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Conflict, peace and development: A spatio-thematic analysis of violent conflicts in Northern Ghana between 2007 and 2013

Kurzfassung: Der vorliegende Aufsatz enthält Informationen und Landkarten zur räumlichen und zeitlichen Dynamik gewaltförmiger Konflikte im Norden Ghanas und fokussiert deren Struktur, Ursachen und Entwicklungstand. Die primären Daten der Studie wurden in ausgewählten Konfliktherden erhoben und dienen zur Validierung der sekundären Informationen, die den Berichten zweier nationaler Tageszeitungen entnommen wurden. Infolge seiner großen ethnischen Heterogenität und des Kampfes um Anerkennung und Dominanz zwischen den ethnischen Gruppen liegen die Konfliktzonen hauptsächlich in der östlichen Region Nord-Ghanas. Konfliktursachen sind Ethnizität, Häuptlingschaft, Religion, Politik, Urbanisierung, Verteilungskämpfe und der Kampf um Anerkennung. Viele der Konflikte sind nach wie vor ungelöst. Da sie den Akzent mehr auf die Auslöser der Gewalt denn auf die tiefer liegenden Streitfragen gelegt haben, blieb Vermittlungsversuchen im Allgemeinen nur ein kurzfristiger Stabilisierungserfolg beschieden. Für einen dauerhaften Frieden im Norden Ghanas müssen Regierung und Zivilgesellschaft den strukturellen Konfliktursachen größere Aufmerksamkeit schenken. Die Nationalversammlung der Häuptlinge muss Regeln und Praktiken und Bräuche der Weitergabe von Autorität kodifizieren. Um Grenzen festzuschreiben und Konflikte um Land und Boden zu reduzieren, muss der Staat die Vergabe von Landtiteln vorantreiben.

Abstract: This study provides in text and in maps the spatial and temporal dynamics of violent conflicts in Northern Ghana focusing on their structure, causes and status. Primary data was collected from identified conflict hotspots to validate secondary information collected from two national dailies. Conflict zones tended to be generally clustered in the eastern corridor of Northern Ghana due the high degree of heterogeneity of ethnic groups and the struggle for recognition and dominance amongst them. The causes of conflicts included ethnicity, chieftaincy, religion, politics, urbanisation, struggles over resources and the fight for recognition. Many of the conflicts recorded remain unresolved. Generally, mediation efforts have only succeeded in yielding short term stability due to emphasis on addressing the triggers rather than the issues under contention. For durable peace in northern Ghana, the government and civil society groups must pay greater attention to the structural factors that shape these conflicts. The National House of Chiefs must codify customs and practices and usages in relation to heirs to positions of authority. Land titling has to be expedited by the state to establish boundaries to reduce land related conflicts.

1. Introduction

Ghana, although described as a peaceful country (United Nations Ghana, 2012), continues to experience violent conflicts in certain parts of the country. These violent conflicts are normally restricted to geographic locations. Indeed many of these localized conflicts preceded independence and have assumed a protracted nature with occasional flaring up of violence which has negative impact on local and general development (Akwetey, 1996). But perhaps the intriguing thing is that none has assumed national dimension thus far.

In Ghana, the occurrence and intensity of violent conflicts, however, vary across regions as some areas of the country suffer more violence than others do. The conflicts in Ghana, especially Northern Ghana, even though they do not assume national dimensions as in other countries, their proliferation, and destructive nature have become increasingly disturbing. In a recent study by Kendie, Osei-Kufuor and Boakye (2014), the three northern regions of Ghana, that is the Upper East, Upper West and Northern regions, were noted to have recorded more violent conflicts than any part of the country between 2007 and 2013. According to the study, northern Ghana recorded a total of 48 violent conflicts as compared to 34 and 39 for Middle and Southern zones respectively. The majority of the conflicts in northern Ghana were recurring while others overlapped. All of these conflicts have been violent, yet the violence in each of them is of different degree of intensity and duration.

The intensity and the protracted nature of the conflicts in northern Ghana have created an image in the minds of many as that of a region associated with violence. Such images are informed by the high frequency of reported violent conflicts and the associated high level of destruction of property and loss of lives. For example between 2007 and 2008, conflicts in the three northern regions recorded a total of 25 deaths and 57 injuries with 448 properties destroyed (Kendie, et al., 2014). These statistics do not deviate much from earlier conflict statistics on northern Ghana recorded by Johnson (2007) and Pul (2003)[1]. They further reinforce the widespread perception that northern Ghana, the least developed part of Ghana, is particularly prone to violent conflicts (Canterbury & Kendie, 2010).

Much research attempts to explain the causes of conflicts in northern Ghana (Awedoba, 2009; Tsikata & Seini, 2004; Assefa, 2000). Importantly, the literature on conflicts in northern Ghana has generally tended to

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[1] Pul (2003) recorded that between 1980 and 2002, the three northern regions recorded 26 violent ethnic conflicts with 17 of the conflicts occurring in the Northern region alone

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consistently focus on three broad perspectives of cause, effect and management (Canterbury & Kendie, 2010; Awedoba, 2009; Tona, 2007). The causes of the conflicts in northern Ghana are attributed to colonial policies, chieftaincy related disputes, title for land and ethnicity (Talton, 2010; Lentz, 2007; Tsikata & Seini, 2004). These factors are connected and often interplay to trigger violence. The effects of violent conflicts on northern Ghana are mostly discussed within the security-development nexus. Many authors are of the view that violent conflicts in northern Ghana have partly contributed to the under-development, human insecurity and the high levels of poverty in the area (Canterbury & Kendie, 2010; Lentz, 2007; Tsikata & Seini, 2004;). On conflict management in northern Ghana, the literature pays attention to the role of civil society in conflict prevention, management and resolution (Osei-Kufuor, Boakye & Kendie, 2016; Johnsson, 2009 and Assefa, 2001).

This paper argues that the missing link in the analysis of conflicts in northern Ghana has been the neglect of the spatial distribution of violent conflicts in the zone. Studies on the distributional dynamics of conflicts (by theme and space) among the three regions are few and therefore provide narrow understanding on how violent conflict is spatially spread among the districts in the three northern regions. Yet, such information is relevant to conflict analysis and management, helping to identify genre-specific hotspots and as an input in the design of theme-specific interventions. This paper therefore presents a discussion of the spatial dynamics of violent conflicts in northern Ghana. Furthermore, the map will analyse the attempts to resolve the conflicts in northern Ghana and provide information on the current status of these conflicts.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, the methodology and the conceptual issues are presented. These are followed by the discussion of the results, conclusions and policy implications.

