Resolving Chieftaincy Conflicts through Intercultural Dialogue: The Case of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee in Northern Ghana

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Abstract

The local turn in peace-building has emphasised the importance of the involvement of local people in the restoration of peace after violent conflicts. This encourages conflict parties to embrace intercultural

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dialogue to address differences typically mobilised to escalate latent grievances into large-scale violence. This article contributes to this discussion by mainly exploring the contribution of the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee to peaceful co-existence in Bawku, a community in north-eastern Ghana with a traumatized history of chieftaincy conflict. It is based on empirical research conducted among key parties to the conflict and members of the committee between 2020 and 2021. The paper draws on the intercultural dialogue concept to analyse and demonstrate how the committee incorporated ethnic inclusion and cross-cultural interactions, enabling it to ensure the warring parties directly engage and address latent grievances and prevent violent escalations. The findings show the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee has strong potential to help preserve peace in Bawku. However, it can only undertake such an exercise satisfactorily provided the state shows strong desire for sustainable peace in Bawku. The paper concludes with an outline for policy and research response, demonstrating how the state can drive the Bawku conflict parties towards an exit from violence.

Keywords: Chieftaincy, Ethnic Conflict, Peace Committee, Intercultural Dialogue, Kusasi, Mamprusi, Bawku, Ghana.

Résumé

Le tournant local [l'appropriation locale] dans la construction de la paix a mis en évidence l'importance de l'implication des populations locales dans la restauration de la paix après des conflits violents. Cette approche encourage les parties au conflit à

s'engager dans un dialogue interculturel afin d'aborder les différences qui sont généralement mobilisées pour transformer des griefs latents en violence à grande échelle. Cet article contribue à cette discussion en explorant principalement la contribution du Comité pour la Paix Interethnique de Bawku à la coexistence pacifique à Bawku, une communauté du nord−est du Ghana qui a été traumatisée par les conflits de chefferie. L'étude se fonde sur des recherches empiriques menées auprès des principales parties au conflit et des membres dudit comité entre 2020 et 2021. Par ailleurs, l'article s'appuie sur le concept de dialogue interculturel pour analyser et démontrer comment ledit comité a intégré l'inclusion ethnique et les interactions interculturelles, pour faire en sorte que les parties belligérantes s'engagent directement et répondent aux griefs latents, avec pour but de prévenir l'escalade de la violence. Les résultats montrent que le Comité pour la Paix Interethnique de Bawku a un fort potentiel pour aider à préserver la paix. Cependant, il ne peut entreprendre un tel exercice de manière satisfaisante que si l'État montre une forte volonté d'instaurer une paix durable dans la région de Bawku. Cet article se termine par un schéma pour la formulation des politiques et pour la recherche, tout en démontrant comment l'État peut conduire les parties au conflit du Bawku vers une sortie de la violence.

Mots clés: chefferie, conflit ethnique, Comité pour la Paix, dialogue interculturel, Kusasi, Mamprusi, Bawku, Ghana.

Introduction

The importance of intercultural dialogue – using locally generated concepts of peace to contain and resolve conflicts in protracted conflict situations – is a core feature of the 'local turn' in peace and conflict research. The 'local turn' encourages inclusion of cultural norms and values in conflict affected societies as part of efforts to restore and maintain peace (MacGinty & Richmond, 2013). This has shifted peace and conflict research from focussing on state and international actors to focussing on local groups and cultural dynamics (Bräuchler & Naucke, 2017), including peace committees, in managing protracted conflicts (Mungai, Iteyo, & Kassilly, 2020). Peace committees are created as early warning mechanisms to address latent grievances that conflict parties tend to mobilise to escalate disagreements into large-scale violence (Odendaal, 2013). Such committees are empowered with cultural repertoires of conflict parties related to peaceful coexistence and are as such often regarded as more 'local' and, hence, legitimate peacebuilders for local communities (Odendaal, 2013; Mungai, Iteyo, & Kassilly, 2020). Local peace committees engage warring parties in intercultural interactions, dialoguing to address misunderstandings and suspicious feelings which typically create hostilities and provoke violence (van Leeuwen, Nindorera, Nzweve, & Corbijn, 2020).

This paper draws on Broome and Collier's (2012) perspective of intercultural dialogue to explore how the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee contributed to the restoration and preservation of peace in Bawku between 2010 and its collapse in 2020. Broome and Collier (2012) emphasised the importance of the use of local traditions and norms to resolve and build peace in prolonged conflict contexts. Furthermore, they underscored communicative processes that facilitate local peacebuilding, including inter-community engagement,

dialogue and alliance-building, aligning with Funk and Said's (2010) notion that "peace must be defined and constructed locally, and peacebuilding efforts become energetic and sustainable only to the extent that they tap local resources, empower local constituencies, and achieve legitimacy within particular cultural … contexts" (p. 101). The paper uses Broomes & Collier (2012) as a lens to examine how the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee engages the Bawku conflict parties in addressing the latent causes within the historical contexts of its prolongation. This is because the Bawku chieftaincy, as we shall later discuss in detail, not only owes its origin to differential colonial developments, but it has protracted with periodic acts of violence since its eruption in the 1930s (Tseer, Sulemana, & Marfo, 2022). This conflict is mainly a communal one as it is fought between the majority Kusasi and minority Mamprusi ethnic groups over the rightful occupancy of the Bawku chieftaincy title (Lund, 2003; Bukari, 2013a).

