The Drum Wars: The Clash of Religious Groups in a Cosmopolitan City

Justice Arthur[1]

Abstract

Ghana has been lauded for its democratic credentials and stability since its successful implementation of multi-party democracy in 1992. In recent times, this image of stability has come under threat because of a conflict between the Ga traditionalists and some Pentecostal-Charismatic churches. Every year, the Ga Traditional Council impose a 30-day universal ban on drumming and all forms of noisemaking, in preparation for the *Homowo,* festival. On the one hand, the Ga traditionalists justify the noise ban as a time-honoured tradition and a constitutional right. On the other hand, Pentecostal-Charismatic churches generally refused to comply with the ban claiming it is an infringement on their right to freedom of worship. While both groups legitimise their claims with the national constitution, the disagreement between these two groups assumed violent proportions since 1998. The annual clashes have resulted in injuries to people and destruction to church property. Drawing on existing literature and ethnographic fieldwork in Accra and using Azar's (1990) Protracted Social Conflict theory, the focus of this paper is to understand why this conflict has persisted despite attempts by various agents to resolve it. I argue that there are several underlying factors that converge to protract this conflict.

KEYWORDS: Religious conflict; Religion and Sound; Protracted Social Conflict; Conflict in Africa.

Introduction

The religious landscape of Accra, the capital of Ghana like the entire nation shows a multiplicity of religions. This diversity of religions is promoted by the national constitution, which was adopted in 1992 after more than a decade of military rule. The legal framework specifically guarantees religious freedom and thereby prohibits the potential for any state religion. This effectively means the country is theoretically, a secular state but a religiously pluralised one with citizens practising several religions (Quashigah 1999). Despite the open religious market, Christianity, Islam and indigenous religions are the dominant religions and have a special status in Ghanaian society. Of the

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[1] Justice is currently a PhD Candidate at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS), University of Bayreuth. Email: justice.arthur@hotmail.com

three main religions, Christianity is the religion of the majority of the people.[2] Among the different Christian denominations in the contemporary framework, the Pentecostal-Charismatic groups, which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s are the most powerful and the least tolerant towards indigenous religions. The exponential growth of this strand of Christianity to date has tilted the religious equilibrium which existed in the country prior to the 1980s to their favour, being the most followed religious group today (Tsikata and Seini 2004: 41-42).[3] The churches adopt a stature of complete rupture from indigenous beliefs expressed through a process of continuous stigmatisation and vilification of indigenous religions. This mentality clearly marks an end to the era of cooperation between indigenous religions and Christianity, which was ushered in by indigenous religion's ability to accommodate other religions and the mainline historical churches' approach to evangelisation usually referred to as *inculturation*[4] and inter-religious dialogue.

The intolerance of the Pentecostal groups toward indigenous beliefs culminates in a very complex relationship between the two groups and this plays out in their everyday interactions in the city. This paper focuses on the *Homowo*[5] festival, which I argue, is a microcosm of the broader relationship between the two parties. Although the Ga[6] have several celebrations including twins' festivals, *Odwira* (yam festival), special naming and burial celebrations, the annual *Homowo* is the most important festival on the Ga traditional calendar. It is an agricultural festival celebrated to thank the gods and ancestors of the Ga people. *Homowo* serves as a reminder of the perseverance of their ancestors in the face of the dire famine that beset them in the past owing to the arid conditions of the Accra plains (Ozanne 1962). The *Homowo,* highlights the union of the Ga people both as a family unit and an ethnic group. It is a time when the Ga diaspora returns to its ancestral homes in the towns along the Accra coast to share a meal with their living relatives and ancestors. It is a time when family disputes are settled and ethnic solidarity is displayed in line with Emile Durkheim's notion of the integrative role of the traditional ritualistic gatherings (1995). Thus, the festival has historical, cultural and religious significance to the Ga. Accordingly, any impediment to the celebration of *Homowo* is viewed as an affront to the entire Ga ethnic group.

Even though the climax of the *Homowo* is in August and early September, the celebration begins in May. The celebrations move from one Ga town to another beginning with *Ga Mashie* (Central Accra). It commences with the planting of the corn and millet in a secluded field by the Ga high priests (*Wuɔmei*, singular *Wuɔmɔ*). After

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[2] According to the 2010 population and housing census, 73.3% of the population is Christian whilst 17.0% and 4.9% of the citizens are professed Muslims and traditionalists respectively.

