The Peaceful Management of Horizontal Inequalities in Ghana

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CRISE WORKING PAPER No. 25
February 2007

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Abstract

Recent scholarship has highlighted the role of severe ethnic inequalities, or what Stewart (2002) has termed 'horizontal inequalities', in provoking a range of political disturbances, including violent conflicts and civil wars. However, some countries with severe socio-economic or developmental inequalities between different ethnic groups or regions have nonetheless remained relatively peaceful and stable. This obviously raises the question: under what circumstances are horizontal inequalities more likely to provoke violent group action? In order to understand the linkages between horizontal inequalities and the emergence of violent ethno-regional mobilisation, we need to analyse not only countries where violent conflicts have emerged, but also countries which have been able to manage their ethno-regional tensions and inequalities relatively peacefully. The current paper aims to do so for the Ghanaian case. From the perspective of horizontal inequality/conflict, Ghana is an interesting case not only because so far the prevailing socio-economic inequalities between the North and South have not resulted in a serious violent conflict at the national level. But also because the most serious political tensions have occurred between the elites of ethnic groups (the Ewe and Ashanti/Akan), whose socio-economic situations are not markedly different from one another.

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1. Introduction

Recent scholarship has highlighted the role of ethnic inequalities, or what Stewart (2000) has termed 'horizontal inequalities'*,* in provoking a range of political disturbances, including violent conflicts and civil wars. In particular, Stewart (2002: 3) asserts that where there are social, economic and political inequalities 'coinciding with cultural differences, culture could become a powerful mobilising agent' that could lead to political violence. This hypothesis clearly mirrors the main claim of the 'theory of relative deprivation', which suggests that the combination of deprivation-induced discontent and a sense of group cultural identity is the primary determinant for (violent) political mobilisation (see Gurr 1970). While it is argued that the presence of severe horizontal inequalities makes countries more vulnerable to violent conflict, some countries with severe socio-economic or developmental inequalities between different ethnic groups or regions have nonetheless remained relatively peaceful and stable. This obviously raises the question: under what circumstances are horizontal inequalities more likely to provoke violent group action?

In order to understand the linkages between horizontal inequalities and the emergence of violent ethno-regional mobilisation, we need to analyse not only countries where violent conflicts have emerged, but also countries which have been able to manage their ethno-regional tensions and inequalities relatively peacefully. The current paper aims to do so for the Ghanaian case. From the perspective of horizontal inequality/conflict, Ghana is an interesting case not only because so far the prevailing socio-economic inequalities between the north and south have not resulted in a serious violent conflict at the national level. But also because the most serious political tensions have occurred between the elites of ethnic groups (the Ewe and Ashanti/Akan), whose socio-economic situations are not markedly different from one another. Despite the evidence of major and coinciding ethnic, social and economic cleavages, 'there has been no development of "Northernness" as a basis for political cohesion, and no north versus south patterning of political alignments' (Brown 1982: 42). In addition to analysing why the north-south divide 'has so far had a surprisingly limited influence upon Ghanaian politics' (Lentz and Nugent 2000: 22), the present paper also explores the social relevance of the so-called Ewe-Ashanti/Akan cleavage. In order to explain why Ghana's two main cleavages have not erupted into a national crisis or conflict (similar to that in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire), I will draw on both primary and secondary sources throughout this paper.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 considers Ghana's ethnic and religious demography; Section 3 discusses the causes and evolution of Ghana's regional developmental inequalities, focusing particularly on the north-south divide; Section 4 provides an overview of the waxing and waning of ethnicity and ethno-regional tensions in Ghanaian politics; Section 5 analyses the main (political) strategies employed by successive Ghanaian regimes to contain ethno-regional tensions and mobilisation; Section 6 explores the social significance of the Ewe-Ashanti cleavage by analysing survey data regarding the salience of people's identities as well as their attitudes towards other (ethnic) groups; and Section 7 draws some conclusions regarding the peaceful management of horizontal inequalities in Ghana.

2. Ethno-regional and religious profile of Ghana

Ghana is a multiethnic country of around 19 million people which is administratively divided into 10 regions (see Figure 1). The four main ethno-cultural groups, comprising together around 86% of the population, are the Akan, Mole-Dagbani, Ewe and Ga-Dangme.[1] While all regions have a sizeable number of migrants or people considered to be 'strangers' in their region, there is a rough coincidence of ethnicity and administrative region in Ghana (Gyimah-Boadi 2003). Table 1, showing the ethnic and religious composition of Ghana, illustrates this.

Figure 1: **Ghana's administrative regions**
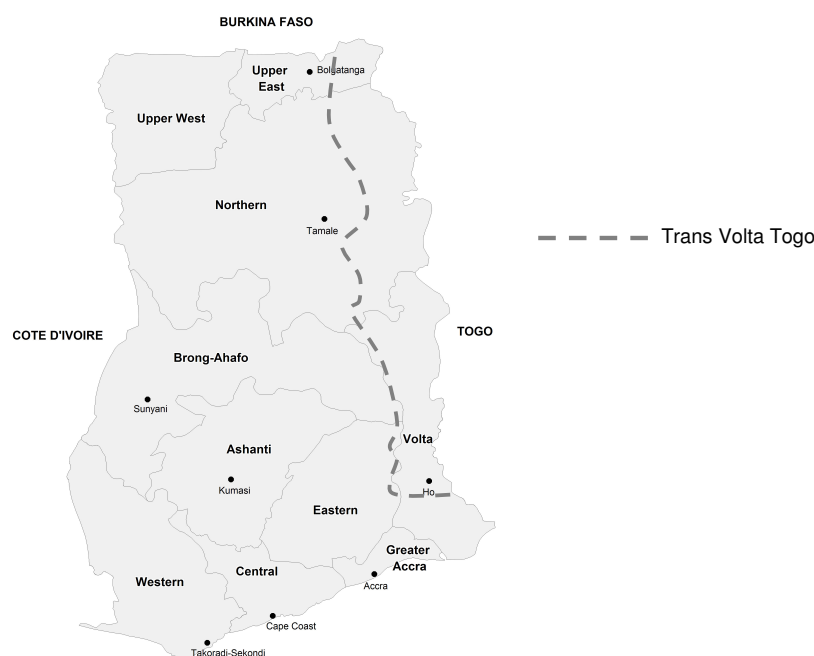
The Akans are by far the largest ethnic group, with approximately 49% of the population, and form the majority of the population in five of Ghana's 10 regions: Western, Central, Eastern, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo. While the Akan comprise around 20 smaller ethnic sub-groups, of which the Ashanti with 15% of Ghana's population and Fanti with 10% of Ghana's population are demographically the most important, the different ethnic sub-groups share important cultural, social and political institutions and customs. An important cultural trait that the Akan groups have in common and which differentiates them from other ethnic groups is their matrilineal line of inheritance. Non-Akan groups generally follow the patrilineal line of inheritance. A common language, called Akan, is another important cultural trait which bonds the different Akan sub-groups. The two most widely spoken varieties of the Akan language are the closely related dialects of Twi and Fante.

While the Akan sub-groups may share important linguistic and cultural traits, they do not behave as a cohesive political unity (Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2006). Gyimah-

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[1] The ethnic categorisation discussed here is based on the classification used by the Ghana Statistical Service.

Boadi and Asante (2006: 243) assert, for example, that 'partly out of fear of Asante dominance and lingering memories of Asante pre-colonial imperialism, elements of other Akan sub-groups, such as the Fantis, Akyems and Brongs, do not always align themselves with the Asante'.

