

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF THE ALAVANYO-NKONYA  
CONFLICT FOR PEACE-BUILDING

BY

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DECLARATION

**Candidate's Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature..... Date.....

Name: .....

**Supervisors' Declaration**

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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Name: .....

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Name:.....

## ABSTRACT

One of the key attributes of ethnic conflicts is that they could be complex and intractable. The Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict is one such conflict that presents traits of a complex conflict since the first violence was recorded in 1923. To understand such complexity, a qualitative research design was employed to study the conflict. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews of six key informants selected purposively from among conflict parties and mediators. Secondary data from 1923 to 2015 was collated from news reports and a temporal analysis was conducted on the secondary data whilst the interview transcripts were subjected to thematic content analysis to identify issues of dynamics. The study found that overall, the trend of the conflict indicates that violent incidents and the peace-building efforts have both increased but intervention efforts have generally superseded the violence, which is probably why this conflict has not blown out into a full scale war. The study also found that various dynamics related to land, ethnic mobilization and generational turnover are playing-out in the course of the conflict. These dynamics bring complexity to the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict and these dynamics also make the conflict complex. The study recommends that state agencies and mediators adopt a modified peace-building approach that transforms the conflict, pays attention to original conflict actors and pursue the possibility of amicably setting aside the hurdle of previous court rulings. Further and wider research is also important for understanding the relationship between conflict complexity and protraction in Ghana.

KEY WORDS

Conflict Dynamics

Alavanyo and Nkonya

Intractable Conflicts

Peace-building

Protracted Conflicts

Dynamical Systems Theory

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DEDICATION

To my family and the peace of Alavanyo and Nkonya

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACCORD	African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes
ADR	Alternative Dispute Mechanisms
ANPA	Alavanyo-Nkonya Peace Committee of North America
DST	Dynamical Systems Theory
GAF	Ghana Armed Forces
GPI	Global Peace Index
MENA	Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NPC	National Peace Council
NPP	New Patriotic Party
PNDC	Provisional National Defense Council
PSC	Protracted Social Conflict
PSCT	Protracted Social Conflict Theory
RPC	Regional Peace Council
SC	Supreme Court
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peace
YPDA	Youth for Peace and Development in Africa

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Complex conflicts tend to have many different sources of conflict located at multiple levels (individual, group, communal, and so on) over time and which often interact with each other to feed or sustain hostilities temporally. This complexity is defined by the dynamics at play in the conflict and such dynamics could make a conflict intractable thereby having implications for peace-building efforts. The Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict in Ghana presents such traits of complexity and therefore understanding its dynamics can help the peace-building process.

#### **Background to the Study**

The dynamics of a conflict are the various circumstances (either through individual, group or institutional actions or inactions) that impact the nature and analysis of the conflict (Coleman, Vallacher, Nowak, & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007). These dynamics could translate into ‘dividers’ (destructive tension enhancers) or ‘attractors’ (constructive tension reducers) within the system. These dividers or attractors, pulling in opposite directions towards violence or peace respectively, bring complexity to the conflict.

Mitchell (2005), explains how dynamism lends to the complexity of conflicts because the sources of hostilities in such intractable conflicts often change continually and may be more or less determining of the peace-building efforts around the conflict. It is therefore expected that the dynamics of a conflict would have implications for the success of peace-building efforts, especially because peace-building is a product of conflict, fraught with many

post-war challenges (Paris, 2014; Sisk, 2013b) and can engage various tracks I, II and III (Lederach, 2005).

Peace-building is described as an action to identify and support structures to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict (United Nations, 2014). The African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) (2013), identifies peace-building itself as a complex and continuously changing term and explains that peace-building itself has several key characteristics, including; the long-term nature of the process, the interdependence of the actors, the multidimensional nature of the process and its concern with the consolidation of peace (ACCORD, 2013). This suggests therefore that the success of peace-building efforts during conflicts, rely heavily on the ability of peace-building agents and conflict managers to understand the dynamics of the conflict.

Peace and security has become an important issue across the world and the Global Peace Index (GPI) recorded a slight deterioration in global peace score in 2014 (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2014), citing sub-Saharan Africa as among those regions that became less peaceful. The 2014 GPI ranks Ghana the 7<sup>th</sup> most peaceful country (from 5<sup>th</sup> in 2012) in sub-Saharan Africa and this makes it a relatively stable and safe country in sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to observations made by Kendie, Osei-Kufuor and Boakye (2014) that, while Ghana has been praised as generally peaceful, it is obvious that violence occurs from time to time involving various protagonists that may be ethnic, religious, economic or political.

In response to this, Kendie et al., (2014) produced a comprehensive mapping of conflict hotspots across Ghana and identified the nature, causes and actors of such conflicts. They identified ethnic conflicts as problematic conflict types in Ghana. One of these conflicts is the one between the people of Alavanyo and Nkonya. This conflict can be linked to ethnicity and competition over resources (Kendie et al., 2014). Tsikata and Seini (2004) explain that the Alavanyo/Nkonya conflict has arisen from an 80-year (now 91-year) old boundary dispute between the Nkonya, a Guan group and the Alavanyo; an Ewe group.

The current state of affairs is that, the Alavanyo-Kpeme people farm on the disputed land but the Nkonya-Tayi people are now demanding their land which they claim was given to the people of Alanvayo-Kpeme. However, the Alavanyo-Kpeme people are not prepared to give up the land to the Nkonya-Tayi because they will lose their source of livelihood (Kendie et al., 2014). Following this, there have been numerous violent clashes at different times and places in the course of this conflict (1923, 1983, 2003, 2004, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015) and in response many attempts to restore peace in the area has not been lasting.

Ethnic conflicts are dynamic and complex (Jalali & Lipset, 1993; Olzak, 1992; Schneider, 2008; Yancey et al., 1976). Jalali and Lipset (1993) argue that the fluid and dynamic nature of ethnic conflicts makes it a daunting task to rely on one factor to provide a comprehensive explanation for the manifestation of such conflicts. As they explain, this is because it is difficult to identify a single cause to ethnic conflicts as they are often underpinned by several factors. This makes the study of conflict dynamics important,

especially since literature on ethnic conflicts cover a number of competing theories (Olzak, 1992; Fearon & Laitin, 1996; Tolsma et al., 2008) and their theoretical speculations do not satisfactorily explain the contextual differences and their spatio-temporal dynamics.

From the background about dynamics of ethnic conflicts, peace-building strategies employed in the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict would benefit from the identification of the various changes in this conflict and help peace actors to address those changes. Looking at the myriad of issues at play in this conflict, it is not enough to end at identifying the causes of the conflict in isolation as has been done by other researchers (Kendie et al., 2014; Tsikata & Seini, 2004), but to move beyond that and focus on how these causes converge in their multiplicity, rather than in their singularity, to create violent ethnic conflicts (Blagojevic, 2009). Hence, the multiplicity of issues could add to the complexity of ethnic conflicts.

To understand such complex dynamics, researchers like Coleman and Vallacher (2010) have applied the Dynamical Systems Theory (DST) to understanding, investigating, and resolving protracted conflicts at different levels of social reality (interpersonal, inter-group, international). DST views conflicts as dynamic processes whose evolution reflects a complex interplay of factors operating at different levels and timescales. This study will apply this theory together with some other theories like Galtung's (1996) model of conflict, violence and peace, as well as the protracted social conflict theory (PSCT) (Azar, 1985) within a conceptual framework to understand the dynamics of the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict and recommend how lasting peace may be achieved.

### Statement of the Problem

The Volta Region has become home to some problematic conflict zones in the southern belt of Ghana with majority of them bordering on inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic disputes among some communities (Kendie et al., 2014). Tsikata and Seini (2004) have mentioned four main conflict areas including Nkonya/Alavanyo, Nkwanta, Peki/Tsito and Abutia/Kpota conflicts. Among these four, the Nkonya/Alvanyo conflict is one that is active and continues to record violent incidences in Ghana today. Kendie et al., (2014) report that, since the conflict begun, there have been 6 violent incidences in: 1923, 1983, 2003, 2004, 2012 and 2013. Each manifestation of violence can change the dynamics of the conflict and eventually add to the existing complexity of the conflict.

Kendie et al., (2014) further report that the violence associated with the conflict seems to have moved beyond Nkonya-Tayi and Alavanyo-Kpeme to involve incidents across the wider traditional areas of Alavanyo and Nkonya. In recent times, killings occur in neighbouring towns and the violence is being perpetrated by unknown persons. In 2014, there was a reported shooting, in vigilante-style, of a soldier on a peacekeeping mission in the area (“Military man shot”, 2014) and in 2015, two separate killings of a man and a woman (by unknown assailants) was also reported (“Sixty-eight-year-old killed”, 2015). The man was on his way to his farm and the woman was shot in front of her house where she was fetching water from a barrel.

These events make it difficult to clearly identify what the motivations for violence are in contemporary times and such observations raise questions about the trajectory of this conflict and the motivations for violence. It also



makes resolution difficult, especially in identifying actors and victims of the conflict. There have also been different modes of intervention such the court settlements and mediation but the violence still goes on. This creates a complex phenomenon in the analysis of the conflict and also highlights the major challenges that confront the attempt to transform society after conflict (Bangura, 1997; Paris, 2014; Sisk, 2013a)

The Alavanyo and Nkonya conflict continues to record various incidences of violence, killings and counter-killings that create setbacks for the ongoing peace-building process and deepen the fault lines in the conflict which could make it complex and possibly affect the peace-building process (Kendie et al., 2014). The interwoven factors that introduce new vista to the dynamics and complexities of the conflict need to be understood in order to effectively resolve the conflict. This research therefore seeks to explore the apparent dynamics of the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict and provide a comprehensive understanding of its complexity to provide recommendations for effective peace-building.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of the study is to explore the dynamics of the conflict in Alavanyo/Nkonya and its implications for peace-building.

### **Research Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study include, to:

1. Analyse the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict trend from 1923 to 2015;
2. Examine the temporal and spatial dynamics of this conflict;

3. Examine the attractors and dividers in the conflict; and
4. Make recommendations for peace-building

### **Significance of the Study**

Building up on previous studies (Tsikata & Seini, 2004; Kendie et al., 2014) that have identified the causes of the Alavanyo/Nkonya conflict, this study goes a step further to explore the dynamics of the conflict that make it intractable. The findings of this study will proffer explanations for why this conflict is protracted. Understanding the contextual dynamics of ethnic conflicts along multiple fault lines provides a basis for a more comprehensive approach to peace building in a multi-ethnic society such as Ghana especially considering that the context of a post-conflict peacebuilding approach is critical for its success (Paris, 2014; Sisk, 2013b).

### **Delimitations**

The conflict under study is primarily situated in the Alavanyo and Nkonya (primarily Alavanyo-Kpeme and Nkonya-Tayi) communities of the Hohoe Municipality and the Biakoye District respectively of the Volta region of Ghana. The research is focussed on the long existing (91 year-old) conflict that exists between the ethnic groups over land in the Alavanyo-Kpem and Nkonya-Tayi towns. The issues discussed in this study are focussed on the changes that occur across the span of the conflict (1923 -2015) including the historical progression of the conflict based on existing literature, the progress of the peace-building efforts and the recent incidents of reported violence. The study was conducted from August 2014 to July 2015.

### **Limitation**

The is a qualitative study and most of the data collected was drawn from media reportage as well as key informants located either within or outside the district(s) under study the conclusions are therefore subject to the opinions gathered from the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

Complex conflicts: Complex conflicts tend to have many different sources of conflict located at multiple levels (individual, group, communal, and so on) over time and which often interact with each other to feed or sustain hostilities temporally

Peace-building: Peace-building is described as an action to identify and support structures to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict

Conflict dynamics: The dynamics of a conflict are the various circumstances (either through individual, group or institutional actions or inactions) that impact the nature and analysis of the conflict

### **Organisation of the Study**

This thesis is organised into five chapters. Chapter one provides a background to the study. It presents a background to the conflict and issues under consideration, the problems statement and explains the relevance of the study. It contains research objectives drawn from research questions that this study seeks to answer.

Chapter two introduces the concepts under focus and defines key terms relevant to this study. It provides an array of theoretical arguments within the sphere of conflict dynamics and peace-building. It further discusses empirical research findings in line with the subject area and situates this research within the theoretical framework. Chapter three presents the study methodology, research design, study area as well as study and target populations used for this study. It also sets out the process of data collection methods and instruments used, bearing in mind the objectives of the study and the sources of information.

Chapter four presents and discusses the results of the study and presents excerpts of the interview transcripts that were used to explain the trend and dynamics of the conflict under study. Chapter five summarises the study findings, draws conclusions and makes recommendations for the future action.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explains the background of the study and argues that the motivation for this study is a need to understand the intractability of the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict and its impact on peace-building. It delimits the study to the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict from 1923 to 2015 and explains the mixed methods research design employed in the study. It also provides some definition of terms and outlines the rest of the chapters in this thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Advance Organizer**

This literature review presents and discuss the various theories underlying conflicts that are relevant to this study. This chapter contains explanations to the various concepts key to this research and present the conceptual framework that guides this research. It begins with explanations of conceptual issues underlying this study, followed by a theoretical review covering key theories underlying this study and then an empirical review of cases relevant to the study in order to develop a conceptual framework.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is built on three main theories: the dynamical systems theory, Galtung's model of conflict, violence and peace and the protracted social conflict theory. The main theory is the dynamical systems theory (DST) by Coleman and Vallacher (2010). Coleman and Vallacher argue that interests, motivations and identities in conflict change over time and that elements in a conflicting society may be inimical or helpful to the peace-building process. The supporting theory is Galtung's model of conflict, violence and peace (Galtung, 1996). Galtung argues that cultural, structural, and behavioural issues are key to the progression and dynamics of conflict. The third theory is the protracted social conflict theory (PSCT) by Azar (1986). Azar argues 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 protraction. The relevance of the theories to the study has also been discussed.

### **Dynamical systems theory**

The Dynamical systems theory (DST) explains how interests, motivations and identities in conflict change over the course of time. It was propounded and used by Coleman and Vallacher (2010) to explain the complex dynamics of conflicts. It is a theory that has been adopted and transformed from the physical sciences to explain changes in certain phenomena studied in the social sciences. In its contemporary formulation, the theory grows directly from advances in understanding complex and non-linear systems in physics and mathematics as well as input from traditions in systems thinking from biology and psychology. The term dynamic systems in its most generic form, means systems of elements that change over time.

DST provides understanding for protracted conflicts that are based on key issues of interest such as identity, the security dilemma, fear of extinction (Horowitz, 1985), and the fear of the future (Rothchild, 1996). According to DST, all these are interrelated, influence each other and could change over time to make a conflict complex. After all, the formation of identity could be primordial, may come as a result of institutional action or inaction or may be structured out of sheer necessity in times of competition.

DST also provide a framework for constructive engagement of conflict parties and their interests. According to the dynamical systems model of constructive engagement (Coleman, et al., 2007) conflicts become intractable as their various elements (thoughts, feelings, actions, issues, norms, symbols, etc.) link together and organize into strong patterns or attractors for destructive interactions, where the elements become mutually reinforcing and self-perpetuating and therefore resistant to change. DST has its remote roots in the

paradigm of dynamical social psychology (Vallacher & Nowak, 2005). They explain that social systems have a tendency to drift back toward a previously established stable state regardless of actions taken to introduce a change in direction. This stable state is what they called an “attractor”. According to dynamical social psychology, real change is created by building new attractors toward which the system will naturally tend to drift, rather than by temporarily disrupting the state of a system within its old equilibrium. Coleman (2010) advises that in searching for a new attractor, it is of utmost importance to identify one that is embedded in the society’s culture, so that it will be naturally sustained.

DST is supported by previous findings of scholars on the motivations of conflict. For instance, Schlee (2004) reasons that “what people are negotiating or fighting about is a fundamental question in analysis of conflict. But there is another equally fundamental question that remains poorly understood, namely, who is fighting whom and why?” (Schlee, 2004, p. 135). Ross (1997) also argues that rural communities and their members are, in fact, connected by multiple social networks and over the range of issues that make up their social life. Ross (2001) explains that when people fight, they war about interests, but the way this is done, the intensity of feelings, and the lengths to which disputants go to defend or acquire what they believe is their right has an important psychological component which is not well understood.

The theory however, is inadequate in explaining whether all conflicts go through changes over time (dynamics) and whether it is protraction of a conflict that breeds these dynamics or dynamics that breeds protraction.

### **Galtung's model of conflict, violence and peace.**

Galtung (1996) proposed an influential model of conflict resolution that is derived from the structural, cultural and behavioral attributes in conflict. This study applies the Galtung analysis here as it is explained for symmetric conflicts. Galtung sees conflict as a dynamic process in which structure, attitudes and behaviour are constantly changing and influencing one another. As the dynamic develops, it becomes a manifest conflict formation as parties' interests clash.

Galtung (1996) uses this tripod model to explain that, as structural differences crystallize, parties develop hostile attitudes and adopt a conflictual behaviour that leads to direct violence. Hence over time it is possible the conflict formation starts to grow and intensify. As it does so, it may widen, drawing in other parties, deepen and spread, generating secondary conflicts within the main parties or among outsiders who get sucked in. This often considerably complicates the task of addressing the original, core conflict. What this means is that an attempt to resolve the conflict would require a reversal of the process and must involve a set of dynamic changes that involve de-escalation of conflict behavior, a change in attitudes and transforming the relationships or clashing interests that are at the core of the conflict structure.

This theory's relevance to conflict dynamics has also been illustrated in Bercovitch, Aleksandrovich and Zartman's (2012) analysis of how the Northern Ireland conflict transformed from asymmetric to symmetric conflict. The strengths of this theory lie in its simplicity in a tripod arrangement, however this also lends to the criticism that it has suffered due to its oversimplification of the conflict resolution debate which other authors



(Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011) argue is still an evolving field. The relevance of this literature has been explained in the next section.

### **Protracted social conflict theory**

Protracted social conflict theory (PSCT) is a social conflict theory put forward by the sociologist Edward Azar. Azar (1985) used the term 'protracted social conflict' 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 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, p305). This obviously suggest that there is no single cause of or dimension to protracted social conflicts. A combination of factors emerges and converge 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 conflict.

### **Relevance of Theories to the Study**

The dynamic systems theory (DST) is as relevant to this study in a similar way that it is relevant to the study by Blagojevic (2009), who illustrated the multidimensional nature of conflicts. According to her, violent conflicts occur because of primordial and institutional factors as well as the actions of political entrepreneurs, and the competition over resources.

The issues of migrations, common boundaries and ancestral inheritances of land are issues that are primordial to the two communities, Alavanyo and Nkonya, under this study. Blagojevic (2009) further argues that ethnic conflict occurs when a particular set of factors and conditions converge which include: a major structural crisis; presence of historical memories of inter-ethnic grievances; institutional factors that promote ethnic intolerance; manipulation of historical memories by political entrepreneurs to evoke emotions such as fear, resentment, and hate toward the “other”; and an inter-ethnic competition over resources and rights.

The causes of the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict have been identified as land, ethnic affiliations, erroneous maps (Tsikata and Seini, 2004) (see discussion of Figure 4 on page 71), non-adherence to previous court rulings and even ‘invisible hand’ (Kendie et al., 2014). To the extent that this study has an objective to explore how these various factors or causes of this conflict converge to trigger violence, the DST’s reference to the multidimensional nature of protracted conflicts is very relevant to that objective.

Aside this, the aim of the DST is to serve as a guide to peace-making and peace-building interventionists (Sisk, 2013a) in understanding the changes in the profile of conflict so they can adjust their peace-building strategies to

meet the dynamics of the conflicts they deal with as in the case of Sierra Leone (Bangura, 1997). This makes the DST very relevant to the objective by this study to suggest peace-building strategies that can accommodate the dynamics of the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict.

The DST also focusses on attractors and dividers. Attractors are factors that promote peace and dividers are factors that promote division in a conflict setting. The Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict has moved between the phases of calm and violence. Such a phenomenon suggests that at certain points in this conflict, attractors and dividers have crystallised and dissolved. Application of the DST under this study will therefore help explain how these dynamics really and contextually play out in the Alavanyo / Nkonya case.

Azar's PSC was focussed on intrastate conflicts between a dominant intrastate ethnic group or society and the state apparatus. Though the conflict under study is inter-ethnic, the key arguments of the PSC are relevant for interpreting the protraction of this conflict. First, this conflict is perceived by inhabitants as mythical. Kendie et al. (2014) have reported in their conflict mapping report across Ghana, that the Alavanyo/Nkonya conflict is perceived by some inhabitants to have some invisible hand that are complicit in prolonging its occurrence.

