

# **Voices of Reason: a Ghanaian practice-based vision of peacebuilding**

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### *Abstract*

This paper investigates the advantages and disadvantages of NGO as opposed to track one or official state-led peacebuilding. Drawing on empirical research into the Kumasi Peace Process of the mid-1990s, which followed a large-scale inter-ethnic conflict in Ghana's Northern Region, it presents three key findings. Firstly it shows how the nature of the war, and how it was ended, shaped the peace that was built. Secondly, it outlines in what ways and by whom the peace process can be seen as a success, from the perspectives of its beneficiaries and its detractors. Finally, it demonstrates how the contingent nature of peacebuilding must be harnessed if negotiated peace processes are to leave a lasting positive impact.

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BADECC	Business and Development Consultancy Centre
CDF	Civil Defence Forces (Sierra Leone)
CRO	Conflict-Resolution Non-Governmental Organisation
KOYA	Konkomba Youth Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NR	Northern Region
NORYDA	Northern Region Youth and Development Association
NPI	Nairobi Peace Initiative
PB	Peacebuilding
PBWG	Peacebuilding Working Group
PDC	People's Defence Committees
PNDC	Provisional National Defense Council
PPNT	Permanent Peace Negotiating Team
RUF	Revolutionary United Front



## Voices of Reason: A Ghanaian Practice-based Vision of Peacebuilding

By Julia Jönsson

In January 1994 a series of inter-ethnic conflicts in Ghana's Northern Region (NR) culminated in a devastating civil war that was to cost at least 2,000 lives and lead to the widespread destruction of villages, property and livelihoods<sup>1</sup>. Members of the Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja ethnic groups, with strong chiefly traditions, fought the Konkomba, a so-called minority ethnic group, in this context meaning traditionally acephalous, or chiefless. Elsewhere I have documented the complicated causation of this conflict (Jönsson 2007, 2009), which came to be known colloquially as the Guinea Fowl war, its outbreak traced to an argument over a guinea fowl in Nakpayili market. The primary concern of this paper, however, is not how the conflict started but how it was ended through the NGO-initiated Kumasi Peace Process, what this process tells us about conflict resolution and the role that both state and non-state actors can play in it.

The paper explores the Kumasi Peace Process in detail from the perspective of its participants and those directly affected by it. It draws mainly on interviews undertaken in 2007 when the surviving delegates were invited to a review consultation 11 years after the signing of the original accord, as well as earlier interviews with members of the affected ethnic groups conducted in villages in the eastern part of the NR and other parts of Ghana in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Further sources include primary documents collected from interviewees and NGOs as well the extant secondary literature on local history, the conflicts and their possible explanations.

The paper examines how the nature of the war, and how it was ended, impacted on the peace that was built. It also clarifies in what ways and by whom the peace process can be seen as a success, as well as outlining its weaknesses and detractors. The particular focus is on the path-dependent process dynamics of this Conflict-Resolution NGO (CRO) attempt to build peace and its relationship with the government's conflict resolution initiative, the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team (PPNT). The analysis draws out the advantages and disadvantages faced by NGO as opposed to 'track one' or official state-led peacebuilding and how the contingent nature of peacebuilding must be harnessed if negotiated peace processes are to have a lasting positive and stabilising impact.

Section 1 sets the scene for understanding the CRO peace process that followed the 1994-1995 war in the NR by outlining its preconditions. These include local views of who would have been able to mediate and reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict and why. By looking at resistance, selectivity and non-participation as responses to the violence it also describes potential peace constituencies. Section 2 shows how local conditions, beliefs and understandings of appropriate roles shaped the conflict and the possibilities for peace. Section 3 takes the opposite perspective and examines how the social organisation of violence impacted on the prospect for peace, specifically in terms of the social incorporation of the fighters and the availability of organisational structures of youth mobilisation that could later be harnessed for demobilisation.

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<sup>1</sup> While the 1999 Oxfam report estimated that 15,000 lives were lost, 2,000 is the official figure quoted by the InterNGO Consortium (1995b) and was based on a body count. However, it is important to note that many Northern Region inhabitants believe the actual death toll to have been higher. In addition, 441 villages were destroyed and in excess of 178,000 people displaced (Inter-NGO Consortium, 1995a).

Progressing chronologically, Section 4 details the inception and history of the Kumasi initiative. Section 5 presents in detail the dynamics of how the Kumasi Peace Accord was forged and the struggles over its institutionalisation. The concluding section presents new material to challenge the argument that government intervention in the NR conflict was a mitigating circumstance that made CRO mediation easier there than in other conflicts. Opportunities and structures that could be used to channel the momentum of the peace negotiations did exist, as outlined in Section 3. Yet, ultimately this paper shows that it was the efforts and moral imagination (Lederach, 2005) of the NGO workers that carried the consent of the parties to the conflict forward, despite a period of government agency resistance to the peace accord, into a situation in which it became accepted by all parties.

## **1. Conditions of War, Preconditions of Peace: Mediators and Peace Constituencies**

When the war broke out on January 31 1994, there was a period of 11 days before the state of emergency was imposed on February 10 and a large military intervention was mounted to stabilise the situation. I will return to these first few days of the conflict, as they are quoted by both sides as evidence of government bias against them. For those on the ground not directly involved in the planning of the conflict they represented a period of fear and confusion, in which attempts to save lives were mainly uncoordinated acts of heroism by determined individuals. To quote the story of a school teacher, Mr I, who was also a prominent member of one of the youth associations that were crucial in organising the violence:

I was there in town in Yendi when somebody arrived from Buipe, and the mob, youths, came and held the boy up - the man and his family. The man, the wife and two kids. Saying 'zungo ti yen ku o mi' [today we are going to kill him]. That was the day they were lynching Konkombas up.

Then my uncle said: 'Mr. I, nyini n ni tooi kpe bi ni a yi bi kpe bi ni ku bia ngo.' [Mr. I, it is you who can save this person or else they would kill him.] What did that uncle do? [He] asked: 'As a Dagomba, do you think if that Konkomba was in your house they would kill him?'

So I went to them and I told them that: 'Oh, this guy! I know him, he is in PDC<sup>2</sup>. He's not a Konkomba - he's a Gonjaman. He's from Buipe and we have been working with him.' Because of my background.

I sent him out there half past ten, my uncle gave me a car and we brought him down, we took him to the Police Station and the police say they will not take him. Just as we got to the police station we got to know that some other group of Dagombas went and organised a Gonjaman to go and talk to him in Gonja! So we were just lucky we took him away. Eventually we found a way of sending him to the barracks. Before we got there the man was soaked in tears.<sup>3</sup>

Although not part of the official relief effort, such incidents were to become a path out of violence at the peace talks, as stories started circulating of the protection that had been provided to would-be enemies by individuals on all sides who had refused to participate in the lynchings, road blocks and raids. Spontaneous acts of inter-ethnic protection were related to and aided what was referred to by a majority of interviewees as the most important safety net for the region's civilians: the assistance and shelter of relatives, neighbours, friends and sympathetic strangers. The foreign-funded NGO and domestic government relief

<sup>2</sup> The PDCs, People's Defence Committees, were local governance institutions established by the Rawlings' PNDC (Provisional National Defence Council) government.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

efforts arrived approximately one and two months into the war respectively, when it had already peaked, and was not enough for people to rely on exclusively for their sustenance and protection<sup>4</sup>. In a situation of insecurity and under conditions of great hardship the main way individuals exercised their agency was through a combination of cooperative self-organisation and avoidance of places and people that were likely to constitute a danger.

Assistance was mainly from personal friends and neighbouring or allied ethnic groups, but people who found themselves on the wrong side or in villages where a hostile ethnic group predominated were sometimes given refuge in the palace of the chief or in churches and mosques. The Saboba chief, now a Konkomba paramount, went as far as escorting his Dagomba villagers to the safety of a refugee camp across the border in Togo, which led to the belief in Dagomba-controlled Tamale that the missing residents had been massacred and to retaliatory attacks on Konkomba residents. As in the story above people were smuggled out and handed over to the protection of the army or the police before and during the period of the lynchings.

Another common observation made by interviewees was how even people who did take part in the killings, or were instrumental in organising them, sometimes rescued those that they for some reason did not 'other' or objectify as members of an inhuman enemy group, such as old friends or children. The peacebuilding potential of this behaviour was clear even at the height of the violence, as this story told by a Nawuri chief demonstrates:

There was a case where I remember a Konkomba man who they thought was killed finally came [back], during the heat of war, and narrated the story of a Dagomba or Nanumba family that had kept him and saved him for *nine* days... And so when he told his story, it was like everything got frozen. And sometimes he would just go out and stand by and ask: 'Don't go. I got saved by these very people you are trying to kill. Who knows what, but that the first man you may hit was the man who saved me?'<sup>5</sup>

Such acts also provided the possibility of a return to the very personal inter-ethnic relations that had become targets of the violence, such as inter-ethnic marriages. In the post-colonial era these were love marriages across ethnic boundaries rather than the absorption of minority wives which had been historically common. While the latter had also created strong inter-ethnic bonds in the past, modern marriages created more equal power relations and close interaction between in-laws. During the conflict sometimes lethal violence was directed at those with spouses from an opposing ethnic group. Some interviewees would also recount stories of specific women who had been made to 're-marry' back into their own group. Inter-ethnic families were broken up as individual parents returned to areas in which they felt safer, the children going with the parent deemed most secure or being sent to stay with relatives. Inter-ethnic relationships became a target in the conflict because of their negation of conflict narratives of exclusive ethnic groupings and cultures, with opposing interests.

The alternative histories represented by such unions questioned the logic of the war and this tension articulated in different ways with local conditions. Far from being always the targets

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<sup>4</sup> Because of differential spatial ethnic patterns of refuge the relief aid also reached different groups to differing extents, mainly benefiting internally displaced persons from the majority groups in towns as opposed to minority populations who had fled to inaccessible rural areas where they had to rely on improvised and under-resourced subsistence agriculture (see note 18) as their food stores were burned with their settlements.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

of violence, the ambiguous status of villages where inter-ethnic marriages were common could sometimes delay or ward off attacks. To quote one local woman leader:

I remember some tribes, those who were left behind, their sisters followed their husbands. And these too, some of their daughters were left behind because of marriage. And because of that you don't go to a place to find a particular tribe to fight right off – the women are still there marrying the other side. So intermarriage plays a very key role, because when you bring up children, and they are responsible children, at least they talk to the groups.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the spill-over effects of violence that intermarriage occasioned, interviewees mentioned it as one of the reasons that violence had to be halted. It presented a practical obstacle to the establishment of ethnic homogeneity by force, with some people explaining the situation in ways similar to a hostage scenario. After the conflict, when inter-ethnic histories became prominent, cross-communal marriage ties also came to play an important stabilising role. As individuals with inter-ethnic loyalties have the most to lose from conflict they constitute a natural peace constituency.

The vested interest in peace of individuals with inter-ethnic loyalties, arising from their ambiguous social position as simultaneous insiders and outsiders, made them crucial at the Kumasi Accords. They were not seen as suitable mediators by most interviewees, however, who described them not as neutral outsiders, but as being under the influence of both sides, probably never equally. As in the quote above, the children of inter-ethnic unions were seen as forming a bridge between groups and as a positive pro-peace influence on the youths of either side, whether or not they were active in the formal inter-ethnic youth organisation that was formed at Kumasi for this purpose.