The second largest ethno-cultural group are the Mole-Dagbani. They constitute around 17% of the population and are predominantly found in the northern regions. Together with the smaller ethnic groups from the north which are not considered to be part of the Mole-Dagbani, particularly the Gurma and Grusi, the northern ethnic groups constitute around 23% of Ghana's population. The Mole-Dagbani are however a very loose ethno-cultural grouping, which consists of about 10 relatively small ethnic sub-groups. The five largest Mole-Dagbani sub-groups are the Dagomba (with 4.3% of Ghana's population), Dagarte or Dagaba (3.7%), Namnan or Nabdom (2.4%), Kusasi (2.2%) and Mamprusi (1.1%). While these ethnic sub-groups have certain social and cultural institutions in common, they have very different histories, customs and traditions (Brukum 1995). Indeed, quite a few them speak languages that are not intelligible to one another (Frempong 2001).

Another reason why it is inappropriate to consider the Mole-Dagbani as a single homogenous ethnic group is the conflictual and occasionally violent interaction between the sub-groups. These ethnic conflicts 'arise from several years of relegation of certain ethnic groups, so-called "minority" groups, to "second-rate citizens" in the traditional and political administration of the region' (Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2006: 244). The most serious episode of inter-ethnic violence occurred in 1994 between the Nanumba and Kokomba and resulted in approximately 2,000 casualties. It is, however, important to note that these ethnic conflicts and clashes were only significant at the local level and did not have any far-reaching consequences at the national level (Agyeman 1998).

Table 1: Ethnic and religious composition of Ghana's regions in 2000 (percentage)

A) Ethnic composition

	Southern regions							Northern regions			Ghana
	Western	Central	Greater Accra	Volta	Eastern	Ashanti	Brong Ahafo	Northern	Upper East	Upper West	
Akan	78.3	82.0	39.8	8.5	52.1	77.9	62.7	10.0	2.3	3.2	49.1
Ewe	5.9	4.8	18.0	68.5	15.9	3.2	3.4	1.9	0.2	0.2	12.7
Ga-Dangme	3.5	2.3	29.7	2.0	18.9	1.4	1.9	0.5	0.3	0.5	8.0
Mole-Dagbani	7.6	1.6	5.1	1.4	3.1	9.0	15.4	52.2	74.5	75.7	16.6
Other ethnicities	4.6	9.3	7.5	19.6	10.0	8.6	16.5	35.3	22.6	20.3	13.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

B) Religious Composition

	Southern regions							Northern regions			Ghana
	Western	Central	Greater Accra	Volta	Eastern	Ashanti	Brong Ahafo	Northern	Upper East	Upper West	
Christians	81.0	81.4	83.0	67.2	82.8	77.5	70.8	19.3	28.3	35.5	68.8
Muslims	8.5	9.2	10.2	5.1	6.1	13.2	16.1	56.1	22.5	32.2	15.9
Other religions	10.5	9.3	6.8	27.7	11.1	9.2	13.0	24.6	49.1	32.3	15.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 2000 Ghana Housing and Population Census.

The third largest ethnic group, with about 13% of the population, are the Ewe. They are usually portrayed as the most homogenous ethnic group mainly because of the lack of sharp sub-divisions as well as the perception that they speak a single language. Nonetheless, a considerable number of Ewe dialects exists. The Ewes are predominantly found in the southern part of the Volta Region which is located in the eastern part of Ghana. The northern part of the Volta Region is mainly inhabited by people belonging to the Gurma and Guan ethnic groups. The southern and northern parts of the Volta Region not only have somewhat different ethnic compositions, but have also had distinct political histories. While the southern part of the Volta Region (roughly from Ho southwards) was administered by the British as part of the Gold Coast, the northern part belonged to the German colony of Togoland. After the defeat of the Germans in World War I, German Togoland was partitioned into a French and British protectorate under the umbrella of the Trusteeship Council of the League of Nations. The French protectorate became French Togo and gained independence as the Republic of Togo in 1960. The British protectorate became known as Trans Volta Togo and was made up of a large proportion of the contemporary Volta Region as well as parts of the Northern and Upper East Regions (see Figure 1). In 1956, the United Nations organised a plebiscite in order to decide whether the people in Trans Volta Togo should be integrated into the Gold Coast. Following a majority vote in favour of integration as well as the British government's recommendation to the same effect, it was decided that Trans Volta Togo would become part of the Gold Coast. However, this decision was not popular with a large proportion of the Ewe population. A majority of them had voted to join French Togo, where their ethnic kinsmen constituted the vast majority of the population in the southern part of the country.

The fourth largest group, with around 8% of the population, are the Ga-Dangme. They are mainly found in the Accra area and form about 30% of the population in the Greater Accra Region. The Ga-Dangmes usually trace their origins to an area in the southern parts of what is now Benin. According to oral tradition, they migrated westwards both by land and sea in the sixteenth century (Buah 1980). Indeed, the name Accra is said to have been derived from the word *Nkran* (driver ants) which was used by a Fante hunter to describe the arrival by sea of a large number of these migrants (Ibid). The oral traditions further assert that the two main sub-groups, Ga and Dangme, were originally one people. In addition to speaking very closely related dialects, 'three important practices seem to confirm their affinity, namely the important role of priests in state affairs, the practice of circumcision, and the well-defined order of child-naming which is not found among any other groups of people in Ghana' (Ibid: 38-39).

These ethno-regional differences are partly reinforced by religious differences. While Ghana is a predominantly Christian country, with almost 70% of the population adhering to one of the Christian denominations (Catholic, Protestant or Pentecostal/Charismatic), Muslims constitute around 16% of the population. Muslims form a particularly important part of the population in the northern regions. Indeed, in the largest of the three northern regions (i.e. the 'Northern Region'), the majority of the population (about 56%) is Muslim (see Table 1). However, this religious north-south divide is much mitigated by the fact that Christians and Traditionalists also constitute a significant proportion of the population in the three northern regions, particularly in the Upper West and Upper East Regions. Overall, only 42% of the population in Ghana's northern regions are Muslim, while 25% are Christian and 29% have a traditional religion. Compared to, for instance, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria (where the Muslims constitute respectively around 60% and 70% of the northern population), the Muslim religion is much less of a unifying factor among the people living in Ghana's northern regions. Rather than ethnicity or religion, the most

important common feature of the people in the northern regions is their relatively deprived socio-economic situation compared to the people in the southern regions.

3. Inequalities in regional development

Like most West African countries that have the Gulf of Guinea as a southern border, Ghana is confronted with a serious developmental divide between its northern and southern regions. This developmental divide arises from a combination of circumstances and policies. Three important factors can be identified in this respect. First, the geographical concentration of most agricultural activities/resources, particularly tree crops such cocoa, as well as natural resources, notably minerals and forest resources, in the southern regions. Due to scant and irregular rainfall, the northern regions have only one main cropping cycle throughout the year which is predominantly used for subsistence farming. While the northern regions account for about 40% of the country's land area, they produce only 14% of its total agricultural output (Roe and Schneider 1992).

A second factor arises from the British colonial policy of investing more heavily in those regions where exploitable resources such as gold, diamonds, timber, and cocoa were available or readily produced, and cheapest to export. In addition to the administrative core region (i.e. the Greater Accra Region), the gold-rich regions, Ashanti and Western, and the cocoa-growing regions (Eastern, Central and Ashanti) received the bulk of the capital investments made during the colonial era. The three northern regions (which under colonial rule constituted together the 'Northern Territories') were largely treated, and to some extent deliberately kept, as a reservoir to provide cheap labour for gold mining and cocoa farming in the south, and as recruiting grounds for the police and army (Bening 1975). The colonial administration undertook almost no infrastructural or human capital development in northern Ghana. Illustratively, at the time of independence, only one secondary school was available to the 20% of the population living in the northern areas (Roe and Schneider 1992).