The colonial state created the chieftaincy title as part of British indirect rule system but granted the Mamprusi who had migrated to the area the right to occupy and exercise chiefly powers over the majority and indigenous Kusasi ethnic group (Tseer, Sulemana, & Marfo, 2022). This colonial decision was hence reversed as undemocratic, ensuring Kusasi occupancy of the institution for the first time in 1958 (Agyemang, Owusu-Ansah, & Ayeltige, 2022). This reversal was also overruled by the military regime of the National Liberation Council (NLC) that overthrew Nkrumah's government in 1966, which issued the Chieftaincy Amendment Decree 112 (1966) to reinstate Mamprusi occupancy of the office for the second time (Kendie & Bukari, 2012; Tseer, Sulemana, & Marfo, 2022). The democratic government of Kofi A. Busia's Progress Party, which replaced the NLC military regime in 1969 maintained Decree 112 and also changed the

name of the district from 'Kusasi District' to 'Bawku District',
changes which were supported by the Mamprusi (Kendie &
Bukari, 2012). The military regime of Jerry John Rawlings,
however, quashed the second Mamprusi occupancy and issued
the Restoration of Status of Chiefs Law 75 (1983) to return
the office to the Kusasi ethnic group (Kendie & Bukari, 2012;
Longi, 2014). This change apparently retained the name Bawku
Traditional Area but was however changed to the Kusaug
Traditional Area through the issuance of Membership of
Regional House of Chiefs Legislative Instrument (LI) 2409 by
the National House of Chiefs. The current Bawku Chief,
Zu'raan (i.e., overlord) Naaba Asigri Abugrago Azoka II was
enskinned in 1984 through the Restoration of Status of Chiefs
Law 75 and subsequently gazetted as the paramount chief in
1986 (Kendie & Bukari, 2012; Ghanapoliticsonline.com.gh.,
2021). The elevation to paramount chief ensured he enskins
and de-skins all sub-chiefs under his authority.

　　　The Kusasi occupancy of the Bawku chieftaincy was
thus affirmed by the 1992 Constitution, especially through
Article 270 (1) which ensured all chieftaincy institutions that
existed prior to the coming into force of the constitution
remained intact. This law was reinforced in April 2003 when a
Supreme Court decision on Writ No. 1/2003 dismissed
Mamprusi's petition to nullify the Kusasi occupancy by
challenging the Chieftaincy Restoration Law 75, 1983 which
had been long repealed by the coming into force of the 1992
Constitution in 1993. The court dismissed the case, warning
the petitioners that they were without the liberty to re-seek
its intervention on the Bawku Chieftaincy matter under article
270 as well as article 277 which defines who a chief is in the
1992 Constitution. This judicial decision was consolidated with
the enactment of the Chieftaincy Act 2008, Act 579, which
came to affirm and operationalise constitutional provisions

related to chieftaincy matters in the country. These state-led interventions affirmed not only the Kusasi occupancy of the Bawku chieftaincy institution but also made the right of the Kusasi over chieftaincy matters in the traditional area a settled matter both in law and in practice. However, the Mamprusi have continued to disregard these arrangements, including identifying with the defunct Bawku Traditional Area rather than the Kusasi-backed Kusaug Traditional Area. These differences contribute to the protraction of the conflict which also means the top-down state approach not only closes off the Mamprusi from any contest over Bawku chieftaincy affairs, but also provide the Kusasi with legal powers to exercise chiefly powers. There are thus frequent sporadic between the two ethnic groups, which the state sometimes contains using military means, including stationing a military garrison in Bawku (Agyemang, Owusu-Ansah, & Ayeltige, 2022).

Still, we contend in this paper that the Bawku conflict has protracted partly because of the foregoing top-down approaches the state has adopted over the years. The state measures formally 'resolved' the chieftaincy dispute but in such a way that the disputants rather remained 'buckled up' and 'stuck inside' their respective conflict claims. The legal resolutions somehow provided the warring parties no avenues to exit from engaging in violent clashes. It is within this context that the Mamprusi have continued to stake claims to the chieftaincy office, disputing the Kusasi occupancy and often insisting both privately and publicly that Bawku has no chief yet (Ghanapoliticsonline.com.gh, 2021), a position which inspired the overlord of the Mamprusi Traditional Area, stationed in the North East Region's capital of Nalerigu, to enskin a rival Bawku Naba in 2023 (Frimpong, 2023). This act followed a colonial trend whereby the colonial government empowered overlords of the Mamprusi Kingdom to appoint cheifs to Bawku (Longi, 2014). While the government issued a

statement condeming this enskinment as illegal, no known concrete action was yet taken to correct it, except a high court arrest warrant issued against both the Mamprusi overlord and the newly Bawku Naba that he enskinned (Lartey, 2023). The court then rescinded and quashed the arrest warrant for the overlord just days after issuing it, claiming its jurisdiction did not reach the area where the enskinment was held.[1]

In the following sections, we present: the background to the establishment of the Bawku multi–ethnic peace committee, highlighting some of its success stories and why it collapsed prior to the 2020 election; context for the Bawku conflict within the numerous chieftaincy conflicts in northern Ghana, demonstrating how there have been a surge in local approaches to addressing these chieftaincy disputes; a literature review, conceptual underpinnings and methodological approach; discussion of the findings obtained from the empirical data collected from our fieldwork; and the conclusion which offers some reflections for future research and policy considerations.

Background to the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee

Violent clashes between the Mamprusi and Kusasi ethnic groups often erupt during and in the immediate aftermath of national elections, especially when national political power is likely to be alternated from either a New Patriotic Party (NPP)–led or National Democratic Congress (NDC)–led government to the other (Longi, 2014). This is rooted in the

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[1] The arrest warrant was issued by a High Court in the Upper East Region where Bawku is located, and the newly enskinned chief was to exercise his authority. The enskinment, however, took place in the North East Region, where the Mamprusi Paramountcy is headquartered.

political origins of the two parties. For example, it was the Busia government which replaced the military regime of the National Liberation Council (NLC) in 1969 that reversed the Bawku chieftaincy title to the Mamprusi. The NPP owes its origin to the Busia government and as such tends to align with the NPP (Kendie & Bukari, 2012). The NDC evolved from Rawlings' military regime which returned the title for the second time to the Kusasi in 1983, earning the party the loyalty of many Kusasi (Longi, 2014; Kendie & Bukari, 2012). Thus, the already complex Bawku conflict takes on these political dynamics, often casting the NPP as pro-Mamprusi and NDC as pro-Kusasi (Tseer, Sulemana, & Marfo, 2022). In particular, Mamprusi ethnic elites are more likely to push their claims to the chieftaincy whenever the NPP is in power or whenever the NDC shows strong signs of wrestling power from an NPP-led government in an impending election. The transfer of power to the NDC in 2009, following the defeat of the NPP in the 2008 national elections, resulted in heavy large-scale violence, necessitating the stationing of a military garrison in Bawku to keep the peace (Mbowura & Longi, 2016).

