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## The British Colonial Factor in Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Contemporary Northern Ghana: The Case of the Nawuri-Gonja Conflict

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to delineate the causes of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict within the framework of the colonial policy of amalgamation and indirect rule. Introduced in the Northern Territories in 1932 by the colonial government, indirect rule made jurisdiction territorial with a paramount chief serving as the nexus of authority at the local government level. It necessitated the aggregation of states to form large territorial units for administrative purposes and political expediency. Consequently, the Nawuri were amalgamated with the Gonja, and this created tension between them as the former lost their autonomy and control over their land. The conditions of conflict and imbroglio so created between the two ethnic groups systematically manifested in skirmishes and eventually culminated in inter-ethnic conflict in 1991 and 1992. This paper argues that the causes of the conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja are rooted in the colonial policy of amalgamation; it created conflict structures, which subsequently found expression in social, political and economic debates in the Nawuri territory.*

**Keywords:** amalgamation, British, colonial, conflict, German, Gonja, indirect rule, inter-ethnic, Kanankulaiwura, Nawuri, Nawuriwura, Northern Ghana

### 1. Introduction

Northern Ghana has been enmeshed in ethnic conflicts over the past three decades marked by phenomenal increases in mayhem and the destruction of lives and property. The causes of ethnic conflicts in Northern Ghana – whether inter or intra ethnic – are varied. They include competition for chieftaincy positions and litigation over rights of land tenure (Tsikata and Seini 2004: 4). Other Scholars have explained inter-ethnic conflicts in Northern Ghana within the framework of the struggle for autonomy, litigation over land tenure system, chieftaincy disputes, competition for power and the demand for representation on local and national government bodies (Tonah 2005: 101).

Like most inter-ethnic conflicts in Northern Ghana, the root causes of the conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja have been traced to the colonial policy of indirect rule introduced in the Northern Territories in 1932, which subsumed the Nawuri under the Gonja as part of the colonial government's effort of rationalizing existing social and political structures for administrative purpose (Ladouceur 1979: 43). By and large, the implementation of indirect rule led to a situation whereby:

*numerous and unassimilated groups such as the Nawuri, Nchumuru, Mo and Vagla, were grouped under the Gonja chiefs; large numbers of Konkomba and Chakosi were made subject to the Dagomba kingdom; the Frafra and B'Moba to the paramount chief of Mamprusi; and the Dagarti and Sisala in the Wala District to the Wala chiefs. In this way the British hoped to rationalize existing social and political structures for administrative purpose (Ladouceur 1979: 43).*

The indirect rule system introduced in the administration of Northern Ghana in 1932 allowed centralized states to consolidate their power over the subsumed ones, as a result of which the Nawuri, for example, lost their sovereignty. As overlords, the Gonja also claimed allodia rights to Nawuri lands. From 1932 a state of conflict existed between the two ethnic groups as they contested jurisdictional authority and allodia rights in Alfai. This paper explores the causes of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict and concludes that the causes of the conflict were rooted in the colonial policy of amalgamation.

### 2. Methodology

The study is interpretative, and it adopted a qualitative method of data collection. It combined archival research with the use of published materials and blended them with oral evidence from the field. Primary data for the study were obtained from archival materials in Accra and Tamale, newspapers, reports of committees of enquiry, petitions, memoranda, Kpandai District Assembly's reports and field researches. Four local languages – Nawuri, Gonja, Konkomba, Bassari and Kotokoli – were used to obtain oral data from informants in Kpandai, Salaga, Kafaba and Kalendi as informants were illiterate. The field research, conducted from 2010 to 2012, took the form of interviews, and the data derived thereof were transcribed into English and edited. The problem of feedback and inconsistencies was recognized and the data derived from the field were only utilized for the study after a thorough scrutiny, comparisons and analyses. Library research was conducted to obtain information from secondary source materials.

### 3. The Pre-Colonial Situation

Nawuri territory of present-day Kpandai District, known in most records as Alfai, is located in the eastern corridor of the Northern Region of Ghana. Nawuri territory borders on the Northern part of Volta Region. To the East, West, South and North it shares common boundaries with the Achode/Chanla, Nchumurus, Krachi and Nanumba, respectively. This territory was the scene of a destructive inter-ethnic conflict between the Nawuri (autochthones) and the Gonja (immigrants and overlords) in 1991 and 1992.

As one of the autochthonous cluster of Guan ethnic groups in present-day Ghana, the Nawuri trace their origins to the Afram Plains. From here they migrated to LartehAkuapem and sojourned with other Guan groups such as Larteh, Anum, Nkonya, Krachi, Nchumuru, and Achode. In about the fourteenth Century the Nawuri migrated from LartehAkuapem. They moved through Anum, Dwan in present-day BrongAhafo Region and Otsu in Kete-Krachi territory, and crossed the Oti. They settled in the adjoining lands and founded settlements in present-day Nawuri territory of the Kpandai District in the Northern Region. Some of the settlements founded by the Nawuri are Kpandai, Balai, Nkanchina, Bayim, Dodoai, Katiejeli, Buya, Kabonwule, Bladjai, and Kitari.