The strengthening of out-group boundaries during conflict, examined in more detail in Jönsson (2007), contributed to the perception among participants in both the war and the peace effort that it would be difficult for a person from any of the ethnic groups concerned to mediate in an inter-ethnic conflict of such scale and intensity. Interviews reflected an endogenous felt need for neutrality. Rather than being seen as a respected elder, if the mediator was of high profile from one of the groups this could even 'add to the suspicion', as one man put it:

It has the biggest mistrust from the other side. And even that mediator, his own people might begin to see him as even giving up information. He will become eventually a bat.<sup>7</sup>

A distinction was made between who makes a successful mediator in large-scale organised violence as opposed to minor inter-ethnic disputes. While the former was widely seen as necessitating a neutral, knowledgeable outsider, mediation in the latter could be conducted more informally, possibly by a respected figure from one of the parties. Neutrality should not be taken to imply objectivity, however. It was clear from the interviews that the Kumasi Accord mediators had benefited from listening to the different narratives and accepting people's self-representations at some level, allowing them to show a side of themselves more conducive to mediation than their everyday persona, a person that they might want to be or could become rather than just project to others. We will return to the ways in which CROs re-negotiate, rather than simply re-frame, discourse in Section 4 below.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

In the case of people's situated rationality, or *Weltanschauung*, it was even more important that the mediator did not attempt to adopt a detached and objective stance, as it is not possible to influence understandings of what has taken place and what is achievable if these are not correctly understood. In particular, going against the grain of spiritual understandings neglects the fact that these are essential to the moral understandings constitutive of the local social fabric of the conflict-affected society. In the words of Durkheim:

We can thus say that, in general, the characteristic of moral rules is that they enunciate the fundamental conditions of social solidarity. Law and morality are the totality of ties which bind each of us to society, which make a unitary, coherent aggregate of the mass of individuals. (1933: 398)

Diminishing spiritual aspects in the name of an objectivity understood as secular would thus have risked engagement with a societal model reflective of the mediators' understanding of local conditions rather than the actually existing local political economy that is the aggregate and enactment of widely held beliefs. More concretely, it would have precluded or impaired attempts to draw on locally strong sources of religious authority to find pathways out of violence in the way outlined in Section 2. Much of the advantage of using mediators from the local area, or even sub-Saharan Africa more generally, lay in their knowledge of and respect for local understandings, accompanied by patience. As we shall see, the long time horizon of the NGOs that supported the Kumasi process, deriving from their interest in being able to continue to operate in the region indefinitely, provided a second advantage in allowing it to be anchored at the community level through a reiterative process of open consultation meetings.

A way of resolving small inter-ethnic disputes frequently mentioned consisted of bringing an inter-ethnic team of informal mediators to the scene. This practice was inspired by the peacebuilding work of NORYDA (Northern Region Youth and Development Association), the inter-ethnic youth association that was set up as a result of the Kumasi Peace Process. When analysing the preconditions for post-1994 peace in the region this acts as a reminder of the fact that the legacy of the peace process, widely seen as successful, has come to influence perceptions of what took place and what can be accomplished through CRO peacebuilding. In conflicts where such efforts fail, the opposite can take place, resulting in CRO distrust, recriminations, and as Dolan (2000) points out in the context of Northern Uganda, increased levels of violence against civilians by disappointed combatants.

One of the consequences of the 1994 war is that mediation has become seen as a skill, its success investing its body of knowledge of conflict resolution techniques with an authority related in part to spiritual and moral sources, and in part to sources of authority derived from higher education. This latter grounding is evident in this description of the Kumasi Peace Process by an ethnic youth association leader:

Mediators were useful in a certain stage in the dialogue, the science of conflicts was taught, the implications of conflict was told them. You know it was after this conflict that people started looking at causes and consequences [...] So it was the mediators who made it to let people to understand that there is a difference between conflict and your response to it and the consequence of your response. So if your response is violent, you have violent consequences and then you go into a cycle. So it was

reasoning and explaining the science of conflict, education of conflict, that's how they were able to reason on it.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that in the NR mediators are now understood as a separate category from those who are seen as able to stop large-scale group violence directly. Participants in the war and in the peace process relate the failure of the other earlier initiatives to their lack of neutrality and conflict-resolution skills, especially an ability to mediate face-to-face talks. Discursive interaction between conflicting parties is widely seen as the best way of making progress on disputed issues. As one man put it, quoting Churchill:

Once you are able to get people to sit down to talk, like we say 'to jaw-jaw is better than to war-war'. Once you get them to sit down and talk you are bound to go somewhere. And so for that person that's able to facilitate that dialogue, clearly it's a major thing.<sup>9</sup>

The next section investigates the social actors and categories of direct control, seeking answers to the questions of who could end the conflict and how. Local leadership is sometimes stronger in societies where the presence of the state is weak, where people are more likely to be organised into local hierarchies that exercise a strong influence over everyday social life. Rebel organisations may try to recreate or mimic these if they are not able to tap into their social capital directly: Revolutionary United Front (RUF) mobilisation and socialisation, for example, made use of many of the rituals of powerful local secret societies. In the NR people seen as being able to exercise direct influence over local combatants were local holders of authority generally and the subsection of this group who initiated, planned and led the conflicts.

## **2. Sources of Authority and Appropriate Roles: The Impact of Local Social Organisation on the Nature and Control of Violence**

As I have previously shown (Jönsson, 2007), different sources of authority overlap and compete for loyalty and the power to mobilise communities in the region. Local 'big men' generally combine, in their own person or through close contacts, positions of authority such as chiefs, youth association leaders, and prestigious professions such as teacher, lawyer or successful trader or farmer. Furthermore, spiritual sources of authority are central. Because religious motifs shape daily life they also shaped the war and peace process. Much of the build-up and preparations for the conflict were concerned with spiritual resources, as was the rhetoric of the narratives of conflict, which centred on traditional authority, traditional states and the actions, rights and legacies of ancestors.

In the centres in which leaders organised the ethnic violence, stocks of amulets as well as arms were collected beforehand, and in interviews with former combatants they often emphasised that an important part of the transformation of a civilian man into a fighter involved rituals such as baths purported to make you immune to bullets. In this way the strong spiritual beliefs of the population were used instrumentally by leaders to motivate ordinary people and give them the courage to engage in organised mass violence. Rituals were an important part of the process of socialisation, with such communal acts reinforcing conflict narratives, often more effectively than the finer points of the rhetoric of justification. As one ex-combatant mused:

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

So I was wondering what actually caused the war... They said that the Konkombas, they wanted, you know... land. And nobody denied you the land. But they were insisting that they would drive Gonjas, Dagombas [away] and take the land. So the chief summoned the people, any able man should come to his palace to bath the concoctions, and then the fellow takes [defends] the land.<sup>10</sup>

The magico-religious way in which the conflicts were understood was reflected in the patterns of violence, and in turn in how the fighting was reported not just in local but also in the national Ghanaian media at the time. On February 21 1994 the then-opposition paper the *Ghanaian Voice* printed the following item, under the heading 'Ju-Ju overcomes power of guns':

A Konkomba fetish priest (picture reproduced) is said to have been giving a hell of a time to adversaries as he turned himself into a buffalo and then to a snake and to grass at various occasions during the war. He was allegedly turning himself from grass back to the human form when he was caught and his head cut off.

It is also claimed that when he leads a group of fighters, he is able to deflect bullets and that is why his capture and killing was celebrated by his adversaries. According to our sources, those who caught him only succeeded after they had also made a counter-juju to stop the vanishing powers of the fetish.

Another extraordinary person in the war was a drum-girl who could bring dead Konkombas back to life simply by touching them. Reports say she has also been killed. [...]<sup>11</sup>

As the reference to the 'drum-girl' implies, women were active in spiritual warfare and the care of the wounded as well as the general sustenance of the communities, which included both families and fighters. Women were crucial to the reproduction of the fighting even though they were seldom themselves combatants, the militias being made up of 'able-bodied men' as described in the quote above. The gendered division of labour within the war shaped the nature of its retaliatory ethnic violence and cast its victims and perpetrators. Women fell prey to physical and sexual violence in the attacks on their villages and as a result of the policing of ethnic group boundaries, but the strong taboo against killing women often held and meant that lethal gendered violence affected boys disproportionately to girls. Reports of boys, especially babies and toddlers, being disguised as girls by their mothers are common and of the boys being killed if found out<sup>12</sup>. Such violence reflects how ethnicity had been practised in the past, seen as transmitted by the man who also posed a threat of retaliation, while women could be absorbed as wives.

Another spiritual dimension of gendered violence in the NR is that directed at women charged with practising witchcraft. Accused women are subject to trial by ordeal and if convicted are lynched or banished to special villages, sometimes with their children or grandchildren. Some marginalised or mentally ill women who believe themselves witches also come to the villages of their own volition, seeing these as safe havens. While the scapegoating of women can be understood in psychological terms as a way of seeking to neutralise and control the threat posed by misfortune, such needs are translated and reinforced by the pragmatic realities of NR life, so that the victims of the accusations are not

<sup>10</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

<sup>11</sup> F. Prince "Nanumba-Konkomba War: Ju-ju overcomes power of guns, as securitymen find it tough and soldiers burn villages". *Ghanaian Voice*, February 21-23 1994, pp 1, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Apart from being reflected in what you are told if you ask about the violence, such reports are used as evidence of brutality in circulating ethnic propaganda, such as Martinson (1994).

random. They are generally widows or other women who lack the protection and support of a husband and would entail costs of caring, or who stand in the way of the distribution of their inheritance or enviable possessions.

The Ghanaian Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) estimate that up to 5,000 women live in witches' villages in four NR districts. Conditions in witches' villages, including the camps at Kpatinga, Gnani, and Gambaga, have improved as they have become the object of NGO interventions<sup>13</sup> but they still lack schools for the children and are shunned by the surrounding communities. The camps are governed by a resident *tindana*<sup>14</sup> who ritually cleanses the women, but also controls their labour, a position open to abuse. Income is generated through low-level subsistence agriculture, and by gathering and selling firewood.

Witchcraft accusations are reported to have increased as a result of the conflict as its misfortunes were interpreted as the result of sorcery<sup>15</sup>. The main reason that these banishments increased in the area during the late 1990s is likely to have been a 1997 meningitis epidemic, however, which killed over 500 and that resulted in lynchings of women in some of the affected villages such as Yoggu, near Tamale. In 1998, the Ghanaian state sought to protect women accused of witchcraft as well as victims of forms of ritualised forced labour, such as child customary servitude in the Volta Region, through legislation, but with little practical effect.

In the build-up to, during and after the main 1994 outbreak of inter-ethnic violence women took part in the construction and spread of conflict narratives through the elaboration and circulation of rumours. They were also important in the acting out of these narratives in the incidents that sparked the various conflicts, including fights between women, and attacks on women which are seen as especially provocative. The lead-up to the Nawuri-Gonja war involved an argument between women from the two groups who were fetching water and the prelude to the violence in Yendi in 1994 involved an attack on a Konkomba *pito*-brewer<sup>16</sup>. As one respected minority schoolmistress saw it:

it is women who go to market, go for water, go to clinics, and they interact. It is out of their misunderstanding that the war sparked off again [referring to the second Nawuri-Gonja war of 1992]. So they now see the essence of involving women, so that they can in turn educate themselves, so that they don't bring about petty, petty scabbles to inflict the war.<sup>17</sup>

As the quote indicates, despite the importance of women to the social dynamics and reproduction of communal violence, the role of women was not recognised in the aftermath of the war, and there were few women at the Kumasi negotiations, with only five of the 44 signatories to the final treaty being female. Its emphasis on engaging with influential leaders, in terms of opinion or social position, coupled with the low status of women in official community affairs at that time meant that most of the representatives sent by local communities were older men. Because youth is understood as a social category that can

<sup>13</sup> An example is the World Vision project at Kpatinga witches camp which has dug a well, and worked with the Ghanaian state to up-grade the housing with tin roofing and concrete flooring.

<sup>14</sup> A traditional religious leader, or earth priest, who is an important figure to all NR groups. The plural is *tindamba*.