This situation prompted the NDC-led government to opt for intercultural dialogue, with the aim of it being an early warning conflict resolution strategy to pre-empt any other grievances except the chieftaincy dispute itself. The parties were discouraged from discussing the substantive chieftaincy dispute itself as this has been regarded as a settled matter in both law and practice; thus, any concerns related to chieftaincy must be addressed through the formal court systems (Mohammed, 2022). While the mandate of the committee excluded discussions on chieftaincy matters, it included discussions on latent grievances underlying periodic violent clashes and early-warning approaches to addressing these grievances. This included grievances over farmland dispossession, funeral celebration, allocating of markets sheds

and stationing of commercial bus terminals. While these grievances are largely remote to the chieftaincy dispute, they are easily mobilised to escalate Kusasi-Mamprusi hostilities (Mohammed, 2022)

The Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee commenced work immediately after being inaugurated on May 2009 (Myjoyonline.com, 2010). The strategy offered the two parties a path to exit from violent confrontations. This included sitting next to the other on roundtables to discuss and appreciate their respective positions and demeanours. It also included traditional leaders of recognised ethnic groups in Bawku, and not just Kusasi and Mamprusi, to compose the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee. This gave each culturally significant group a voice in peacebuilding affairs in Bawku. The committee subsequently appeared to have been successful in restoring and preserving peaceful co-existence, as Bawku hardly reported major violent clashes between 2010 and 2019 (Mohammed, 2022). However, violence resumed in the lead up to the hotly contested 2020 national elections in which both the NPP and NDC eventually shared equal seats in the legislature. In recent times, moreover, violent episodes have become more severe, with several deaths, displacement and destructions to livelihoods, properties and lifestyles even in the midst of curfews, police-military patrols and the permanent military base in Bawku (Mohammed, 2022).

Furthermore, newer trends of violence are peaking. There have been increased trends of roadside ambush and killing and deepening national and international fears that Bawku could become a safe haven for terrorist groups which are active in nearby Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria. One media report stated:

> 10 months of retaliatory violence that ⋯ saw at least
> 90 people killed and split Bawku along ethnic lines ⋯

caught the attention of many Western security analysts watching the conflict in neighbouring Burkina Faso, where a collection of armed groups linked to al Qaeda and the Islamic State group have grabbed territory and displaced 1.7 million people internally with alarming speed in recent years, often by exploiting hyperlocal conflicts. … Analysts warned that the chieftaincy dispute in Bawku, just a few miles from the border with Burkina Faso, was fertile ground for jihadist infiltration — and would mark a worrying spill-over of the Sahel's terrorist groups into Ghana (Courtright, 2023).

While there have been desegregation and partitioning of markets and commercial bus terminals to contain Mamprusi and Kusasi within their respective enclaves to halt the violence, the new circumstances in Bawku's protracted conflict has also led to calls for the restoration of intercultural dialogue. Thus, in this paper, we explore the role of Bawku multi-ethnic peace committee, including the intercultural dialogue activities it used to help restore and sustain peaceful co-existence in Bawku up until the 2020 national elections. The paper discusses some of the reasons it succeeded and failed, and, by doing so, contributes to current debates about the importance of bottom-up approaches to local peacebuilding to managing the numerous chieftaincy conflicts in northern Ghana (Issifu & Bukari, 2022; Issifu, 2017; Mbowura & Longi, 2016; Akudugu & Mahama, 2011).

Bawku Peacebuilding in Context of Chieftaincy Conflicts in Ghana

The Bawku conflict is among some of the chieftaincy conflicts that have continued to challenge development efforts in northern Ghana. Bukari (2016) stated that Ghana has over 232

of such chieftaincy disputes in addition to over 600 land disputes which, because chieftaincy is intimately connected with land ownership, are indirectly linked to chieftaincy claims. These conflicts tend to be intertwined with inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts partly because of the way colonial and post-colonial statecraft manipulated the authority and power of chiefs to rule their communities (Kendie & Bukari, 2012). The Bawku conflict, in many ways, still differs from many other chieftaincy conflicts in Ghana in that it is not an intra-ethnic conflict over succession per se. It is a conflict involving two distinct ethnic groups, in which the occupancy of the chieftaincy office by one group produces a zero-sum outcome for the other (Lund, 2003; Agyemang, Owusu-Ansah, & Ayeltige, 2022). It developed from the introduction of the chieftaincy institution by the colonial administration in hitherto acephalous societies, whose political organisation was originally constituted by community leaders and heads of clans (Kendie & Bukari, 2012; Longi, 2014). This mechanism subsequently gave chiefs not only power over local issues, but influence over national development as well (Tonah, 2012; Tseer, Sulemana, & Marfo, 2022). The involvement of chiefs in development was subsequently affirmed and, in many ways, manipulated in the post-colonial state, such that chiefs have become strong advocates of development in their communities (Tonah, 2012; Mbowura & Longi, 2016). Thus, there is virtually no community in Ghana without a centralised chiefdom. The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution defines who a chief is and also accords the chieftaincy institution with a distinct and specialised Chieftaincy Act 2008 (Act 759). This Act stipulates roles of chiefs in national development by assigning them with specific responsibilities, powers and privileges. It is also in this context that the installation of a chief draws the

attention of both local and national politics (Mbowura & Longi, 2016; Azuimah, 2011).