Two main reasons have been adduced to explain the exodus of the Nawuri from Larteh-Akuapem. The first is that the Nawuri left Larteh-Akuapem because the mountainous area was unsuitable for their hunting, fishing and farming occupations. The second hints at a sense of insecurity generated by frequent dissensions in the fourteenth Century.

The Gonja, on the other hand, trace descent from NdewuraJakpa and his invading *Ngbanye* (Gonja) army. Originally from Mande in modern-day Mali, they penetrated into Northern Ghana in the sixteenth Century, conquered and annexed the territories of the autochthones, and established their rule. In the seventeenth Century, they arrived in Nawuri territory, not as invaders, but as immigrants. The narratives of Gonja arrival in Nawuri territory are varied and, to some extent, muddled. It is difficult to show by firm evidence how the Gonja arrived in Nawuri territory. What is certain is that the Nawuri, the autochthones, were settled in the territory long before the arrival of the first wave of Gonja immigrants in the seventeenth Century. The Gonja neither conquered the Nawuri nor did the two ethnic groups fight each other in the pre-colonial period. The two ethnic groups co-existed as political allies (Awedoba 2009: 189; Mbowura 2002: 24-35). In its report, the Ampiah Committee set up in September 1991 to investigate the cases of conflict between the Gonja, Nawuri and Nanjuro (Nchumuru) affirmed that the Nawuri:

*were an indigenous people in Alfai area who had complete autonomy and lived in friendly association with the Krachis and Nchumurus ... nowhere in the evidence had it been stated that the Nawuris were at any time conquered by the Gonjas. The evidence holds that the Nawuris and the Gonjas were allies and fought together during the Asante invasion of the Area ... the ... ethnic groups existed as a loose association since they met in the now Eastern Gonja Area for common purposes; fighting the common enemies like Asantes and others and protecting their lands (Ampiah 1991: 61-62).*

In about 1922, a small band of the Konkomba and the Bassari arrived in Nawuri territory, and they were followed by waves of immigrants of different ethnic groups. Until the imposition of colonial rule, jurisdictional authority in Nawuri territory was vested in the Nawuriwura, the paramount chief of the Nawuri. He was assisted by recognized community leaders of the various Nawuri settlements. The Gonja immigrants lived in the "stranger quarter" (zongo) in Kpandai, and were ruled by their chief, the Kanankulaiwura. From its primordial beginnings as the recognized head of the "stranger community", the institution of Kanankulaiwura acquired the status of "chiefly" authority in Nawuri territory in the colonial times.

### 4. Theoretical Framework

The surge of ethnic conflicts in Africa at the end of the twentieth Century has led to the evolution of schools of thought by social scientists. Scholars have attempted to link conflicts in post-colonial Africa with the colonial enterprise. The argument is that prior to colonization,

*Africans belonged simultaneously to a bewildering variety of social networks – nuclear and extended families, lineages, age sets, secret societies, village communities, diasporas, chiefdoms, states and empires. Loyalties and identities were complex, flexible and relatively amorphous, and certainly did not add up to clearly demarcated tribes living in well-defined and bounded territories. These multiple identities ... continued into the colonial period (Lentz & Nugent 2000: 5).*

Inter-ethnic conflicts in contemporary Africa are therefore seen as the unfinished business from the colonial era, and ties the causes of ethnic conflicts in Africa to the colonial policy that forcibly agglomerated people of diverse ethnic backgrounds into one nation, which "produced essentialized ethnicities from what were once fluid political groupings" (Cole 2001: 6) as well as the exploitation of the colonists, which compounded already strained inter-ethnic relations. As Jennifer Cole puts it:

*soon after France colonized Madagascar in 1895, General Governor Joseph Gallieni imposed a modified form of indirect rule called la polirique de races, dividing the peoples of Madagascar into different groups according to their customs so as to facilitate the colonial administration. The result of this division and codification, which produced essentialized ethnicities from what were once fluid political groupings, endures today (Cole 2001: 6).*

Thus, through the establishment of administrative structures, colonialism fostered ethnic identities in Africa. This drive for administrative order "even resulted in tribes being invented where they did not exist, meaning that sometimes groups of people who were culturally or otherwise united in precolonial times were now divided by ethnographers into distinct tribes or, conversely, those previously separate were grouped together" (Laumann 2013: 31).

It is argued that the impact of colonialism on ethnicity in Africa was not entirely one-sided; it had something of a mixed impact (Rothchild 1997: 8). Though colonial systems, procedures, and values were imposed on Africans, it is argued that the colonial enterprise did promote a sense of ethnic unity. As Rothchild (1997: 7) argues:

*for administrative convenience, the colonial officials did promote a sense of unity among a number of fluid and disunited peoples whose affinities were based on coresidence in a region and similarities of cultures, traditions, and legal and economic practices, including the Karamojong of Uganda, the Sukuma of Tanzania, the Yoruba and Igbo of Nigeria, and the Kikuyu and Luba of Kenya.*

Whether ethnic identities existed in pre-colonial Africa or were colonial inventions, the colonial enterprise succeeded in putting a lid on the numerous inter-ethnic conflicts, then organized along the lines of traditional states. In the Gold Coast (now Ghana), for example, the British colonial authorities succeeded in bringing to an end the numerous Asante-Fanti Wars, Asante-Akyem Wars, Dagomba-Gonja Wars, among others. The demise of colonialism sparked off ethnic conflicts as subsumed groups attempted to assert themselves. Other times the conflicts arise as "interactions between the state and society assume a constant engagement of rival interests in the contemporary political arena among various groups that have mobilized to secure public resources from those in authority at the political centre" (Rothchild 1997: 3).