The situation in the Volta Region was in many ways comparable to the Northern Territories because it is also largely unsuitable for the commercial cultivation of tree crops such as cocoa and coffee, and does not possess significant quantities of easily exploited mineral resources. Similarly, after the Volta Region (as part of Trans Volta Togo) came under British colonial rule in the wake of World War I, very little was done to develop it: 'the social and economic infrastructure created by the Germans during the period of their administration was on the whole maintained in its previous state but not extended' (Dickson 1975: 105). The Volta Region, like the Northern Territories, therefore also became an area of out-migration, 'a periphery to the more vigorously developing core areas to the West of the Volta' (Ibid). However, due to intensive mission activity from early times the people living in the Volta Region were comparatively well educated. The relative poverty of the Volta Region coupled with the comparatively high levels of literacy and education among the Ewe population, and correspondingly their relative importance in the 'modern' sector of society, prompted Richard Rathbone to describe the Ewe as the 'Igbo' of Ghana (see Rathbone 1978). In Ghana's Northern Territories, in contrast, missionary activities were severely restricted. One of the reasons put forward by the colonial administration for restricting missionary activities in the Northern Territories was to avoid inter-denominational conflict (Bening 1975). However, a more cynical reason for limiting missionary activities in northern Ghana was the policy of keeping this region as a reserve of unskilled and uneducated labour for the benefit of the southern economy, noted above.

A third factor which is important for understanding the persistence of socio-economic regional inequalities (particularly between the north and south) relates to post-colonial development strategies and investment patterns. Like the colonial economy, Ghana's post-colonial economy had an 'endogenous' tendency to favour the south over the north in terms of the location of economic activities. Arguably, only the 'statist' development approaches of Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (CPP) in Ghana's First Republic (1960-1966) and of Colonel Acheampong and his National Redemption Council (NRC) (1972-1978) had a truly positive vision for the development of the north and its integration into Ghana's economy (Shepherd, Gyimah-Boadi, Gariba, Plagerson and Musa, 2005). Despite these efforts, the north remained generally much poorer in terms of income, infrastructure, education and medical services at the end of the 1970s.

According to Kwodo Ewusi's composite measure of development (which is based on a wide range of socio-economic indicators, including per capita energy consumption, proportion of the population employed in non-agricultural activities, literacy rate, earnings per worker and number of hospital beds per 1,000 persons), the Northern and Upper Regions had levels of development equivalent to only 11% and 7% respectively of the level found in the Greater Accra Region in the mid-1970s (see Ewusi 1976). Not only was the inequality-reducing impact of Nkrumah and Acheampong's statist development approaches small, but the state enterprises they established were also often highly inefficient. For instance, the Nkrumah regime set up a tomato-canning facility in Tamale in the Northern Region, even though the production of tomatoes and the main consumer markets were located in the south (Gyimah-Boadi and Daddieh 1999).

The statist/import substitution approach to development adopted in the 1960s and 1970s had disastrous consequences for Ghana's economy and could not be sustained. Illustratively, during the first 25 years following independence in 1957, Ghana's real income per capita fell by more than one-third (Van Buren 2005). Furthermore, the diminishing tax base which accompanied Ghana's economic decline in this period resulted in large deficits, which in turn led to rising inflation and a burgeoning debt burden (Ibid). In 1983, the Rawlings regime, which had taken power in a military coup d'état in December 1981, decided it had no alternative but to embark on a stabilisation and structural adjustment programme (SAP) supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. However, the SAPs, which were implemented from 1983, in general reinforced the existing regional developmental inequalities. In line with the SAPs' objectives of restoring economic growth by rehabilitating Ghana's export economy, most external funding went to Ghana's core industrial region, the Greater Accra Region, as well as the cocoa, timber and mineral industries in the Western, Eastern, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions (Songsore 2003). Ghana's northern regions, in contrast, benefited very little from this renewed economic stimulus.

In order to redress the economic exclusion of the northern regions and mitigate the developmental north-south divide, Rawlings undertook specific projects in the northern regions, including the extension of the national electricity grid, the establishment of the University of Development Studies in Tamale, the rehabilitation of north-south roads, and greater expenditure on education. Another measure aimed at reducing developmental disparities across *districts* (and therefore indirectly across regions) was the adoption of the District Assemblies Common Fund Act (DACF) in 1993. While the DACF only constitutes about 3% of total government expenditure (ISSER 2005), it aims to redress imbalances in development (particularly in health and education) by employing an allocation formula that takes into account the level of

development of each district. Notwithstanding these and other measures, Ghana's socio-economic north-south divide remains severe.

Table 2 shows regional disparities in a range of socio-economic indicators in the 1990s. The table not only demonstrates the persistence of severe socio-economic disparities in the 1990s between Ghana's north and south, but it also shows that the actual impact of Rawlings' investment projects on reducing the developmental gap in this period was at best rather limited. According to some indicators, indeed, the socio-economic north-south divide actually widened during Rawlings' presidency. For instance, while the overall incidence of poverty decreased from 52% to 40% in the period 1992-1999, two of the three northern regions (i.e. Northern Region and Upper East region) actually witnessed an increase in the incidence of poverty. Besides the administrative/industrial/economic core region (i.e. Greater Accra), the Akan-dominated, cocoa-producing regions (i.e. Western, Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo) saw the sharpest drop in poverty rates.

Table 2: Socio-economic inequalities across Ghana's regions in the 1990s

	Incidence of Poverty (%)[a]		Literacy (% literate)[b]		Access to Electricity (%)[c]		Access to health services (%)[d]	Primary school enrolment (%)[e]
	1992	1999	1993	1998	1993	1998	1997	1997
Western	60	27	37	54	21.8	37.8	28	75
Central	44	48	43	55	27.3	48.3	36	72
Greater Accra	26	5	60	76	76.4	86.3	78	70
Volta	57	38	46	58	7.9	21.4	42	70
Eastern	48	44	46	66	25.2	45.2	33	78
Ashanti	41	28	31	64	32.8	50.4	43	72
Brong Ahafo	65	36	30	53	16.1	23.3	32	72
Northern	63	69	8	13	6.3	17.5	18	40
Upper West	88	84	12	20	6.5	7.1	8	45
Upper East	67	88	8	20	8.1	16.7	20	36
National	52	40	34	51	24.4	39.6	37	67

a) Data drawn from Songsore (2003). The poverty line was the same in both years, i.e. ¢700,000 per adult per year.
b) and c) Author's calculations based on data from the 1993 and 1998 Demographic and Health Surveys.
d) and e) Data drawn from the 1997 Ghana Core Welfare Indicators Survey.

Soon after taking over from Rawlings in January 2001, the newly elected New Patriotic Party (NPP) government (headed by President John Agyekum Kufuor) publicly acknowledged the problematic nature of the existing regional developmental disparities, and implicitly criticised previous governments' investment policies for creating and maintaining Ghana's regional inequalities. These views are reflected in the government's main development policy document, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GPRSP), in which the Kufuor government stated that:

> Past policies for a more equitable distribution of resource investment have not been implemented. Failure to allocate investment on the basis of a rational analysis of prevailing conditions led to very high levels of deprivation in some parts of the country. A disproportionate *per capita* investment in Accra has dramatically skewed opportunities, life styles and quality of life in favour of this metropolitan area to the disadvantage of those living elsewhere. The northern parts of the country suffer enduring high levels of poverty. Poverty has deepened and become more

intractable in the Northern, Upper East and Central Regions. High rates of under-five mortality and infant mortality occur in Central Region and Brong Ahafo. Inadequate levels of economic infrastructure occur in Brong Ahafo, Volta and parts of Western Region. Positive action to redress gross imbalances in geographical distribution of resource investment must be taken in the interests of the more effective use of human and physical resources and of equity'.

(Government of Ghana 2003: 31).

In accordance with this policy statement, the Kufuor government introduced several mechanisms to redress the seriously adverse conditions in the northern regions, especially relating to health, social infrastructure, education and economic infrastructure. For instance, the funds that were freed up as part of the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative were earmarked to benefit the north disproportionately (Shepherd, et al. 2005).

Despite the limited success of the strategies of economic redistribution over the decades in closing the north-south gap, their impact on reducing the political *salience* of the north-south divide is likely to have been much more substantial.