2.   Review of related literature

Conflict as a concept has numerous definitions. Coser (1956: 8) explains conflict as "struggle over values and claims to scare status, power and resources in which the aim and opponents are to neutralize, injure and eliminate rivals". The emphasis is on the idea of scarcity in Coser's definition of conflict. Thus when there exist scarcity of material resources and skewed distribution of power, conflict will eventually occur and possibly degenerate into violence. Awedoba (2009: 5) on the other hand, explains conflict as "a relationship between two or more parties that centre on difference, disagreements, incompabilities and clash of wills". Conflict can also be seen as antagonism between individuals or groups in society. In essence, conflict may take place between individuals, between collectives or between collectives and individuals. Both definitions, consider conflict as a feature of all human societies and, potentially, an aspect of all social relationships. Thus conflict can be conceived as a situation in which people, groups or individuals are involved in a serious disagreement or argument which degenerates into violence.

Various theories provide an explanation to the numerous conflicts that occur in African societies. Mbowura (2012) identifies three main theories that explain the sources of conflict in contemporary African societies. These theories are namely; the Nation-State, the Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) and the Greed and Grievance. These theories are discussed in turn in the subsequent paragraphs.

2.1   Nation-State Theory

The main proponents of the nation-state theory are Cohen (1969) and Rothchild (1997). The theory basically describes the processes that are involved in the construction of a modern state that is distinct from its traditional states. The flurry of new state-making in the wake of decolonization in Africa gave prominence to this theory as it shaped majority of state building activities in Africa. The theory places emphasis on the national level with the aim of welding the disparate ethnic groups into a congruent whole, by forging new loyalties and identities at the national level at the expense of localism and particularistic identification (Tilly, 1975). Building an integrated and consolidated polity through the nation state seeks to erase social and regional barriers, and create a resultant homogenous, equalised society (Richards, 2005).

The focus on homogeneous equalized societies was to do away with the multi-ethnic nature of most African states and limit the competition of cultures as well as reduce ethnic hatreds and ethnic dominance. The basic argument as stated in Mbowura (2012: 18) was that 'the multi-ethnic African state is inherently conflictual and that stability necessarily requires that the ingrained "tribalism" be transcended through modernization'. The proponents of this theory argue that the inability of post-colonial states to fully assimilate disparate groups into the nation state has enabled elites to instrumentally draw on ethnicity as a resource for violent conflict or pursue the narrow intentions of the group as against the wider society. Modernization that comes with nation building may also cause conflict as economic and social changes can accelerate and intensify group competition for scarce resources (Brukum, 2001).

The pluralism of ethnic groups in northern Ghana serves as a potential source of ethnic conflicts. However, other authors are of the view that the Nation State Theory provides a simplistic account of how ethnic differences lead

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to violent conflicts in contemporary African societies as the mere presence in the same state of different ethnic groups does not lead to conflict between them (Cordell & Wolf, 2012).

2.2   Protracted Social Conflict Theory

The PSCT was propounded by Azar (1985) to explain a conflict that is long-standing, on-going and seemingly unresolvable. The theory explains that there are certain preconditions and determinants that are very crucial in shaping the onset and progression of such conflicts and that account for their prolongation. The determinants include communal identity, deprivation of basic needs, complex causal chain involving the role of the state and the pattern of international linkages. The pre-conditions for overt conflicts include colonial legacy, domestic historical setting, and the multi-communal nature of the society (Azar, 1985). In Azar's words 'the root of protracted social conflicts are to be found at the interlocking nexus of underdevelopment, structural deprivation (political, economic and psychological) and communal or identity cleavages' (Azar, 1986: 305). This obviously suggests that there is no single cause of or dimension to protracted social conflicts. However, a combination of factors emerges and converges to prolong social and ethnic conflicts. These factors could be economic, institutional, political, cultural, psychological, and colonial.

The inadequacies of the PSCT lie in its over reliance on neo-colonial interpretations of the preconditions for social conflicts and dwells so much on the concept of external manipulation of local communal content thereby making the community in conflict a prey rather than a contributor to the conflict (Mbowura, 2012).

2.3   'Greed or grievance' Theory

The 'greed or grievance' theory has been used to explain the incidence of violent conflicts (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The key argument of this theory is that economic considerations are as important as collective grievances when it comes to explaining violent conflict. Collier & Hoeffler (2004, 2001) are of the view that grievance alone is not sufficient to lead to violent conflict unless there is greed on the part of individuals and group to gain control over resource.

A different position within the 'greed or grievance' theory is that conflict cannot proceed without the presence of palpably perceived group differences, which may have historical dimensions, leading to grievances that fuel internal violence (Gurr 1970). Stewart (2010) is of the view that the existence of power differentials between groups and the presence of horizontal inequalities among culturally defined groups explain the grievances that drives conflicts. According to Steward, horizontal inequalities are a powerful cause of violent conflicts. Stewart argument is that when economic, social and political power differentials exist between heterogeneous groups whether ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious or other categorisation, the outbreak of conflict motivated by grievances is possible. More so, the unfettered access to resources by one group at the detriment of other groups will thus provide a recipe for the outbreak of violent conflict motivated by the felt grievance.

Consequently, the two concepts, "greed and grievance", are regarded as competing views, although they may be complimentary, as greed may lead to grievance and vice versa" (Murshed &Tadjoeddin, 2007:24). From this perspective, the combinations of the two are considered as the main cause of conflict. However, they cannot be considered to be comprehensively sufficient in the analysis of conflicts as there are other prospective causes of conflict that are context-specific. Other factors that may be social, economic and political are important in explaining the cause of conflicts.

One key fact is that the population of northern Ghana is ethnically heterogeneous and the theories reviewed can eclectically be applied to explain the causes and the consequences of the conflicts mapped. In fact, the Nation-State Theory is appropriate for the study as it provides insights into discussing the effects of both colonial and post-colonial art of nation-building and how this failed to transcend ethnic and regional loyalties leading to numerous conflicts in northern Ghana. Traditionally, the social structure in the most parts of northern Ghana has been divided into chiefly and acephalous societies, yet the colonial processes of incorporation failed to recognize this division and fused the latter under the chiefly groups. The period after independence did not witness any significant deviation from this structure but focused on building a homogenous, equalized society within a unitary state. The process of nation building resulted in the marginalization of certain ethnic groups with respect to land ownership and control, and also in the traditional and political administration of the area. The marginalization of some ethnic groups resulted in resentments based on perceptions of economic and political inequalities, social and cultural prejudices, and competition for limited resources.