Galtung's model helps to illustrate the cultural, structural and behavioural issues that underlie the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict. As a conflict with ethnic primordial issues still under contention and the symmetric contest between two parties who compete over a resource that has seen direct violence as a cause of manifestation of grief, it fits directly in the tripod of issues Galtung refers to in the prognosis of a conflict.

## **Conceptual Issues**

The various concepts that are key to this study have been discussed extensively drawing from literature on the various dimensions of conflict analysis.

### **Conflict and conflict dynamics**

Conflict is usually assumed to have occurred when individuals fail to live according to their values, or when their values are threatened (Coser, 1957; Idowu, 2004; Kendie, 2010; Sisk, 2013b). Most definitions of conflict, although not identical in wording, cover relatively similar ground, including that conflict involves at least two parties (individuals, groups, etc.) with incompatible objectives which they seek to realise while neutralising rival parties whose success in realising their objectives would be seen as detrimental. Awedoba (2009) explains conflict as “a relationship between two or more parties that centre on difference, disagreements, incompatibilities and clash of wills” (p.5).

Even though conflicts may occur as a result of structural differences between and among individuals or groups, such differences are further complicated by the attitudes and actions taken by the conflicting parties (Galtung, 1996). The causes of these conflict are often multi-layered and complex and so interwoven that it become difficult to assign one particular cause to any given conflict for effective management of that conflict. Moreover, conflicts that span a long period of time such as protracted social conflicts (Azar, 1985) could potentially have the prime motivations for violence change over time. In explaining these complex dynamics of conflict,

Coleman and Vallacher (2010) argue that conflicts are dynamic processes whose evolution reflects a complex interplay of factors operating at different levels and timescales.

Based on this position by Coleman and Vallacher (2010), it can be argued that over the course of a conflict, actors and drivers of conflicts change, the rationale for violence and the motivations for engaging in dialogue for peace or to perpetuate violence also changes and these bring a lot of changes in the course of conflicts. Aside this, incidences of violence, breaches in peace and isolated attacks could also change perceptions of parties, and these may influence a change in stance of negotiating parties who may be on a path to peace and this usually presents complexities that setback the peace-building process.

### **Peace-Building and ethnic conflicts**

Peace-building is described as an action to identify and support structures, which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict (United Nations, 2014). The African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) (2013), identifies peace-building itself as a complex and continuously changing term and explains that peace-building itself has several key characteristics, including; the long-term nature of the process, the interdependence of the actors, the multidimensional nature of the process and its concern with the consolidation of peace (ACCORD, 2013). This suggests therefore that the success of peace-building efforts during conflicts, rely heavily on the ability of peace-building agents and conflict managers to understand the dynamics of the conflict. Moreover,

Goodman and Hulme (1999) have explained that the emergence of small wars in many countries has shifted the conceptual issues underlying peace-building to include political economy and complex political emergencies.

Peace-building is preceded by peace-making, and this makes it important for peace-making and peace-building interventionists (Sisk, 2013a) to understand the changes in the profile of conflict so they can adjust their peace-building strategies to meet the dynamics of the conflicts they deal with as in the case of Sierra Leone (Bangura, 1997). Sisk (2013) explains that with the changing faces of conflict, intervention for peace-building needs to take cues from the literature on hybrid peace governance which draws from both local and international norms and institutional practices.

Peace building could be approached from both traditional and alternative angles. The traditional and alternative approaches to constructive engagement were applied to the work of social entrepreneurs at a Palestinian school in Israel (Praszkier, Nowak, Coleman, 2010). Using the traditional approach of tackling the core issues of the conflict, the researchers realized that such an intervention evoked negative feelings and attitudes among the local Palestinians. "Some complained that the interveners simply did not have sufficient understanding of their circumstances; others expressed the opinion that by making the Palestinians the focus of the program, the interveners were implying that they, the Palestinians, were the source of the problem" (Praszkier, Nowak, Coleman, 2010, p. 154).

In the alternative approach, which has been called the "anti-conflict approach" (Praszkier, Nowak, Coleman, 2010, p173); a group of activists, who worked closely with local residents and were familiar with the specific

needs of the community, decided to focus their work on an area that crossed cultural lines and was a shared interest of both groups: information technology (IT) (Praszkier, Nowak, Coleman, 2010). The group proceeded to establish an IT school for Arab and Jewish students. As expected, the study of computer science proved to be a “bonding agent” among the students, without regard to religious and ethnic differences. “The long-term outcome resulted in alumni starting their own IT businesses and becoming outstanding models of Arab–Jewish cooperation” (Praszkier, Nowak & Coleman, 2010, pp. 154-155). The deduction made by the researchers is that the alternative approach, in contrast to the traditional one focuses on altering societal dynamics. It does so by creating positive “islands” that do not initially intersect with the “mainland” of conflict. Over time, these islands may expand and become connected, thereby creating a new land of promise and hope. (Praszkier, Nowak & Coleman, 2010, p. 173)

### **Ethnic conflicts**

Ethnicity is a form of identity formation and it plays an important role in escalation, duration and intensity of conflict. Scholars like Horowitz (1985, pp. 17-18) state that “ethnic groups are defined by ascriptive differences, whether the indicum is colour, appearance, language, religion, some other indicator of origin, or some combination thereof.” However, Fearon and Laitin (1996) argue that ‘ethnicity is socially constructed’. From the definition of ethnicity or ethnic group, it is clear that ethnicity is a special form of identification in which group’s history and cultural traditions and beliefs are emphasized.

Hence in the context of ethnic conflicts that arise from ethnic differences, these complex dynamics occur within the economic, social or political space and this makes ethnic conflicts a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Smith, (1991) explains that we need to explain the social, cultural and political dynamics that determine how enduring specific identities are, and how they change. This admission of the dynamism of ethnicity itself is why ethnic conflicts become a very critical conflict type that needs to be studied from the perspective of complex dynamism.

With this understanding of ethnicity, the arena is now set to conceptualise ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict has been defined by Sambanis (2001) as “war among communities (ethnicities) that are in conflict over the power relationship that exists between those communities and the state” (p 261). The point of interest in this definition is the idea of power relationship. Power relationships revolve around key variables of importance to the parties involved in the conflict and usually occurs after actors have assessed the cost and benefits of engaging in a power struggle over such variables of importance. In an apparent attempt to explain this rationality, Langridge (2012) in her paper on rationality of ethnic conflicts, mentions the concept of security dilemma. She argues that the emergence of a security dilemma on either or both sides of conflicting ethnic communities creates an ethnic tension which when unmanaged, manifests in overt confrontation defines ethnic conflict. In the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict, the security dilemma lies in the loss of livelihood perceived by either conflict party because their agricultural economic lifestyle is based on land. This makes parties defensive.



Idowu (2004) has presented the dichotomy of arguments for and against the existence of ethnic conflict. On one hand he explains that those who contend that there are no ethnic conflicts argue that political, economic, psychological and cultural factors are prime causes of hostility between ethnic groups. Hence, the emotional application of these factors tend to arouse deep seated anxieties, fears and insecurities which often lead to acts of violence and aggression. The convergence of these factors with emotion leads to the escalation of violent conflict among these ethnic groups.

The other position that ethnic conflicts exist, Idowu further explains, contends that these conflicts stem from an irreconcilable posture with regard to what is of symbolic value to the ethnic groups concerned. Attempts to compromise any of these symbols, such as language and religion, often leads to conflict. This argument is what supports the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict as an ethnic conflict. These varied opinions above on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts make analysts see ethnic conflict as having that room for manipulation. Such opportunity to manipulate ethnicity for conflict makes the phenomenon a rational tool for actors. These elements of ethnicity that provide room for strategic manipulation will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

### **Conflicts and complexity**

Intractable conflicts are conflicts that do not yield to peace-building activities and they tend to be highly complex, with many different sources of conflict located at multiple levels (individual, group, communal, and so on), which often interact with each other to feed or sustain hostilities (Coleman,

Vallacher, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska, 2007). Complex conflicts could involve over 50 identified variables that lend to a conflict's intractability (Coleman, 2003) and are situated in places where other socio-economic problems brought on by the conflict interact, resulting in long-term patterns of misery and trauma. The sources of hostilities in such intractable settings often change continually and at any given time may be more or less determining of the conflict (Mitchell, 2005); these variables of conflict intractability can be somewhat linked to the phenomenon of conflict traps (Mack & Nielsen, 2005).

Coleman et al., (2007) contend that each case of intractable conflict is different; each has its own unique set of factors responsible for its persistence, which makes generalization from one case to another problematic. This could be a very strong justification for studying such conflicts on case-by-case basis. This makes it possible to make deductions based on the uniqueness of the particular conflict and only cautiously exporting any findings. Another interesting finding that becomes relevant under this study is that intractable conflicts tend to be resistant to traditional methods of peace-making like mediation; despite repeated attempts, they often endure (Kreisberg, 2005; Zartman, 2005). This observation is indeed important to the cultural setting of this conflict because traditional methods have been employed in the past in an unsuccessful attempt to bring lasting peace. The factors that lead to complexity therefore are changes in mode of competition, changes in rationalisation of conflict, the extent of political mobilisation, overlapping identities and interests and the nature of the peace-building process.

### **Ethnic competition**

The concept of ethnic competition has earlier been explained by Barth (1969), to be the socially constructed boundaries through which ethnic groups ascribe difference. Subsequently, Olzak (1992) explains that, competition intensifies the salience of ethnic boundaries and promotes spontaneous forms of ethnic collective action. As will therefore be expected, both ethnic boundary-formation and the conflicts that emerge from them are generally suppressed when groups inhabit separate, spatially-distant, or complementary niches in labour markets and political systems.

Cunningham (2012) argues that, competition, stemming from overlap in the economic or political activities of multiple ethnic groups, becomes a key mechanism through which particular boundaries are reinforced. Olzak (1992) argues that ethnic group competition is highly dynamic in the sense that for a variety of reasons competition may be expected to escalate or subside and this could provide some uncertainty to the path of a violent ethnic conflict and the process towards escalation or de-escalation of hostilities is shrouded in a complex web of incidents.

Schneider (2008) points out that, the presence of out-group members, for instance, or the scarcity of economic or political resources within municipal units, commonly serve as macroproxies of inter-group competition. The expected dynamics of such ethnic conflicts even become more unpredictable as Olzak (1992) observes that high levels of ethnic competition, however, are not expected to automatically produce high rates of collective action and that competition is mediated by variable levels of ethnic group identification, resources, and social organization. Acknowledging that this

process of identification itself is influenced by the rational interpretation of circumstances prevailing, the processes of group identification for competition in itself is subject to various changes over the course of time. These changes in group or individual identity is what Yancey et al. (1976) have explained in their concept of “emergent identities”. According to them, emergent identities play down ethnic alienation to create friendly competition. Because of this, emergent identities could also become spoilers of the conflict management and peace-building process in Alavanyo-Nkonya.

Researchers like Tolsma et al., (2008), have laid much focus on political mobilisation as the key process in ethnic competition. They note that outcomes (most probably violent outcomes) are conditioned by “the unit of measurement of the locale” and focus on the neighbourhood level, where local political decisions are forged and residents’ social networks are densest. This goes to identify the dynamics in political mobilisation as a key issue to assess in understanding the complex dynamics of conflict.

Contextual dynamics influence the progression of violent ethnic conflicts (Coleman & Vallacher, 2010). They explain that conflicts happen in context and therefore contextual deductions cannot be interchanged hence there is the need to differentiate between group competition and whether or not they manifest in violence. Regardless of how group conflicts are studied, as a social concept, Cunningham (2008) posits that there is broad implicit agreement that contextual conditions translate into ethnic conflict or otherwise through the way they impact on individual grievances, i.e., people’s perceptions that they are threatened by members of competing ethnic groups. Such perceptions change as the contexts that influence them change.

While the relationship between contexts and grievances is often assumed rather than demonstrated, it is clear that competitive contexts do not translate into ethnic grievances in a straightforward and invariant manner. As Belanger and Pinard (1991) have found, active contention emerges in settings conducive to inter-group competition, but only when associated conditions are perceived as unfair.

Olzak (1992) has argued that economic resources are the key motivations for ethnic competition. She explains that when there is scarcity of resources, it is easier and sometimes very convenient for political entrepreneurs to capitalize on the conflict potential of ethnicity. Blagojevic (2009) re-enforces Olzak's theory of ethnic competition by stating that: "when scholars discuss competition over resources, they often refer to the economic competition over resources. The argument is that under difficult economic conditions and scarcity, high unemployment and poor economic prospects for the future, people feel victimized and blame their misfortune on other ethnic group(s). This leads to inter-ethnic competition. Olzak (1992) has explained that such blamed groups are usually in-migrants who come in to compete with settlers for economic prospects.

Lake and Rothchild (1996) mention some of the issues that serve as subjects of competition as: "property rights, jobs, scholarships, educational admissions, language rights, government contracts, and development allocations all confer particular benefits on individuals and groups. Whether finite in supply or not, all such resources are scarce and, thus, objects of competition and occasionally struggle between individuals and, when organized, groups" (Lake & Rothchild, 1996, p. 50).

Competition for political participation seems to be the core of most tensions because of its apparent linkage with other resources in society (Blagojevic, 2009; Olzak, 1992). As de Varennes (2003) identified in almost all conflicts, ethnic groups' demand focused on securing basic rights for their group. For example, ethnic groups demanded more effective political participation, a fairer share and distribution of education and employment opportunities. So as will be expected, the participation process now becomes an issue of ethnic consideration.

### **Rationalisation in conflict**

Parties make a lot of rational calculations before deciding whether or not to resort to violence (Blagojevic, 2009; Langridge, 2012). This is because it is important to assess the possible losses and gains at stake before adopting violence. Theories underlying ethnic conflicts have broadly focussed on four main areas which include: rational-choice theory, constructivism, premordialism and structuralism and many conflict experts have sought to explain the conflict phenomenon using one of the above four categories. However, researchers like Langridge (2012) have argued that ethnic conflict can be best explained using a combination of rational-choice theory and interpretivism. Langridge explains that the combination of social construction by elites and the security dilemma to define ethnic conflict, makes ethnic conflict rational.

Przeworski, as cited in Bates et al. (1998), argues that moments of transition constitute moments of maximal uncertainty, thus people may not know where their interests lie, therefore defying rational forms of analysis.

Meanwhile, Olzak (1992) introduce the rational science of economics into the fray of understanding conflicts. To Olzak, the second dimension of competition theory lies in the forces of economic competition among ethnic and racial populations. Scholars who emphasize the economic aspects of competition theory of ethnic/racial conflict express these ideas in terms of the interplay between two types of boundaries: ethnic boundaries and productive niches (Barth, 1969). This reinforces Olzak's (1992) view that economic competition rises to the extent that niche overlap occurs and this happens when new groups invade another's niche, which can be fuelled by immigration, economic contraction, or upward mobility of a disadvantaged group. Therefore, conflict arises when members resist the entry of members of an ethnically distinct group into their niche.

Langridge (2012) however makes an interesting observation that rational-choice theory has to contend with significant limitations when applied to the study of ethnic conflict, as it concerns unstable politics and culture. This instability in the politics and culture of societies in conflict lend to the phenomenon of complex dynamics in conflict. Langridge agrees with Bates et al. (1998) that rational choice needs to marry interpretivism, in order to adequately explain the emergence of ethnic conflict.

The question of rational choice and the complexity of choices by conflict protagonists have been highlighted by several scientists (Ross, 2001; Roy, 1994; Volkan, 1997). Ross (2001) explains that understanding ethnic identity is complicated by the fact that human groups range widely in form and content, and that any one person has multiple identities whose salience varies across situations. Identity involves the capacity to distinguish in specific

settings between people who are like oneself and those who are different, and depending on the context the same people may be variously classified as alike or different. Obviously such interpretation is based on rationality. According to Ross, to analyse identity, we need to examine what it is that people believe they have in common, and to consider how a sense of shared fate develops and is reinforced within a group. These arguments bring to the fore the ambiguity and complexity of the interpretive process that goes on in most ethnic conflicts.

Another dimension to the rationality dynamics of conflict is that although participants in any dispute can often tell someone “just what the conflict is about,” this precision is usually illusory (Roy, 1994). This point was also further illustrated by Ross (2001) who explains that opposing parties operate from very different frames of reference; as a result, they don’t agree on what a conflict is about, when it started, or who they consider to be involved. External events can be interpreted in a number of ways; as a result, groups turn to internal frameworks and perceptions, which then shape subsequent behaviour and the dynamics of rational interpretations come to play when group narratives of parties involved in conflict are used in conflict framing (Ross, 2001).

Narratives about a longstanding conflict contain the culturally rooted aspirations, challenges, and deepest fears of ethnic communities, all of which adopt dynamic re-orientations across generations over time. Ross illustrates this point by citing Volkan’s concept of Chosen Trauma, referring to specific experiences that symbolize a group’s deepest threats and fears through feelings of helplessness and victimization (Volkan, 1997). Such generational



relay of narratives of chosen trauma or glory (as the case may be) could perpetuate tensions and make ethnic conflicts unresolvable across generations. This emotional transfer of grievance or trauma risks falling to complex dynamics of interpretation and the transfer process itself.

Blagojevic (2009) explains that the primordialist explanation of ethnic conflicts helps to account for the role of emotions in ethnic conflict and the conflict potential of ethnicity. While ethnic emotions appear to be primordial, they are a socially and politically constructed reality – drawn from the historical memories of past injustices and grievances. Blagojevic argues that resigning explanations of ethnicity to the “pure” (p. 18) form of the primordialist thinking implies a sense of hopelessness. For the likes of Suny (2001), if we view our realities as socially constructed, the possibilities for cooperation and peaceful cohabitation are more enhanced. What this study seeks to advance therefore is that, it may be helpful to look beyond the straightforward analysis of conflicts from the perspective of primordial grievances and build the understanding that the interpretations of these grievances change over time and brings some complex dynamics to analysing and dealing with conflicts.

In escalating intergroup conflicts, key metaphors, such as the chosen trauma, serve both as a rallying point and as a way to make sense of events that evoke deep fears and threats to existence (Horowitz, 1985; Kelman, 1987). Ross (2001) states that it is only when the deep-seated threats of these stories represent are addressed that a community is able to begin to imagine a more peaceful future with its enemies.

There is also the rational interpretation of what Olzak (1992) calls the “racial threat” (p. 32). This phenomenon is built on an earlier argument that the magnitude of response by dominant groups depends on the timing and size of the incoming group and on the clarity of ethnic distinctions made between newcomers and residents (Blalock, 1967). Olzak therefore explains that in a community, particularly large and concentrated waves of newcomers perceived as ethnically or racially distinct are especially likely to receive a hostile response after all, “tendencies toward xenophobia and intolerance are more natural to human societies than liberal politics of interest (Crawford, 1998: 11).

### **Ethno-political mobilization**

Berg (2008) argues based on research of conflicts in Chad, Sudan and Central African Republic, that political authorities have had significant bearing on how access to resources are determined and how available the resources themselves are to be accessed. Blagojevic (2009) and Olzak (1992) also identify the political domain as an arena of interactions that sparks protest and possible violence in conflict zones. This political dimension to ethnic competition highlights how important political mobilisation is to the progress and execution of violence in conflict. Olzak’s argument is that mobilization arises when newcomers pose threats to the power balance and political control by dominant groups. Powerful ethnic groups or members of a group can therefore mobilize collective action in response to a potential loss in political control. It also means that politically threatened groups will mobilize against any emerging changes that will result in robbing them of their control.

Moreover, Ross (2001), in assessing the psychocultural identity formation in the Northern Ireland, explained the key role of parades in influencing people's perceptions and reinforcing their decisions to carry out violence. Parades offer occasions where political and cultural differences are emphasized and the tensions and anger produced mobilize loyalties along sectarian lines. The implications of this is that public gatherings of various kinds occurring in a protracted conflict zone, could be a driver of violence or a stimulus for awakening old, forgotten rivalries and.

When Azar (1986) cited 'governance and the state's role' as the critical factor in the satisfaction or frustration of individual and identity group needs, he was invariably highlighting the strong direct link between the performances of the state to the performance of government (which is run by politicians). This study would therefore be interested in what kinds of complex interactions occur between state institutions and community groups within the course of this conflict and how these contribute to making the conflict complex. Morris (2001) has also hinted the connection between political leadership and institutions. According to her, the two are "the filter through which all other causes of conflict have to pass" (Morris, 2001, p. 3).