<sup>15</sup> This was an assertion made by educated civil society activists and women in Ghana, but also by Ferguson (personal communication, October, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> *Pito* is a form of sorghum beer

<sup>17</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.



include older commoners, who would still be respected for their age, the representatives of the ethnic youth organisations were also not young, although their mobilisation of youths was in many ways very effective. Young people, like women, do not have a strong position within traditional conceptions of NR society, indicated by the use of words for 'elder' for people of influence. Later NGO-influenced peace projects and the more prominent role of women and youth generally in the late 1990s and 2000s in Ghana have gone some way towards redressing this imbalance.

The way in which two other markers of social status articulated in local understandings of the conflict is evident in how the *Ghanaian Voice* article quoted earlier concluded:

Although latest state of the art weaponry is being used in the current conflict, a number of people from the war front told the "Ghanaian Voice" that the juju factor is actually determining the fate of the war, and that educated people caught in the crossfire are disadvantaged since most of them are ignorant of traditional juju practices that can neutralise bullets and machete cuts.

The relationships between educationally based and traditional spiritual authority are varied and complex. In the article it emerges as concern over the helplessness of educated people who by their separation from their rural background have lost their understanding of, and therefore access to, traditional spiritual healing power.

This tension is also implied throughout by the unusual number of qualifiers used by the journalist. The article was illustrated with a drawing of a man shifting shape into a buffalo, a snake and a plant. It may itself be seen in part as a product of these tensions, a justification for the previous edition of the paper which carried a shocking picture of a crowd of young men in Tamale displaying the severed head of a Konkomba *tindana*, the publication of which violated socially acceptable norms of behaviour in a way that threatened to reflect negatively on the paper. Similarly, tensions between ethnic youth association leaders and chiefs sometimes posit and play on modern traditional divides. However, traditional, spiritual and educational sources of power are just as often combined, as in the constitution of CRO authority.

The importance of spiritual authority and discourses to the local ethics of people's daily life made it central to efforts to counter, as well as organise, the war. The peacebuilding committee of the NGO Consortium competed with the war's leaders for what Wilson calls 'spiritually-empowered agency' (1992: 529), seeking to harness religious condemnation of the violence by disseminating the message of important religious leaders that the war was wrong, at the time of the Kumasi process and afterwards. As we shall see, such practices were increasingly formalised as part of the Kumasi Peace Process, with 'peace jingles' being recorded after the conflict featuring short peace messages by role models, religious leaders and chiefs and transmitted on the local radio channels.

Because widely held traditional religious beliefs and practices are intertwined with Christianity and Islam, various signs of bad luck are understood as the result of divine displeasure. As one interviewee described the importance of the judgement of traditional earth priests:

when they come out and say the gods say the war you are fighting is a war of blame, if you go there you will all perish, they will listen to him.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

One of the ways in which spiritual understandings can facilitate organised violence in this environment is through the attribution of casualties to the failings of the injured individual. The wounded can be said to have broken taboos that must be observed in order for protective magic to be effective, a mechanism that, for example, benefited the raids of the Naprama movement on RENAMO bases in Mozambique (Wilson, 1992). When damage is generalised and sustained, however, this spiritual logic instead becomes an impediment as such losses are interpreted by disheartened combatants as likely to reflect a basic problem in the validity of the cause.

As the conflict raged in early February 1994 without decisive military progress, the association of fortune and divine right created two possible interpretations of the failure of magical protections to work, both of which counteracted further violence. Firstly, among the rank and file who had been persuaded to join because they believed in the righteousness of the war, this was now questioned. Secondly, belief in the power of warrior ancestry was dented, making it more difficult for the educated leaders to use ritual instrumentally. As a respected chiefly leader described the reaction of his middle-class militias:

...these were not professional fighters. They had never seen a war and they have never been trained anywhere, they just went out there. But you see because we have a very vibrant tradition, we have the tom-tom beaters [traditional historians] telling us every day how powerful our grandfathers were, how invincible they were in war, and the rest of it... We believe that it is an inherent thing – it's nice. And therefore when we also go we would conquer like the way our ancestors did. It did not happen because the culture of the Konkombas... they are much more traditional than us. We had Western education, we have television sets in our homes, some have air conditioners. They, living mainly in the bush, and, they living in a rural way, were very close to the ground.<sup>19</sup>

The interviewee doesn't simply juxtapose 'modern' sources of authority, in this case Western capital goods that are symbols of wealth and sophistication, with traditional sources, such as the power of endurance and vigour born of a rural life, as an explanation for the conflict's dynamics. The imbrications and development of these dynamics is important, as his well-to-do militias' belief in their spiritual supremacy is challenged. Leaders on both sides had given the impression that the military superiority of their grouping would ensure an easy win, but in the event both sides were fairly equally matched demographically, and this also held for other aspects of military advantage.

As highlighted in the quote above, the more rural Konkomba had greater experience of hunting, and therefore of using rifles and other weapons. They could also draw upon allied clans from the Togo border region. On the other hand, apart from their local reputation for traditional spiritual powers, the chiefly groups had a strong national network of highly placed individuals in the civil service, government and army, providing invaluable influence and contacts. Even more important, however, was the purchase of modern weapons through the wider Ghanaian diaspora, which added to the inter-ethnic tensions and the military confidence of both sides. To quote a political leader:

Even the intra-problems we had, they used very limited number of guns. But suddenly the arms were flowing in. The Dagombas and Konkombas who were living outside the conflict area; suddenly felt that their homeland was under attack. There is a lot of

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

attachment to our ancestral homes present in our culture. When in a conflict like that... it was very emotional. People easily banded together and they are relatively richer than the people back home. They put together monies and they procured arms. They bought arms from black market. Sometimes even the military themselves, the police themselves, they steal the weapons from their armoury and they sell to you quite cheaply. So some of our contacts, some of our brothers and sisters out there were buying these things and shipping them across. [...] Sometimes, they even took loans to buy the arms to send them here.<sup>20</sup>

Even during the peak of the violence the attacks were unable to secure any decisive success for either side, despite the displacement of more than 178,000 people<sup>21</sup> and the confirmed death of at least 2,000 people (Inter-NGO Consortium, 1995b) in what is a sparsely populated region of 1.8 million (GOG, 2002). This made combatants increasingly reluctant rather than more aggressive, as decisive victories eluded them and the military made it clear that anyone seen in the field with a gun was liable to be shot on sight. As one Dagomba leader put it:

There came a time we found it difficult getting fighters to go. When they realised that it was a no-win situation. The people, you know? Because their approaches were different. The Konkombas were using young, young people, they were fast. They'd launch an attack and [if] they found the resistance is so much they turn around and run. The Dagombas were sending old people that they believe had some juju and some powers, you know? And then any time they go, they couldn't even run. So they just killed them off.<sup>22</sup>

Leaders on both sides saw the conflict as having stopped because of a combination of spiritual discouragement caused by defeat, augmented by the military intervention, which was a powerful disincentive on its own, and positive peace incentives such as the Kumasi peace initiative causing a change in the outlook and strategy of the war's organisers. The pragmatic change in strategy it effected was reflected in how ethnic histories were transmitted. The Kumasi Peace Process emphasised alternative histories of a joint inter-ethnic past and the acts of solidarity detailed in the previous section. A reimagination of ethnic narratives in this direction carried an appeal in which the emotional and the politic were entwined, providing a path out of violence that was understood as noble, religiously sanctioned and, as we shall see, traditionally African. As one former organiser of the violence put it:

So there is no way we can defeat these people. We better start to talk peace. After all, we are brothers and sisters who lived side by side. Our ancestors lived side by side, they intermarried. And therefore, we are one people.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007.

<sup>21</sup> In the area affected by the fighting, majority ethnic groups generally took refuge in the larger towns, while minority groups fled east or south. Many Konkomba from West Gonja district went into the Brong-Ahafo Region and eastern Konkomba into the northern Volta Region. A large proportion of NR refugees also fled to the major cities. In Accra's most notorious slum, Agbogbloshie Market, aka 'Sodom and Gomorrah', the majority of residents are believed to have arrived as a result of the 1994 NR war (Kusimi et al, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

<sup>23</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

### 3. Paths Out of Conflict: The Impact of the Social Organisation of Violence on the Prospects for Peace

Through the Kumasi Accord process, the mediators and the participating NGOs created a path out of the conflict, made it attractive to leaders, and ensured the popular grass-root support needed for a meaningful peace. The peace that the NGOs sought to build echoed that put forward by the local population at large<sup>24</sup>. It was understood not as the absence of violence but as a form of demilitarisation in which interaction between the region's ethnic groups became normalised and unthreatening, the arms build-up and the escalation of rhetoric in the media reversed, trade and inter-ethnic marriages could be resumed, and inter-ethnic families reunited. The following two sections describe the particular path harnessing approach used, starting at the local level with carefully selected mid-level leaders and then continually grounding the process by going back to the villages to discuss and seek support, thereby building a momentum for the process that more hardline, higher-profile leaders could not risk ignoring.

Two main external factors were important for the success of this strategy, in terms of granting the peace process the space it needed to operate and providing the channels through which combatants could be influenced. Apart from the military intervention, the complex significance of which I will explore in more detail in Section 6, the way in which the inter-ethnic violence was organised and conducted played a critical role. While local fighters experienced high levels of violence, social control and predictability was not lost. The process of socialisation that transformed male civilians into what were sometimes called 'Defence Militias' did not seek to remove them from their normal life, their professions and their social context. Instead it appealed to the protection of the ethnic group that was at the heart of social organisation.

Although ethnic militias recruited from the wider region and across the border in Togo, the fighters were organised and lived amongst civilians, often in their home communities if these had not been razed or in host communities with which they shared an ethnic affiliation. This is in contrast with conflicts like that of Sierra Leone where rebels lived in semi-permanent forest camps. The organisation of the Ghanaian Defence Militias was hence more akin to that of organisations like the local, ethnically-based Sierra Leonean Civil Defence Forces (CDF) than the RUF. Former Ghanaian combatants described how the field-level planning and preparation took place in bush meetings. Provisioning was mainly financed through voluntary contributions collected in the villages and in the wealthier internal Ghanaian diaspora, from migrant workers and big men living in the southern metropolises of Accra and Kumasi. Such collections were often organised by the youth associations and known as a 'war tax' (see also Assefa, 2001).

Looting did take place during the war, principally of cattle, which were the main form of embodied capital, and accounting for and returning these was one of the first missions of the inter-ethnic youth association NORYDA. The resale of looted goods did not develop to the point of making the conflict self-sustainable, where the incentives of loot might have generated its own momentum, however. The main objectives of attacks on villages were retaliation and ethnic cleansing, killing and driving away their population and destroying incentives to resettle there. While the former objective blurred the line between civilians and combatants, the latter led to the destruction of many state facilities such as clinics and

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<sup>24</sup> Similar conceptions of peace and peacebuilding, as outlined above, were put forward by all categories of interviewees, ranging from less well-to-do villagers in the open focus groups, to NGO staff members.

schools. This was the reason that development NGOs were so keen to engage in the conflict's resolution. As one NGO worker put it:

It became very obvious to me that the whole notion about development have no meaning if communities could not by themselves engage on the very critical issue of building relationships, building peace amongst themselves in order for that the rest can come in. There is even no question about development, because if even you brought in resources, you are bringing in new grounds of conflict within the level of deep suspicion in which some groups felt completely marginalised.<sup>25</sup>

The spiritually conditioned violence discussed above, although sometimes threatening to forms of authority derived from secular Western sources, was employed to extend the domain of neo-traditional interpretations of exclusive ethnic cultures. Its rhetoric of ethnic defence was reactionary rather than revolutionary in spirit. Although the *tindamba* would have to atone for any blood spilt in the bush as it displeased the earth spirits and there was an increase in witchcraft accusations related to the hardship suffered during the period, there was no generalised sense of the unleashing of forces beyond social control, as resulted from the militarisation of marginalised youth in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Ellis, 1995). This was in part because the violence reflected historically articulated and recognisable divisions between ethnic groups that, although unstable, had accumulated over time and therefore served to reinforce in-group cohesion. In comparison, the swift social reorganisation effected by the RUF rebellion which used kidnapping as a recruitment tool was more disruptive.