Conflict cannot proceed without the presence of palpably perceived group differences, or grievance, which may have historical dimensions and as such the greed or grievance theory is applied to explain the conflicts in northern Ghana that bothers on resource use. Greed reflects elite competition over valuable natural resource rents while relative deprivation and the grievance it produces fuels conflict. Central to grievance are concepts of inter-ethnic or horizontal inequality. As such, grievances and horizontal inequalities are used to explain the

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occurrence of conflicts. As explained by Gurr (1970), relative deprivation and the grievance that it produces fuels internal violence. The Protracted Social Conflict Theory aids the analysis in this study as it distinguishes between the 'underlying causes' which create the conditions under which conflict may occur; and the proximate causes or 'triggers' which ignite the situation.

3. Methodology

The study used a mixed and multi-layered method for the data collection and analysis. The study dwelt very much on primary data, which were collected from identified conflict hotspots to validate secondary information collected from two national dailies namely *Ghanaian Times* and *Daily Graphic*. This information was validated through meetings with relevant entities such as the various regional Police commands, houses of chiefs as well as regional and district coordinating councils.

The first step was to acquire relevant secondary data by collating news reports on violent conflicts from the *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* over a five year period spanning 2007 through 2013, although the period for the northern belt spanned 2007-2012 because it was the first zone where we began the data collection. The selection of the time period was to enable the study include the 2008 and 2012 election periods which are often noted to be associated with electioneering violence. Similarly, the choice of the two newspapers lies with the fact that they are the country's two leading national dailies with reporters in all regions of the country and are considered as credible. Details recorded included: the name and type of conflict; location and incidence; causes and casualties; immediate interventions or remedial actions and peace status (as at the time of reportage). In all a total of 43 different conflicts were recorded in the two national dailies over the five year period between 2007 and 2012 for the northern zone. In the Middle zone, there were 34 violent conflicts recorded between 2007 and 2013 and, in the Southern zone, 45 such conflicts occurred between 2007 and 2013. However, some of these conflicts were reoccurring conflicts, while others overlapped.

The analyses of the information gathered from the newspapers provided the basis for the subsequent field activities, notably identification of flashpoints and the appropriate research design for the primary data collection. With the use of GPS technology, coordinates of all the identified hotspots from the newspaper reports were collected and plotted. Primary data was then collected using in-depth interviews from purposively chosen respondents such as the key protagonists and those coordinating the mediation efforts (including the relevant security agencies, Chiefs, state appointees such as the M/DCEs, state institutions and civil society organisations). The in-depth interview guide elicited information such as the history, perceived cause(s), frequency and conditions for permanent resolution of the conflicts the respondents were associated with.

The data was analysed from two perspectives. First was the plotting of conflict maps for the study area. These maps were multi-layered in nature and were constructed to provide information on the incidence, nature and status of conflicts in the particular spot in question. At the second level, the views of the respondents were analysed for explanations regarding the structural and proximate factors shaping the conflict.

4. Results and Discussion

The study sought to understand the spatial dynamics of conflicts, their current status and management strategies focusing on northern Ghana. These have been documented in maps and in texts to show the distribution and the outcomes of mediation efforts.

4.1 Conflicts and their spatio-thematic dynamics

Four distinct types of conflicts, namely chieftaincy succession conflicts (mostly intra-ethnic), resource based conflicts (normally between different ethnic groups), political conflicts (usually between the supporters of NDC and the NPP), and religious conflicts were identified in northern Ghana. It is important to point out that it is difficult to establish a clear distinction between the different genres of conflicts identified in the northern Ghana as most conflicts in the area either possess a measure of these dimensions or, where starting from one, evolve, taking on aspects of each. However, the study placed emphasis on the conflict trigger, that is, the proximate factors that led to the violence. As much as densities would have been the best indicators of incidence, the nature of the available data allowed only the plotting of locational maps. To this end, clusters (as defined by concentrations of a particular genre in a given space) were used in the analysis. On that basis it was observed in Figure 1 that the religious and communal conflicts were scattered across the study area and did not form any identifiable spatial pattern.

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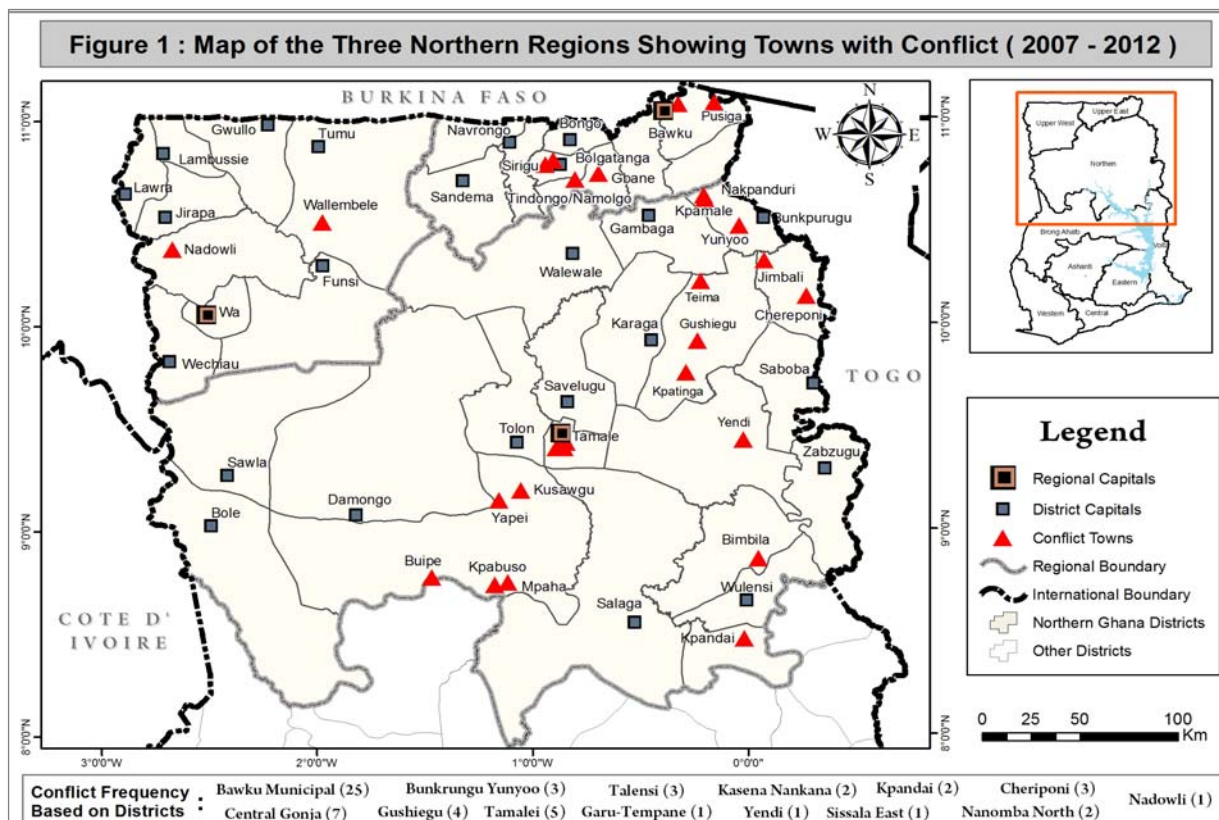conflict & communication online, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2016