### **Overlapping differences and identities in conflict**

Elements of grievance may overlap and make it very difficult for a clear identification and isolation of the real reasons for aggression or violence and such overlaps present some ambiguity in conflict (Ross, 2001). Ross explains that ambiguous events are easily selectively interpreted as confirming evidence for pre-existing beliefs. Furthermore, because many disputes involve

parties with a long history of conflict, older grievances can easily be appended to newer ones as political conditions warrant". Ross is therefore of the view that rather than thinking about particular objective events that cause conflicts to escalate, we ought to be thinking about the interpretation of such events that are associated with escalation and those that are not.

This is where the complex dynamics play out, especially when these ascribed reasons for violence may not have clear boundaries. Individuals or groups could take action based on one or more of the differences discussed and they could even decide to continue fighting for the concerns of other members of the group even if their concern is addressed. For Ruanne and Todd (1996), overlap meant that even if an individual stressed only one dimension of difference, he or she could still identify fully with his or her community in opposition to the other (Ruanne & Todd, 1996). For conflict managers therefore, clearly differentiating where the boundaries lie in dealing with conflicting parties, becomes a complex situation.

### **Institutional change and conflict**

Crawford (1998) has explained that whether or not the politics of individual identity turn into violence will depend on how institutions work. As Crawford states; "Where identity politics is practiced, states can channel it in peaceful political competition as long as they can make credible commitments to shape and uphold agreements made among culturally defined political actors" (Crawford, 1998, p. 517).

Democratic institutions are considered to promote inter-ethnic cooperation and thus mitigate the conflict potential of ethnicity, in line with

Prazauskas view that, “In a democratic multinational state, stability is generally maintained by means of political bargaining and compromise between ethnic subgroups” (Prazauskas, 1991, p. 581). Another scholar, Dixon, similarly argues that “democratic states...are better equipped than others with the means for diffusing conflict situations at an early stage before they have an opportunity to escalate to military violence” (Dixon, 1994, p.14). This arrangement avoids the risk that was identified by Nagel who argues that if the state’s administrative structures and legal institutions distribute resources based on ethnicity, this encourages political mobilization along ethnic lines (Nagel, 1986).

### **Challenges of the peace-building process in protracted conflicts**

Peace-building is described as an action to identify and support structures, which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict (United Nations, 2014). The African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) (2013), identifies peace-building itself as a complex and continuously changing term and explains that peace-building itself has several key characteristics, including; the long-term nature of the process, the interdependence of the actors, the multidimensional nature of the process and its concern with the consolidation of peace (ACCORD, 2013).

Though peace-building can be challenging, Coleman et al., (2008) provide an optimistic view and contend that even if reconciliation processes, trust-building activities, and conflict resolution initiatives appear to be largely ineffective in situations locked in an ongoing protracted struggle, they may

very well be acting to establish a sufficiently strong attractor for moral, humane forms of intergroup interactions that provide the foundation for a stable, peaceful future.

In charting an approach to mediating protracted conflicts, Coleman et al., (2008) re-visited an important element of mediation which applies the ripeness approach based on the willingness and commitment of parties to engage constructively in the conflict. They explain that this approach has been a useful starting point for understanding historical motives, but has limited explanatory power under conditions of intractable conflict especially because of the reality of conflict dynamics. Hence, they argue that in the face of the complex dynamics of conflict, the prescriptive application of the ripeness approach should be replaced with an understanding of the myriad pathways to constructive engagement.

Coleman et al. (2008) also label the process of constructive engagement in mediation as a 'complex psychosocial process' (Coleman et al., 2008, p 54). They identified that mediators of various protracted conflicts adopt three main different strategies in their approach to mediation. They explain that these strategies include using metaphors, frames and assumptions about the type of change they wish to see. According to them, if metaphors are the essential lenses we use individually to comprehend complex conflicts, frames are the structured means by which we deploy these lenses in service of some collective action, such as advocacy, mobilization, or intervention (Coleman, 2004).

Therefore, taking mediation as a typical peace-building activity, it is clear that the various dynamics in mediation can lead to the complexity of the

peace-building process. As Coleman et al. (2007) have summarized; our metaphors provide an implicit theory of a general sense of what motivates and constrains stakeholders to best elicit constructive action; framing of conflicts can determine what we target for change and who we see as relevant for that change to occur; our orientation to time also affects how we conceptualize processes of engagements and our underlying assumptions about change and who and what are important to the conflict are likely to help determine our sense of possibility and agency and influence the particular strategies we use to bring them about.

Coleman et al (2008) identified that each person brings to conflict analysis his or her own set of images, assumptions, and frames, which can significantly affect the perception and interpretation of events particularly when the events are complex and changing. Jones and Hughes (2003) have reasoned that this flies in the face of the traditional assumptions of neutrality and objectivity of fact-finding in contemporary conflict resolution.

### **Empirical Review**

This review discusses three cases (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Adaklu – Anyigbe, Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestinian conflict). These cases were reviewed because they illustrated the concepts of interest under this study which include: institutions, identity, cognitive framing, rationality of actors and peace-building. The cases show how these concepts have contributed to dynamics and complexity in specific conflicts. Lessons learnt from the empirical review for the benefit of this study have also been discussed.

### **Institutional dynamics in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Blagojevic (2009) explains that “the collapse of communism in former Yugoslavia and the ensuing process of democratization represent the major structural change that influenced the context for development of ethnic conflict in Bosnia. Political institutions lost their ability to regulate inter-ethnic relations and keep the expression of ethnic emotions in check. Political entrepreneurs manipulated the conflict potential of ethnicity for their own political gain. Snyder (1993) cited in Blagojevic (2009) explains that the presence of deep, historically rooted ethnic animosities alone is not sufficient to create conflict, as other factors must be involved as well for ethnic conflict to result. Institutional (political system) theory helps explain how, following the collapse of communism, the political institutions in Bosnia were no longer able to regulate inter-ethnic relations and control ethnic animosities, thus facilitating political entrepreneurs’ efforts to manipulate the groups to serve their own interests.

In summary Blagojevic explains that in Bosnia, the competition over resources manifested as an inter-ethnic struggle over future institutional arrangements/ethnic composition and status of the country. It was fuelled by the efforts of political entrepreneurs to capitalize on opportunities of change and by the growing ethnic intolerance. Competition and intolerance eventually escalated into the preparation for and the beginning of a violent armed conflict.



### **Institutional dynamics in the Adaklu-Anyigbe conflict**

Gati (2008) studied how the government of Ghana's indecision about the location of the capital for the new Adaklu-Anyigbe District Assembly in the Volta Region of Ghana only triggered latent generational-long conflicts over issues of identity, traditional power struggles, socio-economic deprivation and underdevelopment between the contending communities. This conflict arose from the decision by government to carve a new district from the Ho Municipal Assembly.

Gati explains that state and semi-traditional institutional failures accounted for the escalation of the conflict in which the leaders of the contending communities mobilized their people along ethnic lines in order to assert what they believe was their socio-cultural, economic and political rights. Gati contends that the interaction between the state and the local semi-traditional institutions are more of sources of conflict than cooperation in the Ghanaian society. This is really interesting, especially considering that such decentralisation processes are intended of collaboration rather than conflict.

Gati first implicates the state apparatus in this by explaining that there seems to be lack of effective mechanisms by the state to mediate the conflict. He also cites economic deprivation as a probable cause of the conflict. He also mentions the politicisation of the process when he explains that, the absence of effective mechanism for locating the capital has been complicated by perceived politicization of the dispute by the two dominant political parties in Ghana; the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress, with either suspected of supporting the other. Even in the conflict mediation process there were some complex institutional operations in the appraisal of the problem.

Gati argued that the proliferation of other institutions intervening in the conflict could have led to conflict among the institutions themselves, which in effect will not make any significant positive impact on the conflict.

### **Identity dynamics in the Northern Ireland conflict**

The identity dynamics in conflict is illustrated in a research conducted by Ruane and Todd (1996) identified in the Northern Ireland situation involving the conflict between Catholics and Protestants who had strong ethnic basis. This case is relevant for this study because the partition of society into Catholics and Protestants was heavily determined by their ethnic identity. They explain that the settler-native distinction was interwoven with the religious and ethnic one but is not reducible to it.

Ruane and Todd (1996) moved on to explain how this rise in settler status took the issues to another level especially when colonisation aligned economic development with modern methods (modernisation). This placed the settlers who had moved in and had the closest knowledge of the modern standards of the colonial protagonists in an advantaged position.

This somewhat exemplifies the constructivist process of psycho-cultural identity as put forward by Ross (1997) that psycho-cultural identity was at the core of shared systems of meaning and identity that define cultural communities and are revealed in a group's narratives recounting their origin, history, and conflicts with outsiders, as well as in the community's symbolic and ritual behaviours and probably; contribution to development in society.

### **Conflict rationalisation and peace-building in the Israel-Palestine conflict**

Bar-Tal, Halperin and Oren (2010) attempt at exploring a possible path to peace-building. They suggest that flexibility usually results from the appearance of a new idea (or ideas) that is inconsistent with the heretofore-held beliefs and attitudes and therefore creates some kind of tension, dilemma, or even internal conflict that might stimulate people to move away from their basic position and look for alternative ideas.

They call what stimulates people the instigating belief and claim it may appear spontaneously in the minds of people and not under any special circumstances, but usually they come to mind as a result of external conditions that force a re-evaluation of the previously held conflict-supporting repertoire (see the comprehensive analysis of the conception in Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2010). This concept of instigating belief can also be looked at from the perspective of introducing fear-reducing measures which compensate for lack of trust as was done in the Arusha Accords of Burundi (Vandeginste, 2009) and the use of norm-diffusing external actors to pressurise negotiators towards peaceful resolution (Vandeginste, 2015).

In conclusion they acknowledge that there are other arguments and processes that lead under certain conditions to a relaxation of attitudes that, in turn, could later lead to the acceptance of beliefs that support peace-making and even reconciliation. In any event, these processes, as indicated, almost always begin with a minority and, in some cases, successfully spread throughout society until the ethos of peace becomes dominant. We must always remember that human beings are the ones who decide to launch bloody

conflicts and that they must also, therefore, be the ones to decide to initiate and finalize a peace process.

### **Lessons Learnt from the Empirical Review**

The Bosnia and Herzegovina case sheds a great deal of light on how the change in institutional provisions could alter how parties frame their opponents and how they rationalise their fears and interests. It provides a hint to how intangible virtual aspects of a conflict, such as rationalisation could be affected by the change in social infrastructure (governance structure) for the management of social order. These observations by Blagojevic (2009) for instance have raised important questions that could shape the focus of this study. What changes have taken place in these institutions and what is the nature of the change? How have these changes impacted the conflict management and peace-building process?

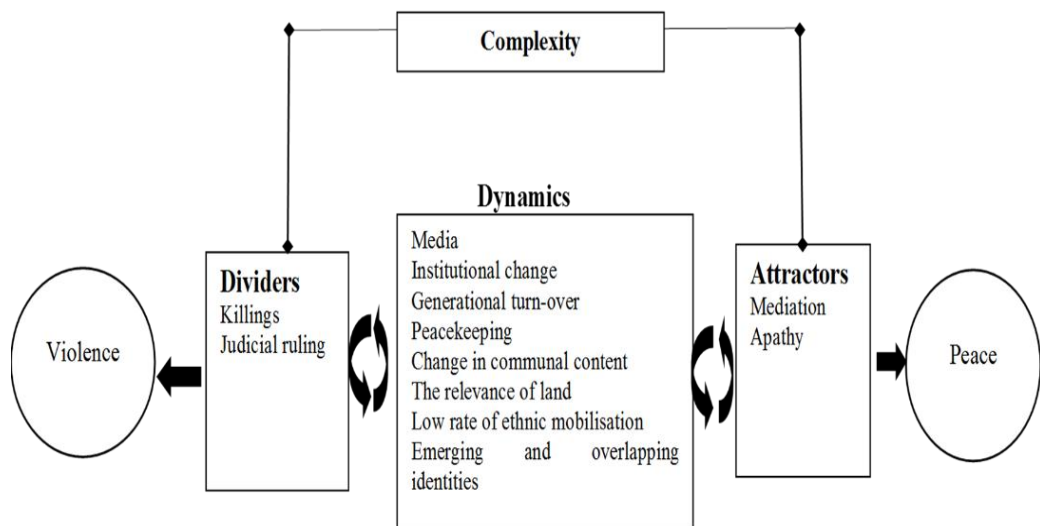
The case of the Adaklu-Anyigbe conflict also highlight the essence of institutional dynamics and its repercussions for peace. The concept of ‘cognitive framing’ introduced by Oberchall will also be adopted an important terminology in the discussion of this research as it sums up the psychological basis of assessing motivations and interests.

The case of Northern Ireland portrayed how a sort of identity shift could potentiate ethno-religious differences. In this study it will be important to know how identity dynamics complicates the conflict situation. The case review of the peace-building process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict raises the concept of “instigating belief” which the authors argue can be the viable process to changing mind-sets about the need for peace. It will be interesting

to explore how this can be applicable in the Alavanyo-Nkonya peacebuilding process; that is if it is not already in use.

The concepts and cases discussed above have informed the conceptual framework which will be discussed on the next page to illustrate how various issues within society in the course of a conflict lend to the complexity of the conflict.

**Conceptual Framework**



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework: Complex dynamics of violent ethnic conflicts** (Source: Penu, 2015)

In the conceptual framework in figure 1 above, the ethnic conflict is considered as a system. Within the system, various circumstances (either through individual, group or institutional actions or inactions) create the dynamics unique to the identity and analysis of the conflict. These dynamics could translate into dividers (destructive tension enhancers) or attractors (constructive tension reducers) within the system. These dividers or attractors,

pulling in opposite directions towards violence or peace respectively, bring complexity to the system (conflict). The conceptual framework of this study operates under the following assumptions:

- That the society has multi-ethnic sociocultural interactions;
- That there is competition in this heterogeneous society;
- That there are structural differences between the groups in conflict, and
- that attractors and dividers do not necessarily have the same weight.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### **Advance Organizer**

This study is to explore the dynamics of the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict and its impact on peacebuilding. This chapter presents the methodology for the study. It captures the study area, an explanation of the research design and the study and target populations. It also discusses the sample and sampling process, the data collection methods / tools and the approach for analysing data.

#### **Research Design**

This study is based on mixed methods but with a largely qualitative approach because it seeks to explore and elucidate as much information to describe fluid concepts such as ethnicity and conflict as they are influenced by rational decisions. The complex nature of the conflict (Kendie et al., 2014; Tsikata & Seini, 2004) makes a qualitative approach an important major route for the study (Creswell, 1998). Minor quantitative techniques were used for the trend analysis.

The study is also exploratory because it provides the researcher the opportunity to analyse the relationship between people and events and also to appreciate individual and group perceptions. As Morgan (1997) explains, explorative research helps to develop an accurate picture of the research topic and also in the formulation and modification of theories. With specific reference to this case, the mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis was chosen based on the initial assessment of research questions and

the assessment of what could be the appropriate methodology, taking into consideration some limiting factors. It was necessary to conduct field data collection involving key people, interview them and gather first-hand information. The detailed narratives required can be best obtained by talking directly with people and allowing them to tell the stories unfettered by what the researcher expects to find or what has been read from the literature (Creswell, 1998).

### **Study Area**

The Alavanyo and Nkonya communities are located in two separate administrative municipalities / districts in the Volta Region of Ghana. The Alavanyo communities are largely located in the Hohoe municipality whilst the Nkonya communities are largely located in the Biakoye District (formerly Jasikan) of the Volta Region of Ghana. It will be noted from the map in Figure 2 that Alavanyo and Nkonya are traditional paramountcies comprising of two different ethnic groups. These paramountcies have numerous towns. The Alavanyo towns include Alavanyo-Kpeme, Alavanyo-Wudidi, Alavanyo-Abehenasi, among others. Whilst the Nkonya towns include Nkonya-Tayi, Nkonya-Ahenkro, Nkonya-Tepo among others.

### **Socio-economic indicators**

The population of Hohoe Municipality is 167,016 representing 7.9 percent of the total population of the Volta Region. It comprises of 52.1 percent females and 47.9 percent males. About fifty-three (52.6%) percent of the population is urban with about forty-seven (47%) being rural. About thirty-

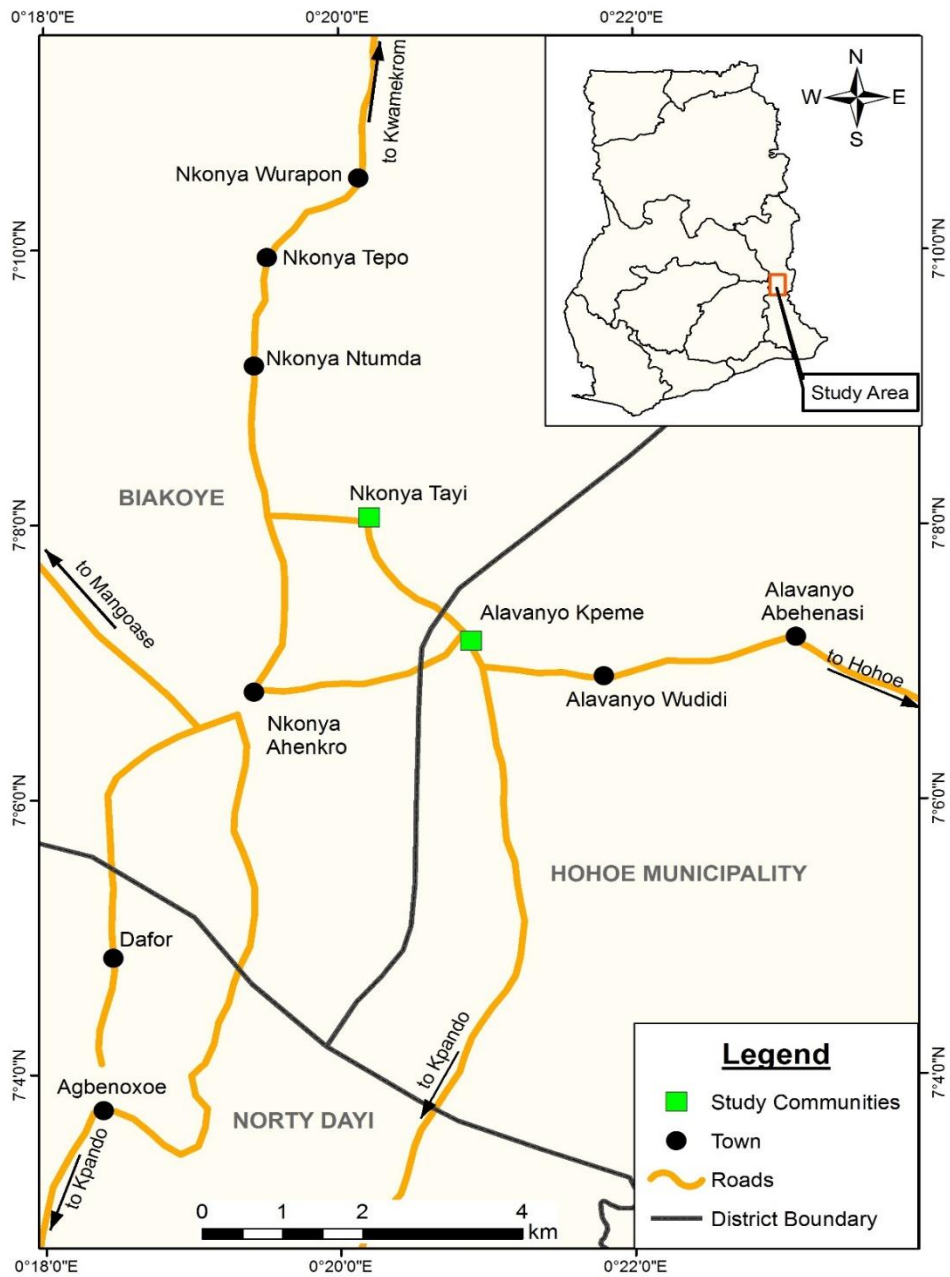


six (35.9%) percent make-up the youthful population which is disaggregated into 78% below 60 years and about 22% above 60 years. (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The population of Biakoye District is 65,901 representing 3.1 percent of the total population of the Volta Region. It comprises 49.8 percent females and 50.2 percent males. About thirty-four (33.9%) percent of the population is rural. The district has a sex ratio of 100.6. The population of the district is youthful with the population under age 15 constituting 40.2 percent (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010).