Intellectual discourses on conflicts in Northern Ghana, whether inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic, have more or less pointed accusing fingers at the colonial enterprise. Specifically on northern Ghana, there are two schools of thought. The first school of thought, which applies the new barbarism theory on northern Ghana, imputes the causes of inter-ethnic conflicts in the region to colonialism. The thrust of the proponents of this view [Bombade (2007), N.J.K. Brukum (2007, 2001, 1999 & 1995), HippolytPul (2003) and Peter Skalnik (1989 and 1983)] is one or a combination of the following points: that the colonial enterprise imposed notions of state and state power on Northern Ghana without taking into account the conceptual differences in outlook between centralized and non-centralized societies; and that colonialism, with its policy of indirect rule, was the major cause of inter-ethnic conflicts in Northern Ghana because it created lots of antagonisms, grievances and festering relations between ethnic groups.

The second school of thought is led by scholars such as Ladouceur (1979), Lentz (2007), Jonsson (2007) and Benjamin Talton (2010). This school of thought establishes the causes of conflicts in Northern Ghana beyond the colonial enterprise. The proponents acknowledge the role colonialism played in the outbreak of ethnic conflicts in Northern Ghana, but consider the social and economic factors as preponderant. They argue that education, modernization, questions of allodial rights, the activities of ethnic youth associations, among others, fostered consciousness of identity, ethnicity and inequalities in Northern Ghana; and that an explanation of ethnic conflicts in Northern Ghana must necessarily take account of the role of ethnicity, identity and inequality.

This paper is situated within the framework of the first school of thought. It reconstructs the causes the inter-ethnic between the Nawuri and the Gonja in the Northern Region of Ghana in 1991 and 1992 within the framework of the colonial policy of amalgamation, and highlights the complicity of the colonial enterprise. It ties the causes and issues which culminated into the Nawuri-Gonja conflict to colonial policies, and argues that colonial rule created conflict structures and established conditions for antagonism and imbroglio between the two ethnic groups which eventually culminated in the communal violence in 1991 and 1992.

##### **5. Colonial Configuration of Traditional Political Structure and the Warrant System**

Nawuri territory was initially part of the Neutral Zone established by the joint Anglo-German Commission in 1887. It was subsequently brought under German administration in Togo when the Neutral Zone was partitioned in 1899. The partition simultaneously brought Salaga and its environs in present-day East Gonja District under the British, thus bringing the entire Gonja kingdom under British rule. By 1900 German rule was effectively and firmly established in Nawuri territory, and the major policy of German colonial authorities was to reconfigure the traditional political structure in Nawuri territory. First, Nawuri territory was included in the Kete-Krachi District, comprising six major traditional areas: Krachi, Nanumba, Nawuri, Nchumuru, Achode and Adele. Second, in an effort to centralize authority in Nawuri territory, traditional norms and patterns of traditional observance were set aside. In their place, the Germans used the "warrant" system to invest traditional rulers with paramount power; and it also happened that an immigrant Gonja, rather than an indigenous Nawuri, was made the paramount ruler in Nawuri territory. As was the case of the warrant chiefs in Eastern Nigeria under British rule, the Germans ignored history and issued a 'warrant' to KanankulaiwuraMahamaKaratu, a Gonja, to exercise centralized authority in Nawuri territory that he had never exercised before. A document given to MahamaKaratu to that effect, dated September 5, 1913, and signed by Dr. Ravon, stated:

*with the authority of Kaiserlichen station Kete-Krachi, the Native Mahama-Kratu of Kpandai is today to become Head Chief ... These villages are placed under him: (1) Kpandai, (2) Katiageli, (3) Balae, (4) Beyim, (5) Nkantschena, (6) Dodope, (7) Kabuwele, (8) Kotito, (9) Abrionko, (10) Suruku (Dixon 1955: 8).*