Figure 1: Map of the Three Northern Regions showing towns with violent conflicts

As indicated in Figure 1, the study identified 24 towns with violent conflicts between 2007 and 2012. Of these, two were in the Upper West Region with six in the Upper East region. The Northern region had 17 violent conflict hotspots during the period under study. As illustrated in Figure 1, the conflict zones tended to be generally clustered in the eastern corridor of northern Ghana within the stretch of land between Kpandai in the Northern region and Bawku in the Upper East region. Only one-third of the hotspots were located outside this corridor. Within that same corridor, the number of inter-ethnic conflicts was higher than intra-ethnic conflicts with majority of the latter related to chieftaincy succession disputes.

The conflicts in northern Ghana centred on chieftaincy, land and ethnicity. With regards to the frequency of occurrence, Buipe, Kpandai, Gusheigu, Bunkpurugu, Tamale and Bimbila, all in the Northern region and, Bawku in the Upper East region recorded multiple conflicts. Bawku recorded the highest number of violent conflicts (25) between 2007 and 2012. Furthermore, Bawku and Yendi were the most prominent hotspots in northern Ghana, together accounting for approximately 30 conflicts with the former disproportionately larger.

With the exception of the violent political conflicts that were episodic in nature and were to do with election related activities, all the other conflicts in northern Ghana were noted to be cyclical as well as ethnic in nature.

From the data it was apparent that violent conflicts that occurred in the Northern region were basically ethnic in nature and were informed by issues such as succession to skins, land ownership, superiority and inferiority complexes and pride and discrimination against perceived ethnic minorities (Gurr 1970; Stewart, 2010). The phenomenon of inter political party conflict is gradually adding to the vista of conflicts in the Northern region. It is important to note that land and chieftaincy related conflicts have taken on ethnic dimensions further adding to the complexities of these conflicts.

Gonja land was noted to be relatively peaceful. However, there were three conflicts recorded in the Gonjaland. The Buipe chieftaincy conflict has now been resolved. The Yapei/Kasawgu conflict is a chieftaincy succession dispute that has also been settled. The conflict in Mpaha in the West Gonja district was an intra religious conflict between the Tijaniyya and the Al'sunna Muslim sects and this has also been resolved. The dispute was about citing of a mosque. Mpaha is a muslem dominated village with Tijaniyya and Al'usuna factions.

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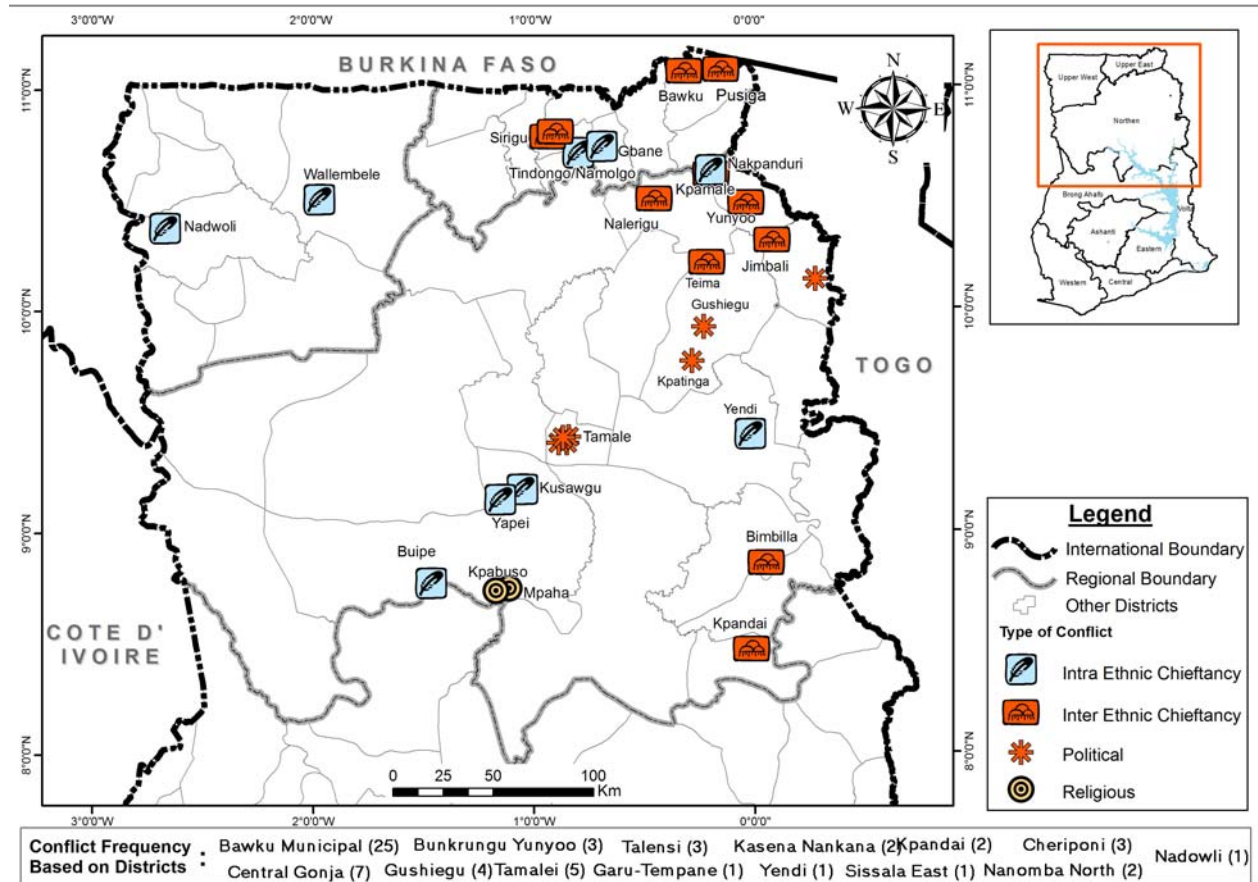conflict & communication online, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2016