Paalo and Issifu (2021) argued that chieftaincy conflicts in northern Ghana such as the Yendi crisis in the Northern Region which lasted between 2002 and 2019 are more likely to be resolved if indigenous peace-making and conflict resolution mechanisms are given the chance (Akudugu & Mahama, 2011). This is because the overarching powers of chiefs make chieftaincy conflict sensitive and delicate to modern statecraft that relies heavily on and reinforces partisan politics which in turn tends to polarise society (Samuel & Halidu, 2018; Issifu & Bukari, 2022). The polarisation particularly pushes feuding factions to align with political parties, hoping that their claim would be granted when the party is elected and forms a government (Lund, 2003; Longi, 2014). Thus, state intervention in cheiftaincy succession matters have come to be viewed along partisan lines, turning succession grievances into political grievances that have the potential to divide chieftaincy title contenders and their supporters along political lines (Kendie & Bukari, 2012; Paalo & Issifu, 2021).

Ghana's Chieftaincy Act 2008 (Act 759) designates chiefs as custodians of lands within their traditional jurisdictions. This means no individual can be accorded the designation of a chief without having a significant control and authority over a recognised landed territory. Therefore, where the chieftaincy is located is important to appreciating the grievances that relate to it. Bawku, located in Ghana's north-eastern tip, borders Togo on the east and Burkina Faso to the north. The Kusasi are the majority ethnic group and first settlers of the land in Bawku but they have co-existed with several other ethnic groups, who migrated to the area (Tseer, Sulemana, & Marfo, 2022). This includes the Mamprusi who trace their ancestry and descent to Ghana's North East

Region. Other groups such as the Busanga, Bimoba, Frafra and
Dagomba also migrated from other parts in northern Ghana
while the Mossi and Hausa who came respectively from
Burkina Faso and northern Nigeria, co-exist in Bawku (Lund,
2003; Mbowura & Longi, 2016). The Bawku community is a
socio-culturally and ethnically diverse community in which
groups have retained their customary leadership styles
(Akudugu & Mahama, 2011; Bukari, 2013a).

While Bawku's multicultural character, including the
Kusasi, Mamprusi, Mossi, Frafra, Hausa and many more other
ethnic groups predates the colonial state, this has been
differently amplified by the variance in development practices
of the colonial and the immediate post-colonial states up to
the contemporary Ghanaian state. The Kusasi-Mamprusi
conflict, which affects the entire area (Agyemang, Owusu-
Ansah, & Ayeltige, 2022), ensued precisely because of the
indirect rule of the colonial state (Tseer, Sulemana, & Marfo,
2022). The Kusasi lived in non-centralised chiefdoms, unlike
the Mamprusi who originated from what is now the North East
Region where centralised systems exist (Tseer, Sulemana, &
Marfo, 2022; Mbowura & Longi, 2016). The Kusasi were an
acephalous group and hence practiced the *tengban-dana*
cultural system, common among many other indigenous groups,
such as the Bulsa, Talensi and Grunsi in the Upper East
Region (Longi, 2014). *Tengban* means earth god while its
worship is the *dana*. Thus, the Kusasi have a ritual relationship
with the land as owners of the land surrounding Bawku. The
earth god is believed and treated as custodian of the land and
the *tendanas*, who offer sacrifice to it, approached it on behalf
of the entire community (Longi, 2014).

The Mamprusi kingdom had a centralised chieftaincy
system. The centralised system of the Mamprusi, compared to
the acephalous system of the Kusasi, more easily

accommodated the British colonial administration's system of indirect rule which, in some cases, created and/or appointed chiefs to serve as intermediaries for the colonial state. Indirect rule was an characteristic feature of British colonialism in Africa; there were even instances of 'invented' chiefs (installing individuals without chiefly lineages as chiefs) as reported in Uganda, Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia as well as in Sierra Leone (Bayart, 2000). These impositions led to conflict of claims and counter claims which in most cases persisted into the post-colonial state, often manifesting in first-settler autochthony conflicts about access to land and chiefly powers (Green, 2011; Bayart, 2000). The creation of chiefs in hitherto acephalous societies was thus both a theory and practice aimed to ensure Britain ruled its colonies through chiefs it had imposed on them, just as chiefs ruled in centralised societies before the advent of colonialism (Longi, 2014; Mbowura & Longi, 2016). In 1931, the colonial regime, instead of creating a chieftaincy for Bawku, rather granted the Mamprusi kingdom currently located in the North East Region the right to appoint chiefs to Bawku (Kendie & Bukari, 2012; Longi, 2014). This colonial appropriation effectively side-stepped the Kusasi as indigenes and thus immediately sowed animosities into the emergent peaceful Kusasi-Mamprusi interactions. It disrupted the pre-colonial peaceful co-existence between the two groups and inspired in-group consciousness among the Kusasi. The collective conscious of the Kusasi was mobilized to protest and successfully reversed the colonial order in 1958 but the two groups could not restore good relations to the level as evidenced in pre-colonial times (Azuimah, 2011; Kendie & Bukari, 2012).

Literature Review and Conceptual Considerations

Local peacebuilding emerged in opposition to top-down, state-led interventions that dominated peacebuilding around the

world. This trend peaked more instrumentally in the post-Cold
War era. It was effort to bring local voices in conflicts that
emerged in the post-Cold War era. It challenged the liberal
peace and conflict research which typically emphasises on
curfews, court litigations, permanent military garrisons and
police stations as well as redrawing of disputed boundaries as
the stabilising forces for sustainable peace in intractable
conflict contexts (Lidén, 2009; Broome & Collier, 2012). The
liberal peace initiatives only achieve minimal successes in
dealing with intractable identity-based conflicts that
characterised the post-Cold War, including Bosnia &
Herzegovina in the 1990s (MacGinty & Richmond, 2013),
Kenya in 2007/2008 post-election crisis (Mungai, Iteyo, &
Kassilly, 2020) and ongoing conflicts in Eastern DR Congo (van
Leeuwen, Nindorera, Nzweve, & Corbijn, 2020). Lidén (2009)
showed liberal peacebuilding prioritises security, socio-
economic development, political reform, and justice and
reconciliation. These issues are important in stabilizing inter-
state conflicts but often lack sufficient legitimacy in
protracted conflicts which are internal to countries. Local
peacebuilding thus emerged with emphasises on the
importance of using peace initiatives of warring parties to help
them resolve their own conflict (van Leeuwen, Nindorera,
Nzweve, & Corbijn, 2020; Donaias, 2009). It assumes top-down
peace interventions and processes are typically disconnected
from local realities and are as well often administered by
professionals with little appreciation for social and cultural
systems of host communities (Mecaspac, 2018; Bräuchler &
Naucke, 2017).

