth Association and the Nanumba Youth Association, to name a few, were very prominent actors in the Guinea Fowl War; acting as the "...spokespersons for their constituencies and for the concerns that, they argue, generate and will resolve the conflict."⁸ Youth groups were also prominent in the articulation of ethnic concerns and in the mobilization for war in other parts of the country. Hence, we need answers to questions such as the following: How did the Ethnic Youth Associations emerge as the de facto leaders of the war effort of their respective ethnic groups? Was the emergence and involvement of these EYAs in the Guinea Fowl War, for instance, a matter of coincidence or part of a larger interethnic power maneuvers. Why did the traditional authority structures of the various ethnic groups seemed to have ceded leadership of the war effort to the EYAs? Were the EYAs involved, directly or indirectly, in the creation of the awareness of inequalities and injustices between their respective ethnic groups, which led to the tensions? Were they involved in the planning and execution of the war? If so, was the involvement of these very well educated men and women a contributory factor to the scale and intensity of the war? Could they be fighting for something else other than land and traditional political authority?

Out of the box - A Search for Alternate Explanations

Based on review of archival records, contemporary publications and newspaper articles, as well as, notes from field interviews conducted between February and March 2003, this article attempts to provide answers to these question by re-examining the rampant chieftaincy and land ownership disputes in Ghana in the light of the politics of inter-ethnic political and economic exclusion that have led to the redefinition of ethno-political spaces and citizenship rights of whole ethnic groups in the country, including the right to political participation in the modern state system. I will argue that the failure of the post-independence state to address issues of internal democracy and/or regulate imbalances in the interethnic relationships that pre-colonial and colonial factors created are fundamental to the perpetuation of enclaves of ethnic states that continue to reinforce ethnic citizenship among members of the amalgam of ethnic groups that

⁸. Ibid Pg 38

now constitute the population of Ghana, rather than the promotion of co-citizenship in the postcolonial state.

I will point out that the interethnic competition for ethnic spheres of influence within the modern state structure has been acerbated by the ethnicization of politics, as a result of the engagement of ethnic elites in the active reconstruction of interethnic histories and/or boundaries to facilitate the exclusion of some ethnic groups from political and economic participation in the modern state system. The postcolonial state, I will argue, is not a neutral player in this game of interethnic exclusion because of the retention of institutionalized structures and systems in the post independent state, which by their very design and intent, have either oppressed, marginalized and/or perpetuated the inter-ethnic inequalities imposed by various accidents of history. As a result, the "Freedom and Justice" that the political independence of Ghana claimed to have brought to its citizens did not translated into independence and real freedom and justice for all the ethnic groups. Hence, the numerous inter and even intra ethnic conflicts that Ghana is witnessing are manifestations of the struggle for internal independence and democracy within and between the ethnic groups. As Zartman (2001:219) notes, after African states fought to obtain their independence, "...segments of some of these states now fight ...to make sure that their destiny is in their own hands"⁹

2. A Nation in Need of Citizens – Challenges of the Postcolonial State

From Natives To Pan-Ethnic Citizens – The Colonial Experiment

Ever since the inception of colonial rule in the pieces of territory that now constitute Ghana, the British tried in many ways to credit common citizenship out of the many diverse ethnic groups that came under their tutelage. In northern Ghana, the introduction of the principle of indirect rule was seen as the instrument for reorganizing the disparate ethnic groups into "mini states". For this reason, contiguous ethnic groups were regrouped under prominent chiefs who were then given the authority to rule over them on behalf of the colonial government. As Irvine, Provincial Commissioner,

⁹. Zartman, William I(ed.), *Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict "Medicine"*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, London, 2001

South, noted in his handing over notes to his successor in 1909, the rationale for this was that:

As it is impossible to govern the country successfully except through the chiefs, every endeavour should be made to strengthen their hands in their dealings with their people as far as it is compatible with equity and good governance" (cited in Staniland 1975:58)

Governor Gordon Guggisberg later articulated the official colonial policy of indirect rule for the Northern Protectorate when he instructed his provincial commissioners that:

Our policy must be to maintain any Paramount Chiefs that exist and gradually absorb under these any small communities scattered about. What we should aim at is that some day the Dagombas, Gonjas and Mamprusis should become strong native states. Each will have its own little Public Works Department and carry on its own business with the Political Officer as a Resident and Adviser. Each state will be more or less self-contained (Ibid p. 58).

He further directed "... the Chief Commissioner to draw up and submit to me in due course a policy for the Northern Territories showing a definite scheme for fostering the formation of these big states without compulsion" (Ibid. p.58). The execution of this order resulted in the reorganization of the districts of the Northern Territories in 1923 "...in such a way that their boundaries now coincide with those of the three native states which had been divided arbitrarily by the Anglo-German boundary (Dixon, 1955:11."¹⁰ The product was the creation of three administrative districts in the Northern Sector with the following designation and descriptions of their territorial coverage:

Mamprusi – All the land lying within the Northern Section subject to the Na of Mamprusi and occupied by the Kusasi, B'Moba and Konkomba tribes.

¹⁰. Dixon, J, "Report By Mr. J. Dixon, Administrative Officer Class I on Representations Made to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations Organization, Concerning the Status of the Nawuris & Nanjuros Within the Togoland Area of the Gonja District", photocopy, unpublished, 1955, p. 11

*Dagomba – All tribal lands lying within the Northern Section --
Subject to the Na of Dagomba, or
Belonging to the Konkomba and Chakosi tribes; or
Subject to the Na of Nanumba*

*Gonja – All the tribal lands lying within the Northern Sector –
Belonging to the Owura of Nchumburu; or
Belonging to the Nawuri tribe and subject to the Chief of Kpandai.*¹¹

The policy, according to Dixon, "...enabled the Administrative Officers to lay the foundation on which it is hoped to rebuild the native states of Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja. (Ibid., p.11)." ¹² Elsewhere in the country, however, the Ashanti protectorate, the coastal colony and eastern portions of the British trusteeships, did not require simple rezoning of ethnic spaces, because of the existence of centralized chiefs that could be readily relied on to for the exercise of control over the citizens. Besides, due to the longevity of their presence in that part of the country, the colonial administrative machinery had already established a firmer hold on the affairs on those territories.