Figure 2: Map of the northern Ghana showing conflict hotspots with types of conflicts

In the Upper East region, a few communal disturbances were recorded in Bolgatanga, Gbane and Sirigu/Yekeni. As indicated in Figure 2, violent conflicts in the Upper East region showed a concentration of Chieftaincy and land related conflicts in the Bawku and Bolgatanga areas. This is not to say that the Navrongo and Sandema areas are devoid of conflict, but it would appear that for the period January 2007 to September 2012 covered by the review, the conflicts in these other districts have been resolved or that peace had been maintained. By and large, the region had two broad generic conflicts: chieftaincy and resource use. Resource use related conflicts occurred between Namolgo and Tindongo in the Talensi district and between Yekene and Sirigu in the Bolgatanga Municipality. The chieftaincy conflict was mainly in the Bawku Township.

Our review of violent conflicts in the Upper West region from 2007 to 2012 did not reveal any such incidence. As shown in Figure 2, two skirmishes were uncovered in Nadowli and Wallembelle, both relating to chieftaincy. Whatever has come close to violence has had to do with isolated chieftaincy succession disputes and religious conflicts especially in the Wa municipality.

The conflict are next presented and discussed according to the thematic areas. This is not to view the causation of northern Ghana conflicts in monolithic terms but to use the proximate factors as the entry point for the discussion bearing in mind that there are other underlying causes' which create the conditions under which conflicts in this region occur.

4.2 Chieftaincy conflicts

Chieftaincy conflict was spread all over northern Ghana with greater concentrations found in the Northern region particularly in the eastern corridor. The history of these conflicts has been extensively explained (see Awedoba, 2009, Bonbande, 2007, Lund, 2003). However, an analysis of the data suggests that majority of the chieftaincy conflicts in the Northern region were mostly to do with succession rules to skins, practices and processes and was intra-ethnic in nature usually between different gates. Indeed, some of the chieftaincy disputes especially the inter-ethnic ones were also associated with land ownership.

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In the Northern region, chieftaincy succession conflicts between different eligible families within the same ethnic group were recorded in Buipe, Kpandai, Yendi and Bimbilla[2]. The Buipe conflict was intra-ethnic between the Jinapo and the Lebu gates. In Kpandai, the chieftaincy conflict is among the Nawuris and it is a disagreement between the Kpandai and Balai Nawuris about the legitimate Chief of Kpandai (Kpandai Wura). The Bimbilla chieftaincy conflict is between the Andani and Nakpa Naa gates. The fratricidal Andani-Abudu conflict in Dagbon (Yendi) is as a result of an extended intra-ethnic lineage-based succession chieftaincy succession rivalry between the two 'lineage gates'- that has to do with eligibility, legitimacy and proper enskinment procedure. The chieftaincy conflict in Bunkpurugu-Yonyoo is among the Bimoba clans of Jafouk and Jamong.

In the Upper East region, the Bawku chieftaincy conflict was the most dominant. The Bawku conflict is identity-based, and revolves around the claim for traditional political power (chieftaincy) between the Kusasis and Mamprusis (see Kendie & Bukari, 2012). Our research in the area reveals deep and entrenched positions and the protracted nature of this conflict. One neutral respondent put it clearly: "there is a funny situation, if you go to the Mamprusis, they give you the story to favour them and the same way, if you listen to the Kusasis, they tell you the story to favour them too. Each group wants to control the resources in the area".

Beneath these sentiments is the struggle for ethnic identity, power (chieftaincy) and control over land that goes with attaining the paramountcy. The colonial policy of empowering the Nayiri to rule over Bawku and many other acephelous societies in the Upper East region has been at the base of the conflict. Putting a society that reveres a spiritual leader under one that upholds the virtues of secular political leadership, provided the opportunity for entrenched positions in the modern era especially when chiefs now everywhere are seen to wield much power and wealth. The Mamprussi insist that the Kusasi remain as tendana (spiritual leaders), while the political chieftaincy position stays under Mamprussi control. The conflict has been deeply politicised and this started with the colonial government supporting an external overlord for political expediency. Immediately after independence in 1957, the main protagonists in the Bawku conflict, the Mamprussis and the Kusasi aligned to political parties in order to win favour. The Kusasis supposedly enjoyed the support of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) Government while the Mamprusis enjoyed the support of the opposition United Party (UP). As a result, the first president of Ghana revoked the Mamprussi control, installing a Kusasi as chief ostensibly to reduce the power of the Nayiri. This was reversed after the 1966 coup. But the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government ensured Kusasi control of the chieftaincy and this has continued to date (Kendie et al., 2014).

The conflicts discussed in the Bolgatanga area are related to chieftaincy (an alien order) and the control over resources. Chieftaincy is an alien order because the societies of the region have and continue to organise their lives and the use of land around the institution of the *tendanba* – the earth-priests. Secular chiefs are recognised by the state and have considerable powers in the administration of the traditional areas. Modernisation and widespread adoption of Christianity and Islam and higher levels of educational attainment by the population, have worked to reduce the recognition of traditional authorities who work in the spiritual realm. Also, the state by vesting lands in the people through the chiefs creates conflict in the role of the chief and the earth-priest. On both scores, the chiefs no longer respect the position of the earth-priest and, in general, traditional methods of dispute resolution are no longer respected and are being ignored.

One notable finding is that the chieftaincy succession disputes and inter-ethnic struggles over land have been protracted and keep recurring in the eastern corridor. For example, the chieftaincy conflict in Bunkpurugu-Yonyoo, as well as the Bimbilla Chieftaincy dispute has recurred more than twice within the last two years leading to fragile peace in those areas. Relative peace has been maintained in other conflict hotspots such as Yendi, Kpandai, Nalerigu, Chereponi and Bolgatanga for three principal reasons: the presence of the military, the voluntarism of some residents to report to the security agencies potential sources of trouble for pre-emptive action and the determination of some of the youth not to be used anymore in violent activities.