The people in the Biakoye district are multi-ethnic with Buem, Nkonya, and Bowiri in the majority. For both districts, the major religious groups are the Traditional, the Christian and Islamic religions. The major ethnic groups in the Hohoe Municipality are Ewes, Akpafu/Lolobi, Santrokofi, Likpe, Logba, Tafi and Nyagbo (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The major economic groups are cooperatives. These groups are engaged mainly in agriculture and small-scale industries. Just like in other parts of the Volta Region, most of the inhabitants are engaged in agriculture. This is followed by wholesale, retail trade accounting, manufacturing transport and construction. The settlements in the districts are characterized by dispersed pattern with a heterogeneous make-up (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010).

It is believed that the people of Alavanyo and Nkonya lived peacefully with each other over 300 years until a conflict over land demarcation ensued about 81 years (now 91 years) ago in 1923 (“Regional news of Wednesday”, 2006). It is also believed that the intermittent violence altercations have claimed over 20 lives so far. The Kendie et al. (2014) report that violent

clashes between Alanvayo-Kpeme and Nkonya-Tayi occurred in 1923, 1983, 2003, 2004, 2012 and 2013 and yet another in 2014.



**Figure 2: Map showing Alavanyo and Nkonya communities**

(Source: Cartography Unit, University of Cape Coast, 2015)

Kendie et al. (2014) have reported that the conflict between the two communities relates to the disagreement over ownership of land located between Alavanyo Kpeme and Nkonya Tayi. They explain that initially the

conflict was between just these two communities but recent clashes have brought in other Nkonya and Alavanyo communities from traditional councils; thereby broadening the scope of the conflict to involve the Nkonya and Alavanyo traditional councils respectively.

The land in dispute is fertile and supports an all-year-round farming regime. It is also economically viable for timber lumbering. Presently the Alavanyo-Kpeme people farm on the disputed land but the Nkonya-Tayi people are now demanding their land which they claim they gave to Alavanyo people. However, the Alavanyo-Kpeme people are unwilling to return the land. Kendie et al. (2014) have reported that there have been over 6 violent clashes in relation to this conflict. There have also been many attempts to resolve the conflict through court rulings and mediation (Kendie et al., 2014; Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

### **Study Population**

The study population involves all key actors in the conflict which includes the traditional and youth leaders from both Alavanyo and Nkonya as well as the mediators and peace facilitators working on the conflict. The target population however, is all those who are involved in issues about this conflict both in academia and on the field; especially those who represent the conflicting parties and those who are responsible for the management of the conflict and the peace-building processes. These include members of the National and Regional Peace Councils in Ghana, civil society organisations with focus on peace-building, academics with focus on peace studies, the

government and security agencies. The structural issues between the Alavanyo and Nkonya ethnic groups are also under focus in this study.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Purposive sampling was conducted through a snowballing process to identify six key informants with knowledge or experience about the ethnic conflict and the peace-building process under study. A lead key informant was purposively selected from the Peace Council. This key informant was used as lead in a snowballing process to contact key respondents from the Consultative Committee, a member of the mediation committee, youth leaders and chiefs from both parties in conflict who were also interviewed. There was no predetermined sample size because theoretical sampling approach was adopted to determine at what point information gathered reached the saturation point. Nevertheless, this study made it a point to get at least one key informant from each side of the conflicting parties. In-depth interviews were used to elicit the relevant information from the key respondents.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A two-step multi-layered method was adopted in collecting and analysing the data. First, secondary data on the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict was collected from online and print sources. This included theoretical and empirical literature review of similar conflicts and scholarly analysis within the framework of various conflict theories. Secondary data covering 1923 to 2005 were drawn from a review study by Kendie et al. (2014) and Tsikata and Seini (2004). Tsikata and Seini (2004) collated a series of news articles, court

reports, press statements and policy documents that cover the events and Kendie et al. (2014) present their findings from a conflict mapping study conducted under the auspices of Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Secondary data covering events from 2005 to 2015 were collated by the researcher from news reports and statements about the conflict within that period.

The second phase was the collection of primary data. This was fieldwork to help validate the information and literature obtained from secondary sources. This was premised on the assumption that secondary information may be inadequate for effective analysis and answering research questions. Fieldwork has been described by Payne and Payne (2004) to refer to an aspect in the qualitative research process where data are collected, over a period of time, in a naturally occurring setting. Respondents gave accounts of their perception (whether factual or not) of issues and this was used in conjunction with secondary data to make deductions.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Interview guide (see Appendix A) was used to obtain responses from respondents. Interview transcripts were obtained using a voice recorder during on-field interviews. A voice recorder was used particularly because it allowed the discussions to move on with little interference and limited pauses. Notes were taken in some instances where recording was not possible. Silverman (2006) calls this, "researcher-provoked data" (p. 30) in contrast to natural occurring data. For the purpose of this research, the two types of data, primary

and secondary, should however be seen as complementing each other. Meanwhile the interviews serve as the main method to generate data.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

The information collected from the newspapers and the field interview visits was transcribed and analysed using the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach was used to identify themes and concepts within the collated data and interview transcripts that are linked to the formal theoretical models underpinning this study. The steps followed in this approach is as proposed by Ryan and Bernard (2000):

1. Read verbatim transcripts,
2. Identify possible themes,
3. Compare and contrast themes, identifying structure among them, and
4. Build theoretical models, constantly checking them against the data.

The existing data by which the themes were checked are founded in the three main theories underlying this study: the dynamic systems theory (Coleman & Vallacher, 2010), Galtung's model of conflict, violence and peace (Galtung, 1996) as well as the protracted social conflict theory (Azar, 1985; 1986).

### **Ethical Considerations**

As much as possible, attempts were made to double check and authenticate secondary data. This was done by seeking a second news item for headline news used. Data was always presented carefully, objectively and original as from source. The data collected from the interviews were

presented in anonymous quotations and any information received on the principle of confidentiality was kept confidential. Data from this study was used solely for research purposes in achieving the objectives set and this was explained to interviewees before the interviews. Voice recordings were done with the express consent of those interviewed and transcription of data and their analyses were done without bias.

### **Chapter Summary and Limitations**

In summary, the methods employed in this study were mixed, with major qualitative and minor quantitative components. The data obtained were from news sources and interviews of key informants. Possible limitations here include that the interviews solicited verbal narratives from respondents and such verbal narratives may not be a credible relay of actual events (Hammersley, 2008). For instance, some of the respondents were referring to incidents they had been informed about through hear-say and which they could not originally hold as factual.

Secondly, bearing in mind that respondents were informed about taping response, such awareness comes with the risk of respondents getting reserved and overly conscious and cautious about their narratives. This may affect the depth of sensitive issues. Thirdly this research bases deductions on personal narratives of interviewees and did not dwell on finding absolute historical truths as is done for phenomenological interviewing as described by Roulston (2010). Finally, this study has no predictive property for the nature and form of the violence that will erupt in case of ethnic strife.

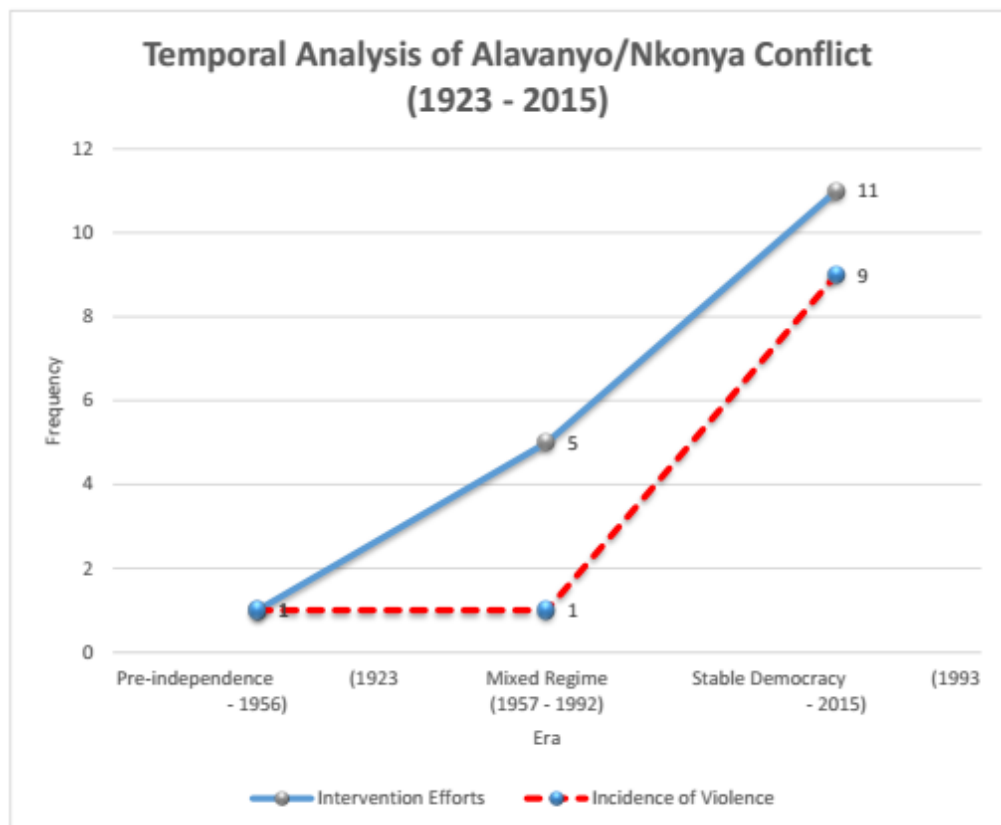
## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Advance Organizer

This study aimed at exploring the dynamics of the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict and its implications for peacebuilding using mixed methods. This chapter presents the findings of the study according to the specific research objectives. Using interview transcripts from 6 key informants and news reports, the trend analysis and key issues of conflict dynamics have been presented and discussed.

#### Trend Analysis of the Alavanyo-Nkonya Conflict (1923-2015)



**Figure 3: Temporal analysis of Alavanyo-Nkonya Conflict (1923 - 2015)**  
(Source: Fieldwork, Penu, 2015)



The graph in figure 3 is derived from secondary data collated from news articles, press statements and other research reports about the Alvanyo-Nkonya conflict in Ghana, arranged in chronological sequence. The sequence of events (violence and intervention efforts) have been presented and discussed under three main eras, namely: colonial/pre-independence era (1923-1956), mixed regime era (1957 – 1992) and the stable democratic era (1993 – 2015). This demarcation is done because the conflict predates the independence of Ghana and after independence, Ghana has seen mixed regimes of military and civilian rule and a latter stable democratic period. Hence it is important to analyze the trend of this conflict bearing in mind the various regimes of governance since leadership and institutions are the filter through which all other causes of conflict have to pass (Morris, 2001).

Over these three main eras, the pre-independence era recorded one violence and one intervention, the mixed regime era recorded one incident of violence and five intervention efforts whilst the stable democratic era recorded nine incidents of violence and eleven intervention efforts.

### **Pre-independence era (1923 -1956)**

The pre-independence era saw the beginning of the conflict with the first and only recorded violent clash (within that period) in 1923. Three conflict resolution interventions were recorded; one in 1923 (by chiefs) and two of them in 1953 and 1957 (by the courts).

Kendie et al. (2014) as well as Tsikata and Seini (2004) mention that the first recorded violent incident took place in the colonial period in 1923 during preparations for Empire Day Celebrations. They report that

unfortunately in 1923 when the country was celebrating Empire Day, the people of Nkonya-Tayi went to the then chief of Alanvayo-Kpeme to show them (the Alavanyos) their land boundary. The Nkonyas came along with a surveyor to assist in demarcating the land but the then chief of Alanvayo-Kpeme refused to accede to the request of the Nkonya-Tayi. Violence erupted and one of the Nkonya-Tayi people died. The case was reported to the chief of Nkonya and the chief fined the Alanvayo people six pounds sterling.

This era saw the colonial Grunner map (see Figure 4) drawn by the Germans in 1913 in an attempt to stall the encroaching of land; a map which has now become one of the primary issues of contention. From the response of the parties interviewed, it was gathered that this map was drawn by a German cartographer called Dr Hans Grunner in 1913, after a dispute between two individual residents of Nkonya-Tayi and Alavanyo-Kpeme over a piece of land led to the various communities seeking assistance from the colonial authorities to resolve the dispute. However, this map has been a matter of contention, with the Nkonya's accepting it but the Alavanyo's not accepting it as the original traditional demarcation between the communities in the area (Field Interview Respondent, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Three interventions were recorded: one in 1923 (by chiefs) and two of them in 1953 and 1957 (by the courts). In this era, violence was relatively low as compared to the intervention efforts probably because the actors were limited to just a few of the members of the two communities who were litigating of the disputed land. Hence the conflict hotspots were limited unlike the stable democratic regime that witnessed an expansion of the conflict hotspots and a deepening of the fault lines. This limited violence was because,

at the time the dispute was locally confined to a few individuals or households and hence the confrontations were on a low tone.

### **Mixed regime (1957 – 1992)**

The mixed-regime is used here to refer to the periods of civilian rule under the Nkrumah administration (prior to 1966) followed by a series of military takeovers interspersed with stints of civilian democracies (1966 – 1992) before the eventual return to stable democracy in 1992.

During this period, there was one major recorded communal clash in 1983. Kendie et al., (2014) report that in 1983, during the drought, a girl from Alavanyo-Kpeme went to the Changana River and a quarrel ensued between her and some indigenes of Nkonya-Tayi and an Nchumoro. As a result of this quarrel, a violent conflict ensued between the two communities resulting in the death of one person from Alavanyo. It is important to note that this is the first overt group clash since 1923. It suggests that the conflict had moved beyond the structural stage and had now begun seeping into the attitudes of the communities involved and this is what now is leading to direct violence (Galtung, 1996).

Meanwhile there were four court rulings (1959, 1970, 1975 and 1980) and one committee of inquiry in 1992. Tsikata and Seini (2004) have identified the important role of the courts who have also been extensively involved in adjudicating the land dispute at the heart of the conflict. They cite a rejoinder written by an Nkonya citizen, which states that four court cases between 1957 and 1980 have all been decided in favour of Nkonya (letter from Komla Tom and published in Chronicle, as cited in Tsikata & Seini,

2004). Furthermore, Kendie et al., (2014) identify the four court rulings as gathered from the narrative of a respondent:

In June, 1959, His Lordship, Granville Sharp's Court of Appeal, upheld the accuracy and authenticity of the 1913 Grunner Map as indicating the true boundaries. In December, 1970, High Court, Ho - Suit No. 28-35/61, ordered the Alavanyos to atone tenancy within one month of the ruling. Again, in December, 1975, Court of Appeal, Accra Suit No. 112/74, ruled in favour of Nkonya and up-held the 1970 ruling by Justice Francois. Finally, in December, 1980 Justice Mrs. Cecilia Koranteng-Addow quashed an order issued by the Stool Land Boundaries Commission for re-demarcation of the boundaries (Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

This decision seemed to have brought some calm but it had obviously not gone down well with the individuals of Alavanyo-Kpeme who had the decision against them. Hence this necessitated other interventions. As Tsikata and Seini (2004) have identified, major attempts at resolution have only followed violent incidents. For example, they explain that the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) in November 1992 appointed the Acquah Committee to investigate the dispute and advise the government as to solutions to the problem.

This era witnessed lots of court cases probably because the alternative dispute resolution institutions were not fully developed at the time (Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of Ghana was passed in 2010) and the courts were the only fairly stable institutions. The violence was also less in this era because of the significant dictatorial control of the military regimes that did not condone lawlessness. As Blagojevic (2009) has noted, strong regimes are able to force

unity among members of society and are therefore able to water down the fault lines and ethnic divisions that may lead to violence. Hence the regime likely deterred any conflict protagonist who considered the use of violence.

### **Stable democracy era (1993 – 2015)**

The stable democratic era refers to the fourth republic of Ghana. It is characterized by seven successful democratic elections and a back-and-forth transition between two political parties. This era marks a return to democracy involving the rule of law and this was expected to mark a consolidation of democracy and state effectiveness (Azar, 1986). This 24 -year period saw a series of events in the 1990s that are described in subsequent paragraphs. These resulted in escalations of tensions between the two communities; with many of them involving the intervention of the police, whilst some resulted in deaths. The year 2000s saw the onset of suspicions and isolated killings resulting in allegations and counter allegations; with wide media reportage on the festering tensions (Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

The stable democratic era saw a rise in violence and killing (2003, 2004, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015). This rise in violence, despite the rise in strong state structures flies in the face of the expectation that the government or state role is a critical factor in the satisfaction (Azar, 1986). Nevertheless, it confirms the fear that inadequacy of the state apparatus could also frustrate individual and identity group needs (Azar, 1986). A couple of factors could have accounted for this. First, the longstanding conflict by this time would have grievances hoarded and crystallized to motivate rise in violent manifestations. It could also be because the civil nature of governance did not

deter perpetrators of violence as there was always the feeling that the long judicial process of the rule of law could provide a leeway for escape. Hence it could be inferred here that despite the democratic dispensation, the state ability to deal with manifestations of the conflict were not adequate and therefore highlights direct link between the extent of violence to the performance of government.

It was also observed in this era that there was a rise in intervention efforts. Two interpretations could be given to this; first that intervention was in response to the increased violence or that the institutions were now strong enough to report and expose violence. This is especially so because from the data gathered, the media and civil society role became prominent from 2003 when those institutions became strong under democratic development in Ghana. This conforms to the relevant role that institutions play as the the filter through which all other causes of conflict have to pass Morris (2001). Hence it can be argued that the strong media as an institution of good governance became active enough to expose or record violence. As this happened, awareness was created and government and other civil society organizations were minded or morally compelled to intervene, both from within Ghana and abroad.

#### *Analysis of the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict during the stable democracy era*

The events surrounding this conflict, within the stable democratic era, have been collated and temporally arranged to reflect the trajectory of the conflict in recent times. This section will analyze the various events captured within the reviewed literature in the context of the stable democracy era.

In October 1997, some Nkonya chiefs reported to the Divisional Police Commander at Hohoe that some Alavanyo residents had trespassed on Nkonya land, and were felling trees and blocking the paths leading to Nkonya farms. Consequently, the police held meetings between the conflict parties to mediate the complaints (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). Tsikata and Seini also give an account of a counter report that some armed people were cutting timber near Alavanyo farms and an appeal to the police to investigate resulted in the police going into the disputed area and confronting some people suspected to be Nkonya people sawing wood, which resulted in a gun battle between the police and the woodcutters. The Hohoe District Chief Executive is quoted to have said that “it was when the team of policemen got to the disputed land that gunshots were fired from the Nkonya side by some unidentified people. The police returned fire immediately to repel the assailants but nobody was injured in the process”. According to the report, the Jasikan District Chief Executive corroborated this account of the Hohoe District Chief Executive (DCE) (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). A letter by the chief of Alavanyo referring to this incident alleged that a large Indian hemp farm was also discovered during the exercise (Letter of Togbega Tsedze Atakora VII, Fiaga of Alavanyo Traditional Area in the *Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

The interviews conducted show that, the police role in conflict management has been strongly felt in this scenario. Both Azar (1986) and Morris (2001) have highlighted the relevance of the state as an institution to manage such conflicts. More so the district leadership in the area on both sides are also seen to have been united in how they conceptualize the conflict. This

agreement by the two district heads (as stated above) can be viewed as one of the reasons why there has been reduced ethnic mobilization within the political space (Olzak, 1992). This is probably the benefit of the centralized system of governance practiced by Ghana especially since both of them are the heads of the district level security apparatus. The local government heads are appointed by the president of the day, hence, the political competition is reduced. This is probably the advantage that the appointment of local government administrators has over their election. With everything in Ghana taking a political spin, the opening up of elections for local governors like DCEs and MCEs could raise a scenario of too much political antagonism at the community level and create a fertile space within the political arena for ethnic grievances to be exploited.