The Nation-State and the Creation of the National Citizen

The landmass that constitutes Ghana today is the product of the cobbling together of four pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, namely a) the Gold Coast colony made up of the coastal lands stretching from Accra to Axim, and a little northward into the interior; b) The Ashanti Protectorate consisting largely of the middle belt covered by the Ashanti kingdom at the time; c) The Northern Territories, which today covers the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions, and d) Trans Volta Togoland, consisting mainly of what is now known as the Volta Region of Ghana. Until 1957 when the state of Ghana came into being, these pieces of the puzzle were administered as separate entities. Nonetheless, the British Nationality Act 1949 sought to provide

¹¹. Dixon, *ibid*, p. 11-12

¹². Dixon, J, "Report By Mr. J. Dixon, Administrative Officer Class I on Representations Made to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations Organization, Concerning The Status of the Nawuris & Nanjuros within the Togoland Area of the Gonja District", photocopy, unpublished, 1955, p. 11

cover for a common citizenship for the people living under the tutelage of the colonial government in Accra.

Soon after independence, the constitutions and several subsidiary legislations defined clearly who was a citizen of Ghana and how that citizenship may be acquired. For instance, the Ghanaian Nationality Acts of 1957 and 1961 conferred Ghanaian citizenship on all persons who were under British protection before the coming into being of the state of Ghana or on people who were born in Ghana after it came into being. Case law affirmed the position of the statutes in a landmark case in which Bonito Olympio, son of assassinated Togolese President Sylvanus Olympio, challenged the authority of the government of the National Liberation Council to expel him from Ghana under the Aliens Compliance Order. In the judgment on the case, Justice Edward Wiredu, who presided over the High Court on July 4, 1969 in Accra ruled that:

...even though the late Sylvanus Olympio [former President of Togo] was born in Kpandu at the time, when towns like Kpandu and Peki were under German administration, with the advent of British rule over part of Togoland, those towns that formed part of Togoland became a Protected Territory and persons belonging to them were described as British Protected Persons... [And] as Ghana now embraces the former British Togoland, Kpandu and Peki are now towns within Volta Region of Ghana [and so] by section 4 (1) of the 1957 Ghana Nationality Act, Sylvanus Epiphonio Olympio [ex Togolese President], who was born in Kpandu in 1902, and became a British protected person on the advent of British rule in Togoland, was a Ghana National because his mother, Fides Affeh, was born in Keta.¹³

Despite the unambiguous nature of the national laws on who is a citizen of Ghana, a common underlying factor in the interethnic conflicts in the country is the definition of belongingness. For instance, it was argued in the case of the 1994/95 Guinea Fowl War that "the Konkomba tribe is not an

13. The Ghanaian Chronicle, "Ex-Togo President was a citizen of Ghana - Justice Wiredu rules", posted at www.ghanaweb.com : General News of Monday, 28 April 2003.

The article was based on the Ghana Law Reports documented in the "Source Book of the Constitutional Law of Ghana - the cases 1872 through 1970," edited by S.O. Gyandoh, Jr., and I. Griffiths, no date, no publication information.

indigenous tribe in Ghana but Togo and therefore gets support from Togo anytime there are such conflicts."¹⁴ In the Volta Region, the boundary wars between the Pekis and Tsito on the one hand and the Nkonyas and Alavanyos on the other represent wars of exclusion that redefine indigeneity and belongingness to a common political space. In more recent times, the eruption of conflicts that usually accompany the (re)demarcation of boundaries of new administrative districts and/or electoral constituencies in the modern state system is but symptomatic of the increasing use of ethnic boundaries as the yardstick for defining belongingness or citizenship of ethnic enclaves.

This strong sense of ethnic territoriality raises questions about the extent to which the post colonial state has succeeded in creating a common citizenship out of the amalgam of ethnic groups it now finds under its tutelage. To all intents and purposes, it is apparent that the chemistry of citizenship in postcolonial state did not happen. Instead, what we have is a mere juxtapositioning of ethnic states; a physical admixture in which ethnic citizenship takes precedence over co-citizenship in a nation-state. Consequently, "in Ghana one does not find Ghanaians; one finds Asante, Ewe, Ga, and Dagomb (sic),"¹⁵ as Cordelia Salter-Nour (2002) noted in her survey of tribalism in Africa. But has ethnic separateness always been a problem in Africa?

Ethnicity and Incorporation in the Precolonial State

Cordelia asserts that: "Despite the best efforts of nationalists and pan-Africanists, nation-state identities have not taken root. African hearts beat to a tribal rhythm." This assertion, however, presumes that the African is inherently tribalistic and xenophobic by nature and exclusionist in their relationships with other ethnic groups. But the assertion runs countercurrent to the acknowledged "...open nature of many African social systems which could accommodate the incorporation of strangers through marriage"¹⁶ in a

¹⁴. Fynn, Debrah and Nana Dompheh-Buulu, "House Addresses ethnic conflict" Daily Graphic, Thursday February 10, 1994, No. 13436

¹⁵. Salter-Nour Cordelia "Looking Beyond the Tribalism Taboo" Project Syndicate, June 2002; available at http://www.project-syndicate.org/article_print_text?mid=908&lang=1 or http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_12-7-2002_pg3_6

¹⁶. Dr. Greg Kimathi Carr "African and African- American Studies Curriculum -- FrameWork Essay Addendum" <http://www.ascac.org/papers/africanandafrican.html>

process of assimilation in which immigrants or "...alien people ...[were] absorbed into the community and state "silently" and "unconsciously" until they were ideally at least fully fledged members indistinguishable from the majority of the population" (Park 1950:209 in Cohen Pg 7).¹⁷ This processes is considered part of:

*...the actual nature of African ...social settings in which groups and individuals identified with one or more kinds of cultural traditions are, and always have been, interacting and creating among themselves the bases for new types of groupings that are or will be institutionalized within new or altered forms of social structures as well as new or altered cultural expressions of these relationships.*¹⁸