　　　Several theoretical perspectives have emerged from
the instrumentalism of local peace building, which invariably
emphasise certain aspects of local peacebuilding while
downplaying other aspects. For example, the interactive

conflict resolution model focuses on empowering individuals to act systematically to transform conflictual relationships (Funk & Said, 2010; Mecaspac, 2018). The bottom-up theory similarly emphasizes local efforts but in ways that suggests local efforts ought to link up with top-down perspectives to be successful (Bukari, 2013b; Bukari & Gurroh, 2013). The top-down perspective also prioritises state-led interventions, including peacekeeping and setting up third-party mediation to empower conflict parties negotiate and find solutions to their grievances (Broome & Collier, 2012; Funk & Said, 2010). The scope of this paper is on the peace initiatives undertaken in the name of ethnic groups, a positionality that seems to have been marginalized in the foregoing perspectives.

This paper prioritises the concept intercultural dialogue in local peacebuilding. Intercultural dialogue, as a local peacebuilding model, seeks to enable conflict parties to identify conflict-causing narratives and counter these with peace-making narratives equally embedded in their cultures (Broome & Collier, 2012; Funk & Said, 2010). It functions as early warning mechanism by allowing conflict parties to directly engage and discuss latent grievances in ways that prevent their mobilisations into violent clashes (Mungai, Iteyo, & Kassilly, 2020; Broome & Collier, 2012). It has the element of 'multicultural peacebuilding' approach in the sense that it roots peacebuilding in the diverse local norms, values, traditions and institutions of conflict-affected parties (Lidén, 2009). This seeks to encourage direct engagement and communication between parties affected by conflict and hence peaceful co-existence (Broome & Collier, 2012). The reliance on intercultural pathways is for parties to collectively own the conflict and contribute to its resolution, using the customs, values, beliefs and traditions of ethnic groups in the conflict-affected community. This may manifest in forms of social practices, involving ritual ceremonies, such as funerals but can

also include efforts to educate and reshape attitudes and behaviours of individual ethnic members towards one another (Lottholz, 2018). The paper contributes to this research tradition with a focus on how a local committee was formulated to use intercultural dialogue to promote peaceful co-existence in the protracted chieftaincy conflict context of Bawku, Ghana.

This paper frames peace committee in terms of local 'communities taking charge of their own peace in the midst of chaotic' and destructive conflicts (Odendaal, 2013, p. 61). Local peace committees are thus often treated more generally in bottom-up conflict intervention mechanisms whereby conflict parties are encouraged to take advantage of their 'everyday experiences of violence and local understanding of how to deal with these' to 'make peacebuilding more sustainable' (van Leeuwen, Nindorera, Nzweve, & Corbijn, 2020, p. 280). It enables local ownership of conflict claims and hence bring legitimacy into efforts to empower communities to prioritise non-violent means to addressing latent grievances (van Leeuwen, Nindorera, Nzweve, & Corbijn, 2020). Peace committees are therefore in contrast to political processes, whereby external parties, especially national state officials impose their version of peaceful co-existence on disputing parties (Issifu, 2017; Issifu & Bukari, 2022). Peace committees are therefore intercultural sites in which intercultural dialogue is used to engage belligerent parties to adjust entrenched positions, hoping to reach a common and mutually reinforcing positions (Broome & Collier, 2012). Thus, local peace committees are culturally grounded, not only because their composition reflects the cultural composition of the community they serve, but also because they draw on shared cultural issues to address divergent grievances.

Peace committees are bottom-up initiatives, but they draw on peace and conflict knowledge of conflict parties. It empowers conflict parties to return to cultural differences and similarities between their ethnic groups to explore peaceful co-existence narratives and deploy these to counter conflict narratives (van Leeuwen, Nindorera, Nzweve, & Corbijn, 2020). Peace committee in this sense concerns the infrastructure, agencies and strategies of local grassroots in the effort to preserve peace in communities fraught with violent conflicts (Issifu & Bukari, 2022; van Leeuwen, Nindorera, Nzweve, & Corbijn, 2020). Local peacebuilding acknowledges local agency of conflict parties as key to ending hostilities and restoring peaceful relations (Funk & Said, 2010). This differs from the liberal peacebuilding which assumes that when conflict occurs, external, compared to local interventions are most likely to stabilise peace and restore social order (Lottholz, 2018; Mecaspac, 2018). External interventions come with assumption of impartiality and neutrality (Denskus, 2014), but in reality, they impose values that interveners have chosen from their own cultural repertoires (Donaias, 2009; Lidén, 2009). This has the potential to marginalise and relegate cultures of conflict owners to the background (Paalo & Issifu, 2021).

The paper builds on the intercultural dialogue concept with a keen focus on the strategies used for the formation and operation of the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committees as an intercultural dialogue body. Broome and Collier (2012) described intercultural communication as useful for analysing communicative processes that facilitate local peacebuilding along three dimensions, namely community engagement, dialogue and alliance-building. The dimensions relate with notions that "peace must be defined and constructed locally, and peacebuilding efforts become energetic and sustainable only to the extent that they tap local resources, empower local constituencies, and achieve legitimacy within particular

cultural contexts" (Funk & Said, 2010, p. 101). This paper however, draws on the community engagement and intercultural dialogue dimensions of the feuding parties. In applying and building on these frameworks, the paper examines the extent to which Bawku peace committee engaged the ethnic groups and cultures of Bawku. This includes but not limited to the ethnic composition of the committee and formulation of the inclusive and exclusive strategy. It also analyses the everyday interactive and relationship restoration activities of the committee, including meetings and grievances such meetings address as well as the mode of decision-making and application of meeting outcomes.