Indeed, at the time of his recognition as the overlord of Nawuri territory, KanankulaiwuraMahamaKaratu "had only come to Nawuri (territory in German Togoland) a short time before the outbreak of war" [World War I] (PRAAD (Accra) ADM 11/1/1621 Report of Enquiry on the Sphere of Occupation of Togoland: Report by SNA on Enquiry into Togoland Affairs, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1918, 19). In the estimation of the Germans, Nawuri chiefs were unenlightened and incapable of an effective political administration in Nawuri territory. Like their Nchumuru counterparts, Nawuri chiefs were deemed to be primitive, poor and unintelligent (Ibid.). By contrast, MahamaKaratu who was literate in Arabic, was described as enlightened and an "experienced man who had travelled much in the course of trade" (Braimah and Goody 1967: 70). In short, by the stroke of the pen and against history and tradition, the Germans made the Kanankulaiwura the repository of traditional authority in Nawuri territory and subordinated the Nawuriwura to him. The result was that KanankulaiwuraMahamaKaratu and his successors were considered by the Germans, and later the British, as overlords and superior to Nawuri chiefs (Ampiah 1991: 16; PRAAD (Accra) ADM 11/1/1621 Report of Enquiry on the Sphere of Occupation of Togoland: Report by SNA on Enquiry into Togoland Affairs, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1918, 19). When Nawuri territory came under British sphere of Togoland in 1919, the British colonial authorities, for the sake of expediency and continuity, simply maintained the super-imposition of the Gonja as the overlords. This sowed the seed of the subsequent rancorous relationship between the Nawuri and the Gonja.

## 6. The British, the “Territorization” of Traditional Authority and the Creation of Conflict Structures

Between 1901 and 1907 the British initially administered the Northern Territories with military staff (Metcalf 1964: 523-524). In the latter year, an interim civilian administration was established. British policy was to create tiny territorial units called native states. The object was to divide the people and obviate a possible combination against the colonial administration. However, by 1910 the British colonial authorities had come to the conclusion that a concerted revolt of the peoples of the Northern Territories was highly unlikely. Consequently, they began to conceive of a new administrative arrangement based on larger native states. This idea was first conceived by Lt.-Col. H.P. Northcott, the first Commissioner and Commandant of the Northern Territories, when he hinted that in every phase of administration, the British would employ local chiefs as agents of the colonial administration. He also hinted that the chiefs would be supported and empowered to deal with all cases except in matters of their relationship with neighbouring chiefs and of offences of a capital nature (PRAAD (Accra) ADM 56/1/258 Occupation of Yendi: Minutes of Meeting Held at Tamale, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1921, 2). In 1921 Governor Guggisberg underscored the importance of forming larger and stronger native states when he hinted:

*there is the tendency of the bigger states to break up to the detriment of development and trade.....our policy must be to maintain any paramount chiefs that exist and gradually absorb under these any small communities scattered about. What we should aim at is that someday the Dagombas, Gonjas and Mamprusis should become strong native states. Each will have its own public works department and carry on its own business, with the political officer as a Resident Advisor. Each state will be more or less self-contained (PRAAD ADM 56/1/258 The Occupation of Yendi: “Minutes of Conference at Tamale, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1921”, 1-3.).*

Guggisberg’s proposition foreshadowed the imminent introduction of indirect rule with its concomitant amalgamation policy, which subsumed some states under others and overhauled the political map of the Northern Territories. To this end, plans were initiated for the introduction of indirect rule. The colonial government organized various conferences in the Northern Territories to codify the traditional constitutions, rules of successions and the relationship between the various ethnic groups. A distinctive character of the indirect rule system was the policy of amalgamation, which required the agglomeration of a number of states into large administrative units. To this end, societies in Northern Ghana were categorized into “centralized” and “acephalous” states. While the Mole-Dagbani, Gonja and Wala states were said to be centralized, that is states with system of government in which jurisdiction was coterminous with the territory of a paramount chief who became the nexus of authority, the rest of the states in Northern Ghana were described as acephalous – lacking a territorial organization in keeping with colonial administrative definition and the notion of chieftaincy. The formula adopted was to amalgamate the so-called acephalous societies with the centralized ones for administrative expediency. Categorized as acephalous, the process of integrating Nawuri territory into the Northern Territories, which began in 1923 when the territory was carved out from the Ashanti Province and added to the Northern Territories, was completed with its amalgamation with the Gonja in 1932. The conferences of principal Gonja chiefs at Yapei in 1923, 1930 and 1932 had drawn schemes for the amalgamation of smaller states scattered around the Gonja kingdom including Nawuri. The result was that “numerous and unassimilated groups such as the Nawuri, Nchumuru, Mo and Vagla, were grouped under the Gonja chiefs” (Ladouceur 1979: 43). Completing the process of absorption into the Gonja kingdom, the Nawuri territory, which was hitherto in the Kete-Krachi District, was carved out and added to the Gonja District. In 1932, it was reported that:

*the area of the Krachi district has been reduced by the removal from it of the lands belonging to the Nchumuru and Nawuri tribes with populations, in round figures, of nine hundred and two thousand, six hundred respectively (Colonial Report of British Togoland, 1932: 10).*