In the case of northern Ghana, for instance, it is acknowledged that the small band of migrant cavalry men who constitute the ruling class among the Dagombas submitted themselves to this well known historical process of incorporation in which "the minority is able to conquer the majority by force of superior military strength and organization, and then change its own cultural practices to a greater ... or lesser ...degree" [and become] "indistinguishable from the majority of the population"¹⁹. As Staniland notes, "the indigenous people figure in Dagomba myth as 'the Black Dagomba [and] the name 'Dagomba' itself may have been that of the indigenous people, assumed by the invaders..."²⁰

In the southern and middle portions of the country, Ganyobi argues that it was the "...serendipitous lumping together of various native groups of uncertain origin within the forests of Southern and Middle Ghana which provided the beginnings of a common culture as well as a lingua franca in the form of a common trade language, Twi."²¹

Along the eastern flanks of the country in what is now largely the Volta Region, D. E. K. Amenumey (2004) records that as the Ewes began to

17. Cohen, Roland and John Middleton (eds.) From Tribe to Nation in Africa: Studies in Incorporation Processes, Chandler Publishing Company, Scranton, Pennsylvania 1970 Pg 6

18. Ibid, Pg 5

19. Cohen, Roland and John Middleton (eds.) From Tribe to Nation in Africa: Studies in Incorporation Processes, Chandler Publishing Company, Scranton, Pennsylvania 1970 Pg 13.

20. Staniland, op. cit. p. 3

21. Ganyobi, Political and Historical Notes of Correction – Complete Text, Okyeame internet discussion group, available at <http://members.tripod.com/ganyobi/Writings/15.html>.

establish permanent settlements after several movements along the coastal lands "... the original inhabitants [of the lands they moved into] were easily assimilated."²² A second wave of incorporation occurred among the Ewes when:

Later other peoples from the west, Accra, Elmina, Lekpoguno and Denkyera came to settle near and amidst them. The GA (from Accra) settled around Glidzi, the Ane or Mina from Elmina settled at Anexo, the Dangme from Ladoku settled at Adangbe, Agotime, while the Denkyera settled among the Tongu, along the river Volta (Amenumey, 2004).

In sum, ethnic groups in Ghana have not always been tribalistic and exclusionist as Cordelia would want us to believe. To the contrary, the ethnic origins of people were never an important factor for the incorporation of people into the political communities of the precolonial native state systems. As Maxell Assimeng (u.d, p. 149) notes, invariably, "Several strangers and slaves were incorporated into tribal "citizenship" for that matter [and] It was highly objectionable for a person's ancestry to be constantly and publicly probed into"²³

If ethnic assimilation and incorporation was possible in the pre-colonial ethnic states, why is it that after nearly half a century of independence, Ghana, and for that matter most of Africa, is still struggling with the confection of common citizenship from the diverse populations that find themselves within their postcolonial borders?

The Postcolonial citizen -- a matter of definition?

The conventional definition of a citizen is a "person who by right or by choice is a member of a state or nation, which gives him certain rights and claims his loyalty"²⁴. This definition raises two important dimensions in the

²² Amenumey, D. E. K. "History of the Ewe", Ewe Youth, available at <http://www.webspawner.com/users/eweyouthsassociation/ewehistory.html>

²³ Assimeng, Maxwell J. "Traditional Leaders' Capability and Disposition for Democracy: The Example of Ghana" available at <http://www.kas.org.za/Publications/SeminarReports/Traditionallocalparticipation/ASSIMENG.pdf> p.6.

²⁴ E.L. Thorndike and Clarence L. Barnhart: Scott, Foresman Advanced Dictionary, 1979.

conception of the postcolonial citizen in Africa. First, the definition provides a territorial conception of citizenship, which anoints boundaries as the yardstick for defining "insiders" and "outsiders" or belongingness and co-citizenship of a common space among people who may otherwise prefer not to be associated in anyway.

To a limited extent and in a rather convoluted logic, this conception of citizenship is in consonance with the traditional African conception of belongingness in which blood relationships, no matter how distantly traced, defines belongingness. And since in predominantly agrarian settings this *jus sanguini*, principle of citizenship was also closely tied to one's place of birth (the *jus soli* concept of citizenship) one's attachment to a definable physical ethno-political space (a piece of land, a village, or ethnic territory) constituted an important anchor for establishing the ethnic identity, and therefore, membership of any ethno-political community. You belonged to an ethno-political community if you could somehow show that you were even distantly related by lineage or clan to some members of that community.

Hence, an important deviation from the western conception of citizenship is that the *jus sanguini* principle took precedence over the *jus soli* one in the definition of citizenship. In other words, one does not have to be born in a place to claim citizenship. It was simply enough to demonstrate that one's blood relations – members of one's family, clans or ethnic groups, have title to land in the chosen location. The concepts of *yiilu* among the Dagara of northwestern Ghana, or *Ebusua* among the Akans to the south, as well as, their equivalence in other languages, are illustrative of this.

Within this framework, therefore, migration, as currently defined was, and to a large extent continues to be a non-issue in the definition of citizenship and belongingness in the African worldview. In the case of northern Ghana in particular, Jack Goody points out the fallacy inherent the use of the contemporary definition of migration as the basis for defining citizenship of some ethnic groups when he observed that:

migration has been defined as 'the physical transition of an individual or a group from one society to another'...this definition tends to assume what is now largely true, the division of the entire world into boundary-maintaining nation states.... But to encompass earlier migrations, particularly those in stateless societies, we need

*to take account of movement of people into empty unclaimed lands into the interstices between existing social groups.*²⁵

It was precisely this freedom of movement of people across ethnic lines without let or hindrance that made incorporation and assimilation of diverse ethnic groups possible in the pre-colonial state, as we have illustrated above.

Of Rights and responsibilities – the postcolonial state and the citizen

The second dimension of citizenship confers rights and responsibilities on the state as well as the citizens. The state gives rights to the citizens and in turn claims his or her allegiance and loyalty. Once more there were very strong confluences of ideas between the African and western conceptualization of the role of the state, if that equation can be made in both instances, especially as it pertains to the assurance of economic rights. For instance, in most African societies, productive resources such as land were communal owned and held in trust for the dead, the living and the unborn.