The conflicts discussed in this section makes it difficult to accept the view of Cohen (1969) and Rothchild (1997) that disparate ethnic groups can be moulded into a congruent whole to form a modern state that is distinct from its traditional states. Furthermore, the dynamics of these chieftaincy conflicts reveals the need to also consider the effects of colonialism alongside the relationship between the state and identity groups. As explained by Azar (1986), the role of the state and governance is a critical factor in the "frustration or satisfaction of individual and identity group needs' (pg.101). Thus, it is the relationship between identity groups and states which is at the core of the problem and often lead to violence. More importantly, if it state machinery comes to be "dominated by a single communal group that are unresponsive to the needs of other groups in the society" which "strains the social fabric and eventually breeds fragmentation and protracted social conflict" (Azaarm 1986: 31).

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[2] See Awedoba (2009) for a detailed discussion of these conflicts.

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4.3 Resource Based Conflicts

Two categories of resource-based conflicts are noticed from Figure 2: land ownership disagreements closely tied to ethnic identity and contests over land-based resources.

In the Northern region, land conflicts were mostly inter-ethnic struggles over access to, control over and ownership of land. Resource based conflicts especially land related ones were recorded in Kpandai, Bimbilla, Bunkprugu Yooyuo and Gushegu. The Kpandai conflict was between the Gonjas and the Nawuris. The Bimbilla conflict is between the Konkomba and Nanumba ethnic groups. The Bunkprugu Yonyuo conflict happened in many villages such as Kpamale, Terma, Jimbale, Kambatia and Bakoni due to competing claims over land ownership among the Manprusis, Bimobas and Konkombas.

The second type of resource based conflicts was found to cluster around disagreements over property rights, access to and use of natural resources. Often they had to do with struggle over land containing some resources or the processes relating to their exploitation. The most common in this regard relate to small scale mining and cattle grazing. The violent conflict between Fulanis and the Kokombas occurred in Zamashegu in the Gusheigu District due to competition over land use leading to the death of 13 Fulani herdsmen. The fight between the Fulani herdsmen and the indigenes of Gushiegu is a clear example of conflict caused by competition for resources.

In the Upper East region, land related conflicts were recorded between different communities as a result of the commoditisation of land. This was amply demonstrated in the Sirigu and Yekeni in the Bolgatanga area conflicts where increasing demand for land for construction purposes forced the prices upwards. The conflict between Namolgo and Tindongo communities is about land ownership and right to land use between the chiefs and the earth priests. The Gbane conflict is ongoing and is a classic case of the 'resource curse' theorem. Gbane community is blessed with gold reserves, which have been mined through small-scale open-cast operations, many of which are now considered illegal because of the need for licenses as mandated by the mining laws of Ghana. In the process, two individuals, who are also citizens of the area, obtained the licenses covering over 50 acres of land. These two licensees contracted a Chinese company ostensibly with better equipment to assist in the mining operations, but the Chinese were to engage only in deep mining. The chief granted the concession to the two gentlemen without consultation with the youth of the area who are also into the mining operations. The conflict is all about the presence of the Chinese who the youth fear will soon deplete the mineral resources and the fact that the chief allowed their operations without resort to traditional consultations.

Most of the resourced based conflicts mapped in northern Ghana can be explained by the grievance theory. In line with the grievance theory, the different ethnic groups in northern Ghana, especially those in the minority, collectively feel that they are being deprived of resources that are crucial to their basic needs. According to Azaar (1990: 9), "failure to redress these grievances by the authority cultivates a niche for a protracted social conflict".

4.4 Political conflicts

The third major genre, political conflicts were found to be more clustered in the North-Eastern Corridor of the Northern zone. Notable political conflict hotspots were Gushiegu, Tamale and Yendi all in the Northern Region and Bawku in the Upper East Region. The conflicts in Tamale, Chereponi and Gushiegu occurred as a result of the 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections. Although Yendi and Bawku are already known to have witnessed some conflicts related to chieftaincy and ethnicity, its volatility has been enhanced since the advent of multiparty democracy in 1992 with these conflicts taking on political dimensions in contemporary times.

The political conflicts were dominated by high stake struggles between the supporters of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). What may been captured as political conflict is in fact a disagreement over something else that is now been played out in the political arena. It was found from the study that some political parties had sought to gain sympathy by deliberately aligning themselves to the various feuding factions (Tona, 2012; Awedoba, 2009). Examples are the Dagbon and Bawku conflicts where the feuding factions are perceived to be aligned to the two main political parties in Ghana. This has tended to create further polarisation of societies and entrenching of positions. Political disagreements and political power add another layer of complexity to the existing conflict dynamics. Thus, political factors end up magnifying the dynamics of existing conflicts especially the chieftaincy disputes. There was also the existence of conflict entrepreneurs who, for personal gain tended to stoke the fires by inflaming passions with the aim of perpetuating the strife. Such persons were particularly found in the Yendi and Bawku conflicts.

4.5 Status of the conflicts

Many of the conflicts in northern Ghana remain unresolved. As indicated in Figure 3, mediation efforts have only succeeded in yielding short term stability and are only geared towards addressing the triggers, instead of the