The fact that societal coherence was not lost during the NR conflict also reflected the nature of the organisational experience of the region's youth who could be reached, negotiated with and controlled through their interaction and contacts with primarily civilian ethnic youth organisations that emphasised education, development and future prospects. Difficulties in ending the conflict in Sierra Leone were linked to the use of military strategies that further marginalised and entrenched what Richards has described as 'the radical homelessness of groups like the RUF' (2001: 81). In contrast, the ethnic militias of the 1994 Northern Ghanaian war, and their families and communities that they saw themselves as defending, had a lot to lose from the fighting. Similarly the leaders were socially incorporated, local big men with jobs, reputations and contacts that were jeopardised as a result of their association with the conflict.

The massive February mobilisation of the military, organised into a special Emergency Task Force and coordinating with local police, helped to stabilise the situation to the extent that more organised aid became possible, beyond the self-help efforts of local communities. Starting from about a month after the outbreak of conflict, NGOs that had a strongly established presence in the NR provided the bulk of the external relief effort to the affected villages and the displaced civilians, working with the army, the Ghanaian government and the Red Cross. These NGOs included indigenous self-help groups that function independently but sometimes canvass large Western development NGOs for funding or undertake subcontracting activities, as well as the local chapters of organisations such as World Vision, Action Aid and Oxfam.

Originally, NGOs did not coordinate their activities but launched multiple fact-finding missions and aid distribution activities, leading to many of the classic problems of NGO sector provision. The suboptimal use of the available resources through the duplication and patchiness of the relief delivery grew more apparent to the local NGO staff as the conflict

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with NGO worker, Accra, August 2007.

raged in early 1994. It was to facilitate the coordination of the relief effort that the NGOs formed the InterNGO Consortium<sup>26</sup>, which held regular meetings, providing a centre from which the aid effort could be directed. Through this organisation the NGOs divided tasks amongst themselves in a way which still amazes the NGO workers involved, and which has not since been replicated in the region. Different aspects of aid delivery and reconstruction were allocated according to organisational expertise. Action Aid became the key coordinator, the Catholic Relief Service and World Vision delivering water and relief aid, CARE repairing bore holes and burnt-out schools, and so on.

Although the military intervention of the government was effective at protecting aid deliveries and halting large-scale fighting, smaller raids and bloody local inter-ethnic clashes continued and there were sinister episodes of military brutality, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 6. The InterNGO Consortium decided to act on the general perception that the army presence must soon be supplemented with a negotiated peace in order to stabilise the area. Like the outcomes of the previous smaller local wars, such as displacement of ethnic groups due to inter-communal fighting, the potential for renewed outbreaks was seen as strong unless or until its results were accepted by the majority of the local population. The common observation of interviewees that continued displacement threatened to lead to future attempts at transforming the status quo echoed von Clausewitz' dictum:

even the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date. (2007: 19)

This understanding was also reflected in the government's appointment in April 1994 of the commission known as the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team (PPNT), consisting of respected high-profile individuals, including academics, religious leaders, and Council of State members, to mediate in the conflict. The government had sent representatives<sup>27</sup> to the NR hotspots before in attempts to prevent the tensions developing into war, but despite strenuous assertions of neutrality and openness to the views of all parties, any comment made by these officials was liable to be interpreted as partial by ethnic ideologues. This made the government reluctant to engage openly with the issues, a disposition which hampered its attempts at solving the conflict politically. State involvement risked aggravating conflict through resource competition incentives and the politicisation of ethnic tensions.

Similarly, the PPNT immediately ran into difficulties, with majority leaders demanding that the Konkomba acknowledge responsibility for the war and apologise as a precondition for face-to-face talks. Meanwhile, the national press reported the incendiary statements of the prominent men seen by the government as representing their ethnic groups, the suspected leaders and organisers of the violence. The war of words was thereby escalated and positions became more entrenched. As the PPNT was unable to convince these leaders to meet, the negotiators were reduced to a dual strategy of shuttle diplomacy and conflict freezing.

<sup>26</sup> The members of the InterNGO Consortium were Action Aid Ghana, Action on Disability and Development, Amaschina Self-help Association, Assemblies of God Development and Relief Services, Business Advisory Development and Consultancy Centre (BADECC), Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Secretariat, Council of Churches, Gub-Katimali Society, Lifeline Denmark, Penorudas, Oxfam, Red Cross, Tiymba Development Association (TIDA), and World Vision.

<sup>27</sup> The government sent a 12-member police delegation in December 1993, which held an open meeting on December 21 at the Presidential Lodge in Tamale, followed by a three-member committee under the chairmanship of Nana Obiri Yeboah, who visited the region to consult with local leaders in January 1994.

While PPNT representatives collected position papers from the different groups of leaders, the latter were also strongly encouraged to stay in Accra, in the expectation that their absence from the theatre of war would make larger campaigns of violence less likely. In the words of one leader:

All that the government did was... the government was buying time for tempers to cool down. They were not serious about making any peace because we never met. The government avoided that direct face-to-face meeting. All they wanted to do [was] in paper, to correspondence between us. They were full of promises that they will bring us together but it never happened, we stayed in different hotels, we never ate together. [...] Meanwhile, the government succeeded in sending the entire leadership to Accra, the thought was that so that those behind the war could not continue the war, like we were hostages... [...] We were there March, April, May, June all the time doing nothing. [...] Then the Nairobi thing came in and said that the problem is still there so they should solve the problem instead of keeping us in Accra and feeding us.<sup>28</sup>

The strategy did decrease the level of violence in the NR, however, and after a few weeks of relative calm the PPNTs efforts culminated in the production of a peace treaty that was signed on June 9. Despite the halt to the fighting, these high-profile leaders did not regard the issues over which the war had been fought as resolved, however, a fact that was reflected in some of the interviewees who had taken part referring to the non-specific treaty as a cease-fire agreement. On August 8 1994, parliament revoked the state of emergency, declaring the conflict officially over, but inter-communal tensions were still acute, making it impossible for members of opposing ethnic groups to travel freely through enemy-controlled areas (see also Toonen, 1999).

The InterNGO Consortium wanted to contribute to the peace effort but realised that its constituent members lacked peacebuilding experience and called on an East African CRO, the Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI), through a personal contact with one of its staff members, Emmanuel Bombande. Bombande hailed from Bawku in the Upper East Region of Ghana, a community that has long been affected by ethnic and chieftaincy-related conflict. He thus combined conflict mediation and peacebuilding experience with local knowledge of the NR conflicts, while not being a member of any of the ethnic groups involved. In November 1994 Bombande flew to Ghana with the then director of the NPI, Hizkias Assefa, to assess the situation and develop a response plan to identify potential interlocutors.

The CRO workers consulted widely with NGOs, aid agencies, and government representatives, meeting with the minister for the interior, the minister for defence, a special presidential staffer, and the Northern regional minister. The view in Accra was that there could be no harm in allowing NGOs to conduct local-level work, to get the communities to air their views. At a time of great strain, some NGO interviewees described the government as overwhelmed and happy for any initiative to go ahead that held a slim chance of improving the situation. It seems clear in retrospect that the CRO workers described their proposed activities as relatively modest, however, aimed at a very local level where the participant NGOs had strong influence and not as a full-fledged mediation attempt likely to compete with the PPNT.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

PPNT members did agree to meet with the CRO staffers, but did not appear to approve of NGO intervention in the peace process, emphasising the fragility of the situation and suggesting that they limit their engagement to the relief effort. Bombande and Assefa also met with church and youth association leaders, and with chiefs and elders in the affected areas. With the help of other NGO workers from the Consortium engaged in the relief aid delivery, some of these consultations were organised in the form of impromptu communal meetings in the villages and refugee sites. The short-term goal of these open meetings was to get people to talk about their recent traumas, in the belief that this would in itself be therapeutic. The medium-term goal was to sound out locally respected leaders.

Following the government-imposed state of emergency and massive military intervention, the open meetings were held in a threatening atmosphere of repressed violence from the side of the military. As one NGO worker put it:

... [we] to try as much as possible if you call it... let people to get out their pent-up feelings. And we thought this was important because apart from the Ghana armed forces keeping the security tight there was nothing happening. The security forces basically moved up and down with their vehicles and Mohawk trucks and did not communicating with anybody. They looked with very stern faces, they were in their military fatigue. And some of them told us if these people don't want to stay with our families then when we are here we are going to be ruthless. Don't also forget that there was an ambush in one of the villages of a military contingent. And that made the military feel that they were in a total war zone. So there was no interaction whatsoever between the military and the communities.<sup>29</sup>

The NGO peacebuilders describe seeing two categories of leaders emerge in the open community meetings. While one expressed distress over the recent violence, the other was adamant that the destruction of the opposing groups was the only solution to the problem and asked them to communicate this in a language similar to the statements what were being made by the most prominent leaders in the national media. Meanwhile, the harassment of Konkombas seeking to access hospitals and other services and government facilities in majority-controlled towns continued, culminating in March the following year when a number of Konkombas were killed in a Nanumba ambush, leading to the death of 18 Nanumba in a retaliatory attack. This in turn led to the sacking of a Konkomba town, after which the conflict again spread to surrounding communities, leaving 150 people dead and 14 villages destroyed (Assefa, 2001). Again cattle were looted and the newly resettled population displaced.

The two CRO representatives worked with the InterNGO Consortium to shape the process that they envisaged by inviting four leaders each from Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja and Konkomba communities, who had been at the centre of the recent violence, to continue their engagement following on from the fact-finding mission consultations. In the words of Emmanuel Bombande "...we thought if we started with the category we call the voices of reason we might be able to move the process forward."<sup>30</sup> The meeting was very low key, billed as a chance to advise development NGOs operating in the war-affected area on how they could continue their development work. This was to be the start of the Kumasi Peace Process.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with NGO worker, Accra, August 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Emmanuel Bombande, Accra, August 2007.



The representatives that emerged were a mixed group of locally respected leaders including members of the educated elite, such as school teachers and lawyers. They also included traditional leaders and what Feierman (1990) would describe as peasant intellectuals, such as the farmer Mamah Sani who, despite having no formal education, had won the high-profile National Best Farmer Award in 1992 and was renowned locally for his wisdom and knowledge of proverbs. It is important to emphasise that this group, termed for the purpose of the negotiations as the 'voices of reason', did not correspond to a simple category of moderate, as opposed to hardline, leaders. These were people who had expressed an interest in exploring ways of ending the violence, and that were of sufficiently high profile to be able to negotiate with the highest-ranking opinion leaders, chiefs and politicians within their own ethnic group. Yet many of them could have been described as hardline in that they had been party to the organisation of the war.

The next step in the process was to identify a suitable location where the negotiations could take place. Kumasi, which is Ghana's second largest city and cultural and traditional capital, as the former seat of the most high profile traditional king, the Asantehene, was chosen for its central location, its positive associations and as a neutral city which would not bring with it the attention from government associated with the capital Accra. While, as we saw, the InterNGO Consortium had informed the government of their proposed activities and gained their approval to pursue local peacebuilding activities it was still very clearly not a government initiative, something that was to have both positive and negative consequences. Meanwhile, the tensions in the North were still such that the Konkomba delegation could not travel safely within the region, and had to be driven in an NGO vehicle in the eastern direction of minority-controlled areas over the border to Togo, down to the Togolese capital Lomé and then from there to back over to Ghana and Kumasi.