As Meek (1946) noted even under the cephalous systems the title to land continues to have a communal character, and the chief is merely *"the custodian of land, but not its owner. The normal unit of land ownership is the extended-family, or kindred"*.²⁶ It was the responsibility of the elders and/or chiefs, whichever was applicable, to ensure that every member of the political community had equitable access to the land. To ensure this, it was the practice that "...land once granted to a family remains the property of that family, and the chief has no right to any say in its disposal" (Meek, *ibid*). These principles were re-asserted in the context of northern Ghana when the I. R Alhassan Committee stated in its report that "Dagbon lands

²⁵. Goody, Jack *"Marriage Policy and Incorporation in Northern Ghana"* in Cohen, Roland and John Middleton (eds.) *From Tribe to Nation in Africa: Studies in Incorporation Processes*, Chandler Publishing Company, Scranton, Pennsylvania 1970 Pg 116.

²⁶. Meek, C.K (1946:26-27) in Michael Mortimore (1997) *History and evolution of land tenure and administration in West Africa*; International Institute for Environment and Development, Issues Paper No. 71 Pg 34.

can never be sold by either a chief or an individual but must be preserved for the present and future generations"²⁷

To the extent that chiefs and clan elders lived by these principles and accorded to everyone equitable access to the productive resources, they could count on their loyalty and allegiance. Otherwise, people simply moved into different communities or new settlements. This, in part, explains why migration and incorporation of ethnic groups was never much of a political problem for ethnic groups in the pre-colonial state.

3. The postcolonial state, political integration and the citizen disconnect

Despite the confluence of ideas about citizenship and the role of the state between the traditional political organizations and the postcolonial nation-state structure, most of the conflicts in Africa now revolve around issues of citizenship and belongingness because citizenship in the postcolonial nation-state has not taken roots. In the specific cases of Ghana, we have noted that the conflicts in all parts of the country center on claims and counter claims of ethnic territoriality and belongingness to shared political spaces. Why should that be the case?

The Distanced State and Alienated Citizen- the challenges of citizen integration

The state claims its legitimacy and loyalty from its citizens at two levels – the political and economic realms. In the political realm, the state has a responsibility to provide a level playing field that assures equitable participation and access to state power and resources to all its citizens. People can only feel committed to, and take ownership of state processes when the platforms for citizen participation are perceived to be just, equitable and accessible to all. Free and equitable participation therefore becomes an important integrating mechanism for creating non-ethnic citizens in the postcolonial state.

Against this background, it is noteworthy that although the Nkrumah regime won the battle against federalism and created a unitary state the postcolonial state failed to dismantle some of the colonial laws and

²⁷. Government of Ghana Report of the Committee on ownership of Lands and Position of Tenants in the Northern and Upper Regions, 1978, Pg. 9.

administrative structures and systems that created the interethnic divisions, suspicions and sense of separateness. In some cases, state actors, institutions, laws and processes actually reinforced the concept of native states, and therefore ethnic separateness, by using these historical edifices as the baseline for defining inter-ethnic relationships in the postcolonial state.

Footholds in the State – competition and exclusion in the post colonial state

Because of the failure of the state to dismantle discriminatory and oppressive colonial structures, ethnic hegemonies began to play important roles in the appointment of people to positions of power and influence. Consequently, the use of ethnically motivated discrimination in political appointments into state institutions such as the civil and public services sustained the sense of “difference” and “otherness” between the ethnic groups in the postcolonial state. For instance, although “ a majority of the Ewe voted for union with Ghana” (US Government CIA files on the web)²⁸ in the 1956 plebiscite, they were soon disillusioned by their membership of the new state because of the limited opportunities for true political participation in the affairs of the postcolonial state. Hence between 1957 and 1963, the disillusionment grew into dissent, as “the Greater Togo Movement of Ewe separatists sought to separate Trans-Volta (now Volta Region) from Ghana and annex it to Togo [because] during this period...not one Ewe held a position in Nkrumah’s cabinet” (Ewe Chronology). Incidentally, when Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966:

Power transferred from the coastal Akan peoples to the Ewe and Ashanti. The Ewe and Ga were over-represented in the cabinet. Northerners represented only 12 [per cent] of the 1966 cabinet [even though] they account for about 25 percent of the country’s population (US Government, *ibid*).

Similar interethnic discriminatory practices in the appointment to state offices emerged at sub national levels as well. In the north, for instance, the so-called minority ethnic groups found themselves systematically excluded from acceding to political offices, especially at the regional levels. According to one interviewee, the exclusion of the non-chiefly ethnic groups, sometimes erroneously referred to as the minority, is orchestrated and

²⁸. Ghana, Relations with Immediate African Neighbors, <http://www.countrystudies.us/ghana/108.htm>

sustained by what has come to be known as the northern equation²⁹ in which only members of the four chiefly ethnic groups can accede to positions such as the political headship of the Northern Region, known at different times as the Regional Minister, Regional Commissioner or Regional Secretary.³⁰ Although this position is an appointed, not an elected one, according to one interviewee, *the northern equation* has ensured that:

no Regional Minister came from the so-called minority tribes. It centered around, in fact three tribes [because] the Nanumbas have only been able to get up to Deputy Regional Minister; they've never had a full Regional Minister for any lengthy time; it's either a Dagomba, its either a Gonja or a Mamprusi ...any other group outside this northern equation is out, no matter what.

Within the traditional authority structure, we have noted that the system of indirect rule introduced by the British created and sustained ethnic hegemonies that became the objects of contest, especially between the chiefly and non-chiefly tribes. Unfortunately, the attempts of the postcolonial state to weaken the power of chiefs in order to create new centers of power in the modern state failed because governments vacillated within and between them over the issue. In the north, for instance, the strategy of Nkrumah's CPP government focused on creating new counter-posing native states in order to diminish the powers of the colonially erected ones, rather than re-engineering a constructive and level playing field for all ethnic groups to participate in the affairs of the state. After the overthrow of the CPP regime, the chieftaincy institution was reinstated almost to the same stature that it had in the colonial era.

For ethnic groups that had hoped to escape their subjugation to colonial overlords the British imposed on them, the restoration of the chieftaincy institution was the highest demonstration yet that the modern state was out of tune with their hopes and aspirations. For them, political independence at the national level did not translate into independence at the local level, since the very symbols of colonial domination – the chieftaincy institutions

²⁹. Essentially the equation said Dagomba = Gonja = Mamprusi = Nanumba. All other ethnic groups were non-members of this set.