In 2001, two Alavanyo men who were illegally cutting timber with a chain-saw in the Nkonya Alavanyo Forest Reserve/Togo Plateau Forest Reserve were attacked by gunmen, resulting in the death of one of the illegal loggers. There was immediate suspicion that Nkonya gunmen were responsible and a report made to the police (Ghanaian Times, as cited in Tsikata and Seini, 2004). In a response to the newspaper report, the Nkonya-Tayi stool clerk wrote to the Ghanaian Times denying that any Nkonya person was responsible as on that day, they were involved in communal labour to build a classroom block. The rejoinder was anxious to correct the impression that Nkonya people were responsible for the killing, in order not to create further confusion between the two communities (A statement by Anane-Quist, Nkonya Tayi Stool Clerk appearing in the Ghanaian Times, as cited in Tsikata and Seini, 2004). There were also reports of the murder of a senior linguist of



Alavanyo at Nkonya Ahenkro in December of the same year. This is a clear case of the security dilemma, fear of extinction (Horowitz, 1985), and the fear of the future (Rothchild, 1996) both scenarios that are a key to the characteristics of protracted conflicts as captured under the dynamical systems theory (Coleman & Vallacher, 2010)

In February 2003, the newspapers reported the shooting of an Nkonya man and his daughter on their farm, resulting in the death of the man (The Chronicle & Ghanaian Times, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004)). One report said that the murder had been followed by the raiding and looting of farms, food barns and the setting of fire to the forests and hilly slopes damaging farm produce and the environment (Evening News, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). A man from Alavanyo also lost his life owing to the conflict in this period (Ghanaian Times, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). It was also alleged that Alavanyo people were inspecting vehicles travelling between Nkonya and Hohoe with the view to attacking Nkonya people on board (Chronicle, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004) or at the very least preventing them from travelling through Alavanyo to Hohoe (Ghanaian Times, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

On 21 April 2003, a media report said the police were unable to substantiate allegations that armed men from Nkonya had camped at Akrofu near Ho to attack the people there. Tsikata and Seini (2004) cite reports that this violence had led to the inhabitants of Akrofu fleeing their town. The rumour was that the planned attack was in retaliation for the suspicion that the people of Akrofu were giving moral and material support to the people of Alavanyo in their conflict with the Nkonya. The same report noted that

following renewed fighting in the area in February, three people died (*Joy News Online*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). The media may also be culpable of non-professionalism and have been cited for some non-factual reports made about killings and attacks in the area with the police in the Volta region coming out to deny reports of reprisal attacks said to have been carried out by the people of Alavanyo on the residents of Nkonya.

Tsikata and Seini (2004) again cited reports by the Chronicle newspaper of a letter from an Nkonya citizen to the newspapers alleging that some people engage in unprovoked skirmishes so that in the midst of the ensuing confusion they have a field day to harvest timber, bamboo, cola nuts and cocoa, fell palm trees for palm wine and also engage in the wild and ruthless looting of food crops, poultry, sheep and goat. This is supported by the MP of Biakoye, a citizen of Nkonya, who has also argued that the area's soils are rich for food and tree crops, and that disputes are usually generated around the harvesting of Odum, a very valuable timber species (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). This reference to the Odum tree, signifies a key aspect of the ethnic conflict rationalization process. As Idowu (2004) explains, ethnic conflicts stem from an irreconcilable posture with regard to what is of symbolic value to the ethnic groups concerned. Attempts to compromise any of these symbols, such as language and religion, often leads to conflict. Hence any thought or narrative that seems to suggest that the Odum, a tree of high economic value in the plains of Alavanyo and Nkonya ignite the security dilemma (Langridge, 2012) that raises uncertainties about the livelihood of the people.

In October 2012, the violence in the area took on a new dimension when what looked like ambush killings reportedly began to fester tension in the area (“Stakeholders in Alavanyo-Nkonya”, 2013). In February 2013, security personnel were deployed in the Nkonya and Alavanyo area to ward off reprisal attacks following the killing of two persons from Nkonya-Tayi (Darfah, 2013). This follows a similar event in December 2012 involving two separate shooting incidents. However, the regional minister in response to the February incident assured that there would not be any retaliation from the side of the Alavanyo people (“Calm restored in Alavanyo”, 2013).

But situations worsened in June 2013, when shocking reports emerged that the traditional leaders of the two communities blatantly took entrenched positions that they were willing to sanction violence in retaliation for perceived threats from the opposing side (“Nkonya-Alavanyo conflict worsens”, 2013). They defied the authority of the regional house of chiefs to the extent that the house of chiefs was willing to invoke stringent measures to keep them in check; deciding at certain times to hold the chiefs directly liable for any acts of aggression (“Togbe Afede warns Alavanyo-Nkonya”, 2013). This is a very worrying development but it goes to illustrate the state of the conflict process where structural differences become deep seated and then form part of the society’s culture and then manifests in overt violent manifestation of the conflict. A point of cultural and behavioural violence as modelled by Galtung (1996) in the tripod of violence types in conflict.

In October 2014, an unusual incident happened in the area. Two unidentified men, in vigilante style, opened fire on a military man who was stationed with the military detachment there in Alavanyo before making their

escape into the bush (Gadugah, 2014). The police maintained that the attack was not linked directly to the conflict and could probably be an issue of settling "personal scores". They assured the public of investigations to ascertain the real truth and the results of a promised investigation ("GAF investigates soldier shooting", 2014) are still not made public. Also in December 2014 the chiefs of the area rendered an unqualified apology to President Mahama following recent clashes in the two towns (Setordjie, 2014). With the chiefs claiming that there were other criminals involved: calling on the police to deal with miscreants among them. This hint at criminality supposes that there are people who benefit either directly or indirectly in an illicit manner from the conflict. Scholars who emphasize the economic aspects of competition theory of ethnic/racial conflict express these ideas in terms of the interplay between two types of boundaries: ethnic boundaries and productive niches (Barth, 1969). In the case of Aavanyo / Nkonya this is likely to give a scenario where the niche of economic competition overlap with criminal profiteering. Olzak (1992) explains that this happens when new groups invade another's niche, which can be fueled by in-migration, economic contraction, or upward mobility of a disadvantaged group. Conflict arises when members resist the entry of members of an ethnically distinct group into their niche.

The persistence of the conflict however seems to have left the government frustrated as officials call for show of more commitment from chiefs and residents to the course of peace (Mordy, 2014). The Deputy Interior Minister, James Agalga minced no words in voicing government's frustration. "We are not happy with the way and manner the people of Alavanyo and

Nkonya have conducted themselves. But government is not throwing its hands in despair; the Peace Council continues to prevail itself upon the warring factions to understand that the way to go is not violence” (Mordy, 2014, p. 1). Bearing in mind that government has been failed many times by the promises of peace from the chiefs, it only hints a possible lack of control from the traditional leadership or probably raises the suspicion of the role of some of the traditional chiefs secretly supporting violence.

But it seems it is not just the government that is frustrated by the intractability of this conflict. Residents of Alavanyo and Nkonya say the curfew imposed on them by government is frustrating them as well; especially their preparations for Christmas (“Review curfew for X’mas”, n.d.). Residents bemoaned their inability to prepare adequately for the Christmas holidays, saying they do not feel safe despite the military presence. The frustration also seems to have caught up with the education sector. Teaching and learning at Alavanyo in particular have been reported to be adversely affected as a result of the conflict (“Alavanyo and Nkonya conflict”, 2014). Teachers living outside the area are reporting to school late and those in the area have to take cover in their homes any time shootings begin in the area.

Even the security agencies were apparently caught up in the frustration. The issue is a real “headache” for the police (“Nkonya-Alavanyo conflict an Albatross”, 2014). The police note that the age-old feud is a security threat if not resolved urgently considering the reprisal attacks could get out of hand. The police also noted that they can only intervene to prevent the conflict from escalating to other areas but could not stop the factions from fighting. This mark of frustration is unfortunate because the state which is

supposed to be the institution to manage grievances and hopes during conflict (Azar, 1986), should not be seen as also given up hope.

The stable democratic era also saw active intervention efforts to resolve the conflict. The early part of this era was marked by extensive judicial-style committees of enquiry. In 1995, the District Chief Executives of Hohoe and Jasikan jointly appointed the Mireku Committee to inquire into and resolve the dispute. Although the Mireku Committee wrote a report and made recommendations, it has not been implemented. The Alavanyo Youth Association in 1997 called for a high powered committee to look into the dispute and resolve it once and for all, instead of waiting for hostilities to begin and arresting culprits (Letter by Kwame Dzathor, vice president, Alavanyo Youth Association appearing in the *Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

Indeed, one of the arguments made regularly by the Nkonya side has been that the courts have always ruled in their favour. Tsikata and Seini (2004) referred to a statement by Mr. Kwabena Onny, spokesperson of the Nkonya chiefs, who stated at a news conference that as far as the Nkonya chiefs were concerned, there was no land dispute in the area as it had been settled by the court of appeal in 1975. He therefore concluded that all the trouble in the area was being fomented by the Alavanyo people so that the government would intervene to enable them re-litigate (*Evening News*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

Tsikata and Seini further explain that not surprisingly, the Alavanyo side has a different position on the court decisions. They have argued that the 1913 Grunner map on which the decisions were based was not accurate, and

too small in scale, and therefore never intended as the basis for boundary demarcations. They, in turn, have cited three colonial and post-colonial court cases in support of this position (, Letter of Togbega Tsedze Atakora VII, Fiaga of Alavanyo published in Ghanaian Times as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). This position appears to have the support of the Mireku Committee which has argued that “the implementation of the court’s decision will not help to promote peace between the two traditional areas” (Mireku, quoted in letter of Togbega Tsedze Atakora, Fiaga of Alavanyo and published in the Ghanaian Times, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). However, the same committee has also noted that it did not have the power to set aside court decisions of 1959, 1970 and 1975.

It is interesting that both conflicting sides have a history behind their claim. The Nkonya’s mention migration and the Alavanyo’s mention the “Anyaa” trees. Obviously such a traditional and primordial claim cannot be resolved by a western judicial infrastructure. This is where the inadequacy of the committees of enquiry and courts lie. These enquiries can be seen as what is referred to as the “the traditional approach to constructive engagement” (Praszkie, Nowak, Coleman, 2010) in modern democratic dispensations. A “neutral” arbiter who may have little or no historical background to the conflict is brought in to resolve a conflict full historical narratives. Praszkie, Nowak and Coleman (2010) identify that using the traditional approach of tackling the core issues of such a conflict with intervention elements evoked negative feelings and attitudes among the local inhabitants.

It is not surprising therefore that these committees of enquiry did not bring satisfy the conflict actors. Tsikata and Seini (2004) note that, despite the

impasse, both sides reject the Mireku Committee recommendation that the government take over the disputed land. The Nkonya side do so on grounds that the courts have adjudicated in their favour. They demand that those committing acts of violence be brought to justice and the decisions of the courts enforced. Togbega Atakora of Alavanyo argues, for his part, that a government take-over would not address the issue of establishing the proper boundaries of the lands of the two communities (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). Kendie et al. (2014) also bemoan the failure of the judicial process to bring closure to this conflict and the frequent violent attacks on each other by the two communities has heightened tension between the Nkonyas and the Alavanyos. The researchers identified there is a general perception of official complicity in this conflict as both sides continue to suspect an invisible hand in shaping the outcome of the conflict.

A more prospective conflict resolution approach is the alternative approach (Praszkie, Nowak & Coleman, 2010) which in contrast to the traditional one focuses on altering societal dynamics. It does so by creating positive “islands” that do not initially intersect with the “mainland” of conflict. Over time, these islands may expand and become connected, thereby creating a new land of promise and hope. (Praszkie, Nowak & Coleman, 2010, p. 173). This can be done through the conflict transformation process, an action that unfortunately was truncated in 2009 when there was the plan to improve economic activity in the area through the building of a road network (“Lodonu bemoans”, 2009). This infrastructural development aimed at watering down the tensions that exist between the people of Alavanyo and Nkonya. It was called the “Jubilee Road” from Gbi-Wegbe through Alavanyo



both in the Hohoe Municipality to Nkonya-Tayi in the newly created Biakoye district. This was intended to celebrate the strides in resolving the decades old land dispute between the Nkonya and Alavanyo neighbours.

The role of the media has also been prominent. Tsikata and Seini (2004) note that long letters and rejoinders recounting the sins of each side are regularly published, with each side trying to portray the other as provocateurs and contemptuous of peace, law and order. The Ghanaian Times also published (after a two-month period) a story about a violent attack, reported to have taken place on 17 April 2003 (Tsikata & Seini, 2004). There are no clear reasons for the two-month gap between the date of the incident and the report in the newspapers. It may not be far-fetched to assume that the different factions to the conflict were actively trying to use the Ghanaian mass media to present their version of events and highlight the alleged wrong-doing of their opponents.

In the view of Tsikata and Seini (2004) perhaps the proliferation of would-be peacemaking institutions is a function of the intractable character of conflicts. They contend that the Nkonya-Alavanyo conflict continues with an ever-present danger of degenerating into violence. They further report that in 2003, the Volta Regional House of chiefs were the new agents to enter the fray of peacemaking institutions which issued a statement asking the two parties to lay down their arms and exercise restraint. In addition, the house of chiefs appointed a three-member committee under the headship of the paramount chief of the Buem Traditional Area to institute a process of reconciliation. The committee was directed to meet both factions separately with a view to ending the hostilities (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004)

In February 2003, the MP for Biakoye, Dr. Kwabena Adjei, appealed to the government to deploy soldiers to the area to “stem the tide of frequent conflicts and its attendant loss of lives” and also establish a high powered committee to investigate the conflict and define the boundaries of the two areas. This statement, made on the floor of Parliament, was challenged by the MP for Hohoe North. The Majority leader moved to stop further comments on the issue to avoid inflaming tensions (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

That same year, the Minister of the region went to Parliament at the behest of two MPs from the Volta Region to answer questions regarding the conflicts and government efforts to resolve them. It was revealed that the Volta Regional Security Committee had deployed a police-military taskforce in the Nkonya-Alavanyo area since September 2002. MPs were also invited to help with conflict resolution and held separate meetings with the chiefs and people of the two areas to find solutions to the conflict. A newspaper (*Graphic*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004) reported that eleven suspects arrested in the joint police-military operation in the Alavanyo Nkonya area for possessing locally manufactured fire arms and Indian hemp (marijuana) had been put before a Kpando Circuit court. Whilst such policing and military presence helps to deal with the behavioral manifestations of the conflict they do no deal with the structural and cultural issues of dispute as illustrated by Galtung (1996).

A mediation committee was set-up in 2005 and a road project connecting the two communities was successful in initiating a peace process that saw a cessation in hostilities. However, this project was reportedly stalled

(“Lodonu bemoans”, 2009). That report also presented views from other stakeholders like a former Regional Director for the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) who called for intermarriages to be promoted among the two sides to deepen the renewed solidarity between them (Sapati, 2009). Queenmothers from both communities have also asked for job opportunities in the area for the young people who were farming on the disputed land (“Lodonu bemoans”, 2009). Despite all this progress, the peace-building process is reported to have suffered some setbacks at the lack of commitment to resource the mediation committee set up to resolve the land dispute. Members of parliament believe that this is partly to blame for the sporadic communal violence in the area (“Parliament prompts”, 2013).

In the middle of 2009, the peace process received some good news when the youth also pledged their unflinching support to the peace process at a consultative meeting of stakeholders (“Nkonya and Alavanyo”, 2009). They pledged their full support for the peace process and said they would not allow anybody to destroy the calm they enjoyed and how they did almost everything together. This progress was dealt a huge blow later in 2009 when mediation broke-down between the factions after one side pulled out of the peace process to further consult with their compatriots after the land in contention was surveyed and mapped. The field responses gathered under this study seem to suggest that if nothing different is done in this mediation process, we may not see it resumed (at least one party may not come back) as is evident from the narrative of one key respondent from the Nkonya side below:

“I am not sure we will go back to that mediation committee if they continue with the way they do their things...Yes. If they continue

asking us to set aside what the court has already decided and give away what belongs to us” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

The Alavanyo-Nkonya Peace Committee (ANPC) of North America, at an emergency meeting held in Toronto, Canada, on March 10, 2013 appealed to the chiefs and people of Nkonya and Alavanyo to exercise maximum restraint in the land conflict. The ANPC was formed in 2006 by some concerned citizens from the two traditional areas but resident in North America to serve as a unified mouthpiece on issues pertaining to their respective traditional areas and also foster friendship and good neighbourliness, both at home and abroad but fears and uncertainty still persisted among the youth in the area (Appiah, 2013). In April 2013 it was reported that the Alavanyo Youth Association appealed to President John Dramani Mahama to personally intervene in the protracted Alavanyo Nkonya crisis. It is unclear however, what level of involvement this attracted from the presidency but it was clear that the peace concerns were mounting. Promoting such norm-diffusing external actors (Vandeginste, 2015) to pressurise negotiators towards peaceful resolution could prove to be very effective.

It will also be good to intensify what the UNDP started in 2010, when they took a gender-sensitive initiative to bring together women from both communities as a mark of the commemoration of the progress of peace (“Nkonya and Alavanyo women”, 2010). This initiative was patronised by the two paramount queen mothers in charge of the two communities and they pledged their continued support for dialogue, in resolving all other outstanding issues, relating to the land dispute. Using personalities outside the key

protagonists of the conflict can be stepped up to pressurise resolution from conflict actors.

On June 29, 2013, following threats of violence by the chiefs of the feuding communities, a peace accord brokered by government and a working committee after a three-day negotiation was reportedly signed by the feuding parties. Government expressed hope in it to prevent the two sides from using violence to settle their differences. On June 30, 2013, the protracted pockets of violence attracted the attention of the house of parliament to this conflict. The then Majority Leader, Dr. Benjamin Kumbuor, called on mediators of the conflict to look at those he called ethnic entrepreneurs, since they tend to stoke the fires of conflicts for selfish interests (“Parliament prompts”, 2013). This was followed by calls for peace by members for parliament with oversight over the communities in conflict (“MP calls for peaceful”, 2013). They admonished both parties to cease hostilities and return to mediation, bemoaning that monies released by government for managing the conflict could have served infrastructural development purposes. Meanwhile, the police have also been very robust with their efforts to manage the conflict especially the institution of 6:00 pm to 6:00 am curfews and arresting those who breach them (“Nkonya and Alavanyo conflict”, 2013).

In July 2014, a Civil Society Group called the Youth for Peace and Development Africa (YPDA), inaugurated an Alavanyo faction of a new peace negotiation committee (Kwakofi, 2014). The team was made up of ten persons including sub-chiefs, elders, women and a few youths in the community. They claim the new committee was necessary because most of the old members have passed on, leaving the committee largely dormant

(Kwakofi, 2014). This development was corroborated in the field narrative and highlight increased role of the youth in the conflict; the effects, both positively and negatively as explained in the discussion under the dynamics of the conflict.

At the end of August 2014 the Minister of the Interior Mark Wayongo, on the advice of the Volta Regional Security Council and by the Executive Instrument (EI) renewed the curfew imposed on Alavanyo and Nkonya Townships with effect from Friday 29th August, 2014 (“Interior ministry imposes curfew”, 2014). The releases issued by the Minister reiterated that, there was a ban on all persons in the two towns and its environs from carrying arms, ammunition or any offensive weapon, and any person found with any arms or ammunition will be arrested and prosecuted. This is a clear irony to an earlier assurance in March 2014 by the out-going Minister of the Volta region to lift the curfew (Osam, 2014). As much as the curfew is helping to stem violence in the area, it is important to note that there is a strong feeling that these would not solve the structural problems and may actually create more problems for the state and the people (Bombande, 2015; Borkor, 2015).

In January 2015, the clergy in the Volta region charged the two feuding factions in the Alavanyo and Nkonya townships to embrace peace in 2015 (“Alavanyo-Nkonya should be”, 2015). Subsequently, the interest of the state in the conflict was taken to another level when the vice-president got involved with fresh initiatives to end the conflict with the Paramount chief of Akpini Traditional Area, Okpekpewuokpe Togbe Dagadu VIII, being the mediator (“Veep starts process”, 2015). Meanwhile the Volta Regional Minister, Madam Helen Adjoa Ntoso who accompanied the vice-president on

this initiative regretted that the people had made empty the apology she earlier rendered on their behalf to President John Dramani Mahama. She also admonished them to be mindful of some people who were exploiting the situation for their selfish ends (“Veep starts process”, 2015). The Vice President on his part at a meeting with the chiefs in Kpando re-iterated the governments frustration that: “The President is unhappy that after the assurances that were given to him, after the apology that was sent to him, which he accepted in good faith, we still are in a conflict mood....The cost of the conflict is now getting rather too high for us” (“Mahama unhappy”, 2015) and further warned that the government was no longer going to tolerate the violence in the area.

The visit of the Vice-president also came with the apparent robust government decision to re-locate the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) firing range and some other operational divisions at Bundase in the Greater Accra Region to the Nkonya-Alavanyo area in the Volta Region (“Military moves shooting range”, 2015). A permanent military training school is also expected to be established between Alavanyo and Nkonya in the Biakoye District of the Volta Region by end of the year. Even though the military installations at Bundase are being relocated to make way for construction of an airport, the choice of the Nkonya-Alavanyo appears to have been chosen because of the protracted conflict in the area.