[3] 29.6% of the national population profess to be adherents of the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches.

[4] *Inculturation* here refers to what Chibueze Udeani defines as "the concept for the penetration and taking roots of the Christian message and the springing up of a Christian life in a way that accepts the uniqueness of the particular culture". Add reference

[5] *Homowo* literally means 'hooting at hunger' in the Ga language.

[6] The Ga people are an ethnic group, the indigenes of the present day cosmopolitan city of Accra. Politically, the Ga people have a decentralised administration centred on seven major communities or towns namely Ga Mashie (Central Accra), Osu, La, Teshie, Nungua, Tema and Kpone. The seven Ga towns or settlements have independent and distinct leadership but with similar governance structures and customs. All these settlements can be found along the coast but every town owns other settlements further inland, which come together with the coastal towns to form present-day Accra. Every town has its principal priests (*Wuɔmei*) and chiefs (*Mantsemei*) but the three chief priests of Ga Mashie (Central Accra): Nai *Wuɔmɔ*, Sakumo *Wuɔmɔ* and Korle *Wuɔmɔ* are generally accepted as the three principal priests of the entire Ga state.

this comes the thirty-day ban on drumming and noisemaking within the traditional area. It is a time of quietude when all the Ga deities are believed to visit the towns to watch over the gestation of the planted grains. All noise is forbidden but particularly noise coming from drums is deemed to interfere with the 'Ga universe' as it makes the deities unhappy and deprives them of the needed peace to bless the plants. The thirty-day ban is followed by the lifting of the ban from one town to another beginning with *Ga Mashie*. The process of lifting the ban is called *Odadaa*, which is an elaborate flamboyant celebration preceded by the playing of the sacred drums, *Obonu*, which are seen only once in a year. The *Obonu* is kept in a secret place because it is believed among the traditionalists that the drums have a spiritual significance to the Ga deities.

The thirty-day noise ban prior to the implementation of the main festival has, however, become a topical issue in the otherwise, rich traditional celebration of *Homowo*. The ban imposed by the Ga Traditional Council (GTC) requires all residents including members of other ethnic groups and religions to adhere to the directive as a mark of respect to the Ga deities. This period is crucial because according to local beliefs, if the seedlings die, it signifies a year of bad fortune ahead and if they germinate and survive, it is an indication of a bumper harvest and a good year ahead of them.[7] Nevertheless, the ban has not gone unchallenged by some residents of the city, especially the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians, for whom loud sound practices generated by powerful public address (PA) systems and musical equipment remain a central part of their worship and the material ground for experiencing the divine. That is, to them God is experienced through the presence of the Holy Spirit in worship, what Birgit Meyer refers to as personal and social experience "shaped through particular, religiously transmitted and embodied filters of perception" (Meyer 2013:9; Meyer 2015:337).[8]

This legitimisation and contestation of the ban has led to various clashes between the two groups in the last two decades. The confrontations assumed violent proportions in May 31, 1998 when a group of Ga youth led by traditional priests attacked a prominent Pentecostal-Charismatic church, the Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI) in Korle-Gonno, a suburb of Accra, seized their musical equipment, injured many in the congregation and destroyed church property, with the explanation that the church violated the noise ban. Prior to the 1998 clashes, communities in and around Accra had largely ignored or complied with the ban without any conflict. Since then however, every year there have been attacks on the churches, followed by confiscation of musical instruments by the traditionalists and sometimes the churches respond with counter attacks or resistance. Besides the clashes with the LCI, there has been other equally prominent confrontations including the GTC and Victory Bible Church in 1999 and GTC versus Christ Apostolic Church in 2001 and many others. The *modus operandi* of these Ga priests and youth is that they go to the churches on Sunday in large groups, sometimes in vans, dressed in red, wielding machetes and sticks and singing traditional war songs. Once they get to a church believed to be in breach of the noise ban, they go straight to the musical instruments, seize drums, keyboards and other sound transmitting equipment. If they do not meet any opposition, then the instruments are conveyed to the offices of the traditional council. The church is then instructed to come to their offices

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[7] Nuumo Akwaa Mensa II, *Interview with Nai Wulɔmɔ by author*, Accra, Feb 17, 2014.