4. Ethnicity and politics in Ghana

Since World War II, the importance of ethnicity and ethno-regional tensions in Ghanaian politics has tended to wax and wane to a remarkable degree (Lentz and Nugent 2000). As Lentz and Nugent (2000: 22) assert: 'At certain times ethnic tensions have manifested themselves overtly, only to be followed by long periods when the importance of ethnicity has been denied virtually on all sides'. Ethno-regional tensions tended to escalate particularly during the short-lived episodes of multiparty democracy (Gyimah-Boadi 2003). For instance, the first competitive multiparty electoral contests in the 1950s saw the emergence of several ethno-regional political parties, such as the Northern People's Party, Togoland Congress Party and National Liberation Movement.

The formation of the Northern People's Party was brought about by a fear among the northern people, especially the educated people and chiefs, that they would be dominated by the southerners after independence (Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2006). The other two regional parties (Togoland Congress Party and Anlo Youth Association) originated from the Ewe-speaking Volta Region and favoured seceding from Ghana and joining Togo, which is also inhabited by a large number of Ewe speakers. Shortly after the 1954 elections, yet another ethno-regional party emerged, the National Liberation Movement (NLM). The NLM was a largely Ashanti-based movement formed to safeguard the Ashanti national identity and institutions (Frempong 2001). Together with the other opposition parties, the NLM was a strong proponent of a federal state.

However, ethno-regional tensions and mobilisation around the time of independence in 1957 were followed by a period of comparative ethnic quiescence in Ghana's First Republic (1960-66) under Kwame Nkrumah, who made national unity a major objective. However, Ghana's First Republic came to an end with Nkrumah's removal from power by the first successful military coup d'état in 1966. The new military regime, known as the National Liberation Council (NLC), was soon confronted with serious ethnic tensions. Drawing on Hutchful (1973), Frempong (2001: 145) asserts that 'by the time the NLC handed over power in October 1969, the military regime

had split into factions with the Ashantis and Ewes poles apart'. These ethno-regional tensions between the Ewe and Akan (Ashantis in particular) were transferred into Ghana's Second Republic (1969-72) under Abrefa Busia.

One of the most notorious expressions of the Ewe-Ashanti/Akan tensions in the Second Republic occurred in June 1970 when Kportufe Agama, an Ewe, then leader of the opposition, introduced a motion in parliament concerning the unconstitutional dismissal of a large number of public servants. He argued that these public servants were dismissed for tribalistic reasons, in particular, 'for being suspected to be Ewe or Ga' (Parliamentary Debates, 16 June 1970, 2nd Series, Vol. 3, No. 22, Col. 782). In the ensuing debate, Agama called Prime Minister Abrefa Busia, an Akan from the Brong-Ahafo Region, a 'tribal prime minister' and the Minister of External Affairs, Victor Owusu, an Ashanti/Akan, described Agama as belonging to 'a tribe that has been notorious for its inward-looking tribalism' (Parliamentary Debates, 17 June 1970, 2nd Series, Vol. 3, No. 23, Col. 783). Since then, the perceived rivalry between the Ewe and Ashanti/Akan political elites has repeatedly stirred up the issue of ethnicity. The ethnic tension that rocked the Second Republic was one of the reasons for Colonel Acheampong's military intervention in February 1972, which led to the removal of the Busia regime.

While Acheampong and his National Redemption Council (NRC) were initially able to dissipate the prevailing ethnic tensions in the political sphere, the lull in ethnic politics was very short lived. Soon Acheampong himself started using the alleged threat of 'Ewe tribalism' as a means of mobilising support behind his regime (Brown 1982). The appearance of Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings on the political scene at the end of the 1970s saw the pendulum swing back once more. Rawlings' second coup d'état in December 1981 was 'particularly noteworthy for the manner in which ethnic claims were subordinated to the language of class interest' (Lentz and Nugent 2000: 22). Illustratively, the main conflicts and internal disputes within the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), i.e. the new governing body after the 1981 coup d'état, had an *ideological* rather than an *ethnic* character.

However, the issue of 'tribalism' and ethno-regional favouritism was catapulted back into the public sphere following a lecture by the eminent history professor Adu Boahen in 1988. In this lecture, he criticised Rawlings and his PNDC for fomenting 'tribalism' and appointing a disproportionately high number of Ewes to influential political-administrative positions (see Boahen 1992). The subsequent path towards 'the return to constitutional rule in the Fourth Republic was strewn with a replay of the Ashanti-Ewe rivalry' (Frempong 2001: 147). The political tensions between the government and opposition became further ethnicised due to an ongoing debate in the media on the government's ethnic tendencies and practices. The private newspapers *Free Press* and *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, in particular, led the public debate on ethnic favouritism and 'tribalism' under Rawlings.[2]

While Ghana has successfully consolidated its democracy since the reintroduction of multiparty elections in 1992, regional voting patterns seem to suggest that ethnicity,

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[2] Some examples of relevant newspaper articles and readers' comments that were published in this period are: Free Press, *True or False? 'Nyebro' Factor Grips Military*, May 28-June 3, 1993; Free Press, *Anlo Tribalism – A Threat to the Heritage*, April 30-May 6, 1993; Free Press, *Serious Warning Against Rawlings' Tribalism*, January 28-February 3, 1994; Free Press, *GWSC in Tribal Chains*, June 4-10, 1993; Free Press, *Awoonor's Voice Still Echoes Vicious Tribalism*, June 18-24, 1993; Ghanaian Chronicle, *Ethnic Imbalance in Ghana: A Hidden Agenda for the Ewes?*, Monday, May 24-30, 1993; Ghanaian Chronicle, *Tribalism in the Ghana Armed Forces*, Monday, April 13-18, 1993, Ghanaian Chronicle, *Ethnic Imbalance in Ghana – There's no such thing here at the Public Services Commission*, Monday, May 31-June 6, 1993.

while not the only factor, remains important for determining political allegiances and election results in the Fourth Republic, particularly in the Ashanti and Volta Regions. In contrast to other regions, the Volta and Ashanti Regions have overwhelmingly voted for their *perceived* home-based parties in consecutive general elections. Despite the fact that the hierarchies of the two main political parties continued to show a high degree of ethnic heterogeneity, Gyimah-Boadi and Asante (2006: 248) assert that 'the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), are largely perceived as Ewe- and Ashanti/Akan-based respectively'. Indeed, Ewe-Ashanti exceptionalism in voting patterns is seen by some scholars as a clear indication of the persistence of the Ewe-Ashanti cleavage in Ghana's Fourth Republic (see e.g. Agyeman 1998; Frempong 2001; Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2006).

Yet while there have been political tensions over the years, these have not erupted into serious political violence at the national level, nor even threatened to do so.

5. Containing ethno-regional tensions and mobilisation

Kwame Nkrumah, the first national Ghanaian leader, was confronted with serious ethno-regional tensions and mobilisation in the immediate pre-independence period. Nkrumah's strategies to deal with the ethno-regional tensions and mobilisation, and promote national integration, have to some extent become institutionalised, both formally and informally. An important aspect of Nkrumah's strategy to contain ethno-regional mobilisation in the political sphere was the adoption of the Avoidance of Discrimination Act in December 1957. Under this law, the formation of political parties on ethnic, regional or religious lines was prohibited. Consequently, all ethno-regional parties that raised the question of federalism were banned and forced to merge into the United Party (Frempong 2001). While the Avoidance of Discrimination Act was fiercely criticised and strongly opposed by the opposition at the time, since then successive Ghanaian political elites have likewise recognised the centrifugal potential of ethnic, religious or regional political parties. Consequently, the 1969, 1979 and 1992 Constitutions and the 2000 Political Parties Act all contain provisions aimed at curbing ethnic electoral politics and ensuring that political parties are national in character.