Remarkable of all the structures of indirect rule was the territorial administrative system. By this, traditional boundaries were redefined to make them coterminous with, and tangential to, administrative boundaries of districts. The “territorialization” of traditional authority dramatically changed the political map of the Northern Territories as smaller states were unnaturally amalgamated with bigger ones, leading to the virtual obliteration of their traditional boundaries. The colonial enterprise also put in place measures that supported the centralized states to consolidate their power over the subsumed ones. The British colonial authorities appointed paramount chiefs over the various peoples and districts. The ideal was one for each district. Chiefs were encouraged to visit and

co-operate with one another in the hope that their positions and their control over their people would be enhanced (PRAAD (Accra) 56/1/461 Bawku District: Report for the Month of December, 1917, 2; PRAAD (Accra) 56/1/219 Extract from the Chief Commissioner’s Memorandum to His Excellency the Governor on Recruiting in the Northern Territories, 1). Besides, the chiefs constituted the local government structures and authority of the colonial government. In the estimation of the colonial authorities, the policy of imposing chiefs on peoples was considerably successful, and that it was due, in part, to the prevailing view that the peoples of the Northern Territories were, on a whole, “an amenable people, living under their tribal chiefs, who in their turn, paid allegiance to their paramount chiefs, through whom the administration worked as far as possible” (PRAAD [Accra] 56/1/219 Extract from the Chief Commissioner’s Memorandum to His Excellency the Governor on Recruiting in the Northern Territories, 1).

In the Gonja District, the Yagbumwura (paramount chief of the Gonja) was made the ultimate traditional authority of the colonial government. As the appointive authority of the traditional members of the divisional and sub-divisional Native Authority administrative bodies, the Yagbumwura appointed Kanankulaiwura as the highest traditional authority in Nawuri territory. It is an apparent paradox that indirect rule, in its effort to sanitize colonial administration of the Northern Territories at the local level should become a device to deprive the Nawuri and other subsumed ethnic groups freedom and autonomy. The policy created inequalities in Nawuri-Gonja relations as Nawuri lost their autonomy, were reduced to subject status, lost their social status, and lost control over their land to the Gonja overlords. The “territorialization” of traditional authority changed the erstwhile power

relations between the two ethnic groups and made Gonja rule over the Nawuri irreversible, and thus created conflict structures within which the two ethnic groups jostled each other.

### 7. From Amalgamation to the Outbreak of the Nawuri-Gonja Conflict

The amalgamation of the Nawuri with the Gonja created conditions for Nawuri-Gonja confrontations. This ultimately bred resentment and agitation on the part of the Nawuri, which culminated in conflict between the two ethnic groups in 1991 and 1992. A remote cause of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict was Nawuri-Gonja arguments over Native Authority structures in Nawuri territory. As the autochthones and allodial owners of Nawuri territory, the Nawuri demanded the presidency and a majority of seats in the colonial local government body in the area – the Alfai Native Authority (Ampiah 1991: part I, 22). The colonial government dismissed Nawuri demands as attempts by to monopolize the local government body in the territory (Ampiah 1991: part I, 22). The Gonja took advantage of the fact that the presidency of the local government body and the right to appoint traditional members vested in their head-chief, the Kanankulaiwura, to appoint Gonja chiefs and establish Gonja dominance over the Alfai Native Authority (later renamed the Alfai Local Council). The Nawuri resented the local government arrangement and refused to submit themselves to its authority and obligations imposed on them, including payment of taxes (Ampiah 1991: 19-26). The Gonja, on the other hand, were determined to enforce their overlordship rights and the authority of the local government body in Nawuri territory. The intransigence of the Gonja increased antagonism and made conflagration and mayhem unavoidable.

The colonial policy of amalgamation did not only sour the relationship between the Nawuri and the Gonja; it also accounted for Gonja refusal to recognize Nawuri chiefs. The local government arrangements in Nawuri territory only recognized Gonja chiefs or others endorsed by the Gonja Traditional Council. Predictably, the Gonja refused to recognize chieftaincy as it existed among the Nawuri well into the 1990s (Ampiah 1991: part I, 56; Mbowura 2013: 39). In 1991 the Kanankulaiwura rejected radio appeals for a mediation meeting between the Nawuri and the Gonja, claiming that reference to Nawuri leaders as chiefs was unacceptable (Ampiah 1991: part I, 56). He said:

*you are no doubt aware that as the Kanankulaiwura, I am the direct representative of the Kpembewura who is the divisional chief of Kpembe including Alfai area. In the Alfai area, I am the direct representative of the Kpembewura who is the divisional chief of Kpembe including Alfai area. In the Alfai area, I am assisted by Dusaiwura, Bladjaiwura, Njawrewura and the Chowura. Apart from these chiefs mentioned, there are no other chiefs in the Alfai area. Your Excellency, I am making this point because in your radio announcement inviting us to this meeting you mentioned Nawuri names with titles 'Nana'... I want to make it clear at this initial stage that throughout the Gonja Traditional Council area no chief bears the title 'Nana'” (Ampiah 1991: part I, 56).*

Nawuri effort in the colonial and post-colonial periods for their natural rulers to be recognized as “chiefs” by the government, the local government structure and the Gonja was not heeded. This left the door to conflict wide open, and the outbreak of war between the two ethnic groups in 1991 was the result.