This military decision amidst the imposed curfew has drawn doubts from some security experts about the viability of such a move in bringing lasting resolution to the conflict. Dr. Michael Borkor, in his analysis of the situation published online (Borkor, 2015) raised points from his opinion. First,

he argues that the decision to move the shooting range installation to that area suggests that the aspect of ‘jaw-jawing’ is over and done away with suggesting an era of ‘intimidation’. He states that the decision regarding this military ‘show-of-force’ may serve transient purposes but won’t help resolve the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict. Emmanuel Bombande, of the West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP) recently asserted that the curfew could be counterproductive. (Bombande, 2015).

### **The Temporal and Spatial Dynamics of the Conflict**

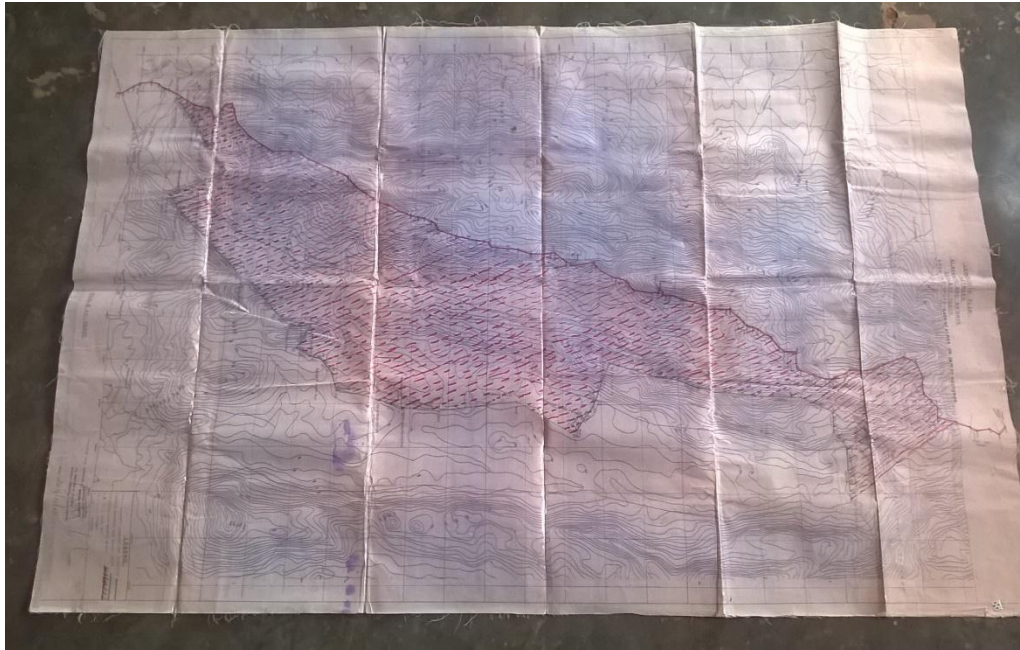
The dynamics of the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict will be discussed here under the various thematic concepts that have been reviewed under the literature. This section seeks to discuss how the various circumstances surrounding this conflict fit into the literature on conflict dynamics. The study found that the dynamics of this conflict can be analyzed from various dimensions as discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

### **The role of land in sustaining and expanding the conflict**



**Figure 4: The Grunner map of 1913 showing the colonial boundaries between six ethnic groups (Source: Fieldwork, Penu, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)**





**Figure 5: The re-demarcated map of 2007 supervised by the mediation committee showing the ten-square-mile marked land area under dispute. (Source: Fieldwork, Penu, 28 April 2015)**

The respondents were asked whether they thought that land was still relevant to the conflict and what the significance of land was.

One respondent said:

“It will interest you to note that most of the killing these days don’t happen on the disputed land; but in people’s houses. So it is difficult to say that the land is the cause of the conflict. Other issues have come. We can say the conflict has changed. But, we have to be careful. What do we report these days? Killing, destruction of farm lands and the rest. So if these happen outside the disputed land then the actors are going to be ‘enlarged’. So when other new communities are affected they will also position themselves and see the others as people in conflict with them”

(Field interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

Another said:

“Those days the killings were on the land. But now Ntchumuru, Asakyere, Kedjebi and the other border towns are now involved. They say all Nkonya’s are Nkonya. This is why they extended the fight to the other communities even beyond the Grunner boundary to Ntcumuru, Asakyere and Ahenkro. So it is expanding. You see the map that was developed by the mediation committee is not the same as the Grunner map (figure 4). Some of the communities were left out. For instance, where will Santrokofi be on the new map drawn by the mediation committee, if they say we share boundaries with Alavanyo all the way there” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Another also said:

“Yes. Land is still the issue. Because, someone believes he gave a piece of land to the Alavanyo people. In the beginning the fighting was about encroachment of land and so the fighting was on the land in that bush. But today someone has been indoctrinated to believe that the Nkonyas gave Alavanyo land. There is the feeling that the Alavanyos want to get more land. If that is the case, let us drive them away all together” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

And yet another also had this to say:

“Specifically this one is about a dispute over a particular piece of land that was not solved. But unfortunately this has now degenerated into vengeance mentality. Somebody has a dear one killed and wanted to retaliate but did not see the perpetrator so

killed someone else or even more. So now hearts are on fire and they say their family members have been killed. So it is land dispute that has escalated.” (Field interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

The responses above show mixed reactions as to how significant land is, as the cause of the dispute in contemporary times. There was a consensus that the dispute over a portion of land (disputed area shown in Figure 5) is the structural cause of the conflict. Coupled with the Grunner map of 1913 (Figure 4), the dispute has primarily been about disputed land boundaries. There is also a consensus from respondents that the dispute that started over a small piece of land between Nkonya-Tayi and Alavanyo-Kpeme has now spread to many of the other Nkonya and Alavanyo communities, with hints of retaliatory actions. Based on the map shown, there is the possibility that this land dispute, if not well managed, may spread to other communities (Santrokofi, Gbi, Bowiri, Akpafu) in the future. Especially because the process of mediation and judicial proceedings have brought up the map for demarcation and re-demarcation many times on the mediation committee.

Hence from the above narratives, the study concludes that land constitutes a critical component of the basic needs of the actors in the conflict and hence it is a contending factor to the recurrence of the conflict. But it was also gathered that the dispute over land only serves as a structural cause of the conflict whilst other issues like vengeance, bitterness, poisoned emotional narratives and unintended targets of the killing stoke the violence in a similar manner that Volkan (1997) observed with the Holocaust. Volkan explains that when this happens, the emotional pain is imported as part of the aggrieved

group's identity. Hence this new identity, and not land, was the reason for its expansion to other communities.

### **Interest of conflict parties during mediation**

Respondents were asked about progress and challenges of the mediation process. The narratives from the field interview below highlight how thorny the mediation process has been. An Nkonya respondent said:

“The mediation committee asked us to suggest two proposals for resolving the conflict. We said, let's abide by the boundaries of the Grunner Map of 1913 which is internationally recognised with copies in some European countries. These people were the ones who colonised Africa. Two, we should abide by the court rulings and the rule of law” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

An Alavanyo respondent:

“The court verdict they are relying on, someone needs to draw their attention and tell them that it was for some individuals and that should not affect the other areas under the traditional paramountcy. It was 6 people from Kpeme and a few from Tayi” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

In 2009, mediation broke-down between the factions after one side pulled out of the peace process to further consult with their compatriots after the land in contention was surveyed and mapped. The narratives from the field interviews highlighted the circumstances that led to the breakdown of the mediation in 2009.

The Alavanyo side explain that:

“In that mediation, we had all been schooled to understand that using the gun will not solve the problem. The youth even said that they were going lock us (the paramountcy) up until we brokered peace. But during the process, when we were just about to sign the agreement, an Nkonya youth took his phone, went out and came back with the story that Alavanyo people had entered Nkonya and were killing people. I called back home and the bishops from the various sides also called back home. The feedback they got was that there was no attack going on. Even one of my elders said there was an Nkonya woman selling fish where he was standing. But this is how everything was scattered. That’s how somebody used 5 minutes to scatter what we have used 5 years to achieve” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

The Nkonya side also present their version of the story:

“We were then asked to produce our proposals as to how we think the conflict can be curtailed. The Alavanyo’s said two things (which meant the same). The “so-called” disputed land (10 mile square) should be divided into two and shared amongst us. Second they said that government should take over the whole land, establish a job that will benefit the two sides. This is the same sharing. We said, let’s abide by the boundaries of the Grunner Map of 1913 which is internationally recognised with copies in some European countries. After we did this, the chairman of the mediation committee said we were taking them back (that we had

taken an entrenched position). And I was surprised to hear them say that we should not be slaves to court ruling. This brought some unease in the room. So we suspected that the mediation committee influenced the Alavanyos to bring that proposal. That's why we boycotted the mediation and we are not willing to go back since they are not willing to listen to our side. Because they said they are not willing to go into history; how can you solve this problem without going into history?" (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

Such narratives hint at the security dilemma mentioned by Langridge (2012). This dilemma is with respect to economic security and the dilemma that arises due to the fear of losing historical identity tied to inheritance. Especially because the Nkonya identify themselves with the disputed land in question and this can even be deduced from the fact that the name 'Tayi' (Nkonya-Tayi) is drawn from a tree that is of significant economic value to the Tayi people and that can be found in the forests nearby.

The parties have maintained entrenched positions, but it is critical to note that different members have walked in and out of the mediation process and its judicial antecedent and these people have had different experiences with the conflict which makes them approach the issues differently. This is what Coleman et al. (2008) referred to as a 'complex psychosocial process' in relation to constructive engagement in mediation.

It is important also to note that from the onset of mediation efforts in 2005, parties have moved in and out of the mediation and other conflict resolution platforms. The Alavanyo mainly cited traditional rhetoric and supported the re-demarcated disputed 10 square mile land map (Figure 5) to

back their claims whilst the Nkonya have mainly cited post-independence court rulings and map (Figure 4).

Mediation as a reconciliatory process helps in building trusts and understanding historical motives and Coleman et al. (2008) seem to provide a more optimistic view of its role in intractable conflicts. They explain that this approach has been a useful starting point for understanding historical motives, but has limited explanatory power under conditions of intractable conflict especially because of the reality of conflict dynamics.

First of all, both (or at least one) of the parties have taken entrenched positions. The Nkonya have concluded that all the trouble in the area was being fomented by the Alavanyo people so that the government would intervene to enable them re-litigate and that past court verdicts in their (Nkonya) favour have to be honoured. The Alavanyo have also taken an entrenched position that the Grunner map which formed the basis for the court order was not accurate, too small in scale, and therefore never intended as the basis for boundary demarcations. Kendie et al. (2014) identified that both communities have maps from colonial times showing their land boundaries, but these maps vary and contradict each other.

The contention between the pre and post-independence justifications in this feud highlight the conflict between traditional rhetoric and formal colonially inherited institutions like the Grunner map of 1913 and the judicial courts. In fact, there is even allusion to the metaphysical when Kendie et al. (2014) report that parties perceive the involvement of an invisible hand in shaping the outcome of the conflict.

### Overlapping and emerging identities

“When there is conflict, there are people who want to benefit. Because those days if you were brave enough you could go there and tap palm wine or log there without anyone knowing” (Field interview, 29th April 2015)

As the narrative indicates, stakeholders started hinting at criminal rather than ethnic motivations for the violence in the conflicts. This is evident from a letter by the chief of Alavanyo referring to an incident of killing and alleging that a large Indian hemp farm was also discovered during the exercise (Letter of Togbega Tsedze Atakora VII, Fiaga of Alavanyo Traditional Area published in the *Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004). Another incident in 2001 of two Alavanyo men who were illegally cutting timber with a chain-saw in the Nkonya- Alavanyo Forest Reserve/Togo Plateau Forest Reserve who were attacked by gunmen, resulting in the death of one of the illegal loggers also points to the criminal undertones. It is possible that these criminal activities became the motivations for the attacks and that they had nothing to do with ethnic animosity. There are also allusions to unprovoked skirmishes so that in the midst of the ensuing confusion, criminals may have a field day to harvest timber, bamboo, cola nuts and cocoa, fell palm trees for palm wine and also engage in the wild and ruthless looting of food crops, poultry, sheep and goats (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

Aside this, others seemed to have used the cover of the conflict to stockpile arms. This includes leaders of society like the Omanhene of the Nkonya Traditional Area, Nana Kofi Okoto I in whose room three locally manufactured cap guns were retrieved, (*Graphic*, as cited in Tsiakata & Seini,



2004) as well as the police and military personnel interception of a large cache of firearms and ammunition being escorted from Alavanyo-Deme towards Alavanyo-Kpeme reportedly for ambush attacks.

With the onset of the stable democratic era, stakeholders in this conflict started raising concerns that the perpetrators of violence were more of criminals and conflict entrepreneurs than acts of ethnic grievance. This raises the possibility that, the media and other interventionists in this conflict may still be seeing the insecurity in the area as a result of ethnic tension when it may in fact be a case of criminality and conflict profiteering. This is the dilemma of 'emerging identities' as argued by Yancey et al. (1976) that arise in conflicts over the course of time.

From the field interviews, it was clear that the identity of the actual killers was not known because none had been caught and no one had volunteered information towards a suspect's arrest. Besides, these killings mostly happened in the bush and this is what fuels suspicions that either side (Alavanyo / Nkonya) is the one committing the crime. Nevertheless, all respondents agree the criminal issues are rife and need attention. It may however be important to note that one of the state institutions that have been perceived to be lax, are the police (Tsikata & Seini, 2004) with stakeholders calling for them to pay more attention to the criminality underpinning the violence (Setordjie, 2014). The respondents believe that the inability of the police to make arrests following killings is a key issue that fuels the urge for reprisal killings. Meanwhile, other respondents believe that this deficiency by the police is due to the obstruction or lack of support from the parties involved since they are not willing to give up perpetrators of killings.

But it became clear also that the community inhabitants from both sides have a role to play in helping differentiate crime from the conflict. As one of the respondents said:

“With the criminality, unless the people themselves own up the killers, then they become parties to it. But if they shield them, then it is difficult to know what is criminal and what part of the interethnic violence is” (Field interview, 29th April 2015)

Another twist of the identity overlaps is that perceived criminal elements attack people who turn out eventually to be their own family members. At other times, parties interest or family affiliations on the other side make them resist attacks on them. This is a very classical case of identity influenced by the rational interpretation of circumstances prevailing. For instance, one of the respondents explains:

“Sometimes the residents of Alvanyo-Deme and Alvanyo-Wudidi restrain or prevent the criminals from Alvanayo when they try to stop them from causing harm to Nkonya people or their farms. When this happens sometimes they fight their own people and kill them and then it is alleged that because it was an Alavanyo who died, the killers are Nkonya. I am very sure about this. I have encountered that before”. (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

The above narrative illustrates how conflicting parties may identify themselves differently under different circumstances. It also highlights how stereotyping can pose a problem during conflict because of the emerging identities (Yancey et al., 1976); creating a dilemma for conflict managers since it makes it difficult to assess their real cause and motivations for

violence or dilemma in identifying perpetrators or victims of violence. Emergent identities may be positive or negative for conflict management because they could be a result of a shift in identity (Ruanne & Todd, 1997) that makes it difficult to frame the distinction between attackers and victims. Under such circumstance they could play down ethnic alienation to create friendly competition whilst at the same time they could also become spoilers of the conflict management and peace building process because of the dilemma they create for mediators and other conflict managers.

### **Ethno-political mobilization and intervention efforts**

The study found that there has been low ethnic mobilisation attended by many intervention efforts. The respondents acknowledged the significance of the conflict management and resolution processes that have attended the conflict till now.

An Nkonya respondent said;

“You see; I always say that the courts have done what there is to be done. The court ruling is all that we need. The land is for the Nkonyas” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

An Alavanyo respondent said:

“I have always said that we have to go back to the mediation committee. This is something I have always been advocating for. That is the only way we can peacefully solve this problem” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

From the responses above, it can be gathered that whilst the Alavanyo side lauded the efforts of the mediation committee, the Nkonya side were

supportive of the judicial court rulings that have been handed out. It is clear that at every point in time, there have been a process that is appreciated by at least one of the conflicting parties and this obviously has a bearing on watering down frustrations of conflicting parties. After all, whether or not the politics of individual identity turn into violence will depend on how institutions work (Crawford, 1998).

Political mobilization is important during ethnic competition and interactions (Olzak, 1992; Tolsma et. al., 2008). The Alavanyo/Nkonya conflict has seen relatively low ethnic mobilization. Devastating ethnic conflicts are usually marked by huge ethnic mobilizations (Ruanne & Todd, 1996). The higher the extent of ethnic mobilization, the more devastating the violence and destruction. However, this conflict, despite all the tense moments that have surrounded it has not generated into a full-blown war. This may be attributable to the democratic dispensation in Ghana that provide avenues for peaceful conflict resolution. Hence from the field interviews, the role political entrepreneurship in this conflict was almost silent and it is not far-fetched to allude this to the governance environment and the work of institutions that have attended this conflict.

It is worthy to note that from the trend analysis conducted on this conflict, intervention efforts have at all periods been more than the acts of violence. This therefore waters down the frustration of parties but not resolved the conflict (Dixon, 1994; Prazauskas, 1991). As Morris (2001) has also hinted, there is a connection between political leadership and institutions and the two are the filter through which all other causes of conflict have to pass.

Olzak (1992) and Tolsma et al. (2008) have both identified that political mobilization is key in ethnic competition and interactions within the political domain spark protest and possible violence in conflict zones. This political dimension to ethnic competition may not necessarily refer to partisan politics but any sort of competition for leadership. Ethnic groups mobilize and launch onslaughts in response to fears of insecurity or counter plans by the opposing side. This has been seen in the cases of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. It is therefore unusual that the fears of reported mass ambush campaigns (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004) did not lead to large scale overt ethnic clashes. This supports the belief that the ethnic nature of this conflict has been watered down over the years, or that the process of political mobilization along ethnic lines has not been very prominent. It is important to assess why this is so. The difference could be in "the unit of measurement of the locale" (Tolsma et al., 2008) at the neighbourhood level, where local political decisions are forged and residents' social networks are the densest. The long co-existence of the Alavanyo / Nkonya groups may have created social networks that produce the unit measurement of local so fine that it overrides ethnic socialisation. It could also be because of the strong democratic structures that exist in Ghana and for that matter the Volta region. This democratic predisposition creates room for political bargaining and compromise between ethnic subgroups (Prazauskas, 1991) and it also equips the state with the means for diffusing conflict situations at an early stage before they have opportunity to escalate to armed violence (Dixon, 1994).

### **The conflict resolution approach and the protraction of the conflict**

In February 2003, there were discussions about a military takeover of the land under dispute. Despite this disagreement, it was revealed that the Volta Regional Security Committee had deployed a police-military taskforce in the Nkonya-Alavanyo area since September 2002 (Tsikata & Seini, 2004). Also in 2015, the state decided to move military training facilities to the area (“Military moves shooting range”, 2015). The study found that this is not really an easy solution as suggested by the responses below.

One respondent said:

“Military detachment won’t solve the problem. Because, are they going to protect all boundaries for everyone to visit their farms in peace; also will they allow us to tend our cocoa farms? This means that they are taking the land and we would not accept it. If the land is used by government for mutual benefits, it means that we are being cheated.” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

Another also said:

“It is assumed that government could take up any land with resources. But how does government take over land that has laws around it. Will there be compensation for owners? Who will be compensation? And how much? If government can enforce their takeover, why then can they not enforce the decision in our favour? What about the families who live there?]. If there is a takeover, then government should be careful otherwise there could be inflammation of passions” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

The study notes that the military takeover, if it ever materialises would not be a smooth process but would have its own challenges (Bombande, 2015; Borkor, 2015). As it could be interpreted as the government taking sides with the Alavanyo to deprive the Nkonya of 'their' land. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore the key role that the peacekeepers have played in de-escalating the conflict, an action that Galtung (1996) argues is a key step in the peace process.

Based on Galtung's (1996) model for peace, the progression of violence from structural through cultural to behavioural needs to be reversed in dealing with conflict. Hence the management of violence should have given way for transformation of attitudes and lasting resolution. However, it seems that the Alavanyo / Nkonya conflict has received an inverse approach to its management. It begun with the courts and committees of enquiry and moved to conflict transformation (2005-2009). Now there seems to be a shifted focus the adoption of a mixed method of military detachment interspersed with high-level mediation. It is also interesting to note that whilst there have been concerns about the use of military intervention to deter violence, the government has gone ahead to deploy a military detachment to the area under contention.