Broome and Collier (2012) emphasised community engagment in terms of inclusion of diverse groups in peacebuilding activities, such as town forums, peace circles, situated peace education both efforts in schools and local organizations to enable conflict parties discuss differences and grievances underlying the conflict. The paper draws on this dimension to explore the extent to which Bawku peace committee is inclusive of the ethnic and cultural groups in the area. This highlights not just ethnic composition of the committee but also the inclusive and exclusive formulation that enables people to engage in peacebuilding activities. Broome and Collier (2012) stressed the intercultural dialogue dimension as encompassing efforts that seek to promote non-polarized discourse and interaction in peacebuilding activities. It seeks to ensure that where conflict parties converge is conducive enough to enable them fashion 'something in common' out of their age-old grievances (Broome & Collier, 2012, p. 256). The effort is to improve understanding, enhance constant communication, and build viable relationships and hence provide foundation for collaborative problem-solving and action (Broome & Collier, 2012). The paper draws on this

dimension to analyse everyday activities of the committee, including meetings, grievances they address, mode of decision-making and application of decisions. Both dimensions imply peace committees are cultural sites where groups of diverse backgrounds can converge as a community to engage in shared and distinctive issues that affect their peaceful co-existence. This allows for addressing bitter legacies resulting from longstanding violence while promoting mutual and reciprocal respect for divergent perspectives.

Methodological Approach

The paper is a qualitative research, involving triangulation of empirical data from select members of the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee and analysis of reports of existing studies. This qualitative approach involved fieldwork conducted in the Bawku municipality between 2020 and 2021 and reflective analysis of peer-reviewed publications, as well as civil society and media reports. The fieldwork study included semi-structured interviews with key parties to the conflict, especially those who serve on the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee in the capacity of their respective ethnic groups. The interview participants included the protagonists of the conflict — Kusasi and Mamprusi, but also other ethnic groups who have been incorporated into the committee. Each group member was contacted for participation; however, some members of the committee, especially those identifying with the minority ethnic groups used the resurgence of the conflict to decline inclusion. Eventually, six (6) members of the committee were interviewed. These interviews were conducted on one-on-one basis and transcribed ad verbatim by the second author but co-analysed by the two authors, using pseudo-names (such as K1, M1, M2, B1, etc.) to conceal and protect the identities of participants from possible third-party vilifications. The analysis was conducted based on the

intercultural dialogue analytical framework we have drawn from Broome and Collier (2012) to guide the paper.

Results and Discussion

Intercultural recognition and inclusion

In this section, we discuss the extent to which the Bawku peace committee incorporated Bawku ethnic groups and cultures and what principle was used to ensure this intercultural recognition and inclusion as well as the underlying motivation for its formation. The Peace Committee was created in 2009 with an aim to implore the Kusasi and Mamprusi communities to use dialogue to find solutions to conflict 'without having to fight' (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). Clearly, underlying the formation of the committee was the notion that protracted conflicts are best resolved when local cultures and actors are given the chance to engage and mitigate the causes of these conflicts. In other words, it suggests sustainable peacebuilding is promoted by fostering intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and reciprocal empathy across conflicting parties. It ensures opposing factions acknowledge their role in the conflict and collectively take steps to stop violent escalation of grievances, as alluded to in the statement below:

> We are a group of people [of diverse ethnic backgrounds] who always come together to sit down and talk about peace – how to maintain peace – because most at times when there is conflict the security details will always come and impose curfew on us and drive us into our homes. In that way the peace has been forced on us. And now we, ourselves have come together to talk about peace, to see how

we can control the youth among us, to see how we can bring peace together so that Bawku will be in peace (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee)

This comment not only indicates that locals are not too enthused about what they perceive as enforced peace, but also shows that the committee ensured parties who once pointed guns at each other could come together to discuss matters of mutual benefit such as peaceful co-existence. It was, however, "realised at the inauguration of the committee that it had only one woman out of the 10 members and it was felt that in modern day dealings women are not neglected and especially in peacebuilding matters" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). In particular, according to K1, "the Kusasi side already had one woman and the Mamprusi side had none. They then got one woman and then the Kusasi added another woman, making it two while the Mamprusi having one, resulting in a membership of 12, comprising 6 for each group".

On the other hand, the committee appeared to have mistakenly construed that since the conflict revolves around Kusasi-Mamprusi claims, peaceful co-existence in Bawku was equally the exclusive reserve of the two groups. Hence, it excluded other ethnic groups in the formation of the committee and started off with "10 members, five each from the Kusasi and Mamprusi ethnic groups" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). This misperception was, however, immediately corrected before the committee could begin its works: "the minority ethnic groups also raised concern prior to its inauguration - the fact that they are also affected by the conflict and therefore should be involved in the search for a peaceful resolution" (ibid). Subsequently:

> We identified 4 other major minority ethnic
> communities who have settled in Bawku. We do not
> take all the ethnic groups who exist in Bawku but
> those who are permanently based in Bawku. We
> identified the Busanga, Mossi, Dagomba and Hausa. We
> found their inclusion necessary because if the two
> protagonists were engaged in endless arguments they
> will serve as referees. They were asked to bring two
> representatives each, resulting in 8, to add to the
> existing 12, bringing the total membership to 20 (K1,
> member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

The inclusion criteria, as K1 narrates, considered
whether ethnic groups other than the Kusasi and Mamprusi
had a long history of settled life in Bawku. This resulted in the
inclusion of Busanga with the historic Kulungugu as the
traditional homeland, and Mossi who originally hail from nearby
Burkina Faso. It also included the Dagomba and Hausa, who
had settled in Bawku after their initial migration from the
northern regions of Ghana and Nigeria respectively. The
committee, however, excluded groups such as the Frafra and
Bimoba who did not have a long history of permanent
settlement in Bawku. K1's contribution further showed that an
underlying motivation for the inclusion of these minority ethnic
groups was for them to serve as buffer and neutral arbiters in
instances when the Kusasi and Mamprusi failed to agree or
disregarded each other's perspective. Thus, the Bawku
Interethnic Peace Committee, "put in place in 2009" included
indigenous and settled ethnic groups, working together to
preserve peace and promote harmonious co-existence (M2,
member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