In addition to the legislative or formal 'suppression' of ethnic, regional or religious political parties, the Ghanaian body politic also agreed in more informal ways to avoid using ethnicity as a means of gaining electoral support. For example, as part of the 2004 Political Parties Code of Conduct, which is a legally non-binding document, the political parties agreed to refrain from using ethnicity in their political campaigning. However, despite the formal and informal agreements and rules, as well as the existence of strong norms against the use of ethnicity as a means of political action, the ethnic card has nonetheless been repeatedly played both by government and opposition parties/politicians. Furthermore, ethno-regional voting patterns (particularly in the Ashanti and Volta regions) as well as survey research suggest that ethnicity remains (or at least is perceived to be) an important factor in the public/political sphere. For instance, a perceptions survey conducted in 2005 in three urban areas (Accra, Ho and Kumasi) in Ghana found that between 35% and 38% of the respondents thought that a person's ethnic background affected his/her chances of getting government jobs, government contracts, formal private sector jobs and public housing.[3]

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[3] For further discussion of the results of the Ghanaian perceptions survey, see below, Langer (2007) and Langer and Ukiwo (2007).

Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (CPP) are also widely regarded as having promoted national integration by 'its denunciations of communalism and by the "ethnically blind" stance of Nkrumah himself' (Brown 1982: 41). Illustratively, as early as 1946 Nkrumah wrote that 'all provincial and tribal differences should be broken down completely' (Nkrumah 1962, quoted in: Smock and Smock 1975: 227). In its place, Nkrumah promoted a *Ghanaian* identity and culture which he projected as an amalgam of different ethnic cultures within Ghana (Hagan 1992). For instance, one way in which Nkrumah demonstrated the pluralistic nature of the Ghanaian state and identity was by wearing different traditional dress (such as the northern *fugu* or *smock* or the Ashanti *kente*) at official ceremonies. In many ways, Nkrumah aimed to establish what Young (1976) has termed 'a culturally neutral state' or a situation of 'cultural status equality' (Langer 2006), which entails no particular ethnic culture or religion being given more status and/or recognition *in* and *by* the state. An indication of Nkrumah's success in terms of nation-building is the fact that many Ghanaians think back to Nkrumah's time as *Ghanaians* rather than as Ashantis, Ewes, Mole-Dagbanis or Gas (Hagan 1992).

Like Nkrumah, most of his successors continued to promote the Ghanaian state's cultural inclusiveness and neutrality by undertaking a range of measures in the legal/institutional, policy-oriented and symbolic spheres. Thus, for instance, Nkrumah's practice of alternating between suits, *kente* cloths and northern smocks on public occasions was continued by most heads of state, especially Rawlings. Other measures, practices and customs that illustrate the culturally inclusive and neutral character of the Ghanaian state are, for example: the persistent rejection by consecutive Ghanaian governments of the promotion of a particular local language (especially Twi/Akan) as Ghana's national language; active state support for the study and teaching of Ghana's 15 major local languages;[4] the incorporation by institutions such as the Ghana Dance Ensemble of songs and dances from all major ethnic groups; the conscious effort to ensure that radio and television programmes are broadcast in all major languages; the custom that representatives from the government attend the most important ethnic and/or traditional festivals and events (*durbars*) throughout the country on a regular basis. Similarly, some (symbolic) actions and practices which demonstrate the political elites' commitment to promoting and sustaining *religious* status equality and inclusiveness are, for instance: the practice that representatives from all major religions are present at official state functions; the state's active organisational support for the annual Hajj pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia; and the introduction of a new public holiday on the Muslim festival of *Eid-al-Adha* in 1996.

In addition to attempts to preserve the cultural and religious 'neutrality' of the state, an arguably even more important strategy was aimed at maintaining certain ethno-regional balances in the political sphere. While this has remained a largely informal 'policy' or convention among Ghana's political elites, the members of the Constituent Assembly of the 1992 Constitution nonetheless decided to call explicitly upon the state to take appropriate measures 'to achieve reasonable regional and gender balance in recruitment and appointment to public offices' (see Article 35(6) of the 1992 Constitution). However, since Article 35 forms part of Chapter Six of the 1992 Constitution regarding the *Directive Principles of State Policy*, it is not a legally enforceable stipulation, but rather a 'guiding' principle for the state in applying or

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[4] Successive governments have actively promoted the study and teaching of Ghanaian languages within the context of, for instance, the School of Ghana Languages and Functional Literacy Programme. The 15 local languages which are promoted in this context are: Akuapem, Asante, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Fante, Ga, Gonja, Gurune, Kasem, Nzema, Kusaal, Sisaali and Buli. All these languages are considered major languages in the regions in which they are spoken (Bemile 2000).

interpreting the Constitution or any other law and in taking and implementing any policy decisions (see Article 34(1)).

Interestingly, even Nkrumah, who had invested so much in reducing ethnic consciousness and attachments, conceded in retrospect that 'tribal' considerations did play a role in his government appointments. As he stated in his 1968 monograph *Dark Days in Ghana*: 'While I believe we had largely eliminated tribalism as an active force, its by-products and those of the family system were still with us. I could not have chosen my government without some regard to tribal origins' (Nkrumah 1968: 66). While Nkrumah achieved a reasonable ethno-regional balance in his early governments, towards the end of his time in power the Akans were considerably over-represented and there was no Ewe representative. This is illustrated by Figure 2 below, which shows the relative representation of the Akans, Ewes, 'northerners' and 'southerners' among the government ministers of consecutive Ghanaian governments in the period 1952-2005. Each group's *relative representation* is calculated by dividing its percentage proportion of government ministers by its percentage size in the entire population. Consequently, one means proportional representation; figures higher than one point to over-representation and less than one to under-representation.

Figure 2: Relative representation of different ethno-regional groups in government, 1952-2005 (government ministers only)[5]
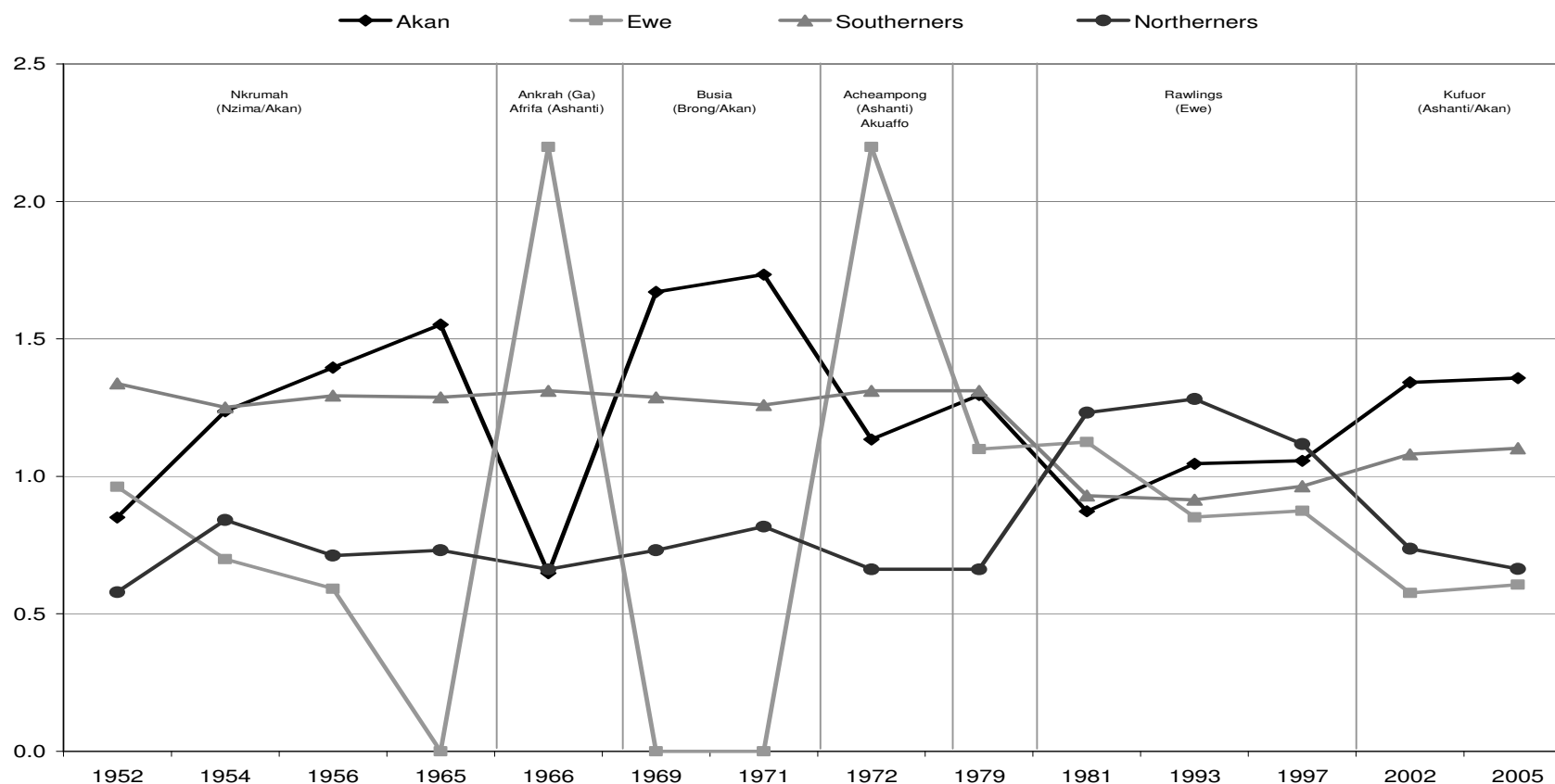
Source: 1952-1965: Danso-Boafo (1996), 1966-1971: Smock and Smock (1975), 1972-1981: Gyimah-Boadi (2003), and 1993-2005: this author's data.