The ramifications of the colonial administrative arrangements in the Nawuri territory were political, social and economic. Politically, the Nawuri were reduced to “tenant farmers” of sorts on their own land. As in all traditional systems of government, Gonja demand for tribute from the Nawuri was an incident of their overlordship derived from the colonial policy of amalgamation. As the political “overlord,” and “supposed” owner, of Nawuri territory, the Kanankulaiwura claimed tribute rights from the Nawuri and other inhabitants. The tribute took various forms. In the beginning, hind-legs of all large animals killed, whether domesticated or wild, by all subjects were given to the Kanankulaiwura as tribute. In addition, elephant tusks and ears as well as skins of wild animals such as lions, leopards and hyenas were also given to the Kanankulaiwura as tribute (Ampiah 1991: part I, 51, part II, 9). In the course of time, the obligation of giving lumps of meat to the Kanankulaiwura was extended to the Kpandai abattoir as well. For the use of the land and other natural resources in Nawuri territory, the Nawuri and other subject ethnic groups were obliged to provide foodstuffs to the Kanankulaiwura during Gonja festivals such as *Damba*, *Abrotie* and *Akyang* (Ampiah 1991: part I, 51, part II, 9). Similarly, it was the duty of all fisher folks to provide baskets of fish or their equivalent to the Kanankulaiwura every Friday and during Ramadan as part of the privilege of fishing in tributaries of the Oti River in Nawuri territory (Ampiah 1991: part I, 55; Dixon 1955: Appendix VI). In a number of petitions, the Nawuri decried the tribute exactions by the Gonja. They described them as exploitative and unjust, and maintained that as the allodial owners, their chiefs but not Gonja chiefs should be the recipients of all the tributes paid in respect of the land (Ampiah 1991: part I, 19; Dixon 1955: Appendix II). Similarly, the Nawuri proposed that the tributes collected from the fisher folks should be paid to the Oti River Fetish Priests, but the government rejected the proposal (Dixon 1955: 28).

The colonial administrative arrangements in the Nawuri territory also had socio-cultural and economic implications. In 1951 the Kanankulaiwura, acting in collusion with the Yagbonwura and Government Agents, usurped the customary right of the Balai Nawuri to enrobe a new *KankpeEsiapu* [Fetish Priest] (NRG 8/2/210 Nawuri and Nanjuro under United Nations Trusteeship: Petition from Alechu, Balai Kojo and Yaw Mamfio to the District Commissioner, Salaga, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1951). Gonja interference left the Nawuri in no doubt that the Gonja were not only minded to destroy their traditional religious institutions; they were also hell-bent on destroying their ethnic identity.

Economically, the Gonja imposed new economic burdens on the Nawuri. First, the Gonja demanded labour services from the Nawuri and other ethnic groups in Nawuri territory. They were obliged to send their people “annually to make a farm for the Kanankulaiwura for the use of his household being part of the tribute owed by the inhabitants to their sovereign, the Kanankulaiwura” (Dixon 1955: 28). The “labour tax” demanded by the Kanankulaiwura caused a lot of discontent among the Nawuri as it turned them from legitimate owners of their territory to serfs, and was one of their main grievances against the Gonja (Letter, Atorsah and Nawuri Elders to District Commissioner for Salaga, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1951; Ampiah 1991: part I, 19). Persistent petitions to the colonial and post-colonial governments to address Nawuri grievances received no attention (Ampiah 1991: 19). The only way open to the Nawuri to exorcise the ghost of Gonja’s arbitrariness seemed to be war.

Besides, the Gonja assumed allodial claims to land in Kpandai and its environs in their capacity as overlords. Consequently, they assumed the right to allocate parcels of land in the Nawuri territory to individuals. In some instances, the Gonja interfered with parcels of land effectively under the occupation of the Nawuri. Indeed, they sometimes confiscated Nawuri farmlands (Motion of Notice: "Kanankulaiwura vs. Kodjo police, Philip Kwaku and Three Others 30<sup>th</sup> July 1954; Kodjo Police: Affidavit 30<sup>th</sup> July 1954). Trouble often arose between the two ethnicities in cases where the Gonja attempted to interfere with land in possession of the Nawuri under the guise of "overlordship" (Ampiah 1991: part I, 49). Peeved by the arbitrariness of the Gonja, the Nawuri decided to resist and re-assert their right in land by either seizing or re-selling parcels of land the Gonja had sold. This act brought the two ethnic groups to a collision point in 1991 over a parcel of land sold in Kpandai by the Nawuri to the Roman Catholic Church which the Gonja attempted to re-sell (Ampiah 1991: part I, 33).