Although the inclusion criterion suggests it ensures
effective and respectful working relations within the
committee, yet it excludes minority ethnic groups from

leadership portfolios. These positions, including co-chairing and co-leading meetings, were shared by the Kusasi and Mamprusi because "if you took a chairman from the Kusasi side the Mamprusi side will not accept and if you took a chairman from the Mamprusi side the Kusasi will not accept" (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). In particular, "we, among ourselves, at the committee level, decided that when there was a meeting one co-chair will chair and he was to be assisted by the other co-chair. In the subsequent meeting, the other co-chair will also chair and be assisted by the one who chaired the previous meeting" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). As such, "sometimes I play the role of the co-chair because there is a substantive co-chair who is a lecturer at one of the national universities. Indeed, in most cases, I act as the co-chair" (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). Members from minority ethnic groups can only intervene to break a deadlock, thereby avoiding direct engagement with issues that "drag the conflict" (M2.)

Intercultural dialogue and early warning signal

The above narrative showed the committee successfully brought together not only factions who are directly involved in the conflict but also groups that have a history of permanent settlement in Bawku to dialogue on issues of common concern. These issues do not, however, include the question of which ethnic group qualifies to occupy the chieftaincy office. Both Kusasi and Mamprusi members of the committee somewhat agree that chieftaincy matters are settled matters, at least for the time being (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). Hence, grievances related to which ethnic group is the rightful occupant of the Bawku chieftaincy office must be lodged and litigated through the law courts (K1 member of Bawku Interethnic Peace committee).

As the conflict involves a number of deeply interconnected factors, disagreements over one or a combination of these factors can easily degenerate into large-scale violence. These include farmland disputes, provocative funeral songs and dancing styles, market quarrels, political activities and venues for ceremonial events (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace committee). Consequently, members of the committee remain watchful against potential sparks:

> Some of us grew up and heard the violent happenings of the 1980s, 1990s. The severe ones on 31st December 2007 and somewhere in 2009 we also saw them ourselves. All this time the approach has always been the same – using military and police. But since 2009 onwards the approach has changed, and now we ourselves have come together to talk about peace, to control the youth among us and bring peace to Bawku. We talk peace among ourselves, dialoguing, and anytime there is an issue that could have caused or led us to fight, we come together and then resolve the issue without escalating it (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

M1's remarks show the extent to which conciliatory dialogue is central to the work of the committee.

Furthermore, the committee works with its own unique ground rules such as restraining committee members from media engagement "apart from the co-chairs, because sometimes out of media reportage we can escalate the situation" (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). Moreover,

> We have made it clear that if there is an issue occurring in our neighbourhoods, it is only members of the committee that we must first call upon to find out

and we tell our people to be at peace until it is resolved … even in the middle of the night, members of the committee will wake up and engage. This is because here in Bawku, a single gunshot randomly somewhere is enough to spark larger violence (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

M1 elucidates what we might call an early warning mechanism, central to local peacebuilding, which disarms ethnic publics but engages ethnic leaders to exchange ideas and information on happenings within their respective neighbourhoods. In this way, communication about conflicts is controlled so that falsehoods may not spread and provoke other groups to respond. The Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee was particularly helpful in attenuating possible cross-group bloodshed as evinced in the following example:

> I could remember somewhere in 2010 where the security personnel had an issue with a group of armed robbers, who teamed up in Bawku going to Garu to meet their colleagues to mount a barrier at Yendi road and rob. The security personnel got a hint and laid ambush at the outskirts of Bawku. This led to serious gun exchanges and Bawku was immediately tense. Members of the Kusasi and Mamprusi got up, but we the committee members called one another, until we got the crime police office of Bawku telling us it is an engagement between the police and armed robbers, and we went back to sleep (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

This illuminates how local peace committees are easily acceptable as legitimate arbiters of cultural conflicts. But for the trust built by the committee, this situation could have easily devolved into conflict which, only too late, would have been discovered to be a criminal case that had nothing to do

with Bawku itself. The episode M1 recounts also reveals another issue that could potentially provoke and trigger bloodshed.

Still, the committee's other preventative measures include public peace initiatives as M1 discloses below:

> We try to visit one another if there is any important social gathering. If the Kusasi or Mamprusi are celebrating festival or funeral, you could see Mamprusi, Kusasi, Dagomba, Mossi, Hausa, Bissa walking together to go there and sympathise or share the joy. Even sometimes we organise ourselves just to have a peace walk and you could see Kusasi and Mamprusi men walking freely in the township, chatting. It signals to our young ones, those that we always engage to go and cause mayhem, to rethink and ask why is it that these people are able to talk, constantly engaged in conversation and they always lure us into fighting. These experiences help a lot in the peace process in Bawku here (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

These occasions often have a good number of members of the committee attending, aiming to showcase not just the depth of solidarity within the committee itself but also to symbolically signal to their respective communities the importance of cooperating with ethnic others. This is facilitated by the way each member of the committee is offered opportunity to speak to their publics using their own language (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). Hence, "anytime we have radio discussion, you could see a Mamprusi, Dagomba and Kusasi man talking. You could see a Bissa talking in the local dialect for the people to also understand what they are doing when it comes to peace"

(K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). After these events, each member is encouraged to meet their group and relate what transpired: "anytime we have a meeting or engagement, the essence of it is to go back to meet our people and talk to them about the outcome of the meeting – the essence is for us to live in peace" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). Lastly, evident again in M1's narration is the committee's focus on the youth to dissuade them from being co-opted to escalate grievances into outright violence.