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[5] *Northerners* include individuals with a Mole-Dagbani, Gurma or Grusi background. *Southerners* include individuals with an Akan, Ewe, Guan or Ga-Dangme background. Other smaller ethnic groups (such as the Mandé-Busanga) are excluded from these calculations. For the period 1952-1979, the ethnic composition data are based on the 1960 census, while for the period 1981-2005 the 2000 Housing and Population census was used.

Throughout the post-independence period, the southerners persistently controlled most of the ministerial positions and were actually, as a group, somewhat overrepresented in proportion to their relative demographic size. However, each consecutive Ghanaian governments (both civilian and military) had a reasonable representation of northerners. While their relative representation hovered between 0.6 and 0.8 in the period 1952-1979, under Rawlings they actually became slightly over-represented in proportion to their relative demographic size. Since Kufuor assumed power in January 2001, the northerners have again become somewhat under-represented among government ministers. However, Kufuor appears to have compensated for this under-representation by appointing a more than proportionate number of *deputy ministers* from among the northern ethnic groups. In the government of February 2005, for instance, about 17% of all ministers (including deputy ministers) had a northern background, which corresponds to a relative representation of about 0.75. The fact that the position of Vice President, the second most important position in Ghana's 1992 Constitution, has been occupied by a northerner, Alhaji Aliu Mahama, since January 2001 has further contributed to a reduction in the political salience of northern under-representation among government ministers.

With regard to the relative representation of the Ewes and Akans in government, a much more volatile pattern emerges (particularly for the Ewes). During two brief spells (i.e. Nkrumah's government of 1965 and Busia's governments of 1969 and 1972), not one of the government ministers had an Ewe background. Interestingly, on both occasions, a military coup d'état with active involvement of Ewe officers completely reversed the situation. In particular, in both the National Liberation Council and the National Redemption Council, the Ewes were significantly over-represented in proportion to their demographic size (see Figure 2). The exclusion of the Ewes from Busia's governments was a somewhat special case as it was the direct result of the Second Republic's Westminster Model of government, which required that ministers be appointed from among the members of parliament. As the Progress Party (PP) did not have a member of parliament with an Ewe background, Busia was unable to appoint an Ewe minister (from his own party) in his governments of 1969 and 1971. In order to avoid similar kinds of institutional limitations on achieving ethno-regional balance in government, the Constitution of Ghana's Fourth Republic gives the President the authority to appoint up to half of ministers from outside the National Assembly.

After the coup d'état of December 1981, an Ewe, John Jerry Rawlings, became Ghana's head of state.[6] Although the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), which became the new governing body, initially had a fairly balanced ethno-regional composition, this soon changed after the so-called 'northern radicals', Chris Bukari Atim, Sergeant Aloga Akata Pore and Zaya Yeebo, left the regime in 1983 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2003). An important reason for the tensions within the PNDC, which led to the northern radicals' departure, was the fundamental change in economic ideology from a radical Marxist-Leninist approach to a neo-liberal capitalist approach. Importantly, the adoption of a neo-liberal approach 'marked the beginning of the isolation of the Rawlings government and its inability to expand its social base beyond a narrow Ewe/Volta Region core and a few old friends' (Gyimah-Boadi 2003: 128). Rawlings' alleged Ewe favouritism from the mid-1980s provoked the public condemnation by Adu Boahen in 1988 noted above.

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[6] Although Jerry Rawlings is perceived by most people (including himself) to be an Ewe, his ethnic background is actually mixed, with an Ewe mother and a Scottish father.

Although Rawlings continued to be accused in opposition circles of being a 'tribalist' in the period 1992-1994, the government that he formed in April 1993 was exceptionally well balanced in ethnic terms. Instead of dominating his government, the Ewes were actually slightly under-represented in proportion to their demographic size (see Figure 2). By far the largest ethnic group in this government were the Akans, with about 51% of government ministers. The Rawlings government of October 1997 had a similarly ethnically balanced composition. Under Kufuor, the ethnic composition of the government became considerably less well balanced. Kufuor and his New Patriotic Party's (NPP) poor showing in the Volta Region during both the 2000 and 2004 elections was translated into a marginalisation of the Ewes in his governments. In the January 2002 government, only four out of 71, or 5.6%, of all ministerial positions (including the deputy-ministerial positions) were held by Ewes. In the February 2005 government, the Ewe representation declined even further, to 3.4%. Thus, while the *northern* under-representation among government ministers was to some extent compensated for by the appointment of a disproportionate number of deputy ministers from among the northern ethnic groups (as well as the fact that the vice-presidential position was held by a northerner), the Ewe under-representation was clearly not mitigated in this way. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a significant minority of the Ewe population feels insufficiently represented in the Kufuor government and perceives it to be a largely Akan-dominated government.[7]

6. Ewe-Ashanti cleavage: A threat to peace?

Brown (1982) has convincingly argued that the political myth of and mobilisation behind the Ewe-Ashanti/Akan rivalry has its origins in the deliberate 'scapegoating' of the Ewes by various Akan-dominated governments in the 1970s. He asserts in this respect that 'if communal hostilities were to be employed at all, the Ewes were the obvious target; not because of major objective disparities between the two groups, but more because of their very visibility and similarity to the Akans, which lent credence to the allegations that they were disruptive rivals' (Ibid: 68). Moreover, the main reason that the Acheampong regime from the mid-1970s deliberately propagated the popular image of Ewe 'tribalism' and nepotism was 'to discredit those who opposed his policies concerning the Volta Region, and as one of several "scapegoats" detracting attention from the growing economic and political crises which threatened his government' (Ibid: 61).