³⁰. This position is equivalent to the status of a governor in federal systems.

imposed on them -- were still in existence and fully operational as the colonialists had intended them to be.

In the north, this reinstatement of the chieftaincy institution translated into the reinforcement of ethnic hegemonies and the exclusion of the so-called minority ethnic groups from political participation, even in the traditional authority structure. For instance, until 1997, only four out of the 17 ethnic groups in the Northern Region had Paramount Chiefs. In this configuration, the colonial definition of mini states referenced above rather than numerical strength of the ethnic groups was, *de facto*, the determining criterion for paramount chiefship. For instance, the Konkombas who had the second largest number of indigenes living in the region did not have a paramount chief of their own at the time. By contrast, the Gonjas, Mamprusis, Nanumbas, and (after 1997), the Mos with smaller populations had paramount chiefs and, therefore, the right to be represented in the Northern Regional House of Chiefs (see table 2 below).

Table 2: Distribution of Indigenous Ethnic Groups and Access to Paramouncy in the Northern Region

No.	Ethnic Groups in the Northern Region	Population Distribution		Total Ethnic Population as % of National	% of Ethnic Pop. Resident in Northern Region	Ethnic Pop as % of Total Reg. Pop	Paramouncy Status
		National	Northern Region				
1	Dagomba	747,924	594,865	4.3	79.50%	32.90%	YES
2	Konkomba	474,293	305,575	2.7	64.40%	16.90%	NO
3	Mamprusi	200,393	132,494	1.1	66.10%	7.30%	YES
4	Gonja	211,703	131,814	1.2	62.30%	7.30%	YES
5	Bimoba	113,130	49,013	0.6	43.30%	2.70%	NO
6	Nanumba	78,812	45,414	0.5	57.60%	2.50%	YES
7	Chokosi (Anufo)	63,910	35,989	0.4	56.30%	2.00%	NO
8	Bassare	51,299	20,331	0.3	39.60%	1.10%	NO
9	Nchumburung	113,334	13,624	0.6	12.00%	0.80%	NO
10	Vagla	41,684	5,205	0.2	12.50%	0.30%	NO
11	Mo (Deg)	55,174	5,178	0.3	9.40%	0.30%	YES

12	Safaiba	7,827	2,159	-	27.60%	0.10%	
13	Birifor	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	NO
14	Hanga	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	NO
15	Koma	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	NO
16	Nawuri	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	NO
17	Tapulma	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	NO

Source of Population Data: Government of Ghana, 2000 Population and Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results, Extracts from Table 4: Ethnic Grouping of Ghanaians by Birth by Region, March, 2002.

A return to localized ethnic politics and citizenship question in the post colonial state

The phenomenon of the “northern equation” presents a case study of how state level actors may have retro-engaged in localized ethnic politics in order to consolidate their hold onto both state and non-state power. As one interviewee pointed out, the northern equation represents an intentional coalition/alliance building among the chiefly ethnic groups in order to perpetuate the exclusion of the non-chiefly ones. The theory of systematic exclusion of the nonchiefly ethnic groups from the traditional authority structure gained credence when the Konkombas, as required by law, submitted an application in 1995 to the Ya-Na for the elevation of one of their chiefs to the status of a paramount chief. The Ya-Na, through the Dagomba Traditional Council dismissed the application *ab initio* on the grounds that the Konkombas were a foreign people and therefore, could not be granted their own Traditional Council and the right of representation and participation in the Regional House of Chiefs on equal terms with their overlords. In a response to the Konkomba request dated 21st April 1995 and addressed to the Saboba-Na (the Konkomba chief widely tipped at the time to become the first paramount chief of the Konkombas, if their request was granted), the Dagomba Traditional Council argued that:

...no land of Dagbon can be carved out by the Ya-Na and given out to Saboba-Na to enable him establish a Traditional Area. The Ya-Na has repeatedly stated both verbally and in writing that he can not [sic] give an inch of Dagbong land to any ethnic group. And since Saboba-Na has no allodial title to any land it is not entitled to a

Traditional Area... How and Why [sic] should the status of a Paramount Chief or a Traditional Council be granted or be recommended by the Ya-Na for a foreign settler...It is certainly unthinkable to cede land to a foreign settler and make him a Paramount Chief³¹ (my italics).

The rejection of this application meant that the Konkombas and other ethnic groups in the same circumstances would remain "aliens" in the lands they may have lived on for centuries, and therefore subjects of Dagomba rule. Their exclusion from the traditional authority structure had political and economic ramifications that we shall explore shortly.

The localized nature of the political exclusion of the non-chiefly ethnic groups was further argued on the grounds that the structure and composition of the Northern Regional House of Chiefs was inconsistent with the operations of the chieftaincy institution in other parts of the country. As the Konkomba Youth Association noted in one of their letters on the subject, "the Volta Region is about a quarter of the size of Northern Region [and yet it has] 20 paramount chiefs, and 20 traditional councils". Similarly, they argued, "In Ashanti where they speak the same language and have almost the same culture there are over 30 paramountcies apart from the Asanteman Council."³² Incidentally, in the Upper East and Upper West Regions, which form part of the Northern Territory during the colonial era, every identifiable ethnic group (or subgroups in some cases) have their own paramount chiefs.

In brief, the failure of the postcolonial state to dismantle all barriers to free political participation led to the ethnicization of politics and the resultant musical chairs of interethnic exclusion from political participation in the modern state structure. This soon mushroomed into ethnic sentiments of political discrimination, which gave rise to new platforms of elite action, using ethnic bases as their footholds. The use of ethnic constituencies has underscored the continued challenges of nationhood to date.

³¹. Dagomba Traditional Council, (Photostat) letter to Saboba-Na and others on the "Petition of Saboba-Na for Paramountcy and Traditional Council, Reference DTC/63/175, dated 21st April, 1995. p.1

³². Afrani, Mike "Sweeping The Dirt Under the Carpet", The Ashanti Independent, Monday 28 February – 6 March 1994.