### **8. Ominous Signs of Conflict and the Drift to War**

The Nawuri began to resist Gonja rule intermittently and sporadically from the inception of the implementation of the amalgamation policy in 1932. The amalgamation destroyed the last vestige of rapport between the Nawuri and the Gonja, and aroused in the former anti-Gonja sentiments. The first ominous sign of a looming inter-ethnic conflict appeared in the relations between the Nawuri and their Gonja overlords in 1935 when the Nchumuru, in alliance with the Nawuri, staged an open revolt against the Gonja aimed at securing autonomy. The revolt began in the Nchumuru settlements and spread to some parts of Alfai. The Gonja blamed the revolt on Nchumuru insubordination, stemming from their greater "enlightenment." According to Goody and Braimah (1967: 72-73), the Nchumuru were a people enlightened by their travels, especially to Ashanti and the Gold Coast Colony, where they had experienced how the people lived under modern conditions. The colonial report for 1936 attributed the Nchumuru "movement for autonomy" to their desire to serve the Krachiwura and the Krachi Dente (Colonial Report of British Togoland 1936: 12), but the Gonja were aware of other reasons, which caused the Nchumuru to seek to renounce their allegiance to them. The revolt was attributed to Nchumuru reaction to tribute extortions of the Singbunwura, the Gonja sub-chief of the Kpembe Division under whose sub-division the Nchumuru were placed (Lumsden 1973: 127). The Nchumuru revolt for autonomy turned out to be short-lived. It was crushed by KpembewuraJawula (1931-1936), who invaded the Nchumuru territory with a party of district security and "at least the tacit support of District Commissioner (Salaga) Guthrie Hall" to compel the Nchumuru to submit to the Gonja (Lumsden 1973: 128). In the process some Nchumuru were murdered while others got drowned in their attempt to flee across River Daka in canoes. The KpembewuraJawula invaded the Nchumuru territory as far as Wiae, and was heading for Kpandai, the Nawuri capital, to crush the incipient Nawuri revolt when he was recalled by the District Commissioner (Lumsden 1973: 128). Even before the Kpembewura was stopped from proceeding further to Kpandai, the Nawuri had abandoned the revolt when they got news of how the Nchumuru had been crushed. Some of the Nawuri instigators were said to have gone into hiding while others left their settlements in anticipation of invasion by the Kpembewura. The Nawuri took a cue from the failure of Nchumuru revolt for autonomy and decided to bide their time until an opportune time in the future. Though the 1935 revolt was unsuccessful, it left no one in doubt that a state of tension existed between the Nawuri and the Gonja over the subjugation of the former under the terms of the amalgamation of Nawuri territory with the Gonja kingdom.

The second ominous sign of looming conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja developed over the forcible recruitment of Nawuri for service in World War II. The "rising discord between the Nawuris and the Gonjas came to a climax" in 1943 when the Nawuri were compelled by the Gonja to contribute to the quota of troops demanded from the Yagbumwura by the colonial government to assist Britain's war efforts (Dixon 1955: 15-16; Ampiah 1991: part I, 19-20). The Nawuri paid Yagbumwura through his sub-chief, the Kpebewura, £200 to hire Mossi soldiers from Kumasi Zongo to take their place, but that notwithstanding, the Kpembewura came back to demand recruits from the Nawuri. The Gonja explanation was that many of the Mossi soldiers they had hired and paid in advance proved physically unfit (Dixon 1955: 16; Ampiah 1991: part I, 20). The Nawuri felt outraged by the Kpembewura's demand and refused to accept liability. In anger and frustration, a group of Nawuri attacked the Gonja in Kpandai with clubs and inflicted wounds on them. This created a chaotic situation in the Nawuri territory (Dixon 1955: 16; Ampiah 1991: part I, 20). As war between the Nawuri and the Gonja became imminent, the Kanankulaiwura made a report to the Kpembewura, and Mr. T.R Talbot, then District Commissioner for Salaga, visited Kpandai and met the Nawuri and the Gonja (Ampiah 1991: part II, 49-51). War was averted when Talbot forced the Nawuri to emigrate from their settlements in the Gonja Traditional Area to those in the Kete-Krachi District for refusing to acknowledge the overlordship of the Gonja. An agreement was allegedly signed by the Nawuri to vacate their lands in the Northern Territories under Gonja Traditional Area (PRAAD (Tamale) NRG 8/2/211 Enquiry Regarding the Claims of the Nawuri and Nchumuru: "Provisional Agreement" signed at Banda on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1943). In compliance, the Nawuri in Kpandai moved away to the territory of Kitare in Kete-Krachi District; the Nkanchina Nawuri migrated to Banda in Kete-Krachi District; while a section of the Balai Nawuri moved away to Chifeli in the Nanumba District.

Slowly but surely the drift to war between the Nawuri and the Gonja was moving to a crescendo, and by 1989, an inter-ethnic conflict between them had become a distinct possibility. In that year, the Nawuri and other Northern ethnic groups in Northern Ghana subject to the Gonja, Nanumba and Dagomba appear to have come to a secret understanding to fight to regain their autonomy. They took practical measures to stockpile sophisticated modern weapons and train their people in their use (Letter, General Secretary of the "National Liberation Movement of Western Togoland" to its Members, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1989). A letter by a group of people, who referred to themselves as the "National Liberation Movement of Western Togoland", reveals that a meeting was held in Kpalime in modern Togo in April 1989 at which a consensus was reached to assist the Nawuri to attack the Gonja in Alfai. The letter read:

*there is a general consensus that Alfae (sic) [Nawuri territory] should be liberated before Yendi, which will definitely need more men and equipment. Another school of thought has it that we should wait until the PNDC government hands over power to civilian government before we tackle the Yendi issue since the government may not stay aloof to see our plans go through ... We have taken delivery of the arms and ammunition through Mr. Njoriam and the three training (sic) of the Nawuri Youth to handle the weapons has begun. It is hoped that by September, they will be prepared to annihilate the Gonjas from Alfae (sic) area. It is feared that by this time we may not have enough ammunition to keep the enemy ...*

The outbreak of war between the Nawuri and the Gonja was only a matter of time. It only needed a trigger. Three events brought the Nawuri and the Gonja closer to the brink of war from which retreat was an impossibility. The first was the insecurity in Nawuri territory following the impasse between the Nawuri and the Gonja over the convening of Gonjaland Youth Association conference in Kpandai scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> March 1991. The Nawuri protested against the intended holding of the Gonjaland Youth Association's conference in Kpandai (Ampiah 1991: part I, 30). Underpinning the Nawuri protest was the festering question of allodial rights in Nawuri territory. Their protest was against Gonja claim to allodial rights in Nawuriteritory connoted by the designation "Gonjaland Youth Association." Ampiah (1991: part I, 30) suggests that the assertion of the Gonjaland Youth Association that Nawuri territory belonged to the Gonja "was so repugnant to the thinking of the Nawuris ... as to arouse in them old and smothered belligerent feelings and their objection of Gonja "overlordship." Tension began to mount in the Nawuri territory as Nawuri protests gathered momentum. From Kpandai, news of an imminent war between the Nawuri and the Gonja soon trickled down to Salaga and the various Nawuri settlements. Attempts by the East Gonja District Security Committee (DISEC) to defuse tension failed; neither did the attempts of the Northern Regional Security Committee (REGSEC) yield any positive results. REGSEC invited Nawuri and Gonja leaders to a meeting in Tamale at which it banned the holding of the Gonjaland Youth Association conference at Kpandai. It also banned the holding of the Gonja Traditional Council meeting which had been scheduled to take place in Kpandai simultaneously with the Gonja Youth Association conference. REGSEC also dispatched a number of Police personnel to Kpandai on 25 March 1991 to "strengthen the security of the area" (Memorandum – East Gonja District 1991: 3).

The second event was a clash of egos of Nawuri and Gonja women. Mid-morning of April 7, 1991, street fight broke out following an argument that occurred between some Nawuri and Gonja women over land and the politics of ethnic identity. It initially began as an innocuous argument but soon became partisan as scores of the Nawuri and the Gonja joined. Ultimately, a free fight ensued. The fighters pelted each other with stones and sadistically wounded themselves with manoeuvrable objects of any kind. After almost an hour of a free fight, the fighters finally dispersed. Though the fight was not widespread in scope, it was significant because it heightened the already tensed atmosphere in Alfai, particularly at Kpandai. It signalled the preparedness of both groups to resort to war to sort out their differences, and served as a dress-rehearsal for a more violent and widespread confrontation between their male counterparts.

The third event that set the Nawuri and the Gonja on a collision course was the physical confrontations that occurred between Nawuri and Gonja men subsequent to the fracas between their women. As the embers of the fight between the Nawuri and Gonja women began to flicker out, an intense verbal confrontation ensued between some Nawuri and Gonja men. The confrontation began when Nana AtorsahBresiamOkore I, the Nawuri chief of Kpandai, confronted "Abe-Chairman", a Gonja, over a disputed piece of land (Ampiah 1991: part I, 33). Nana AtorsahBresiamOkore objected to the attempted sale of the land to three fitter-mechanics. The confrontation between the two, which initially was an argument about allodial rights, soon degenerated into violence when a number of Nawuri youths joined. This resulted in street fights between Nawuri and Gonja men, causing a number of injuries, and eventually degenerated into an inter-ethnic conflict between the two ethnic groups when Anekor, a Nawuri and the war's first victim, was shot and killed by Asimani, a Gonja (Ampiah 1991: part I, 34).

## 9. Conclusion

Pre-colonial Nawuri-Gonja relations were relatively cordial and peaceful. The Gonja immigrant minority living among the Nawuri majority were not conquerors. The two ethnic groups did not fight each other in the seventeenth Century and in the inception of colonial rule. The two ethnic groups co-existed as political allies. Cracks in their relations began to appear when the Germans created a nascent Gonja hegemony over Nawuri. Through the warrant system, which super-imposed the Kanankulaiwura over the Nawuri, the German colonial authorities established structures for Gonja dominance over Nawuri. These structures were subsequently adopted and strengthened by the British for political expediency and continuity.

In 1932, the British, through the agency of indirect rule, amalgamated and subordinated the Nawuri to the Gonja. With the subordination, the Nawuri lost their sovereignty, autonomy, social status and autochthonous allodial rights in their territory. The Gonja profited from the constitution of their chiefs into the officially recognized traditional authority in Nawuri territory. The colonial power structure as established in Nawuri territory negated tradition, custom and history. It established relations of authority and subordination between the Gonja and the Nawuri, and created a Nawuri-Gonja imbroglio over layers of political, economic and social issues, which eventually culminated in the outbreak of war in 1991 and 1992.

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