Since then, both government and opposition parties/politicians have at different times employed strategies and discourses that have simultaneously rekindled and used this political myth. For instance, from the end of the 1980s, the Akan-dominated opposition used the epithet of Ewe 'tribalism' and nepotism as a way of discrediting the Rawlings government and mobilising support against his regime. Conversely, in the 2000 general elections, Rawlings and his National Democratic Council (NDC) started playing up the 'Ashanti baggage' of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) which was headed by John Agyekum Kufuor, a 'full-blooded' Ashanti from the Ashanti Region where he has royal ancestry (Frempong 2001). The Rawlings/NDC strategy was aimed at portraying 'Ashantis as wicked and vindictive and to call on the other tribes to gang up to defeat the Ashanti "invasion"' (Ibid: 156).

While the political elites' rivalries appear to have had a relatively important impact on people's *political* views and behaviour (see Langer and Ukiwo 2007), I argue that the

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[7] See Langer and Ukiwo (2007) for a detailed discussion of *perceived* political inequalities and the role of ethnicity in the public sphere in Ghana and Nigeria.

perceived Ewe-Ashanti/Akan cleavage hardly poses a serious threat to Ghana's socio-political stability because it is largely limited to the *political* sphere. In order to substantiate this assertion, I will present and analyse survey data on how people see themselves and others in Ghana, and how this differs across ethnic groups. In addition to assessing the salience of different identities, I will also discuss people's views and attitudes towards other identity groups, focusing particularly on the Ewes and Akans. The data are drawn from a perceptions survey of 608 randomly selected individuals of 18 years or older from three urban settings: Accra in the Greater Accra Region, Ho in the Volta Region and Kumasi in the Ashanti Region.[8]

Four questions from the perceptions questionnaire will be used to assess the social significance and depth of the alleged Ewe-Ashanti/Akan cleavage.

The first question deals with the salience and relative importance of different identities. For this cleavage to be a serious threat to national accommodation and political stability, it is necessary that ethnicity and ethnic loyalties constitute a very strong, if not the strongest, social tie for the two ethnic groups in question. A relevant question in this respect asked respondents which *three* identity aspects were the most important for the way they perceived themselves. Figure 3 shows the proportion of the four major ethnic groups who mentioned a particular identity aspect as one of their three most important ones.

The four major ethnic groups appeared to have very similar views regarding the relative importance of different identities. While about 40% of the respondents mentioned *gender* and *nationality*, the vast majority of all four ethnic groups considered their *religion* and *occupation* to be among their three most important identities. Interestingly, only a minority of about 20% of the respondents considered *ethnicity* as one of their three most important identities. One could however argue that ethnicity, language and region of origin refer to a similar kind of identity and should therefore be added together in order to get a more accurate indication of the importance and salience of ethno-regional/linguistic identities in Ghana. Interestingly, the proportion of respondents who mentioned this broadly defined 'ethnic' identity as one of their three most important identities was still considerably smaller than those mentioning religion or occupation (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: **The proportion of respondents of the four major ethnic groups who mentioned a particular identity aspect as one of their three most important ones**
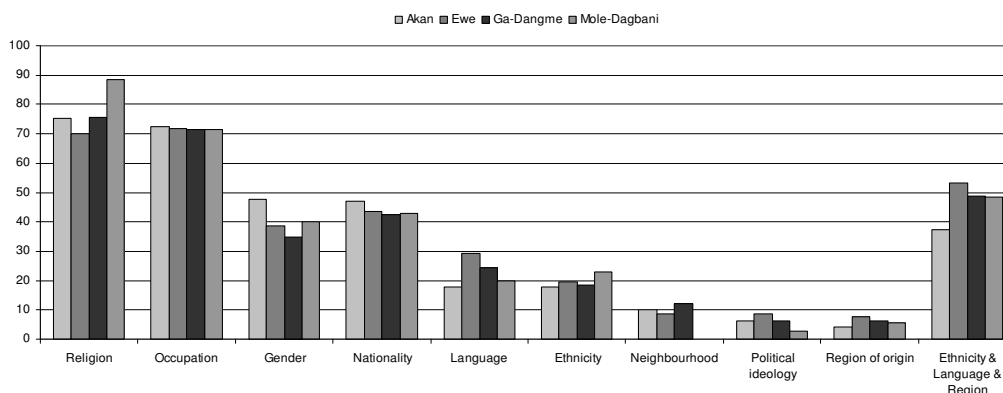
A second question which is relevant for determining people's attitudes towards other groups, especially ethnic groups, dealt with the issue of inter-ethnic and inter-

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[8] The Ghanaian perceptions survey was conducted under the supervision of this author during a four-week period in July and August of 2005.

religious marriage. On this subject, the perceptions questionnaire asked the respondents whether they would object if their daughter or sister wanted to marry someone from a particular religion, ethnic group or nationality. If respondents answered 'yes' to this question, they were asked to name up to five groups, members of which they would not wish to see their daughter or sister marry. If a respondent had neither a daughter nor a sister, the question was asked in a hypothetical way. The majority of the respondents had no marriage objections whatsoever. In particular, 353 out of 608, or approximately 58%, of the respondents said they had no objections to any religion, ethnic group or nationality. However, the remaining 242, or around 40%, of the respondents expressed one or more marriage objections against certain groups.

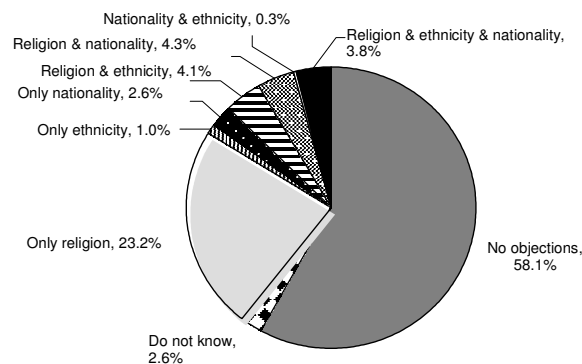**Figure 4**: **Incidence of and grounds for marriage objections**

Figure 4 shows the incidence of and grounds for marriage objections. Objections on the basis of religion were by far the most common in this respect. As the vast majority of the respondents in our survey were Christians, the two most commonly expressed marriage objections were against 'all non-Christians' and 'Muslims'. No more than 9% of the respondents had objections to certain ethnic groups. Interestingly, only 21, or 6.9%, of the Akans and seven, or 6.8%, of the Ewes mentioned that they would object if their daughter or sister wanted to marry an Ewe or Akan respectively.

The third question was aimed at determining the salience of certain stereotypes and prejudices. In this respect, the questionnaire asked respondents to position or assess the four major ethnic groups on three different scales: hard working-lazy, violent-nonviolent and honest-dishonest. For every characteristic, respondents were shown a card with a 7-point scale (for instance, for the hardworking-lazy scale, 1 meant 'hardworking' and 7 meant 'lazy') and were subsequently asked to choose for every ethnic group any number or position between 1 and 7. Table 3 shows how respondents from the four major ethnic groups perceived their own and other groups on these three scales. The last row of the table provides the average score given to an ethnic group by respondents from the other three ethnic groups
It emerges that respondents generally tended to have more favourable and positive opinions about themselves than others. Except for the Ga-Dangmes with respect to the nonviolent-violent scale, all ethnic groups gave themselves a better score than the average score of the three other ethnic groups. It is interesting to note that the Ewes and Akans had very similar and quite positive views about one another. For instance, while the Akans perceived themselves to be the most peaceful group, they considered the Ewes to be 'second-best', giving them a much better score than the

Ga-Dangmes and especially the Mole-Dagbanis. Similarly, the Ewes considered the Akans to be the second most peaceful ethnic group after themselves.

With regard to the hardworking-lazy scale, a somewhat different picture emerges. Both the Ewes and Akans perceived each other as the third most hardworking ethnic group, behind respectively their own ethnic group and the Mole-Dagbanis. The Ga-Dangmes were perceived by respondents of both ethnicities to be the 'laziest' ethnic group. On the dishonest-honest scale, the Akans and Ewes appeared to have considerably different opinions about one another. While the Akans perceived the Ewes to be the second most honest group, the Ewes in contrast considered the Akans to be the most dishonest group of the four major ethnic groups. Interestingly, the Ga-Dangme and Mole-Dagbani respondents had a similar view as the Ewes, perceiving the Akans to be the most dishonest ethnic group.