[8] Article 26 of the 1992 Constitution guarantees ´*the right to maintain and promote culture, language, tradition and religion.* ´; Article 21(1)(c) states that ´*All persons shall have the right to freedom to practise any religion and to manifest such practice.*´ The Pentecostal-Charismatics argue especially on the biblical injunctions ´…have no other gods before me´ (Exodus 20:3 KJV) and ´Make a joyful noise unto the Lord…´ (Psalm 100:1 KJV), which they believe enjoins them not to heed to the directives of the traditionalists.

to pay a fine in order to retrieve their instruments. On the other hand, if they face opposition, then they fight back to repel the resistance, which sometimes ends in bloody encounters. Despite successive Ghanaian governments employing several strategies to mitigate or intervene, this conflict[9] has endured to the extent that it has become a stain on Ghana's credential as a peaceful state in an often-troubled West African sub-region.

While the conflict has both religious and cultural aspects, there are other underlying triggering factors which makes it difficult for its nature to be strictly defined.[10] According to some of my informants however, the real motivation behind the violent clashes is economic and political rather than a religio-cultural one, because the majority of the Ga youth mainly involved in the violence are not driven by religious motives. However, most of these informants were Christians and obviously "people who identify themselves as religious sometimes argue that the real motivation behind so-called religious violence are, by definition not religious" (Cavanaugh, 2009:9). It is important, though, to stress that religious motivation is at the forefront of the encounter between the two groups. Having said that, it is equally significant to note that other factors such as social, economic and political come to play in these confrontations. While it is difficult to detach, "the religious from economic and political motives in such a way that the religious motives are innocent of violence," the question really is, how important are the factors outside of religion and culture? (Ibid: 5). Are they so crucial we no longer want to classify the conflict as a religious one? How do they contribute to the intractable nature of the conflict? Drawing from a year-long participatory field research and existing literature, this paper examines why the conflict has protracted. Let us now look at the theoretical considerations that informs the analysis.

Theoretical reflections

To ascertain the conundrum of why violent conflicts were prevalent in some religiously and ethnically plural societies while being absent in others of such composition, several theoretical conceptualisations have been employed to study the sources of social conflicts in multi-ethnic settings in Africa. Three prominent ones are Stewart's (2008) 'horizontal inequalities,' Collier's (1998) 'concept of greed' and Zartman's (2005, 2008) 'need, creed and greed'. First, Stewart asserts that the causes of violent conflicts and wars are horizontal inequalities (HIs), which she defines as 'inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups' (2008: 3). Accordingly, she argues for policies of affirmative action against all forms of horizontal inequalities (political, social and cultural) between identity groups in a nation-state as that will lessen the HIs and consequently, the possibility of conflict. But to deal with HIs as independent variables is problematic because as pointed out by Brown and Langer (2010), identities themselves may be shaped by inequalities, becoming less prominent as inequality is reduced and *vice versa*. This theory nevertheless has been used to study conflicts in Ghana and Nigeria in recent times (Langer and Ukiwo 2008; Asante 2011). Second, Collier suggests that 'greed' rather than 'grievance' leads to wars and other violent conflicts in multi-communal settings. In that sense, he is arguing that these conflicts take place when it is financially or sometimes militarily rewarding – that is, his interest is in the economic aspects of civil wars and other internal conflicts. Collier cites

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[9] Conflict is here defined as 'the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups.' Ramsbotham et al, 2011, 30.

[10] In this paper, I follow an approach that sees religion and culture as two separate entities but constantly interacting with each other.

examples of conflicts where greed was the main factor in places such as Sierra Leone, DR Congo, and Angola where avidity over diamonds and other natural resource extractions in a multi-ethnic setting led to prolonged conflicts. Nevertheless, Collier and other proponents of this theory such as Hoeffler and Rohner entirely ignore or downplay the role of existing social grievances and other culture related subjects such as language, religion and customs as possible causes of conflicts. Third, along the lines of the 'greed' theory, Zartman and Arnson (2005) show how the intersection of 'need, creed and greed' plays a role at various stages to bring about violent intra-state conflicts. The need phase he argues, could be poverty, discrimination, inequality or injustices, which lead to the creed phase, where ethnicity or other identity based factors such as religion becomes the main element that political figures exploit to bring perceived marginalised or affected groups together to fight to defend their constituency. This then gives rise to the greed factor, where the "temptation to turn the means into ends begins to rise." Therefore, for Zartman and Arnson all conflicts contain these factors and it is more about how these different parameters come together to cause and sustain violent conflicts. This framework has also been applied in Angola where UNITA exploited ethnic identities; Afghanistan, where the Taliban exploited religious identities and in Colombia, where the FARC rebels exploited class and geography (2005:273).