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deeper underlying structural causes. The notable exceptions to this trend are the Wa and Wellembelle Chieftaincy conflicts which have seen some relative closure by way of court decisions as well as democratic resolution which all protagonists have respected. As shown in Figure 3, majority of the conflicts in the eastern corridor are still pending leading to fragile peace with military presence in these areas. The conflicts in Bawku, Bunkprugu, Yendi, Bimbilla and Kpandai have all become protracted with no closure in sight.
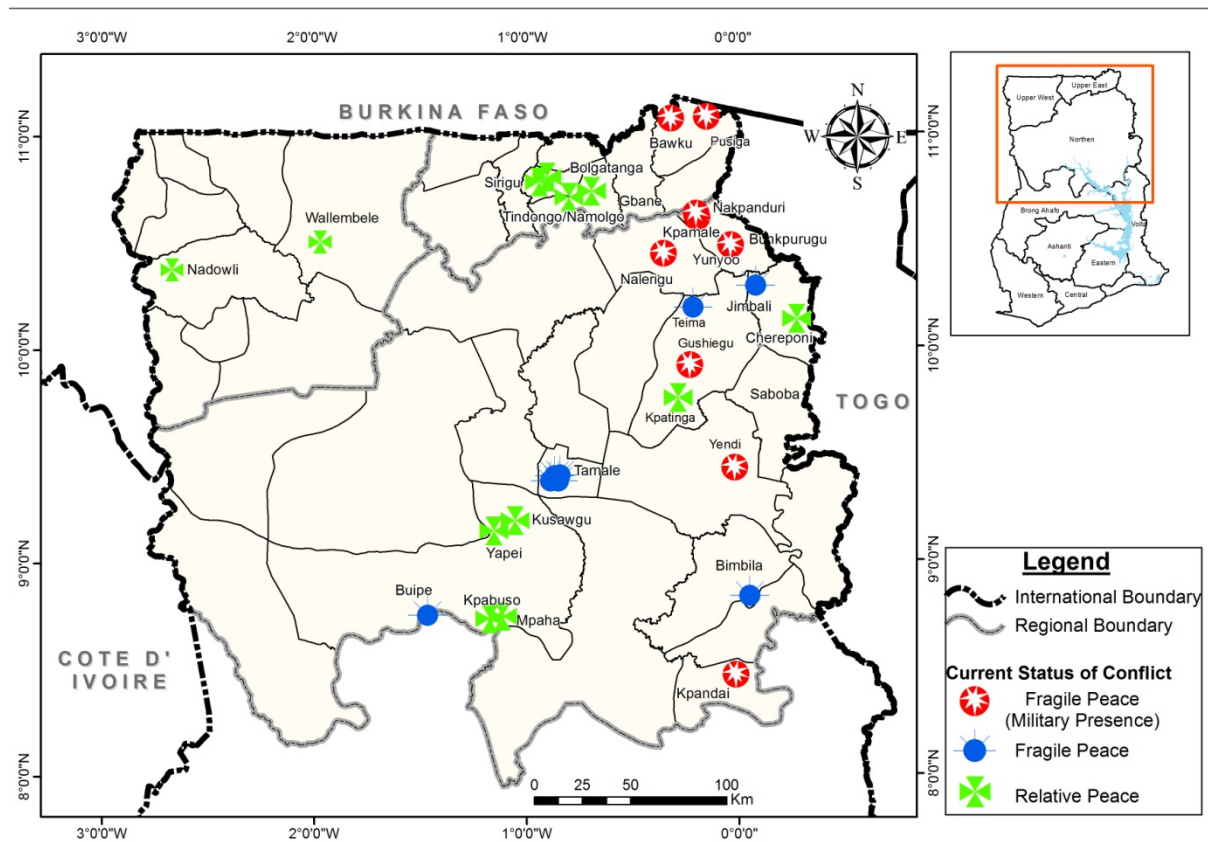

Figure 3: Current Status of Conflicts in northern Ghana

An analysis of conflicts in the zone reveal three major findings with respect to mediating efforts: (1) availability of a wide range of mediation organizations and their related efforts, (2) the adoption by the state of a range of different intervention strategies for the same conflict and (3), the volatile nature of the region culminating in a plethora of mediation organisations. Three categories of interveners were identified. These are the state initiated and directed; state initiated but not led and private entity initiated. The interventions are also classified under three broad subdivisions: military, legal processes and negotiation/education.

The state's interventions have come in two main forms- military and legal. The military interventions have been initiated by the state through the Regional/District Security Committees and have included (1) military/ police engagement to stop the hostilities and (2) stationed personnel in the conflict area to keep peace through curfews, patrols and disarming of the people. The military interventions have appeared the most effective in terms of maintaining peace and calm. This was noted in all the areas (Bawku, Bimbilla, Buipe, Kpandai, Yendi and Bunkprugu Yooyuo). The use of the armed forces coupled with the restrictions on movement, disarmaments and imposition of curfews tend to prevent the combatants from engaging in warfare. The exception to this trend was found in Bimbilla and Bunkprugu where the conflicts recurred.

The legal methods have centred on court actions, injunctions as well as prosecutorial activity. Except in a few instances, the court employs a combination of both methods. This trend was found in Bimbilla, Kpandai, Buipe, Wa and Wallembelle. The legal interventions, however, have not been as successful as the military efforts. In Bimbila, Kpandai and Yendi, the legal interventions have only served to worsen an already volatile situation. The court systems have been found either to be culturally insensitive (Buipe), unjust (Yendi) or not having the power to enforce its own decisions (Bimbilla and Bunkprugu).

On a relatively limited scale, the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), a state institution was, also found to have intervened in the Gushiegu NPP-NDC clashes. Private entity initiated mediations are both initiated and led by non-state institutions or civil society groups. Key actors in this regard were the Catholic Church in the

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Yendi conflict, the Concern Citizen Association which is working in the Bimbilla conflict and the West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP). The study noted that WANEP played active roles in post conflict management in most of the conflict areas in the northern Ghana.

4.6 The spatial-historical nexus of conflicts in northern Ghana

The observations made from Figure 1 show some interesting spatial patterns across the three regions in northern Ghana. The context specificities of the conflict hotspots have made parts of Northern Ghana a conflict prone arena. Majority of the districts are peaceful with no record of violent conflict in the past decade. In the three regions, violent conflict is predominant in the Northern Region with the Upper West region being the most peaceful. Unlike other areas of northern Ghana, the eastern corridor has many ethnic groups with different traditional structures that were modified during colonial and post colonial governments. The tinkering of traditional structures of authority especially chieftaincy by colonial administration affected property rights to land and other resources. As a result, the different ethnic groups contest over land and other resources based on perceptions of economic and political inequalities, social and cultural prejudices. As suggested by Azar, (1986), these economic, institutional, political, cultural, psychological, and colonial factors converge to prolong the ethnic conflicts manifesting in northern Ghana.

The spatial distribution of conflict hotspots in northern Ghana raises concerns the assumptions made about violent conflicts and under-development. The Upper West region is the most peaceful of all the regions of northern Ghana; yet on all indicators of socio-economic progress, it is one of the poorest. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2013), the three northern regions, remained the poorest and least developed regions of Ghana. This is broadly in line with the GSS (2006) poverty measurement which recorded poverty incidence in 2006 of 52.3 percent for the Northern Region, Upper East Region (70.4%) and Upper West Region (87.9%) – far higher than the national average of 28.5 percent. However, in the Upper East Region, the Bawku East District, a volatile zone, is the biggest economy in terms of the volume of intra-regional and international trade and revenue generated to the District Assembly. Its inhabitants have relatively more income generating options than say, Bongo district which has very little arable land for farming, yet Bongo has not exploded in violent conflict in distant memory (Mba, 2010; Akudugu & Kendie, 2010).