The PPNT and similar earlier government initiatives were widely perceived as problematic and ineffectual. The leaders who took part in the negotiation efforts of the PPNT attributed this to a tendency to stop at asking what they wanted and what the problems were that had led to the fighting, creating expectations that were never fulfilled. It was impossible for the government to simply accede to the inflated demands and propositions of high-profile ethnic leaders, yet even their failure to do so created the suspicion of enemy bias on both sides. One chiefly leader explained the difference in persuasive power in these terms:

...when Accra was trying to find who is right and who is wrong, professor [Assefa] was trying to find out what went wrong. Not who, what. Not to apportion blame. And I think this was the main weapon he used to cool down tempers. And he asked everybody to be honest enough, every group to say it, what went wrong, what you did wrong. Assess yourselves, and see in the conflict what did you think you did wrong, and I think we were honest enough. Yes, and we find out that actually the fault wasn't from one side, it was from both sides.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. Voices of Reason: Harnessing Positive Path-dependence in the Kumasi Peace Process**

The approach of the Kumasi Accord was radically different from that of the PPNT. As an NGO initiative its facilitators could not offer any resources as a reward to the leaders of the factions, instead the idea was to start by bringing peace-minded community leaders together so that they could put their assertions to each other, exploding inflated claims and lowering demands, and then build on emerging agreement. To quote an Nchumburu leader:

<sup>31</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

...you see that people from that thing [NPI] are neutral, open-minded. And therefore you said what you would say, and the people who were assembled there too seemed to be open-minded. And at the end of the day people say 'So this is what you really wanted and you didn't even say it?' Some of us felt very, very bad because of all of this and people were able to disabuse their minds on somethings. I give you an example, the late T [Gonja chief], when we said 'They don't want education in our area and therefore the District Assembly will not build schools because it's being controlled by Gonja'. Then he said 'My friend, do you know at T [Gonja village] we have only one primary school?' For thirty-something villages. You get these things out. So that initiative was professionally handled. The others [PPNT] they just say 'Ok, so what is it? So, what do you want?'. And after that nobody does anything, so we didn't have confidence that something would be done.<sup>32</sup>

This was a process of conflict defusion through interaction: Churchill's 'jaw-jaw', quoted earlier. As can be seen in the quote above the selection of 'open-minded' initial participants was important to its success, as were the constructive, practical objectives of the initial meeting. The lack of resources and power that are often described as disadvantages of CRO peacebuilding were to have negative effects on the institutionalisation of the outcome of the Accord as we'll see in Section 5, but at this stage it was also a relative advantage of the NGO negotiations compared to those of the PPNT. The PPNT was a channel through which leaders could pose demands to government on behalf of their group, for land rights and legal rights, including in the traditional institutions. It thereby became a forum for vertical power struggles with the state as well as horizontal conflict between ethnic groups.

The specific legal and narrative circumstances of this conflict, detailed in Jönsson (2007), are exacerbated by a vague national legal framework on land and chieftaincy rights in the region and relatively equally matched parties. Historically rooted grievances that had been aggravated in recent times by a number of smaller local wars were sharpened by the demands of minority ethnic youth association leaders who had started to clash with the neo-traditional leaders of the majority groups. Tensions mounted as different disputes were elaborated into one single conflict narrative, ethnic identities homogenised and weapons acquired. Thus, while resource and symbolic competition were central to the Kumasi negotiations, their resolution benefited from an inter-group approach rather than a national-level process in which legal precedents would have been complicated by their implications for other regions with different tensions over similar issues and the addition of state resource incentives. What was off the agenda was as important as what came to be on it.

The Kumasi Peace Process cast itself as outside of the political manoeuvring and antagonisms of Ghanaian party politics, and as drawing on African sources of authority, such as tradition and local history, despite being externally funded by donor NGOs and the British High Commission. In fact, what it represented was a very nuanced form of micropolitics that created space for local discourses to articulate around a number of sources of tensions, including tradition, history and modern and spiritual power. Once voiced, these tensions could be creatively reconciled through 'jaw-jaw', first discursively and then in practice. As we shall see this meant first the re-construction and elaboration of peace narratives of joint histories and interdependence, followed by the development of locally acceptable neo-traditional compromises.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

Crucial to the path that the process was to take was the build-up of a constructive atmosphere between the delegates, and the care that the CRO mediators took to encourage it is reflected in the participants' comments about professionalism: as an important part of what is referred to as their conflict-resolution skills. Some aspects of this were practical, such as establishing respectful ground rules about hearing each other out and not getting personal. The CRO mediators also made use of a wealth of conflict-resolution techniques that formed part of NPI practice. Functioning as facilitators in the most practical sense of the word they structured the discussions into different sections and exercises, alternating between moderating discussions, leading them, working quietly behind the scenes and seeking to inspire the group.

Yet, to a large extent facilitation consisted of embodied knowledge, an ability to tap into traditional and spiritual authority through charismatic and discursive practices similar to those of a successful evangelical preacher. In the sessions the mediators would urge on or soothe participants through their actions and presence. Words and sentiments were picked up on, re-stated and re-negotiated, rather than re-framed, their connotations channelled towards peaceful objectives that were portrayed as accepted. In this lay another CRO advantage as this approach harmonised with the use of a pan-African, spiritual emphasis, more likely to suit an informal NGO-organised process than the commission-style, government appointed PPNT process which was modelled on a secular Western institutional format.

Initially, in Kumasi mistrust between the different delegations was rampant. The Konkomba team, as the only minority group represented at the first round of talks, was especially exposed. As one delegate said of the first day and night at the hotel:

The tension that was with it – today we are laughing as I said, and smiling, embracing each other. Even when they were given single rooms in a hotel [...] each delegate has a room. Nobody slept in his room alone! [...] Everybody was insecure, because who says in the night somebody would not come and murder you?<sup>33</sup>

The Konkomba delegates were not only outnumbered, they were also outranked by the members of the chiefly delegations, many of whom were men of great traditional and spiritual authority and included the second highest-ranking Dagomba chief, the Mion Lana. The chiefly delegates of the majority groups were, as is customary on official occasions, accompanied by their courtly retinue of helpers. In the case of the Mion Lana these would sit beside him on the floor, the traditional praise singer clapping if he spoke. This display of symbolic power was suggestive of the large status gap between the two sides, which was precarious in a situation where the grievances of Konkomba populations and leaders focused on feelings of marginalisation, discrimination and inequality.

Apart from the intimidating nature of the conference room arrangements, the start of the negotiations also proved difficult in practical terms. In the morning of the first day a truck hit the main electric pole connected to the compound. Without electricity to power the fans the venue was uncomfortably humid and hot. The mediators decided to try to set the tone by exploring African proverbs<sup>34</sup>. The reason they gave for choosing the discourse of proverbs was firstly to adjust the expectations of the participants. Through metaphors couched in motifs of pride and cultural authenticity the mediators sought to make it clear that they could not bring peace, but were there to support the development of local compromises.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

<sup>34</sup> The proverbs included a story of a dutiful boy-child who gives an old man a stick to scratch his back with, rather than scratch it for him.

Secondly, proverbs were chosen as a means of engagement with the majority chiefs. Since such stories carry their own claims to traditional wisdom they were seen as a means through which neo-traditional narratives could be contested through a congruent and respectful idiom, likely to be interpreted as requiring a constructive response. In the words of Bombande the mediators sought:

to let them understand that the opportunity that we were creating was profound not just in terms of the aftermath of violence but in terms of the social construct and meaning of community inter-relationships in the Northern region. Which was going to, in my view, going to go for quite a long while, in decades. It was about how we could begin to rewrite history. A history in which, for the Konkombas, whether it was the colonial period or the post-independent years, they did not belong. And yet if you listened attentively, they wanted to belong for a good reason, they wanted to feel part of Ghana. They wanted to feel respected. There was simply no communication to allow this to happen due in part maybe to the stereotypes, the many years of social exclusion.<sup>35</sup>

As pointed to in the quote, the war in the NR was taking place in a context of national as well as local pressures. Much social interaction and organisation in the north is shaped by national rather than ethnic boundaries. Schools, political institutions and the civil service, communications, transport and the media are all organised along national lines and disseminate national norms of citizenship and development. These are norms that modern ethnically-exclusive associations, such as the ethnic youth associations and neo-traditional institutions, engage with. This can be seen in the compromises that were developed by the accord, including the concept of traditional citizenship, in the sense of recognised right of residence in an ultimately state-designated Traditional Council area.

In combination with the importance of inter-ethnic trade for the region, such hybrid sources of identity could be used to recreate inter-ethnic narratives of peace. Trade articulates in complex ways with ethnicity. The majority group drum histories speak of the adoption of local languages as well as wives, and larger languages such as Dagomba became a medium for trade. As Richards (1996) points out in the context of Sierra Leone such languages then develop, changing with internal processes and the control of trading posts rather than wholesale invasion, folk wanderings or conquest.

Ethnic identities were strengthened and elaborated during the colonial era, so that such linguistic maps, influenced by language flux, linguistic convergence and re-convergence, became more strongly bounded, culminating in attempts at ethnic mapping (see Illustrations 1 and 2 in Appendix ) that are historical objects of struggle (Jönsson, 2007). The dissolution of inter-ethnic trade was an important aspect of the disentanglement of looser ethnic identities into more exclusive conceptions in the region. For example, the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) decision to create Konkomba trade networks for their yams rather than using Nanumba traders in the run-up to the 1981 war signalled a unilateral renegotiation of communal relationship that, however biased and extractive, had developed into an inter-ethnic tradition since the arrival of the Konkomba settlers in the 1940s. The structuring of new forms of land use through the highly symbolic channels of local chieftaincies rather than more secular forms of landlordism was contested because the new relationships tied into sensitive historical narratives of conquest and slavery.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Emmanuel Bombande, Accra, August 2007.

Because trade relationships are an enactment of inter-group communication they are a barometer of hostility, requiring trust, or normative as well as physical proximity. Moreover, through exchange relations other relationships develop and are sustained as friendship builds and inter-dependency is demonstrated, enacted and accepted. For these reasons, trade was commonly mentioned by interviewees as a contributor to peace. As one participant put it:

You know, immediately after the conflict, people were not interacting to trade. But after some time, we realised [that] we needed items from each other. The villages needed clothing, needed cooking utensils, needed roofing sheets – building materials. And the townpeople needed food, they needed labour. So it forced us to come together – it played a very important role, trade.<sup>36</sup>

Although resumption of trade could not immediately and completely remove suspicion and fear, making it safe again for traders to travel to communities dominated by formerly hostile groups was to become one of the most visible areas of improvement occasioned by the Kumasi Peace Process.

The authority of the Konkomba representatives, the educated leaders of KOYA, were drawn from modern secular sources, including higher education and the weight of numbers in a newly democratic system, whereas most of the majority delegates derived at least some of their standing from chiefly traditions. This meant that the major hurdle to getting the parties to communicate was whether the authority of Konkomba leaders would be respected. This major challenge was voiced immediately following the preliminaries of the proverbs, the ground rules and the introductions. The Mion Lana expressed his disgust at finding the KOYA representatives were the people chosen to represent the ethnic group, saying that it was evidence of how the world was upside down that he should be sitting in the same room with that type of delegation. Mr Bombande described this moment as a turning point, akin to those that his former teacher Lederach (2005) was later to theorise as instances of moral imagination. The moral imagination describes the capacity to create and use such turning points to transcend old destructive patterns and make new ways of interaction possible.

Instead of responding to the comments with the usual counter-accusations of the illegitimacy of feudal exploitation the leader of the Konkomba delegation, Isaac Sukpen, answered the accusations in their own terms, forging a new composite discourse that reconciled the positions, making the complaints of both sides intelligible as problems thrown up by the same narrative. After expressing his deep respect for the Mion Lana he said that the problem lay in exactly this, because the Konkomba had been prevented from organising around their own paramount chief, who would be an elder, they were represented by youth association leaders. Their relationship was an anomaly and the Mion Lana could solve this by supporting the appointment of a Konkomba paramount, so that in future there could be a meeting of paramount chiefs when there was a problem, and not youth leaders.