The collective participation of members of the committee seem particularly strategic as there are also intra-ethnic divisions within the minority ethnic groups which the Kusaasi and Mamprusi often leverage to mobilise support for their respective claims: "Here in Bawku, we have Dagomba who are aligned with the Kusasi and we have Dagomba who are aligned with the Mamprusi. But if there is a meeting all of them will come together as the conflict affects all of them" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). It is through these direct engagements that "we have so far managed to deal with thorny issues likely to bring confrontations, including farmland disputes and celebration of festivals" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

Unfortunately, the committee was confronted with a challenge that contributed to its speedy collapse. The committee had agreed to embark on traditional pacification of the land from curses of bloodshed: "Sometime back we engaged in blood cleansing, visiting and pacifying about 26 or 27 battle-spots where blood was shed and offered various traditional sacrifices to cleanse the lost blood" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). This process was however truncated at the final stage, which required symbolic burial of okro stick, a symbol that indicates an end to feuding

in Kusasi traditions, enabling warring parties to "feel free to mingle" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). The final rites involved the national government and the mobilisation of resources; invitations were extended to the President, National Chief Imam, political heads and local religious leaders. In the process, the committee "purchased a white cow and other items for pacification and went together as a united group to brief the political leadership of the region" (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee). This process encountered

> no negative reaction from any member until the national government sent two officials to prepare the grounds before the program took off. The officials went to the Bawku Naaba and Bawku Naaba expressed his readiness. They went to the Mamprusi and suddenly the Mamprusi opposed the idea, saying that it is not part of their culture and they will not take part and yet their representatives were with us in all the processes. We told them the okro stick is what we know about how to end conflict and they could bring anything from their culture to be incorporated but they brought nothing. Since then, we have not been meeting (K1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee)

But for the truncation of the cultural pacification rite, the committee could have helped end the longstanding chieftaincy conflict. However, state complicity in the prolongation of the conflict such that its presence only in what was a community-led project, incapacitated the committee and brought its work to a dramatic end. Until this unfortunate episode, the committee could bring leaders from

the Kusasi and Mamprusi ethnic groups to engage on various issues, as evidenced below:

> anytime we have a discussion and there is an issue of contention, the first place we go is the palace. We visited the palace of the Bawku Naaba; we equally visited the Mamprusi Regent in his palace. For example, at the just ended 2020 elections, funding for the committee to embark on campaigns about countering electoral violence was difficult. We went to Bawku Naaba for him to use his letterhead to write and appeal to the MPs within the Bawku traditional area to support and it yielded positive results. If we need his people, we go to him, we need the elders, he will gather all of them for the committee members to come and meet them (M1, member of Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee).

This case shows how the committee had a strong potential to enable both the overlord Chief of Bawku and Regent of the Mamprusi to indirectly engage through its work. The national state could have also exploited this opportunity to covertly engage the two leaders on how to exit from violent confrontation and ensure sustainable peace in Bawku.

Conclusion

This paper analysed how the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee contributed to preserving peace and social cohesion in Bawku between its creation in 2010 and its collapse in the lead up to the 2020 general elections in Ghana. The paper demonstrated how the committee incorporated ethnic inclusion and cross-cultural interactions, enabling it to ensure that the warring parties directly engage and address latent grievances and prevent violent escalations. This process was shown to have a strong potential to help

preserve peace and social order. It was however observed that the committee could only undertake these exercises satisfactorily provided the national state showed strong desire for sustainable peace in Bawku; this was, unfortunately, significantly lacking on their part. In the context of the local turn in peacebuilding on which this paper is founded, these findings have implication for the roles of local peace committees and Broome and Collier's (2012) concept of communication in peacebuilding. This concept allows for analysis of communicative processes that facilitate local peacebuilding, especially its two dimensions of community engagement and intercultural dialogue. One of such contributions is how the committee's success is limited by activities of the state. This shows local committees and the intercultural dialogue they tend to prioritise can be successful only to a limited extent. They can only halt violence temporarily as they lack the capacity to address the fundamental cause of conflicts.

The foregoing observation therefore implies that local actors alone, relying on their cultural repertoires of peacebuilding, cannot occasion and maintain peace, at least in the case of protracted conflicts that may easily attract the interests of local and national politics. It is thus suggested that the efforts of the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee should be augmented by the efforts of third parties who identify with neither the conflict parties nor the causes of the conflict. Such a hybrid peacebuilding process should, however, be led by the state, but only aimed at mobilizing non-state actors to provide guidance and guardianship for the committee. Indeed, third forces can sometimes aggravate conflict matters (Bukari & Gurroh, 2013; Denskus, 2014; Donaias, 2009). This threat should however serve as a guide rather than a limitation to local peacebuilding. It requires non-conflict party

actors who are revered and seen as neutral with no interests in underlying causes of the conflict (Issifu & Bukari, 2022). In the case of Ghana, these actors could be an assembly of revered non-Kusasi and non-Mamprusi religious and traditional leaders who have the powers to call any external interference in the work of the committee to order.

The evidence further showed intercultural dialogue and communicative activities can be significantly helpful for the conflict parties in Bawku to return to peaceful co-existence. It showed a potential to empower them to assess their respective cultural repertoires for peaceful narratives and redeploy these to support peaceful co-existence while waiting for the underlying cause of the conflict to be resolved. This broadly suggests that once a people know how they previously had lived peacefully, they can always return to the norms that supported such a peaceful co-existence and reform and amplify them for the benefit of peace in their current situations. This also means policies that seek to encourage external parties to help protracted conflict actors to assemble peace narratives from their cultural norms must first understand these cultural norms. In this way, they could highlight those that support peace while downplaying those that have crystalized relations of conflict parties with hatred and violent animosities. These norms could however be earthed more systematically provided future research is undertaken to establish clearly how the Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee could be reinstated and given enough room to operate and preserve peace in Bawku. These findings hence elaborate current studies that call for the reactivation of the collapsed Bawku Interethnic Peace Committee to help tame the tide of ongoing violence in Bawku (Mohammed, 2022; Myjoyonline.Com, 2022). The evidence of the paper however shows such calls are more likely to benefit from additional research that provide evidence to show the parties how to

return to norms of peaceful co-existence and incorporate these norms into efforts to preserve and sustain peace in Bawku. These efforts should ultimately enable the parties to the Bawku conflict to exit from violence.

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