Perhaps, the intergroup inequality arising as a result of the unequal access and control over resources (especially land distribution) among heterogeneous ethnic groups along the eastern corridor explains the high incidence of violence in the Upper East and Northern Regions (the eastern corridor). This implies that relative poverty and deprivation other than absolute poverty accounts for the high incidence of conflicts in the Upper East and Northern Regions. In fact, poverty by itself does not cause conflict but violence occurs when people act out their frustrations if "they believe that they stand a chance of relieving some of their discontent through violence" (Gurr, 1970: 210).

The data base provides enough basis to support the existing knowledge that conflicts tend to be shaped after the environmental - social and economic conditions of the places involved (Ladouceur, 1979; Lentz, 2007; Tsikata and Seini, 2007). Thus, issues of ethnic organisation and identity are critical to understanding violent conflicts in northern Ghana (Mbowura, 2012). Much of the Northern region is occupied by 18 different ethnic groups with only four as Chiefly states (Dagbon, Gonja, Nanum, Mamprugi) with the rest regarded as dispersed ethnic communities often referred to as "acephalous" societies. The Upper East region is occupied by predominantly "acephalous" societies. The same is true of the Upper West region (except the Wala). There are manifest differences therefore in the level of power bestowed on a chief in the centralised states compared with the acephalous ones. The acephalous states recognised and intensely differentiated the functions of a *tendanba* (spiritual land owner) and the local leader(s): the latter were not generally recognised as chiefs in the modern usage of the term. And while there was a hierarchy of *tendanba*, this did not constitute recognition of a hierarchy of even traditional spiritual leaders as each village or group of villages (same clan) was more or less autonomous.

Colonialism however tempered with this structure of political and spiritual control in the societies when the British sought to achieve administrative control by instituting chieftaincy in the acephalous societies. Besides, the British recognised and institutionalised the control of some of these acephalous societies by putting them under the centralised states (e.g. Vagala under Gonja, Kusaal, Grune under Manprugi, Konkonba under Gonja) thereby turning them into 'vassal' states with implications for land resources control and ethnic identity. Lands in northern Ghana were also vested in the crown and after independence in the state. This policy was however reversed by the 1979 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. But since chiefs do not control land, this reversal is also creating conflicts between the chiefs and the *tendanba* whose traditional function it is to protect the land for the use of the people.

Inter ethnic conflicts were also noted to prevalent and widely spread across the eastern corridor and this is largely attributable to issues of colonial policy of amalgamation, ethnicity and allodial rights in land. According to Mbowura (2012), colonialism created new notions of jurisdiction and claims to land among the different ethnic groups in northern Ghana leading to conflicts over allodial rights in land. So, from Bawku to Kpandai, and Kpandai

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different ethnic groups are laying claim to a particular territory as well as the authority to select the paramount chief of the area (Tona, 2012). For example, Bawku, in the Upper East Region, has been a flashpoint of violent conflict between the Kusasi and the Mamprusi. The Kusasi-Mamprusi conflict has been the most intractable inter-ethnic conflict in northern Ghana. The struggles over land ownership between the Nawuris and the Gonja in Kpandai have also shaped the conflict landscape in the Northern region.

Urbanisation and increases in land prices complicate the issues in northern Ghana. As demand for land for home construction increases, conflicts are bound to arise especially in peri-urban zones. Increasing commercialisation of land, speculation and the breakdown of traditional land ownership systems create new dynamics for land ownership and land use (Kendie and Enu-Kwesi, 2011). However, in peri-urban settings, farming and other agricultural pursuits still provide a substantial portion of household income; the pressures to sell land impoverishes many households when off-farm employment opportunities in the urban setting are not readily available. The pressures on land in many peri-urban areas of Ghana as discussed by Kendie et al. (2011) are also being played out in the Bolgatanga area. Peace has been restored in the area through police action; but this is only temporary.

5   Conclusion and policy implications

It is important to recognise that the causes of conflicts in northern Ghana are varied and show some spatial patterns. The causes of the various conflicts were found to be consistent with the known generic sources as discussed in the literature. These included chieftaincy succession disputes, struggles over resources and the fight for recognition. Indeed, the heterogeneous ethnic groups in northern Ghana are composed of different interests competing for power and resources that often results in direct violence. Other key issues that underpin the conflicts mapped include ethnic identity and security. However, chieftaincy conflicts were the most preponderant and widely spread across the study area and this is largely attributable to the colonial policy of putting acephalous societies under centralized states. Consequently, many of the chieftaincy conflicts that were intra-ethnic in nature bordered on the issue of succession to skins. In the case of the inter-ethnic strife, recognition and access to resources formed the structural basis for the occurrence of conflict. A few of these causes are, however, contextually unique to the study area and are therefore worthy of highlighting. Bawku and Yendi and quite recently Bunkprugu, Bimbilla and Nalerigu, were the most prominent hotspots in the entire northern Ghana.

The spatio-thematic patterns observed point to the existence of differential types of conflicts in northern Ghana and highlight the need for more theme-specific interventions. For the northern Ghana, documentation processes are instrumental in helping to address chieftaincy and resource-based conflicts.

The titling of land is also imperative. The existing system of land titling and registration appears not to be foolproof and is being manipulated for personal gain. As was noticed from the study, the present land grab in urban areas calls for a more pre-emptive and decentralized approach to titling. This is especially true as the changing socio-economic conditions imply that hitherto unattractive lands can suddenly become prime locations. Currently it is the urban areas which are experiencing these pressures most but it provides a good opportunity to title and register all lands in Ghana even if they are currently conflict-free. Land titling has to be expedited and decentralized by the state to establish boundaries to reduce such land related conflicts as encountered from the study.

Across northern Ghana, however, there is an urgent need for peace education to be integrated into the national educational curriculum at all pre-tertiary levels. Conflict comes in various forms and intensities and it is important for young people to know the causes of conflict and how to prevent them. Also important may be the establishment of Conflict Intelligence Units attached to the various decentralized units of the National Peace Council which can create early warning systems of potential violent eruptions. Such units will be charged with monitoring these thematic conflicts and to signal appropriate authorities of any impending trouble. Such an exercise will need to be supported by a strong conflict data base which allows for time-series analysis and other estimation techniques.

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