The Mion Lana considered this argument and responded that despite being an elder and a chief, he did not necessarily have the wisdom, and that Mr Sukpen, despite being a young man representing the Konkomba, had spoken wisely. This was seen by delegates as an unexpected turning point in Dagomba-Konkomba relations that opened up the possibility of dialogue. To quote Mr Bombande, the mediator:

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

out of the blue emerged a certain spirit, a certain willingness to tolerate one another even in very difficult circumstances. And to build upon that and make it possible for people to talk, however difficult the issues are to talk about. And that was how we started.<sup>37</sup>

This was to be the start of a long and difficult process. The first round of talks lasted only four days and didn't aim at negotiating any of the issues, but rather sought to let the different community representatives voice their losses and stress inter-ethnic bonds, to strengthen the perceived need for a negotiated peace. Such perceptions of the futility of violence were illustrated in one interview with a Nawuri leader recounting the following allegory of the result of struggles between parties reluctant to negotiate because of their belief in the justness of their claim or their superior power:

maybe if your item is with me, because I feel I got a firmer grip of it I feel it very difficult to release it back to you so you see us struggling unless – maybe the thing is I mean you pull it so hard. And if it is a calabash it will destroy and it will be difficult to mend, even if you mend it, it won't hold water? So the proper thing is that if there is an issue about land you sit down and you negotiate.<sup>38</sup>

After the first meeting the delegates were asked to inform their communities about what had taken place and raise suggestions of who else should be included in the second round. The InterNGO Consortium also formed a specific Peacebuilding Working Group (PBWG) at this stage, which was put in charge of supporting, monitoring and coordinating the process. Three months later the now expanded delegations reconvened for a second round of talks, known as Kumasi II. After establishing contact at Kumasi I, the need for peace, and alternative inter-ethnic peace supporting narratives, such as historical intermarriage and the instances of cross-communal protection outlined in Section 1, Kumasi II was billed as an opportunity to analyse what had actually happened and why. It is common practice for negotiations to start by establishing agreement over root causes (King and IISS, 1997) as defining the problems sets the agenda for what differences the talks will aim to resolve. Forging a joint discourse of what were the issues at stake is the first step in defusing conflict narratives by discursively reconciling the resentments of both sides into one account of mounting inter-ethnic tension. Problems are sorted into root causes and triggers, and escalation is explained as a self-reinforcing spiral, as we saw in the quote about the 'science of conflict' from the ethnic youth association leader in Section 1.

For such a discourse to be adopted and seen as reflective of the lead up to the war the delegates have to want to reverse the dispute. It then helps to understand the conflict's momentum as inadvertent. I have previously shown how hardline leaders sometimes intentionally construct and spread disinformation, as in the leaflet distributed in Tamale and Yendi in 1993 connecting all the local minority wars with the defunct National Liberation Movement of Western Togoland (Jönsson, 2007). By not portraying the conflict narratives of hardline leaders as intentional disinformation aimed at engendering hatred and mobilising people for violence, such a conflict explanatory makes it possible for formerly extreme leaders to enter the process without cognitive dissonance.

In 1995 the conflict in Northern Ghana had reached an impasse, communities were shocked at the level of destruction that the war of 1994 had wrought and leaders were finding it difficult to recruit militias, especially outside the relative unemployment of the winter dry

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Emmanuel Bombande, Accra, August 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

season. As subsistence farmers, most of the combatants needed to resume their agricultural work once the rain returned in the summer, a strong incentive as the rains were good in 1994. Respondents describe a situation in which everyone was 'tired of war' and wanted an alternative, yet the government negotiated treaty of June 1994 had failed to resolve communal tensions, as shown by the renewed outbreak of fighting in March. As mentioned above, the divisions among the effective leaders of the ethnic groups were not between hardliners who had organised the war and pacifists. Instead they were between those who were willing to work with representatives of peace constituencies, such as those with inter-ethnic identities or ties and the NGOs, and venture into negotiations with the enemy, and those who refused to engage, often citing principled objections such as not being able to work with those responsible for particular atrocities.

Kumasi II was a difficult phase as different narratives of what had happened clashed, yet it succeeded in its aim of reform through a process conceived as a deep social analysis of the issues. As mentioned the first workshop had established the forum as one in which local customs of politeness were respected, expressed in the ground rule of "being hard on the issues but soft on the people." Because of this atmosphere of respect the issues had to be voiced in an acceptable idiom, that handled sensitively past relations of slave raiding for example, which meant making them more amenable to negotiation. While ex-delegates remember how discussions got heated and positions sometimes seemed entrenched, they also emphasised that the actual points of disagreement appeared reduced through this process of description and reformulation and the prospect of compromise increased.

## **5. Kumasi III-VI: Forging and Institutionalising the Kumasi Peace Accord**

Although there had been some continual contact between the PBWG, the government and the armed forces, the promise of real progress towards a negotiated peace that was raised by the end of Kumasi II made the CRO staff go back to Accra to extensively brief the PPNT and the members of government that they had first informed before their village consultations. While members of the PPNT expressed surprise at the extent and speed of developments, they also made a recommendation that was to be critical for the progress of the talks and the stabilisation of the area: that the other minority groups that had partaken in the recent wars be invited. This chimed with the wishes of the Konkomba delegation, who were keen to bring the other minorities onboard.

The inclusion of Nchumburu, Nawuri and Basari delegations, again recruited through enquires at the local village level, in the third round of talks had several implications. Firstly, it decisively shifted the balance away from the marginalisation of the Konkomba delegation in that there were now four minority groups present as well as the three chiefly groups. Rather than alienating the majority groups, this new dynamic seems to have concentrated everyone's mind on reaching a workable peace plan. It also widened the remit of the talks from the specific status and land issues of the 1994 conflict, such as the Konkomba petition for paramountcy, to the local minority-majority tensions more generally. Because of minority modes of decentralised leadership, the additional minority delegations brought more youth association leaders to the talks which helped to tap into organisational structures that were to be used later for practical demobilisation through NORODA.

From the Konkomba side, their highest-profile traditional leader, the Ucha Bobo of Saboba who they had mooted as their potential paramount, also attended Kumasi III. In a customary idiom amenable to majority chiefs he expressed the friendly intentions of the Konkomba group and their aspirations for recognition, explaining that they had come to realise the practical and status advantages of having chiefs as opposed to secular leaders in, for

example, securing meetings with high-level members of government. The secular authority of the negotiations was strengthened as well as its customary credentials. Larger and higher-profile talks attracted higher-profile leaders who had previously not been willing to engage. One side-effect of this was the increasing number of delegates who were also lawyers or well-known politicians.

One future minister was so touched by what he heard at one of the sessions that he stood up and apologised for his past behaviour, saying he had been raised to disrespect the other ethnic group throughout his childhood and he had not realised until now that his behaviour was part of the patterns that were causing the conflict. While CRO critics are often suspicious of the authenticity of such redemption narratives, it is clear from the interviews with this man and other conference attendants that not only does he describe this episode as an important turning point in his career, but the other delegates valued the apology as a genuine act of recognition.

At Kumasi III, highly informal side meetings were arranged in which leaders such as the Mion Lana and the Ucha Bobo could build rapport. Afterwards newly converted leaders were asked to inform other leaders who remained to be convinced and to whom they were close of what had taken place at the meetings. Three months were set aside to raise awareness and discuss the new developments, no longer just at village meetings but also in the larger towns, a process that the PBWG assisted. The PBWG coordinated a number of other local activities, supported by a grant of £50,000 and a 4x4 from the British High Commission. They visited key traditional leaders to show their respect and exchange symbolic gifts, opening doors to future visits by traditional leaders from the conflicting groups.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Social Welfare, who supplied another car, they launched a peace education campaign. One volunteer was drawn from each delegation, slogans were invented, peace radio jingles recorded and posters and T-shirts printed. The inter-ethnic team made up of these well-respected leaders then travelled from village to village to disseminate news of the advances made at the talks, but also to challenge conflict narratives by physically demonstrating that it was safe for them to work together with members of previously hostile ethnic groups.

Community members that I interviewed who had not been at the talks often spoke of the visits of this group, and how they were taken seriously because they were not paid NGO representatives expected to advocate peace but their own community members actively demonstrating the possibility of coexistence and therefore of peace. Although as we have seen conflict-resolution skills now carry their own authority which can assist mediation in channelling the expectations of participants, such preconceived expectations can also mean that peace messages do not carry the same weight when voiced by CRO workers who are expected to transmit them, hence the usefulness of the campaign. The inter-ethnic peace-building team was also seen by delegates as a guarantee against the misrepresentation at the community level of what had been agreed, resolving the problem of the distrust of majority group leaders of the influence of KOYA.

The question that formed the starting point for Kumasi IV was how the communities could achieve peaceful and meaningful co-existence. At this point most of the delegations had at least one member with legal training, included because lawyers at previous meetings had been drawing the attention of their delegations to the possible legal implications of different peace agreements. At Kumasi IV compromises were hammered out, many of them neo-traditional in nature, like the concept of traditional citizenship previously mentioned. A final round of consultations then followed to ensure that the treaty was sufficiently reflective of



community concerns and therefore rooted enough to endure. Practically this meant photocopying the draft accord and discussing at a variety of fora. Interest in the accord was such that it was spontaneously translated and discussed in places such as markets as well as in the open meetings arranged by the PBWG, with individual wordings giving rise to heated public debates and the comments transmitted back to the delegations.

There was also progress in chiefly relations, as the PBWG convinced the Ucha Bobo to formally visit and pay his respects to the Ya-Na. The Dagomba paramount at the time accepted the Konkomba elder as a visiting chief and after exchanging greetings they shared the traditional cola nuts offered to guests. One interviewee, an NGO worker who had witnessed the meeting, recalled the sense of respect and empathy between the two elders, remarkable in a context of recent ethnic affronts:

You felt there is a certain time when traditional people engage one another, silence becomes powerful. There were certain times you could not do the type of analysis we did in the rooms in Kumasi. But the silence spoke for itself, it's like I feel what you feel and you feel what I feel. And I remember spontaneously the drum started to beat and the Konkomba chief started to dance and he was joined. And that was unprecedented. I mean you cannot see that, you cannot see that beauty. Enemies so to speak are now expressing themselves in this way. It was incredible. It was such a powerful experience. And the Ya-Na kept on saying: 'My goodness, we fought and killed one another, and look at this!' For me it was that meeting that convinced the Ya-Na to propose the Konkomba chief to be elevated to a paramount chief.<sup>39</sup>

However, the burgeoning success of the Kumasi process was brewing trouble in the secular field. Rather than simply providing a popular mandate, the open process of consultation was to have unexpected ramifications, as it attracted the attention of the media. The sudden prominence of the Kumasi talks in the press effectively side-lined the PPNT causing considerable resentment within the commission. This gave rise to the major setback of the process, immediately in terms of the momentum of the talks and for its later implications for the institutionalisation of its outcomes. Following the conclusion of Kumasi IV, the CRO staffers had again briefed the government and received an unprecedented invitation: President Rawlings wanted to meet with the delegates in the Office of the President, Osu Castle in Accra. However, when the delegates arrived they were greeted by a message saying that the meeting had been cancelled.