As has been discussed under the challenges of the judicial process, it may have been better if mediation or other Alternative Dispute Mechanisms (ADM) had been used to start the process towards reconciliation at least before it got to the Supreme Court (SC). The attempt, during mediation, to transform the conflict by introducing mutual infrastructural development for people of Alavanyo and Nkonya was positive. But the incomplete process

created setbacks for progress in conflict transformation. For example, the ‘Jubilee Road’ from Gbi-Wegbe through Alavanyo both in the Hohoe to Nkonya- Tayi in the newly created Biakoye district was intended to celebrate the strides in resolving the decades old land dispute until the project was reportedly stalled (“Lodonu bemoans”, 2009).

### **Use of the judicial process and its challenges**

The field interviews clearly echoed the difficulties that the court decision had posed to a reconciliatory resolution of the conflict. Most of the respondents were of the view that the court decision had set a very high non-malleable standard that has entrenched positions so far. In explaining this, one of the respondents as stated below:

“There have been some attempts to resolve this conflicts through the law court. This has not been able to resolve the conflict. There is a hurdle with mediation and facilitation because to what extent can you go to get people discuss issues that have been decided by the courts? That is what makes this conflict difficult to resolve. We are supposed to respect the rule of the court. But that decision of the court is not helping matters because the communities have to live side by side hence the need for other approaches”. (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

Another respondent explained how the inadequacies of the court led to mediation:

“This conflict has seen court rulings until Supreme Court ruling. We have a problem in Ghana: so many laws. Enforcement is a



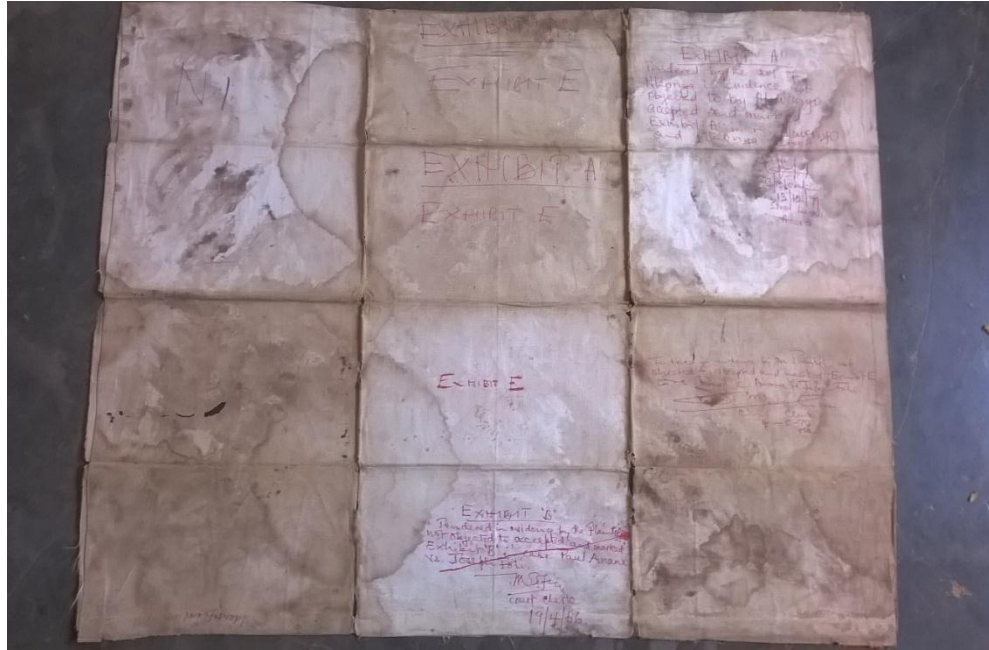
problem. If Supreme Court ruling had been upheld and enforced at the beginning, then the other party may have sought a remedy at another judicial level. But here in this case, those who say they have the ruling, when they go there they go and die” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

An Nkonya respondent took the position further to rule out reconciliation:

“We think that people’s conception about mediation being win-win would not help the matter. We gave them land to settle and they have no right to push us off the land”. We don’t need any reconciliation with Alavanyo people. The courts have decided” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Such narrative point to an obvious fact that the court ruling has become an ominous wand that has become the bane of effective mediation. There is always the case of a party coming to the mediation table with the ‘judicial standard’ in mind.

The fact that the courts were used to decide this case in the early stages presents and lot of difficulty to any other process; such as mediation, which is more reconciliatory. Bearing in mind that court proceedings are meant to bring final resolution, they should have been the last resort. This is because structural differences are the last issues to be dealt with (Galtung, 1996). The court decision has set a standard that is difficult to amend and the strict, non-flexible, nature of the judicial adjudication makes it difficult to accommodate the principles of reconciliation rather than the winner takes all affair.



**Figure 6: Marked court exhibit of the Grunner map of 1913**

(Source: Fieldwork, Penu, 28 April 2015)

The judicial process can be blamed for the non-accommodating posture of conflicting parties and has made reconciliation difficult. For instance, whilst the Mireku committee is of the opinion that "the implementation of the court's decision will not help to promote peace between the two traditional areas" (Mireku, quoted in letter of Togbega Tsedze Atakora, Fiaga of Alavanyo and published in the *Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004), the same committee has also noted that it did not have the power to set aside the court's decisions. Tsikata and Seini note that the multiplicity of institutions and the Mireku committee's comment about its powers in relation to court decisions raises the question of the status of the different institutional efforts to solve the conflict – the courts, the committee, the chiefs, the police and army. The question is pertinent in the sense that these are the institutions regularly called upon to resolve the conflict. It is not surprising therefore that Kendie et al. (2014) bemoans the failure of the

judicial process to bring closure to this conflict as responsible for persisting tensions.

It is also noteworthy that, it seems the court decision has already set a standard of expectations from either side. As Tsikata and Seini (2004) have noted, the plethora of interventionists have muddied the efforts towards resolution. The court is expected to be the last resort for such a socio-cultural dispute because the courts would usually arrive at final determinations of cases and have limited room for review or incorporating all the cultural nuances that cannot be solved through the strict court regiment. In this case however, the conflict seems to have seen court adjudication before other processes were employed. Efforts like the Volta regional house of chiefs' appointment of a three-member committee in 2003 under the headship of the paramount chief of the Buem Traditional Area to institute a process of reconciliation might have served better as the first steps to resolution. (*Ghanaian Times*, as cited in Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

### **Institutional change and peace-building**

The respondents during the field interviews gave mixed opinions about the institutional changes and their impact on the dynamics of the conflict. Whilst a majority of the respondents (four) felt that the institutions (governments, committees of enquiry and mediation committee) were well oiled to withstand any stress in changes over time others (two) still felt there was some effect. The responses revealed that institutions have had mixed success at playing the key roles expected of governance institutions as the

avenues for toning down frustrations and the filter through which causes of this conflict pass (Azar, 1986; Morris, 2001).

One of the respondents said:

“Within this conflict I would say that we have nothing changing with the teams from the parties. Maybe for the security forces it may happen during transfer, but there is debriefing and they have to come with an open mind. As for change in government, I would say the structure of mediation makes it difficult to bring in politics. Even those to constitute the team had been approved by both sides. President Kuffuor (of the NPP) set up the mediation team and the NDC continued to finance the process. I would only say it was unfortunate that the mediation became a fiasco because we targeted the wrong people but it had nothing to do with institutional change” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Meanwhile another respondent felt that there had been some effect, if not completely.

“Yes institutional change affects the process. Those who stay and understand the process are transferred and this affects the process. For instance, the first Alavanyo chief before this one had accepted the court ruling and had even sent people here with wine to atone tenancy. But the problem started when this current one took over when his father died in 1983. Also some of the policemen who were willing to tell the truth, we only heard they had been transferred. Even the former regional minister was also doing well.

Just one day we heard he had been transferred. They have brought a woman; what can she do”? (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Another respondent had this to say:

“I can’t say there has been any spectacular effect of change of government or institution on this. Some people feel that when NPP was in power the conflict was abating and it’s worsening under NDC” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

This particular point is interesting to note. This is because in the narratives from both conflicting parties. The names of three prominent members of the National Democratic Congress (NDC); two from Alavanyo and one from Nkonya were perceived to have had a bearing on the conflict; either from their action or inaction. In this respect therefore the subtle role of politics in the ongoing conflict can be detected, even though not significantly highlighted by respondents.

There is even the contemplation of further administrative partitioning of the Volta region as this narrative suggests:

“Some of us are thinking that the Volta region should be divided into two. So we have the Guan/Akan and the Ewe. So that when they are fighting us, others up here can also help us. Because all the Ewes are helping them. But it is so political that we don’t want to mention that but someday if things continue this way, it may come up” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

This is identity politics and shows that the ramifications of this conflict are not only relevant in present governance of the areas in question, but also for is effective and unified governance in the future. This identity politics

when encouraged or allowed to fester will lead to an observation like that of Gati (2008) where the interaction between the state and the local semi-traditional institutions will become sources of conflict than cooperation in the Ghanaian society, defeating the purposes of decentralisation as intended for collaboration rather than conflict. On the other hand, this identity politics can be channelled by the state into a peaceful political competition as long as they can make credible commitments to shape and uphold agreements made among the culturally defined political actors (Crawford, 1998).

As already stated under the trend analysis (in the first section of this chapter), since the beginning of this conflict in 1923, there have been different government regimes (interplay between democratic and military rule). There have also been changes in civilian governments since 1992, including changes in other things like district demarcations. It is expected that these changes may have a bearing on the progress of the conflict and conflict management process (Blagojevic, 2009). Whilst majority of the respondents did not identify any adverse effect of these changes on the conflict, others also felt that things were better under certain governments than others.

### **Generational turn-over of community members and peace**

The study found that the youth from both sides are significant and could be considered as both an attractor and a divider depending on the actions they take within the community. This is what is discussed under this section. For starters, some of the respondents were youthful and were well versed in the narratives of old events.

For example, one peace facilitator stated that:

“The youth are not happy with the way things are now. But it is usually the youth who are blamed for the killings. The youth are diverse have different interests, some have moved on and are doing different things without the land. So there is a section of youth not interested but it is not all of them who are less interested. There are those who think they have to hold on with the struggle.”

(Field interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

Another respondent explained how the youth became attractors and dividers of the conflict mediation process at the same time.

“In that mediation, we had all been schooled to understand that using the gun will not solve the problem. The youth even said that they were going to lock us (the paramountcy) up until we brokered peace. But during the process, when we were just about to sign the agreement, an Nkonya youth took his phone, went out and came back with the story that Alavanyo people had entered Nkonya and were killing people. It turned out not to be so but this scattered the mediation.” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

In July 2014, the Youth for Peace and Development Africa set up a new peace negotiation team including sub-chiefs, elders, women and a few youths in the community. They claim the new committee was necessary because most of the old members have passed on, leaving the committee largely dormant (Kwakofi, 2014). It will be helpful to know how changes in negotiation committee have impacted the process.

Both the formal and informal propaganda socialisation processes also keep stoking the fire. This phenomenon illustrates the concept of ‘Chosen Trauma’ (Volkan, 1997) referring to specific experiences that symbolize a group’s deepest threats and fears through feelings of helplessness and victimization. The narrative below illustrates how the chosen trauma is being transferred to the young children within the community:

“When the children are playing you see them carrying sticks to defend themselves. Now children are used to it. It is not good. My maths teacher from Hohoe taught me what I know about our land issue. He told me it belonged to us and that the Hohoe people asked the Nkonyas not to give the land to Alavanyo” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

The sight of children acting out warfare by carrying sticks as weapons hints at an impression of hostility gradually being etched on the minds of the younger generation. The question of whether generational turn-over may water down the tensions between the two communities received mixed reactions. Whilst the respondents hoped that over time these tensions would be eroded. Others were sceptical about such prospects.

“I can only hope that one day this conflict would end. Like Nigeria and Cameroon; because the truth came out.” With us, the generations that come will think about retaliating. Now all the youth know what is happening, they know their lives are in danger. So it will be difficult to see that this (conflict) would stop. The curfew is there but we are not assured that we would be safe when we sleep. The children are growing up and for some of them,



their siblings were killed and their heads taken off; till today, no sign of them (the heads)” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Another said:

“I can’t predict if it would end. But I have that feeling that during my time, I will be able to solve it so that my predecessor won’t inherit this” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

One respondent used the argument of faith as basis for believing that peace could prevail in the future:

“As a man of faith I believe that we can resolve the conflict. I don’t think all avenues have been exhausted. It’s difficult to know whether generational change may make things better or worse. Because the people are so much connected. Marriages and other family relationships make people even defy the danger of going to the other land. For instance, the short path between the two communities, someone was killed there and the other side swore that let any person use this place. However, they were helped to reverse this by the mediation committee. But the vocabulary being passed on to younger people is poisoning the minds of the young ones. So the minds of children will grow whatever is fed into it. With these killing all broadcast and children hearing it, what sort of society are we building? Because the demonization and suspicions have become too much but we hope the people themselves will decarbonise their minds about each other.” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

This narrative shows that the spirituality and culture could serve as a very important fabric of the societies in conflict. These elements are very important for understanding the structurally and culturally motivated actions being taken by the actors (Galtung, 1996)

Another respondent said:

“Violence stopping? I am not sure. No matter the efforts, there will be people who would not accept peace. So it will be deception to say there won't be conflict. What we hope is that at the end of the day, a bigger majority would be able to mend their relationship”  
(Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

From the above narratives, it is observed that the relay of ‘poisoned’ narratives risks raising tensions in future generations and thereby preventing the peaceful fortunes of generational turn over. Clearly, the respondents from the field interviews lamented the relay of ‘poisoned; oral histories that is feared to have the potential to harden the hearts of the younger generation to continue the struggle and the killing. Also it seems the youth have risen to the forefront of mediation processes in contemporary times and this is probably because the old protagonists of this conflict seem to be passing away. Such an emergence of new faces and forces to the conflict may be expected to elicit apathy from community members, state officials and stakeholders involved in its management. Hence the youth play the role of both attractor and divider. But this notion seems to be missed.

In 2008, the youth from both sides came to the limelight in assuring the state that they will be committed to peace and in April 2013 it was reported that the Alavanyo Youth Association appealed to President John Dramani

Maharna to personally intervene in the protracted Alavanyo-Nkonya crisis. In July 2014, a Civil Society Group (CSG) called the Youth for Peace and Development in Africa, inaugurated an Alavanyo faction of a new peace negotiation committee.

Over time, this generational turn-over could also breed frustration and apathy that has the potential of dousing the ‘flames’ of violence. As one party to the conflict said:

“We are fed up. We have not planned to fight and we are being forced to do what we have not intended to do. But now we are used to it” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Officials of government and the police have at various times expressed frustration at the protraction of the conflict. At some point the police have even been reported to have tagged the conflict as an albatross on their necks (“Nkonya-Alavanyo conflict an albatross”, 2014). At the level of the presidency, the vice president also expressed frustration at the case (“Mahama unhappy”, 2015; Mordy, 2014). Even though the response of those interviewed did not explicitly state loss of interest in the conflict, there were statements that smacked frustration such as this from a respondent from one of the conflict parties:

“It is not our intention to fight but we are forced to” (Field Interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

### **The Attractors and Dividers of the Alavanyo-Nkonya Conflict**

Within the literature, agents of destructive interaction are termed ‘dividers’ whilst the elements that can shift the equilibrium towards peace are

termed 'attractors' (Coleman & Vallacher, 2010). The study found four elements that serve as attractors and/or dividers. These include: conflict management efforts, anonymous killings, communal content in the conflict over time and the media. Out of this four, one (anonymous killings) is an outright divider and the other three are fluid and serve as attractors and/or dividers depending on the time, nature and circumstance that they become relevant. Among these three however, the change in communal content over time and the conflict management efforts is the most significant. Overall, it can be assumed that the effect of the attractors is greater than the effect of dividers and this has contributed to the relative and greater extent of calm than violence over the lifespan of the conflict.

### **Communal content of the conflicting communities**

Azara (1986) uses the term communal content to refer to the socio-cultural elements (economic activity, social interactions) of a community that make up the way of life of a given people. Azar explains that these elements could be fuels of violence. The onset of this conflict has a strong foundation on the communal content of the two societies and the formation of the structural issues of dispute and these serve as the precursor to conflicts (Galtung, 1996). The strong economic value of land and strong attachment to agriculture as the main economic activity made it very easy for land to become the basis of discord between the two ethnic communities. Both communities (Nkonya-Tayi & Alavanyo-Kpeme) had similar communal content. There was an overlap in their sources of livelihood leading to a zero sum struggle. This

notion was supported by the narratives from the respondents who are parties to the conflict:

“The land is still very relevant for the Nkonyas because before 1983, Tayi people were able to produce 80 tonnes of cocoa. They are not stool lands, they belong to individuals, and families farm there. Part of the land is a forest reserve and so our farms are really there. The land is still very relevant to us. Since we are no longer working there we are very poor. In 1983, when the war actually started, all the farmers on the land were killed, beheaded and it was reported to the police but nothing was done” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

The economic value of the land is also now a key fuel to the sustenance and expansion of the conflict (Blagojevic, 2009; Olzak, 1992). However, the economic interest has moved beyond just farming to the sawing of wood from individuals perceived to be from both sides. As one of the respondents submitted:

“There are some people from both sides who are sawing wood in the area. So those sawing wood are trying to prevent others from sawing wood. What you are doing is illegal and you are policing another person who is also going to saw wood. One of the Alavanyo youth had his chainsaw confiscated at gun point by Nkonya youth. Today if that youth sees the others using their chain saw, what do you expect him to do?” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

The communal content makes it viable for the contention to spread from the initial two primary communities (Alavanyo-Kpeme and Nkonya-Tayi) to the entire Alavanyo and Nkonya traditional areas (Kendie et al., 2014). Population growth comes with relative scarcity of the primary economic resource and this leads to more people feeling the frustration of the (apparent) deprivation of resource. This is especially so when population growth is not matched by diversification of economic activity and increase in employment hence creating a situation of economic deprivation which is a key fuel of conflict (Azar, 1986). The interview responses above, reveal that the strong economic value of the land makes it very attractive as well as motivating factor for criminals associated with the conflict.

### **Communal content as an attractor in the conflict**

A respondent highlights an interesting scenario that could be seen as a positive effect of communal content. The respondent notes:

“Let me tell you something...I was nearly killed by my own relative who had been given orders to do so from members of the other side. My relative only got there to realise that the one he had been tasked to kill was his own blood” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

It is fair to say that, the protraction of this conflict has not seen an increase in violent manifestations and this phenomenon could also be explained with the communal content philosophy. Ross (1997) for instance, argues that rural communities and their members are, in fact, connected by multiple social networks and over the range of issues that make up their social

life. Ross (2001) explains that when people fight, they war about interests, but the way this is done, the intensity of feelings, and the lengths to which disputants go to defend or acquire what they believe is their right has an important psychological component which is not well understood. The findings of this study suggest that the social linkages in the communities involved contributes as an attractor that tones down hostility.

All the respondents agree that there is a lot that the two communities share in common (in terms of historical family relations), that an attempt to wage any violence on the other side will be self-inflicting. In effect, it is not easy to frame “us” versus “them” due to identity shift due to the murky nature of the settler-native dichotomy (Ruanne & Todd, 1996).

Such communal dynamics make it very difficult for overt clashes between the people. This observation is a significant deviation from the perceived dividing role that primordial issues play in conflict. Blagojevic (2009) identifies primordial issues as key to the manipulative power of political entrepreneurs during the competition over resources. The issues of migrations, sharing of boundaries and ancestral inheritances of land are issues that are primordial to the two communities, Alavanyo and Nkonya. Whilst they may be the issues under contention, this study also finds that this historical familial and social ties are the reasons that large scale overt violence has not been possible. Some of the narratives like the one below highlight the nature of connection between the two communities:

“What is even interesting is that today there is a boundary at Nkonya-Asakyere down to Nkonya-Ntcumuru with Alavanyo-

Dzogbedze, they cook their food and invite their counterparts from the other side” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Another respondent noted that:

“We should be mindful of the fact that when you kill your brother or relative, there are serious curse implications to that. They are all brothers and sisters” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Since the conflict started over 91 years ago, the demographic constitution of the two societies in conflict have undergone some significant changes which have had a bearing on the conflict. For this conflict, the role of communal content is both an attractor and divider. This can be explained from three angles.

First, in relation to the onset of the conflict (as a divider), second, in relation to the progress of the conflict (as both a divider and an attractor) and finally the management of the conflict (as an attractor). This is based on the analytical framework developed by Coleman and Vallacher (2010) that explains that attractors in a protracted conflict are those that move the conflict towards a greater equilibrium and help conflict management and resolution. Dividers work against societal equilibrium and are very much what Edward Azar had in mind in his allusion to “communal content” in the protracted social conflict theory (Azar, 1985). Some of the communal changes that have helped reduce tension include: the original protagonists of the conflict are no longer existing, the volatile peace in the area has sparked migration of the youth and the presence of non-natives also play a role in diffusing the ossification of historical system of primordial bitterness (Coser, 1957).