4. Lost in the Crevices – Economic Citizenship in the Postcolonial State

After political participation, the economy or the market represents the second most important mechanism for integrating diverse populations. Strong markets create joint interests and common stakes that can glue people of disparate ethnic origins and allegiances together in the search for a common destiny. Hence, in the realm of economics, the state plays an important role as a provider of public goods and services to ensure effective functioning of the economy. It also serves as the regulator of interpersonal and inter-communal transactions to ensure equity and fairness. It is the organizer and intermediary in the operations of markets to guarantee equitable access to level playing fields for all actors. Its laws and operations ought to provide fair and equitable access to productive resources. This is probably why Aristotle said the state does not only exist to make life possible, but to make it good.³³

Economic participation and failure of the market as an integrator

However, the postcolonial state remains essentially a subsistent agrarian economy in which more than 60% of its population is illiterate rural farmers who have very little connection or stakes in the state economy. Under the circumstances, access to and control over land remains an important economic resource for the population. But the experience of most communities in Ghana is that the state has, in many instances failed to address interethnic imbalances in the access to economic resources. For instance, the Land and Native Rights Ordinance of 1927 (as amended in 1931), vested the "management, control and administration of native lands" in the Northern Territories in the Governor (Konings: 1986 Pg 156)³⁴. This Ordinance and its subsequent amended versions were never reversed even after independence, even though its tenets ran contrary to the practice in the southern half of the country where land was vested in the indigenous people.³⁵

³³. Strong, C. F. *Modern Political Constitution*, New and Revised Edition, reprinted 1977, Sidwick & Jackson, London, p.14-15.

³⁴. Konings, Piet: (Edited by Ravell, J.J: The State and Rural Class Formation in Ghana A Comparative Analysis; London, 1986.

³⁵. Hence, the Administration of Lands Act 1962 Act 123, the State Land Act, 1962 Act 125; The Public Conveying Act, 1965; and the Conveyance Decree, 1973 NRC 145 all upheld the basic

Although in practice this situation did not affect inter-ethnic access to land in the north, it created the conditions for the eruption of the violence that the north has witnessed since the late 1970s. The sparks for most of the conflicts came when the government of the Supreme Military Council decided to set up the *Committee on Ownership of Land and Position of Tenants in Northern and Upper Regions* (commonly referred to as the I. R. Alhassan Committee) in 1978 to decide on, and return lands from the state to the traditional owners. This exercise created the platform for inter-exclusion that culminated in the denial of titles to land to several (minority) ethnic groups. This has been the single most important cause of many of the interethnic wars we have already noted. Elsewhere in the country, the failure of the state to impartially mediate in the various interethnic land disputes is what has sustained the Peki-Tsito and the Nkonya-Alavanyo conflicts in the Volta Region, for instance.

At the level of trade, Konkombas saw their economic relationships with the Dagombas and Nanumbas as exploitative and feudalistic as they were required to:

...supply the Bimbilla Naa (Nanumba chief) hind legs of animals killed at funerals, work on the chief's farm, submit their disputes for adjudication by the chief, and sell their yam produce at low prices to Nanumba middle women. The Konkomba resented these feudal obligations, especially the incessant demands on them for bribes during the adjudication of their complex and peculiar marriage custom that the Nanumba chiefs did not understand but settled on the basis of the highest bidder (Brukum, 1999).

This discontent among the Konkombas added fuel to the disagreements between Konkombas and Nanumbas over trade rights in the yam business. The Konkombas resented the perceived domination of the yam trade by Nanumba middlemen. They argued that even though they did all the farming, the Nanumba traders reaped the profits by mediating the trade between the farms in the Konkomba villages and the yam markets down south and elsewhere in the country. The Nanumbas were alleged to have restricted and/or denied Konkombas direct access to the market men and

tenets of the 1927 Ordinance with respect to the ownership and/or management of lands in the three northern region.

women who came from the south to buy the yams. The disagreement over rights of access to the markets resulted in violent encounters in the early 1980s, which eventually led to the creation of the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra. But the rapture in relationships between the two ethnic groups has proved irreparable unto this day. Indeed, it has under girded the recent conflicts between them.

The Esoteric significance of land to belongingness

Besides being the yardstick for defining ethnic spaces in relation to other groups, land constitutes a communal productive asset whose shareholders reach beyond the present generation of trustees. As such the living have a duty to uphold and preserve the ownership in the land they have inherited in honor of the dead and for the sustenance of their unborn members. This transcendental dimension of land evokes the spiritual dimension of land ownership, which brings with it a symbolic significance in the interethnic or interfamily relationships that touches the core of the identity and status of ethnic groups in relation to others. For instance, the "Mango War" between the Komba and Bimobas in 1985 had its roots in land and chieftaincy disputes between the two ethnic groups. But as an interviewee who does not belong to either ethnic groups noted, the overriding aim of the Bimoba leaders was their desire to be able to say "We own Bimbago, we are the indigenous people of Bimbago and we own all the lands, including the resources and we sacrifice to the gods of Bimbago"³⁶.

Similarly, the Sirigu-Mirigu war of 1991, on the other hand, was not about the name of a clinic. It was about ceding the ownership of a piece of land, whose current titleholders have an obligation to hold it in trust for the dead, the living and the unborn. Even though "the immediate cause of the conflict between Abutia Kpota and Abutia Agordeke was an attempt by the Battor inhabitants of Abutia Kpota inhabited by Mafis to install their own headman", the real issue at stake was who owns the land. For chiefs can only be installed on lands over which they have ancestral claims.

In short, by its failure to integrate its citizens politically and economically, Ghana, like most postcolonial states in Africa, has failed to claim the legitimacy and loyalty of the ordinary persons.

³⁶. Interview of 5 March, 2003, Tamale

The Return to Ethnic Citizenship

The failure of the state to permeate the socio-political and economic fabrics of the ethnic enclaves has resulted in its inability to recreate non-ethnic citizens from the plurality of ethnic groups within its borders. As a result, the link between the state and the citizen in the postcolonial state is weak, to say the least. This validates Goran Hyde's suggestion that in much of Africa, the state stays suspended above the citizens, with very little, if any contact between the two. In the process, ethnic identity or citizenship, has taken precedence over national ones as the reference point for defining personal identities. One feels an Asante, Ga, Fante, Grunne, Dagao or Gonja first before considering oneself a Ghanaian. This is why ethnic groups are prepared to sacrifice lives and limbs to defend their rights to title to ancestral lands, but none will pick up the bow to defend the state. In deed, one may even postulate that military coup d'etats have had such a high rate of success in Africa precisely because soldiers are not prepared to risk their lives to defend a state that is far removed from them.