The peace process participants, including both the delegates and the facilitators interviewed, believe that the withdrawal of the official support of the President was the result of PPNT intervention. The cancellation of the meeting was a slight to the delegates, many of them chiefs, and also to the importance of the treaty that they were there to discuss. The CRO workers tried to salvage the mood of the occasion by hiring conference facilities at a hotel and arranging for a meal, to ensure that the delegates would be motivated to return to the fifth round of talks to sign the agreement, but the profile of the accords was damaged by their failure to receive official recognition. Subsequently, the PPNT arranged a press conference in which they sought to undermine the credibility of what had been achieved in Kumasi. Criticising the NGOs for engaging in peace negotiations rather than the distribution of relief aid, which had been their accepted function, they even went as far as stating that the Kumasi Accord was baseless as the NGOs were acting without a government mandate.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with NGO worker, Accra, August 2007

Although there was a renewed interest from President Rawlings in the wake of the sixth and final Kumasi meetings when the PPNT and the PBWG cooperated to arrange traditional reconciliation ceremonies (see below), there was a common feeling among the delegates interviewed that this represented a missed opportunity as official and sustained presidential engagement in the process would have ensured its institutionalisation. Respondents saw such institutionalisation as dependent on the harmonisation of government strategy with the accord, through its white papers, future legal provisions and commissions, which would have created greater continuity in subsequent political negotiations affecting the NR so that the advances in community relations it represented could be built upon and better sustained. As one Nanumba leader put it:

... this process we went through and signed. It is now, I will say, it is now an orphan. Nobody wants it! We came and briefed the regional minister at that time, Seini, saying this is what we've done. We went to the government, the government say: "We have heard you, that is fine." Up to now nobody has followed it, nobody! Children who were 6 years at that time, 5 years, 7 years, they have not understand what happened, and they are in majority now. They are now 18 years, 21, 22 years old and they didn't know this thing was signed. There are Nanumba young men and women who didn't know this thing was signed, there are Konkomba young men and women who did not know this thing was signed. So after this they should have ownership, so that Konkombas in Nanumba and Chamba they will all gather, young men and women, old men, and they should tell them this is what happened 12 years ago and this was what was agreed upon!<sup>40</sup>

The CRO staff had tried to avoid bringing any media attention to the peace talks, but were unsuccessful because of the initiatives of the correspondents of the two large Ghanaian newspapers, the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*. The damaging consequences of the ensuing furore, as the PPNT as the officially mandated actor became concerned about the NGOs taking the credit for achieving peace, demonstrates the political vulnerability of CROs even when they make an effort to build a popular mandate and gain the official permission of the government for their activities. This led one CRO worker interviewed to blame himself for not having done more to keep the attention of the media away from the process. Some of the delegates spoke of how they had resisted PPNT attempts to take credit for the peace, with one delegate, an Nchumburu leader, even making the point in his official statement at the peace ceremony in Salaga described below.

The Kumasi Peace Process was not fatally damaged by government disengagement, as it was clear to its parties that it represented an opportunity to progress inter-communal relations beyond the destructive patterns that had developed and that were threatening the region's prospects. Its continuation was possible because, as we'll see in the next section, the Ghanaian state itself managed to narrowly escape becoming seen as a party in the conflict by the leaders of the combatant groups and therefore its direct participation was not necessary. In March 1996 the delegations returned to Kumasi with the comments from the consultations to hammer out and sign the final accord. The negotiating room had been constrained by the strongly felt views expressed at the public meetings (see also Assefa, 2001). This led to last-minute wrangling over wordings and the failure of the Nawuri representatives, who had been brought in in round three, to agree to a compromise with the Gonja over land issues outstanding from their 1991-92 war.

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

Yet on March 30 1996 a comprehensive accord was signed. Various follow-up activities were planned as well as an inter-ethnic youth association aimed at overcoming the role of these associations in the articulation and mobilisation of exclusive ethnic identities, to be created at the sixth and final meeting. As one participant put it:

we now needed an infrastructure to sustain the peace. And that was when it was found out that since the youth associations coordinated the fighting and the war effort, why don't they come together to form an umbrella body? That way they were called NORYDA. So, NORYDA was discussed in its detail and outdoored [presented to the public/made official] in Kumasi VI. On the momentum that was produced on the Kumasi Peace Accord. And we then continued to try as much as possible and sustain the peace efforts in the work that was then done in terms of the follow up.<sup>41</sup>

The successful signing of the Kumasi Accords and the visible improvement of inter-communal relations in the region through the gradual resumption of trade and free movement in 1996 presented the PPNT with a *fait accompli*. In order for the commission, which was under criticism in the Ghanaian media for its expenses, not to become redundant it had to engage with the closing stages of the peace process and it chose to do so through the medium of neo-traditional reconciliation ceremonies. There are structural political disincentives for a Ghanaian government to intervene in 'traditional' disputes, including both intra-ethnic succession and inter-ethnic conflicts. The threat to the state's perceived neutrality and prestige posed by most forms of engagement lead to inefficient strategies of conflict freezing through devolution of responsibility and security force interventions, in effect suppressing rather than resolving tensions (Akwetey, 1996; Skalník, 2002).

The volatility of the symbolic language of chieftaincy emphasised by Gilbert (1994) was central to NR conflict narratives, and constitutes a real political problem. In the past it had held back government engagement and the publication of the findings of previous commissions and it was again instantiated in the principal PPNT peace ceremony. The legitimacy of the neo-traditional ceremony arranged in Salaga to mark the reconciliation between the factions was compromised not only by arguments over which group had the right to perform the sacrifice to the earth gods, and the failure of the Nawuri chief of Kpandai, who had not been able to reach a satisfactory outcome at the talks, to attend (BADECC, 1996). It was also undermined by the fowl offered by the Konkomba representatives dying on its chest rather than on its back. The assembled crowd interpreted this as the offering not having been accepted by the spirits, evidence that the Konkomba were still secretly hostile. The ceremony was almost aborted in the presence of President Rawlings and was concluded in an atmosphere of continued distrust.

The instrumental use of non-secular traditional sources of authority requires the negotiation of spiritual idioms in a way that inspires popular agreement and thereby consent. The CRO-led peace process was able to make careful use of such moral imagination and carry forward a widening momentum and constituency from its starting point of articulation with traditional and local respected leaders. The PPNT was unsuccessful in building close ties with and between leaders partly because of its connection to political power and resources, leaving it less able to co-opt traditional power. While, as mentioned in Section 1, the Kumasi process benefited from embracing the humane self-image projected by its participants, the PPNT was perceived by interviewees as more apprehensive and distrustful of NR leaders.

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with peace process participant, Accra, August 2007

In a region where traditional values of courtesy are prized, the stability of political relations was threatened by excessive bluntness and needed careful re-establishment. While allusions to coercive government power are seen as insulting and any statement by a government-empowered commission is read for signs of partiality, failure to stop large-scale outbreaks of violence is even more damaging to government authority as the state is responsible both indirectly, through its ultimate legal control of disputed rights and resources, and directly, as the holder of the monopoly on sanctioned violence. As mentioned, all sides interpreted the fact that the government did not mount a major security response for the first 11 days of the conflict as evidence of its bias against them. Interviewees from all the delegations expressed the suspicion that the government had sought to give their opponents a free run to ethnically cleanse their area and only intervened when it was clear that this was not going to be possible.

## **6. The Dog that didn't Bark: NR CRO Negotiations, Mitigating Circumstances and Persistent Problems**

Most of the interviewees now regard the military intervention as having been neutral. The stabilisation of the security situation in 1994 also facilitated the initiation of the peace talks as the CRO staff could hold open meetings with the refugee population and community leaders and move around the region relatively freely. Interviewees pointed to the hardships caused by the break-down of inter-ethnic relations and even the dusk-to-dawn curfew established at the time of the state of emergency as further incentives for seeking to establish meaningful peace beyond the cessation of the campaigns of violence. Some NGO staff cited the pressure on the warring communities as an opportunity to encourage a distancing from the leaders that were inciting the violence by raising consciousness of their relative situations.

Extremist leaders were not themselves forced to stay in the worst-affected areas as they had the resources to move their families to safety. Interviewees resented their own children being put at risk and their schooling interrupted while such leaders continued to agitate, at a time when life was extremely difficult in the NR. Peace narratives often emphasised the losses borne by the common people and such instances were used to build support for peace during the Kumasi process. These are often powerful personal stories, such as this one told by a Nawuri chief:

I will say that war is senseless and just as it starts with emotion, sometimes God wonderfully stops it with some emotions. You will find that somebody recalls a situation and he thinks it is not worth it. And the word goes like that again. There was a time, if I can positively remember? The Nawuris they started to celebrate their victory, or their independence, every year in May, or June, thereabouts... And one day in my village, the youth were drumming and dancing, and I happened to be passing by somebody's house and I heard somebody wailing. I got into the house, to find the son of one of the fallen heroes, one who had died during the conflict, weeping about the loss of his father. So that boy does not celebrate the victory... So I looked at it and I realised that those who were celebrating were children of those who ran away! They didn't take part in the whole thing, they lost nothing. So they have the courage to celebrate.<sup>42</sup>

Section 3 showed how the social incorporation of both the members and the leaders of the ethnic militias was a disincentive to risk continued social unrest, as only the top commanders had the resources to protect themselves from the physical risks and even their reputations

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

could be damaged. The military pressure can therefore be understood as having assisted the ending of the war in Ghana, by tipping the balance against further inter-ethnic attacks. Such a dynamic was not inevitable, however. While CRO staff sought to channel the stories of the hardships borne by the majority of the population in order to distance them from their leaders, the tragedies suffered could also have entrenched positions and alienated them from the state.

One of the problems for the credibility of CRO work is the impossibility of establishing the counter-factual. When a crisis does not develop its dangers are easily forgotten or interpreted in a way that underplays elements of risk. In the case of the NR conflict subsequent popular and official understandings of the security force intervention make the mistake of seeing it as a uniformly mitigating circumstance conducive to its resolution. The previous section showed how government engagement was a delicate balancing act where any and all interventions could be interpreted as partial and for which its instruments were rather blunt, granting a comparative advantage to the NGOs. Suspicions of partiality in combination with the brutality of the security forces risked turning the conflict from an inter-ethnic to an anti-government war, which would have been devastating to national security.

The excessive violence of the initial military intervention can be seen to have endangered national stability at least as much as the pre-intervention inter-ethnic fighting. By retaliatory burning of villages belonging to groups suspected of attacks the army practised similarly indiscriminate violence as the ethnic militias, and could have turned a war initially limited by the geographical concentration of the groups concerned into an anti-government rebellion centred around the Konkomba or other targeted ethnic groups. As one visibly upset community leader put it:

The firearms that were opened on them! Military convoys fired on some villages and burnt them. A soldier told me that the briefing that they were getting in Accra was like that, when you get a Konkomba man treat him as a prisoner of war... They were asked to come and disarm Konkombas and Bassares. So that's what they were told in Accra, but are you so stupid you came where there is no fighting, and then you were killing and disarming? Obey before complain, that's them.<sup>43</sup>

Indiscriminate attacks on villages, acts of extreme brutality including lethal beatings, incidents of extortion, forcible disarmament and the military's shoot-to-kill policy towards any unidentified groups of armed men in the affected areas during the state of emergency led to retaliatory attacks on soldiers which threatened to change the nature of the conflict. The most high-profile of these attacks was one in which a group of Konkomba combatants managed to destroy a government armoured vehicle. This was the ambush alluded to in the quote by the NGO worker above as adding to an atmosphere in which the military felt in 'a total war zone' and did not interact with the communities in which they were stationed. There were also smaller incidents like this described by one militia leader:

soldiers came and they spread the X [ethnic group] and fired and killed some. So they went and lay an ambush and kid [tricked] the soldiers that they had killed some goats that they were roasting and eating under trees and they fired on them. And one chief told me we slept there for three days, thinking there would be reinforcement of soldiers, but no one came so we had to disperse.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

<sup>44</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

Allegations of harassment and abuse by the soldiers of Konkombas, easily recognisable because of the common tradition of ritual facial scarring, were widespread. The risk of an escalation of the conflict into an anti-state rebellion was hence acute because security force brutality threatened to cause a break-down of state legitimacy among the Konkomba group. Rumours of Task Force bias were strengthened by the fact that the government-appointed national chairman of the Task Force Committee was a Dagomba, Alhaji Mahamma Idrissu. As detailed in Jönsson (2007, 2009) the chiefly or majority groups against whom the Konkomba were fighting have an historical educational advantage and this makes members of these groups much more likely to be army officers or high-ranking politicians. The only Konkomba MP at the time was suspended from Parliament for his comments on the situation, considered incendiary. Because the Konkomba ethnic group is not only one of Ghana's largest but also has a large number of members in other regions, such a break-down of relations would have threatened to spread the conflict into neighbouring regions, primarily the Volta Region but possibly further, seriously destabilising the entire Ghanaian nation state.