Table 3: Respondents' perceptions of themselves and others

	Hardworking (1) – Lazy (7)				Non-Violent (1) –Violent (7)				Honest (1) – Dishonest (7)			
	Akan	Ewe	Ga-Dangme	Mole-Dagbani	Akan	Ewe	Ga-Dangme	Mole-Dagbani	Akan	Ewe	Ga-Dangme	Mole-Dagbani
Akan	1.82	2.73	4.09	2.26	1.71	3.03	3.21	4.99	3.03	3.32	3.81	3.43
Ewe	2.94	1.85	3.94	2.69	3.19	1.99	3.41	4.51	4.53	2.30	3.65	3.59
Ga-Dangme	2.24	2.41	3.25	2.58	3.93	3.33	3.4	4.39	3.82	3.49	3.15	3.16
Mole-Dagbani	2.75	2.66	3.64	1.82	2.33	3.3	3.45	3.41	3.90	3.00	3.37	1.94
Average from other groups	2.64	2.60	3.89	2.51	3.15	3.22	3.36	4.63	4.08	3.27	3.61	3.39

The fourth question dealt with people's associational life. The survey established that most respondents belonged to one or more 'social' organisations, associations and/or clubs: 474 of the 608 respondents, or about 78%, belonged to at least one social organisation and about 41% of the respondents belonged to two or more social organisations or associations. The three most common types of organisation in which respondents participated were: religious (72% of respondents), professional/trade (17%) and educational (13%). Importantly, as Table 4 shows, most of these 'social' organisations had an ethnically mixed membership profile. Even in the relatively homogenous cities of Kumasi (Ashanti Region) and Ho (Volta Region), most organisations were ethnically mixed. From the open-ended follow-up interviews that were conducted with about 8% of the respondents, it emerged that the inter-ethnic interaction in these organisations, in combination with the inter-ethnic interaction in respondents' neighbourhoods and work environments, were very important for *positively* shaping and influencing people's attitudes and views about one another.

Table 4: **Ethnic composition of respondents' two most important organisations**

	Accra	**Ho**	**Kumasi**	**Total**
Exclusively one ethnic group	7.1	6.8	2.6	5.3
Mainly one ethnic group	7.3	8.0	17.6	11.3
Mixed ethnic membership	85.6	85.2	79.9	83.4

To conclude, while it appears from the previous sections that ethnicity remains a relatively important factor in Ghana's political/public sphere, this section has shown that on a personal/private level ethnicity and ethnic loyalties are much less relevant and salient. Not only were religion and occupation considered to be much more important aspects of identity than ethnicity by the vast majority of respondents, ethnicity was shown to be largely *insignificant* as an obstacle to social interaction. In many ways the survey results confirm and to some extent explain Ghana's generally good and peaceful inter-ethnic relations.

7. Some conclusions

Although scholars such as Smock and Smock (1975) and Ladouceur (1979) argued in the 1970s that a north-south conflict in Ghana was latent and could explode at any time, so far this has not happened. Indeed, despite the coincidence of economic, social and cultural cleavages, the north-south divide has actually not even become the most salient cleavage in Ghanaian politics. From the perspective of horizontal inequality/conflict, this is particularly interesting as it demonstrates that severe *developmental* horizontal inequalities are *in* and *by* themselves insufficient to explain the emergence of (violent) group mobilisation. This paper has highlighted several factors that helped to explain the failure of north-south mobilisation and confrontation to emerge in Ghana.

Following from the discussion of Ghana's ethno-regional and religious profile, there appear to be important 'structural' impediments to the mobilisation of the north as a group. In particular, the presence of a considerable number of relatively small ethnic groups, which not only differ considerably in terms of their cultural traditions, histories and institutions, but also have been in conflict with one another at different times, has undoubtedly contributed to impeding the development of a strong *northern* identity or consciousness. The likelihood of northern mobilisation in the political sphere is

further reduced by the fact that the Muslim religion is insufficiently widespread or dominant to act as an overarching 'northern' identity.

In addition to these 'structural' obstacles to northern mobilisation, consecutive Ghanaian regimes employed certain strategies and policies which further contributed to diminishing the political salience of the north-south divide. An important factor in this respect was the continuous efforts by successive Ghanaian governments to reduce the developmental gap. Although the actual impact of the inequality-reducing efforts and measures was shown to be rather limited at best, the *symbolic* impact appears to have been much more substantial. The continued commitment and efforts of consecutive political leaders and elites to maintain a culturally and religiously 'neutral' state was another factor that contributed to national integration and the prevention of ethno-regional mobilisation and conflicts.

While the strategies of ethno-cultural 'neutrality' and economic redistribution towards the historically disadvantaged northern regions contributed to defusing the socio-economic grievances among the 'masses', the *political* inclusion of the northern elites was a crucial complementary strategy to defuse ethno-regional mobilisation. This largely informal policy of ethno-regional balancing ensured that political horizontal inequalities and exclusion at the *elite* level were generally very moderate, which in turn meant that the northern political elites had few incentives to mobilise their constituents along ethno-regional lines. Thus, Ghana provides evidence of the importance of the *configuration* of political and developmental horizontal inequalities in determining whether (violent) political mobilisation occurs on a group basis.

The Ghanaian case demonstrates that if severe socio-economic inequalities between different 'cultural' groups or regions are not complemented by serious political exclusion, culture is less likely to become a driver for (violent) political mobilisation. Conversely, the *simultaneous* presence of severe political *and* socio-economic horizontal inequalities appears to be a much more dangerous socio-political situation, because in this context the excluded political elites not only have strong incentives to mobilise their supporters for violent conflict along 'cultural' lines, but are also likely to gain support among their constituencies quite easily (see Langer 2004; 2005). The emergence of the violent north-south conflict in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 provides strong evidence in support of this hypothesis. While Côte d'Ivoire has been confronted with severe socio-economic inequalities between its northern and southern regions ever since becoming independent in 1960, serious north-south tensions did not emerge until the northerners also became increasingly politically excluded and disenfranchised from the mid-1990s onwards (Ibid).

Somewhat paradoxically, the political salience of the north-south cleavage in Ghana was further reduced by the repeated confrontations between the Ewe and Ashanti/Akan political elites. The Ewe-Ashanti/Akan cleavage in the political sphere is noteworthy because it shows that political elites and their instrumental use of ethnicity and ethnic histories are crucial in determining which 'cultural' cleavage becomes the most salient one. However, the Ewe-Akan cleavage 'has hardly presented a dire threat to the Ghanaian body politic' not only because the Akan group is hardly a monolithic and politically cohesive entity (Gyimah-Boadi and Asante 2006: 249), but particularly because the differences in views and attitudes between these two ethnic groups are largely limited to the political sphere.

In this respect it is crucial *not* to blur the difference between politics and the private/social sphere of society. While Langer and Ukiwo (2007) provide evidence that ethnicity is widely regarded to be an important factor in Ghana's political/public sphere, in the private/social sphere of society ethnicity appears to be much less

salient. In addition Ewe-Akan differences and antagonisms in the private/social sphere appear to be largely absent. Indeed, instead of ethnic loyalties, religion and occupation appear overall to be the two most salient identities in Ghana's society. Moreover, the widespread interaction between different ethnic groups in the private/social sphere appears to have muted the development of antagonistic perceptions, which in turn has helped to limit elite rivalries from spilling over into communal hostilities. But it is equally true that political elites' rivalries, while at times leading to the ethnicisation of politics, have generally been conducted in a 'responsible' manner, mainly because of an agreement among Ghana's political elites that the role of ethnicity should be kept at bay.

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