This is what has resulted in the situation where Cordelia Salter-Nour's statement that one does not find Ghanaians in Ghana difficult to reject. It is however important to reiterate that the withdrawal into to ethnic citizenship is not an inherent propensity, as we have discussed above. It is a reaction to the failure of the postcolonial state to provide ample space for the co-habitation of all ethnic groups on equal terms.

5. The re-emergence of ethnic statism and citizenship

The failure of the postcolonial state to permeate the social fabric of the society in all parts of the country created political and civil voids between the family, the state and the market. Hence, although constitutionally marginalized from the state machinery, the chieftaincy institution has, nonetheless, become " active processor of state power, and possessor of the spirit of our ancestors and of the State [as well as] ...the basic vehicle for the mobilization of the people for development [serving as] a vital link between the people and the Central government..."³⁷ precisely because of the need to fill the void that currently exists between the state and the

³⁷. Source: "Chieftaincy institution riddled with disputes", available at www.ghanaweb.com: General News of Wednesday, 09 April 2003, http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/printnews.php?ID=35107

people. In the process, chiefs and the institutions they represent have re-emerged as the hub of political organization in the communities.

At the local government level, for instance, the traditional councils, headed by the paramount chiefs, and the Regional Houses of Chiefs provide an important interface with governmental decision-making processes, such as District Assemblies and the Regional Government Departments and agencies, especially with respect to the management of natural and productive resources such as lands, forests, and water bodies. In some cases, chiefs serve as important gateways to the provision of development services. Indeed, having a prominent chief puts the ethnic group on the radar of the state and non-state policy and decision makers, especially with respect to the allocation of resources. The current Ashantehene of Ghana has demonstrated this par excellence when his development initiatives attracted not only massive contributions from the local business community into his educational fund, but a loan from the World Bank.

Besides the resource mobilization role, chiefs remain the symbols of ethnic identity in the anonymity of the modern state. As such, they occupy an important place in the civil and political spheres. In most rural areas, no politician can expect to win an election there without the support of the local chief. This is why having a chief that can represent ethnic interests in the sphere of the state is very important.

A logical progression from this subtle reinsertion of chiefs into the administration of the state was the revival of ethnic hegemonies as the rallying points for reclaiming ethno-political spaces in the postcolonial state. Led by their chiefs, even if nominally, ethnic groups increasingly reasserted their ancestral spheres of influence through the reconstruction of boundaries and ethnic histories, often based on doubtful and/or disputed historical evidence. This has created conditions for increased interethnic competition for spheres of influence in the modern state structures. In the context of Ghana, the void that ensues from this situation has given rise to the re-emergence of ethnic statism, which provides the backdrop to most of the ethnic conflicts Ghana has witnessed in recent times. But the strategies for rebuilding ethnic states often varied from exclusionism to expansionism, as we shall briefly illustrate.

Ethnic Statism and the Redefinition of Citizenship

As we have alluded to earlier, a central factor in the present day conflicts of northern Ghana stems from the use of the arbitrary and fuzzy international borders of the postcolonial state to redefine the citizenship of members some ethnic groups in Ghana. For instance, the Bassares, Bimobas, Birifors, Konkombas, Lobis and other acephalous groups have been described at one time or the other as immigrants and, for that matter, non-citizens of Ghana despite the existence of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary from oral and written histories, as well as statutes and case law, as noted above. The Konkombas in particular have been the primary objectives of these arguments. We have already alluded to the migrant theory in the Konkomba-Dagomba wars. In the northeastern corner of the Northern Region, the same arguments have also been used in the Bimoba-Konkomba conflicts, among others, in attempts to redefine who is and who is not a citizen of Ghana in that part of the country. Similar arguments have been made in the Konkomba-Bimoba conflicts. In deed, the persistence of these arguments compelled the Tamale branch of the Konkomba Youth Association, in 1979 to file a writ at the High Court seeking a declaration on:

*...whether we as Konkombas had any right to live in any part of this country as we wanted and if we breached any law, the law should deal with us. Number 2 whether we had the right to choose leaders of our choice.*³⁸

But other ethnic groups have suffered the same fate as well. In 1971, the Gonjas called for the expulsion of the *Lobis* or *Birifors* in the western part of the Northern Region from Ghana on the grounds that they were aliens, presumably from La Cote d'Ivoire and/or Burkina Faso. This is in spite of the admission of the counsel for the Gonjas to the Gonja/Lobi Committee of Enquiry that the Lobis had been living in what is now part of Ghana since 1917 – forty clear years before Ghana came into being as a nation-state. In his response to questions from the Chairman of what is also known as the

³⁸. Pul, Hippolyt, "Exclusion, Association, And Violence: Trends And Triggers Of Ethnic Conflicts In Northern Ghana", Thesis for the Master of Arts Degree Presented to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University, p. 126 reported from notes of interview of March 12, 2003.

Hayfron Benjamin Committee of Inquiry into the Gonja-Lobi Affairs, counsel for the Gonjas suggested that the 1957 and 1961 Ghana Nationality Acts were not applicable to the Lobis. He argued that the fact that the Lobis had been allowed to register and vote in all elections in Ghana before independence and up to 1971 was immaterial to their claims of citizenship.³⁹

On the eastern flank of the country, the Ewe's revived their secessionist sentiments when "two leading Ewe members from the Volta Region sent a petition to the UN in 1974" to demand separation from Ghana. The sentiments were so strong and widespread among the Ewe that:

By 1976 a Togoland Liberation Movement and a National Liberation Movement for Western Togoland existed and were agitating for separation from Ghana. The Eyadema government publicly backed their demands (Relations with Immediate African Neighbors, <http://countrystudies.us/ghana/108.htm>)