As a conflict that has ethnic undertones it is expected to rely on the social structure and constitution to thrive and this can be likened to what Edward Azar (1985) identifies as ‘communal content’. It can be analysed from three angles; first, on how it began, second, on how it is progressing and third, on its management.

### **The media as an attractor and divider in the conflict**

During the interviews, respondents did not raise so many questions about the general role of the media. Majority of the respondents believed that the media has not been too troublesome in the conflict. However, there were still some outlets that were flagged as bias and sometimes insightful.

As one of the respondents from a conflict party said:

“The media, sometimes don’t consult us before they break the news. Like in those days when a soldier was shot at the Alavanyo side, they said it was us without proof. There is also this local radio station (Sekpele community radio at Nikpe) that has been inciting Ewes against us” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Another respondent said that:

“The media reportage, you can always find some problem with them. But as far as I know there have not been any adverse reportage or complaint of the media that adversely affected the process” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

The narratives above show that the role of the media as attractors or dividers in this conflict is controversial. Whilst the media could be lauded for bringing to light the acts of violence, the progress made in the conflict

management process and championing the campaign for peace, it has also been implicated as a negative propaganda tool for division and heightening tension (Tsikata & Seini, 2004).

The onset of the conflict has seen many words traded in the media, ranging from press conferences, to editorials written by experts and representative of the parties in conflict. But the impact of this media frenzy is mixed. Even though media reports play a key role in getting the state to respond to acts of violence, they also become precursors of retributive action by the parties in conflict. Even more worrying, is the fact that as some of these reports were said to be unconfirmed by the security apparatus. For instance, on 21 April 2003, a media report said the police were unable to substantiate allegations that armed men from Nkonya had camped at Akrofu near Ho to attack the people there even though the media had reported it. There is also an apparent attempt by some persons in to manipulate the media to their advantage. This is hinted by Tsikata and Seini (2004) who write about an incident reported to have taken place on 17 April but appeared in the 12 June edition of the Ghanaian Times.

### **Intervention efforts as attractors and dividers**

The responses gathered from the field interviews led to the mixed conclusion that whilst peace interventions may be beneficial in conflict, the manner and timing could also create challenges for lasting peace.

One Nkonya respondent said:

“...When we proposed our ideas for resolution saying the courts have ruled on the matter, the chairman of the mediation committee

said we were taking them back (that we had taken an entrenched position) and I was surprised to hear them say that we should not be slaves to court ruling. This brought some unease in the room. So we suspected that the mediation committee influenced the Alavanyos to bring that proposal and that's why we boycotted the mediation and we are not willing to go back since they are not willing to listen to our side" (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Another respondent also talked about the problem of the court decision:

"The court verdict they (Nkonyas) are relying on, someone need to draw their attention tell them that it was for some individuals and that should not affect the other areas under the traditional paramountcy" (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Despite this fluid role that institutional intervention efforts have played as attractors at some time and dividers at other times, it is important to note that generally, the conflict would have been more devastating without these interventions. Observing from the trend analysis that the intervention has always been more than the violence, it is fair to say that their overall effect tilt towards the direction of an attractor.

The trend analysis summarised in Figure 2 shows that at all times, since the inception of this conflict, the intervention efforts have always been more than the incidents of violence. This is a positive observation and in this regard serves as an attractor. These institutional interventions have provided a platform and avenue where conflicting parties seek redress. They have served as the channels that filter the causes of conflict (Morris, 2001) and also have

helped in playing down the primordial or structural contentions between the parties (Blagojevic, 2009).

The police and military detachment has undoubtedly helped to deter full-scale violent confrontations, the mediation committee was also successful in getting the parties to dialogue for a sometime and the court rulings also brought some finality to the dispute during the early stages of the conflict and this even moved some tenancy atonements to be made. All these highlight the benefit of democratic dispensations to provide space for political bargaining and compromise between ethnic subgroups (Prazauskas, 1991) and also in diffusing conflict situations at an early stage before they have opportunity to escalate to armed violence (Dixon, 1994).

On the other hand, however, some of the interventions have served as dividers. Some of the fallouts between parties has been as a result of these interventions. The mediation committee's proposal to divide the disputed area between parties; the courts' benchmark rulings that now have become a bane for the mediation process and some police crackdown and arrests that have followed instances of violence. As gathered from the responses on the field, these institutional actions have affected at least one faction's perception that they are threatened by members the institutions alone or in connivance with the other party. The perceptions of the negotiators change as the contexts that influence them change. Such perceived unfairness creates or resurrects active contention settings that are conducive to inter-group competition (Belanger & Pinard, 1991).

### **The intermittent violence and killings as a divider**

The killings that have occurred across the life-span of this conflict have always created a setback for the gains made through intervention efforts. All the respondents agree that the some of the killings are a reaction of vengeance for earlier killings. Unfortunately, the dynamics of this conflict include a lot of killings intermittently. It makes it very difficult therefore to sustain the peace in the area. Aside this, it also becomes the reason why the conflict is expanding because those who are killed are usually not directly linked to the conflict and they in-turn become actors out of grievance and frustration.

The narrative below is a classical illustration of how false alarm of killing was used to shatter progress made on the mediation committee:

“...During the process, when we were just about to sign the agreement, an Nkonya youth took his phone, went out and came back with the story that Alavanyo people had entered Nkonya and were killing people. I called back home and the bishops from the various sides also called back home. The feedback they got was that there was not attack going on. Even one of my elders said there was an Nkonya woman selling fish where he was standing. But this is how everything was scattered” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

In summary of this section, the dynamical systems theory (Coleman and Vallacher, 2010) explains that during a conflict and its management, “attractors” contribute to interactions that try to resist change of the status quo. According to the dynamical systems model of constructive engagement

(Coleman, et al., 2007) conflicts become intractable as their various elements (thoughts, feelings, actions, issues, norms, symbols, etc.) link together and organize into strong patterns or attractors for destructive interactions, where the elements become mutually reinforcing and self-perpetuating and therefore resistant to change.

Vallacher and Nowak (2005) also argue that social systems have a tendency to drift back toward a previously established stable state regardless of actions taken to introduce a change in direction. This stable state is what is called an “attractor”. According to dynamical social psychology, real change is created by building new attractors toward which the system will naturally tend to drift, rather than by temporarily disrupting the state of a system within its old equilibrium. Coleman (2010) advises that in searching for a new attractor, it is of utmost importance to identify one that is embedded in the society’s culture, so that it will be naturally sustained.

### **Recommendations for Peace in the Alavanyo-Nkonya Conflict Area**

The respondents were asked what could be done differently to bring peace. This is expected to inform the nature of recommended peace-building efforts going forward.

The Nkonya side stuck with their call for adherence to the court decision:

“What can be done differently is the government intervention. And then making a pronouncement. Military attachment and sharing won’t solve the problem” (Field interview, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

But the Alavanyos responded discounting those claims and proposing a different approach:

“The court verdict they are relying on, someone needs to draw their attention and tell them that it was for some individuals and that should not affect the other areas under the traditional paramountcy. 7 people from Kpeme and a few from Tayi. That would be a problem for about just 10 individuals” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

A key respondent from the mediation committee shared some very helpful insight on how things can be done differently going forward. He focusses on promoting communal relations:

“We must be concerned about one another. But this should tell us from now on that if there is a court case, and it is not working, the parties should be made to sign an undertaking to set aside the court case. For instance, along the line in the past things were going well and a lawyer came in to use the court ruling set back everything. And the people to sign won't be paramount chiefs, the people themselves should be made to speak for themselves. Surrogate parties should be minimal; direct parties should talk for themselves. We have been working with “strategic allies” and you leave out the people themselves out. Let us not make a mistake to think that the chiefs can deal with the matter if it does not concern them” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

These narratives above indicate that the parties would want to stick to their idea for resolution. The position of the mediation committee member may however a very good way forward. The court action needs to be set aside in a manner that does not destroy the confidence of the party that would be

affected by it. There is also the concern about curfews and military take-over of the disputed land. As a respondent notes:

“That we can transform this conflict which would make people able to go around their business peacefully. Curfew is not a solution to the problem, it’s a security measure. We should be able to have the institutions to isolate the individuals who perpetrate violence and so that people don’t use them as reasons to perpetuate it” (Field interview, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

All the respondents agreed that militarisation of the area is not enough to solve the problem and may raise more problems than solutions. This is because a take-over may be interpreted by the Nkonyas as government’s decision to deprive them of what is rightfully theirs (as decided by the courts). Also, government would not be able to provide security for all areas taken over by government.

One respondent was of the view that there is the need to deal with the concerns of the people. He said:

“You see, some of the people have farms in the area and they think that if they don’t fight for what is theirs it will be difficult for them to have food for their families. Sometimes I think that is why they are not interesting letting go off things. They may not want war but they don’t also want to lose their property. And I am sure the Nkonya people would tell you when you go there that the courts have decided so it is theirs” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

As I have already discussed, the challenge to introducing new fear-reducing institutions is the standard set by the court rulings by determining the



case for the Nkonyas. Any institutional arrangements to pursue a reconciliatory resolution of this conflict would have to bear in mind the dictates of the court which is somewhat non-negotiable for as long as a party is interested in maintaining the status quo and invoking the court ruling. One of the problems of setting aside the court ruling, is the fear dilemma of what ambush situations could arise out of the action. Hence to be able to encourage the setting aside of the court action, especially from the side that won the ruling, then there is the need to introduce these fear-reducing institutions as was used in arriving at the Arusha Accords (Vandeginste, 2009)

A respondent also expressed hope that more stakeholders will be invited to help calm tensions. He said:

“You see the churches were doing well in getting the people to get to negotiation. But since this has not worked fully, maybe we need to engage other stakeholders who can speak to the conscience of the actors to see reason to stop fighting. You see, if someone you respect came to speak to you to stop an action, you will do it”  
(Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

This responses bring to the fore effective maximisation of the external norm-diffusing forces; the youth, institutions and economic activity that can transform the conflict. The road project that was stalled in 2005 was a lost opportunity to transform the conflict through an economic boom. All these could be used as norm-diffusing external actors to pressurise negotiators towards peaceful resolution (Vandeginste, 2015).

One of the narratives clearly illustrated how the youth pressurised their leaders to nearly sign a peace agreement at the mediation. As an Alavanyo respondent noted:

“One time the youth locked us in the mediation room and said that if we did not arrive at peace we should not come out” (Field interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015).

Bearing in mind that there is a seeming apathy that seeps into many years of this negative peace atmosphere, conflict transformation through increased economic activity, can become the viable way forward. Aside that, the youth can be seen a strong force. They are a very potent force that can be used to resolve or transform the conflict. In the long term, conflict managers should aim at introducing an ‘instigating belief’, (Bar-Tal et al., 2010) which will contradict the previously strongly held beliefs that there is a need to continue the conflict.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Advance Organizer**

The aim of this study was to explore the dynamics of the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict and the focus was to understand its complexity and to suggest peace-building strategies that accommodate those dynamics. The study employed a qualitative design to collect and thematically analyse primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from in-depth interviews of six key informants who were selected purposively and through snowballing. The secondary data was collated from online news articles, publications as well as published print sources about the conflict since its inception in 1923. A temporal analysis was conducted on the collated secondary data whilst the interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic classic content analysis. This chapter presents a summary of the key findings, conclusions arising from these findings and the recommendations for peace-building.

#### **Summary**

In accordance with the objectives set under this study, the summary of the key findings are as follows:

#### **Trend analysis of the conflict**

The study found that across three main governance regimes in the history of Ghana, there was less violence in the pre-independence (1923-1956) and mixed-regime (1957 – 1992) as compared to the stable democracy era

(1993 – 2015). There was also a proliferation of multiple intervention efforts and media attention during the stable democratic era.

### **Temporal and spatial dynamics of the conflict**

- The study found that land is still relevant to the continuation of the conflict. The dispute over land is a structural cause of the conflict with other issues like vengeance, bitterness, poisoned emotional narratives and unintended targets of the killing fueling violence. The emotional pain is imported as part of the identity of those aggrieved from both sides. It is the vengeance borne out of these emotional pains (new identity), and not land, that has so far resulted in the expansion of the conflict to other communities like Nkonya-Ahenkro, Nkonya-Ntcumuru or Nkonya-Asakyere.
- The study found emerging identities in this conflict. The acts of grieved ethnic individuals alone cannot be blamed for the killing. However, to a very large extent, actions of criminals and conflict entrepreneurs can also be suspected. The insecurity in the area may actually be a case of criminality and conflict profiteering and not as a result of ethnic tension.
- The study found relatively low ethnic mobilization in this conflict and this is probably why it has not generated into a full-blown war. This may be attributable to the democratic dispensation in Ghana that provide avenues for peaceful conflict resolution. This has also limited the role of political entrepreneurs. The study also found that the Alavanyo-Nkonya conflict has seen a gradual shift from group-sanctioned acts of violence to isolated incidences of individual violence. The nature of violence during the colonial and mixed regime eras was: group versus group; in the democratic

era, violence seems to have taken the nature of isolated ambush murders or covert criminal dealings.

- The study identified that the nature of conflict management approach has been inimical to the peaceful settlement of the dispute. It begun with the courts and committees of enquiry and moved to conflict transformation (2005-2009). Now there seems to be a shifted focus towards the adoption of a mixed method of robust military detachment interspersed with high-level mediation. The robust military approach being contemplated by government in recent times, has mixed support from parties and risks creating huge problems.
- Moreover, the study also found that the court rulings on this conflict present and lot of difficulty to the other resolution strategies; such as mediation, which is more reconciliatory. The court decision has set a standard that is difficult to amend. The strict, non-flexible, nature of the judicial adjudication process makes it difficult to accommodate the principles of reconciliation that seeks a middle ground rather than the winner takes all affair.
- The study found that the relay of ‘poisoned’; oral history across generations can potentially harden the hearts of the younger generation to continue the struggle and the killing. At the same time, the prolonged conflict is breeding apathy and also getting others frustrated so this could kill the resolve to continue fighting. Also the study observed that youth are holding the fort in issues related to the conflict as the old protagonists pass away. This could be positive or negative for conflict management or resolution.

### **Factors that serve as attractors and dividers in the conflict**

- Change in communal content over time: Over the past 91 years, the demographic constitution of the two societies in conflict have undergone some significant changes which have had a bearing on the conflict. Some of the communal changes that have helped reduce tension include: the original protagonists of the conflict are no longer existing, the volatile peace in the area has sparked migration of the youth and the presence of non-natives also play a role in diffusing the ossification of historical system of primordial bitterness.
- The media: The role of the media as attractors or dividers in this conflict is controversial. Whilst the media could be lauded for bringing to light the acts of violence, the progress made in the conflict management process and championing the campaign for peace, it has also been implicated as a negative propaganda tool for division and heightening tension.
- Intervention efforts: The study observed that intervention efforts have always been more than the incidents of violence. This is a positive attractor in the conflict. They have served as the channels that filter the causes of conflict (Morris, 2001) and also have helped in playing down the primordial or structural contentions between the parties (Blagojevic, 2009) but they have not been able to comprehensively solve these structural issues. On the other hand, however, some of the interventions have served as dividers such as some part of the mediation committee's work and the court rulings.
- Intermittent violence and anonymous killings: The killings that have occurred across the life-span of this conflict have always created a setback

for the gains made through intervention efforts. Unfortunately, the intermittent killings bring a lot of dynamics to this conflict: arousing tensions and suspicions and making it very difficult to sustain the peace in the area. This is also why the conflict is expanding to other communities as a result of 'blind' vengeance killing.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

Overall, the lifespan of this conflict has seen a steady rise in violence as well as a commensurate rise in intervention efforts. At all times, the incidence of intervention efforts has been more than the incidence of violence and this probably explains why this conflict has not escalated to involve all Alavanyo and Nkonya traditional communities.

This conflict is protracted because it is intractable (complex). The intractability of the conflict lies in the various areas of the dynamics discussed with respect to: land is relevant to the sustenance and expansion of the conflict; there are overlapping and emerging identities among conflict actors and stakeholders; there is low rate of ethnic mobilization; the conflicting parties' have diverse interests during mediation processes; violence in the conflict has shifted from group action to individual action; the conflict resolution approach can be implicated in the protraction of the conflict; institutional change has had adverse effects on peace-building and generational turn-over of community members may be a key hope for lasting peace in the future. These issues have created highly complex mesh of issues, that provide many sources for conflict or peace-building located at located at

multiple levels (individual, group, communal, and so on), which often interact with each other. This complexity presents a tense environment that portrays the phenomenon of 'negative peace'.

The court rulings have been the biggest challenge to a reconciliatory resolution of the conflict. Whilst the judicial process has been conclusive in its determination, it has not been reconciliatory; a feature that is very important when dealing with conflicts that involves parties that have a long historical linkage. The judicial process has set a standard that has rendered all other intervention processes inadmissible; including probably any further judicial remedies.

There are four elements that serve as attractors (peace factors) and dividers (conflict factors) in this conflict. These include, conflict management efforts, anonymous killings, communal content over time and the media. Out of these four, one (anonymous killings) is an outright divider and the other three could serve as attractors or dividers depending on the time, nature and circumstance under which they manifest. These three are fluid attractors and dividers and have shown to be more or less determining of the conflict depending on how they have impacted the conflict. Among these three however, the change in communal content over time and the conflict management efforts is the most significant. Overall, the effect of attractors is greater felt than the effect of dividers and this has contributed to the maintenance of calm rather than over violence existing in the area over the lifespan of the conflict.



Findings from this study lead to belief that protracted conflicts may not necessarily be complex (intractable) but complex conflicts are usually protracted due to their multifaceted and multidimensional nature.

### **Recommendations**

1. This study recommends a resumption of mediation but with a modified approach led by the National Peace Council and other facilitators of the mediation process. This new mediation approach should give priority to the original protagonists of the conflict as against dealing with surrogate representatives who are not directly linked to the disputed land. Also fear-reducing measures which compensate for the lack of trust. The mediation and management process could also benefit from the continued use of norm-diffusing external actors (like the diaspora) to pressurise negotiators towards peaceful resolution
2. The National Peace Council, the Judicial Council and Parliament should collaborate to consider exploring the possibility or legal propriety of setting aside the court decision with mutual consent from parties in order to have an open mediation. It is also the recommendation of this study that, judicial processes should be avoided in the initial stages of dealing with conflicts with psychocultural and historical appendages such as this one. More reconciliatory approaches with consent from parties are the best points to start with in dealing with such conflicts.
3. Local government policies should aid conflict transformation by providing infrastructure that help alleviate other social predicaments like poverty and

economic frustration that could channel youthful energies into the pursuit of positive economic activities.

4. The local government authorities and the security agencies should be mindful of the interest of other communities attached to the boundaries between Alavanyo and Nkonya. In the process of trying to satisfy the parties in the conflict some alterations may be made which could affect the interest of other communities linked to the boundary but not linked to the dispute. In relation to this, security agencies should stay awake to the threat that this conflict poses to the future unity of the Volta region; especially between the Ewes and non-Ewes. Especially because the disputed boundary also serves as the barrier between the Ewe and non-Ewe parts of the Volta region.
5. Militarisation and curfews only deal with behavioural issues and not structural issues. However, if it becomes necessary to do so, the objectives of the militarisation of the zone may need to be reviewed occasionally so that it maintains its relevance. In addition, government may need to be slow in implementing its plan of setting up a permanent base on the disputed land but focus more on the structural issues of dispute.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

There is the need for further research to clearly demarcate the differences between the conceptualisation of protracted conflicts and complex (intractable) conflicts. This would require an expanded research on conflict dynamics across various protracted conflicts in Ghana and possibly the West-African sub region.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide for Key Informants

Date of interview.....

- Why do you think this conflict is hard to resolve?
  - Could you talk about any particular incidents that reversed peace-building progress?
  - How do you think the following have changed with the conflict over time?
  - Causes (How is the issue of land still relevant to this conflict?), Actors / Stakeholders
- How do the conflict factors and causes converge to promote violence?  
Explain how you think any of these factors have fuelled the conflict?
- Economic activities OR Traditional beliefs, Police interventions, Mediators interventions, Political Motivations (manipulation by political and traditional leaders), Criminal and Opportunistic entrepreneurs' activities, Institutional change / Lapse (chieftaincy change, political heads change, security agencies)
  - How do you think the peace-building process have developed or progressed over the years?
  - What would you want to see done differently in the peace-building process?
  - Do you think that over time the violence will stop? What will make that happen?