The security forces' attempts at disarmament during and after the conflict were not only characterised by violence, they demonstrated a lack of understanding and control of the local situation as well as a lack of consent. Interviewees described how the military would search houses during the state of emergency, mainly finding arrows as more advanced weapons would have been hidden more securely, for example through burying. The soldiers would then burn what they found, a pointless exercise in that the metal tip which didn't burn could easily be attached to a new shaft after they had left.

Attempts at quelling the violence through disarmament were ineffectual for reasons more fundamental than misunderstanding the local technologies of violence. Contrasting the situation with that of developed countries like England, seen as having a trusted police presence to guarantee safety, participants said that they simply could not disarm when they did not feel safe. Much of the weaponry used in the violence exists normally as part of rural life, including hunting rifles, cutlasses (the local word for a machete) and bows and arrows. Moreover, as we saw in the quote from my interview with the political leader in Section 2, when threatened, community members even went so far as to take loans to procure weapons, often from the military or the police. This both contributed to the hardship suffered by these disadvantaged communities and meant that the strengthening of the armed forces in response to the outbreak of violence was in part counter-productive.

The government of a state affected by internal war may portray it as a matter of policing, as to do otherwise would mean conceding the possibility that combatants may be motivated by legitimate grievances. The parallel between the type of security force intervention needed in a situation of mass communal violence and policing is not accurate, however, as the effectiveness of military intervention depends on persuading the organisers of the violence to withdraw or stop their forces as opposed to the isolation of individual criminals. The military intervention must be calculated to make stopping a more attractive option to combatants than continuing, as in areas where policing is not strong and places to hide are many, violence will otherwise persist. The military intervention in Ghana initially risked alienating the combatants but eventually came to be seen as neutral. The iterative NGO peace process stabilised the situation and managed to build lasting community-level peace out of the militarily imposed cease-fire and in the post-war political climate it was in the interest of all the parties to mend bridges with the government and military.

After Kumasi VI the PPNT sought to organise a ceremony in Tamale in which weapons collected from the ethnic militias would be burnt. Lack of support for the initiative meant that

this symbolic act was instead incorporated into the peace ceremony at Salaga described above. As mentioned, delegates resented the PPNT's attempts to take the credit for the newly established peace and destruction of the weapons was perceived as an empty gesture: the weapons burnt were unlikely to make much difference to the stability of the region. Because the military action derived, like the PPNT initiative, from central government, the actions of one tainted the reputation and likelihood of success of the other. This quote by a man who participated in both peace processes illustrates how the representations by the PPNT and the peacekeeping mission of the army were conflated: "The government's peace process was poor and it was political. Soldiers were standing with guns and shouting on people."<sup>45</sup>

Negative associations with government violence was compounded by the physical and social distance of the PPNT's shuttle diplomacy strategy, both between the commission and the population and between the parties that the commission sought to reconcile. This gave rumours and speculation the opportunity to spread because they were not disproved through interaction. As one leader said:

During the war, in fact we expected that the team, the government permanent team, they should have probably gone to the areas to see for themselves what had happened. And then when they see it would help them to determine the situation. It was after the ceremony, then they came. They were calling us to Accra and other areas.<sup>46</sup>

Conversely, the InterNGO negotiation process benefited from strong local ties that derived from resource distribution, both historical and during the relief effort. The lack of government social capital for the PPNT to draw on can be seen as a side effect of NGO provisions of basic services. To some extent NGOs have transferred onto themselves the community trust that conveys their most important comparative advantage simply by providing services to those who need it the most, and the government has lost it because it has been content to accept such provision, demonstrating some of the pitfalls of what Hearn (1998) has described as the NGOisation of the social sector of developing states. To quote one Konkomba interviewee:

The schools we have in Saboba, the secondary school is by the EP [Evangelical Presbyterian] church, the technical school by the Catholic church and the hospital by the Assemblies of God church – government hasn't done anything for us!<sup>47</sup>

In Kumasi, NGOs were building on their social capital and used existing channels of authority selectively to forge a momentum for peace for which there was a ready constituency in the local population that was losing out from the violence. To summarise, it was not mitigating circumstances in terms of military or political intervention by government that made the Kumasi process successful. Instead it was the instrumental use of local structures of secular and traditional authority in ways that emphasised local knowledge, trust and respect. These practices were embodied by mediators who stressed their African origin as part of the revaluation and development of local neo-traditional solutions, contributing to the sense of the authenticity of this vision despite external donor funding. The idea of the mediators as a neutral outsider, popularised by the practice and success of the Kumasi Accord, is not seen as a Eurocentric import but has been widely adopted and naturalised.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

<sup>46</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

<sup>47</sup> Interview with conference delegate, Tamale, August 2007

The sensitive and contingent nature of such micro-politics is not adequately captured by concepts like social capital or by thinking of CRO work in terms of reframing, although the channelling of the conflict dynamic which took place had a discursive as well as practical aspect. It is best understood as a process of attempting to steer and harness path dependence to create an alternative vision for inter-communal relations and the momentum through which to realise it. The historical development of social categories and relations of authority in NR society has created fault lines through which mass violence articulates. The conflict narratives used to incite and legitimise group violence often concern non-secular objects and relations, as struggles over tradition have become symbolic and ethnicised.

This paper has shown how CRO staff were able to counter local discourses of conflict, using neo-traditional discourse which carried an emotional as well as a practical appeal to affect a practice-based ethic of conciliation. This process took advantage of the social organisation of violence and the availability of organisational structures of youth mobilisation that could be harnessed for demobilisation. It used the strength of local leadership institutions, including chieftaincy, to select effective and recognised counterparts for the mediation efforts. Peace narratives that emphasised the best intentions of leaders and the suffering of the people created an attractive and respectable path out of conflict for the leaders willing to advocate peace even if this entailed a change in their position, and their dissemination impeded mass mobilisation.

How fraught the manipulation of tradition and spiritual symbolism can be is demonstrated by the death of two guinea fowl; the first sparking the largest war in Ghana's modern history and the second endangering a peace ceremony at the time of the war's resolution. National Ghanaian politics are no less precarious and, as we have seen, because of the effort put into building local consent and carrying it forward the NGOs were not as successful at negotiating relations with the PPNT. This had negative consequences for the institutionalisation of the measures proposed in the Kumasi Accord and also briefly threatened its momentum when the delegates were turned away from the meeting with the president.

As we have seen, people will spontaneously refuse to participate in war because of its destructiveness to normal life and relationships, many of which had been inter-ethnic in the NR, and may stop fighting because of competing obligations such as the need to return to agriculture. Yet a halt to the fighting, whether for these reasons or because of a military intervention may, as Clausewitz indicated, be just a temporary pause. Negotiated peace stands a greater chance of normalising relations if it can arrive at a mutually acceptable arrangement. Through the Kumasi process the CRO workers were able to assist in the development of such a vision and carry the consent of the parties to the conflict forward.



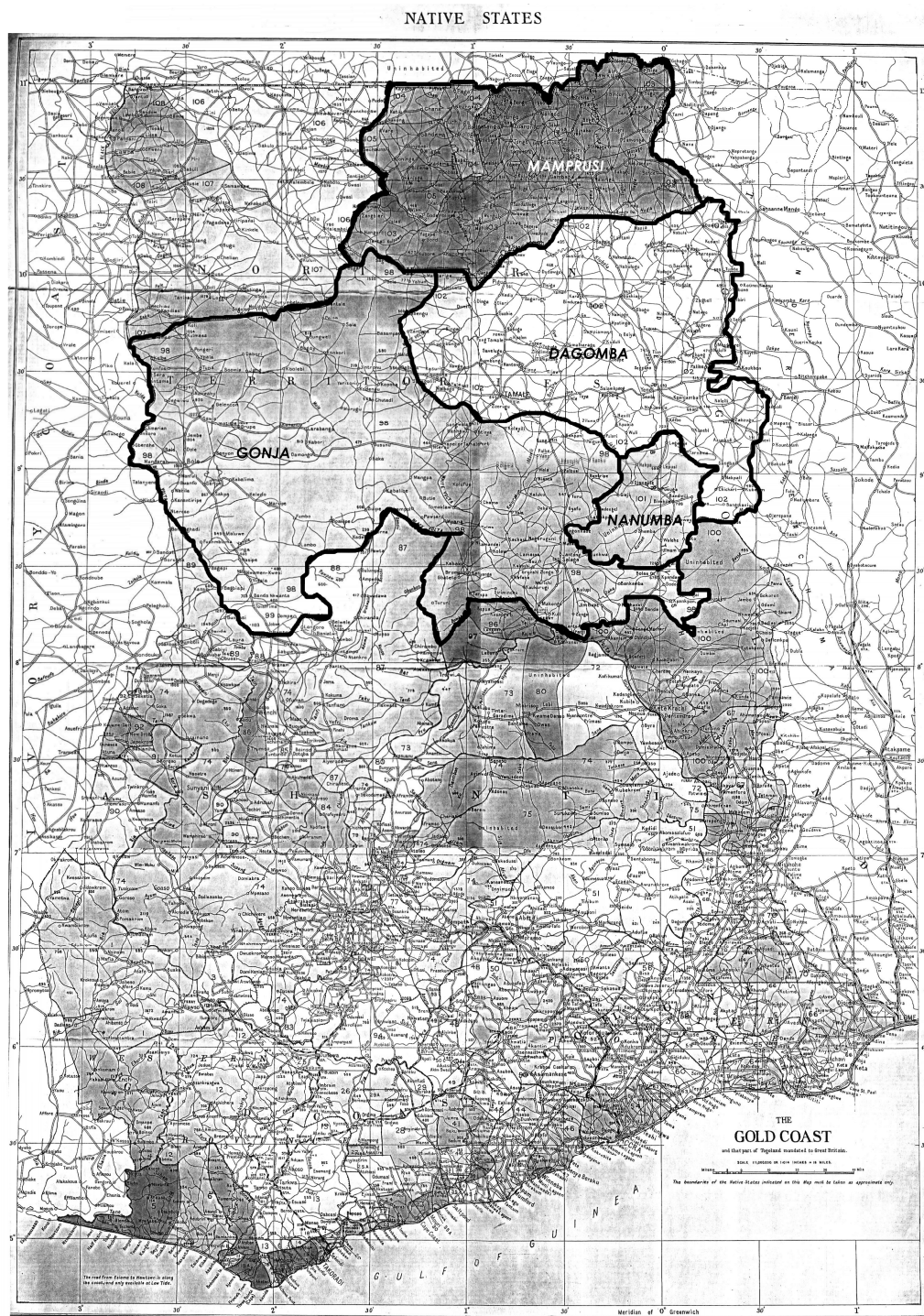
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## Appendix

### Illustration 1. British Colonial Map of Native States



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Illustration 2. Map of Ethnic Groups from 1960 Census



Source: Lentz and Nugent, 2000. Permission applied for.