In other parts of the country, the re-establishment of ethnic hegemonies took the form of territorial appropriation or expansionism. The boundary wars between the Pekis and Tsitos, and the Nkonyas and Alavanyos in the Volta Region represent a less aggressive (call it, protectionist) version of this assertion of territorial claims. In some respect, the denial of Konkomba claims to land before the I. R Alhassan Committee in 1978 was a subtle form of expansionism in which the exclusion of Konkomba claims translated into the expansion of the rights of the overlords to the lands the Konkombas laid claims to. As stated in the report of the Committee, the Konkombas lost their claims on the grounds that:

*"the land the Konkombas now claim should be vested in them is under the Ya Na by conquest but is currently predominantly inhabited by the Konkombas, thus their demand for lesser area than they say they once possessed. We therefore accept the claim of the Dagombas that the area claimed by the Konkombas is Dagomba land."*⁴⁰

³⁹. Proceedings of the 33rd Sitting of the Gonja/Lobi Committee of Enquiry held on Tuesday, 7th June, 1971 at the Office of the Northern House of Chiefs, Tamale, unpublished, p. 2., photocopy.

⁴⁰. "Report of the Committee on ownership of Lands and Position in the Northern and Upper Regions", 1978, (Unpublished) Pg 5, #10.

In recent times, the Gonjas who once favored the exclusionist methods of state building have also changed their strategies from exclusionism to incorporation. In deed, some Nawuri interviewees) have argued that the transformation of the *Gonja Youth Association* into the multi-ethnic, all-inclusive **Gonjaland Youth Association** with participation from once hostile groups such as the Vagla and Birifor Youth Associations is a ploy to dissipate the separate identifies and causes of the other ethnic groups (Pul, 2003).

But the most aggressive form of territorial expansionism came in 1996 when the Asantehene tried to "...reassert his influence over [some towns in the Brong Ahafo region], which had once been part of the Ashanti empire but later became autonomous" (Inter Press Service, 2/19/96). This attempt resulted in violent rebellion when: *...on Feb. 12... Asantehene Opoku Ware II announced the promotion of 17 subchiefs to the rank of paramount chief. The newly promoted chiefs included those from Tanoso, Tuobodom, Tano Boase and Buoyam in the Techiman area. The promotion should have been done by the paramount chief of the Techiman Traditional Area, Nana Takyi Ameyaw, who saw Ware's move as meant to reassert his former authority. Following the promotion announcement, therefore, the four towns each had two chiefs, one installed by the traditional kingmakers of Techiman and the other by the Asantehene (Inter Press Service, 2/19/96).*

Ethnic Statism and the Redefinition of Citizenship

The power vacuum between the State and the citizens tended to be filled by periphery power brokers – ethnic elites and interest groups - that operate outside the ambit of both state and traditional systems, and yet are able to tap into and utilize the resources of either to further their agendas. For instance, all political power seekers in the modern state usually claim to represent the interests of their respective ethnic groups. And the emergence of Ethnic-based Youth (and Development) Associations (EYAs) represents attempts by organized groups to fill the power vacuum and claim legitimacy in representing the interests of their ethnic groups. Unlike political parties, EYAs have the capacity to focus on ethnic specific interests and

aspirations. It is therefore possible for them to project an ethnic agenda at the national level without losing focus in the anonymity that national political parties create. In many cases, they have served as effective lynch pins that allow ethnic groups to participate the activities of political parties and the nation at large. Ethnic Youth Associations played key roles in the events leading to, during and after the Guinea Fowl War. In all cases they served as the official mouthpiece of their respective groups.

Because of the unchallenged legitimacy they draw from their representation of ethnic-specific issues in the state systems, however, both State and traditional authority structures have become captives of, and/or vulnerable to manipulation by these power brokers. In many cases, state power is often hijacked and used to further the agendae of these power brokers; while the goodwill and interests of the traditional authority structure and the people they represent is often used as a front for the activities of the power brokers – a situation which tends to make the many ethnic conflicts we witness in Ghana conform to John Mueller's assertion that:

*...ethnic warfare more closely resembles nonethnic warfare, because it is waged by small groups of combatants, groups that purport to fight and kill in the name of some larger entity. Often, in fact, "ethnic war" is substantially a condition in which a mass of essentially mild, ordinary people can unwillingly and in considerable bewilderment come under the vicious and arbitrary control of small groups of armed thugs.*⁴¹

This situation raises the question whether Ghana, and for that matter Africa can obliterate the images of violent ethnically motivated conflicts? My answer is yes, but with one condition. Africa must redemocratize its body politic, by deconstructing the postcolonial state in order to rebuild a new state that creates space for all its citizens. This will require the dismantling of colonial barriers to citizen participation in political and economic affairs of the state, be it within the modern state systems or in the traditional authority structure. The latter may require the full integration of the chieftaincy

41. Mueller John "The Banality of "Ethnic War"" *International Security*, Summer 2000 v25 i1 p. 42. Available on the web at <http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/ambrosio/old/ndsu/pols499/banality.html>, as of May 9, 2003.

institution and all other forms of ethnic hegemonies into the nation-state structure in ways that put it beyond the machinations of the elite few. If this means granting of chiefships to every ethnic group on equal basis, so be it. It also means making the selection of chiefs and elective process to ensure popular participation, and higher levels of transparency and accountability in the affairs of the institution, that must be done.

CONCLUSION

As in other parts of Africa, the flurry of political agitations that gave birth to the new nation-state of Ghana is yet to translate into full independence for all its peoples. Political independence remains meaningless unless internal independence of all groups is guaranteed. Unfortunately, the failure of the postcolonial state to provide egalitarian environments for all ethnic groups to participate in the affairs of the state have created conditions where recourse to ethnic citizenship is gaining preference over citizenship in the nation state.

The withdrawal into ethnic comfort zones creates conditions for the emergence of ethnic power brokers whose activities may not always be in the interest of the state or the people they profess to represent. But since these people operate in the periphery of both state and ethnic structures of governance, they remain unaccountable to any of them. As such what may seem to be ethnic agenda pursued by these people may after all not be ethnic at all.

The only in which the state can reclaim its citizens is through the increased democratization of both state and non-state process to eliminate the middle role of these power brokers. Otherwise, the ethnic conflicts in Ghana, and in Africa for that matter may yet have a long way to their end.

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