Nevertheless, in this paper, Edward Azar's protracted social conflict (PSC) is employed as an alternative framework to all the three aforementioned perspectives to examine why the conflict between the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana and the Ga traditionalists has lingered to date (1985; 1990; 1991: 91). Azar, a conflict resolution expert put forward one of the earliest theoretical conceptualisations in the 1970s, aimed at comprehensively explaining and analysing the protractedness of violent intra-state conflicts. This served as the foundation on which many PSC scholars have built, although Oliver Ramsbotham argues that further development beyond his original model has been limited (2005). There are two reasons for using Azar's framework in this paper. First, I proceed on the premise that this conflict has endured for almost two decades and therefore has become a protracted social conflict, that is, "the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation" (1990:6). At the heart of these conflicts is mostly religious, cultural or ethnic communal identity and "they are not easily suppressed, and continue to be pursued in the long term by all means available" (1991:91). Accordingly, Azar's PSC helps us to understand the protractedness of the conflict. Second, this framework emphasises the sources of the conflict are usually intra-state while also highlighting the external sources and actors that contribute to inflaming such conflicts. Third, Azar's framework, unlike the three aforementioned is a synthesis of both the 'greed' and 'grievance' theories in conflict studies, making it more dynamic and comprehensive.

Encounters with Diversity: Accra as a Multi-Communal City

As was alluded to earlier, several overt sources including the sound practices and theological inclinations of the Pentecostals, the resurgence of Ga indigenous religion, fundamentalism, among others have been cited by several scholars as the root causes of this conflict (Van Dijk 2001; De Witte 2008; Amanor 2009; Asamoah-Gyadu 2009; Attuquayefio 2012). I argue however, that it is the covert underlying sources of the conflict that has protracted it. Foremost, I maintain that the multi-communal setting of Accra contributes enormously to the conflict. Accra is a cosmopolitan city with diverse

ethnic, religious and even racial groups. Traditionally, the city stretches from the *Densu* River in the west to the *Laloi* lagoon in the east (Field 1937: 1-3). Present day Accra unlike other big cities such as Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi, has become the most ethnically heterogeneous city - a melting pot of different cultures, religions and lifestyles. It is a microcosm of the entire country with almost all the ethnic groups represented. This unique status has been facilitated by several factors such as a complex history of pre-colonial settlements, colonial and post-colonial administrations, territorial expansion, influx of migrants and commerce (De Witte 2016: 3). According to the recent population census, the Akan are the dominant group in the Greater Accra region followed by the Ga-Dangbe, who have a first-comer status and are indigenous to the region (Ghana Statistical Council 2012:40).[11]

Obviously, all the ethnic and racial groups who move to Accra also come with their religion and diverse cultures. For example, most of the ethnicities coming from the north of Ghana are predominantly adherents of Islam and are found in the Muslim dominated settlements within the city. The Akan and the Ewe people from southern and middle Ghana are mainly Christians with some traditionalists among them. The Indian population are mainly Hindus who worship in the city's main Hindu temple on the Odorkor-Kaneshie main road. The majority of the native Ga people are Christians, but a significant number of them especially those who live in the traditional coastal areas also follow the Ga indigenous religion, known as *Kpele*. Accordingly, the Greater Accra region is a multi-communal area with residents from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. While the traditionalists recognise the fact that Accra is a multi-communal city, they also insist on their customs being adhered to by the various groups in the city. This is because they believe the dominant Akan groups follow their traditional customs in the comparatively homogeneous Akan areas like Kumasi but tend to ignore Ga traditions when they locate to Accra with the reason that Accra belongs to all Ghanaians.[12] Thus traditional beliefs are presumed by the traditionalists to prevail over the differentiated landscape of the city of Accra.

Although Fearon and Laitin (1996) have argued that the majority of all ethnically heterogeneous communities are not violent, Samuel Huntington (1996) in his 'clash of civilizations' disagrees and posits that there is an inevitable likelihood of violent clashes involving communities with multiple racial, ethnic and cultural differences. Despite agreeing with Fearon and Laitin, Stewart argues that conflicts of a violent nature within multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies are on the rise in the African continent (2008:3). Azar also posits that the communal content of a society is one of the conditions which needs to be met in order for a PSC to emerge (1990:1-3). Accra's multi-communal status is rather complicated as it has been influenced by external factors such as the colonial legacy of land alienation through a European style land tenure system, foreign to the local notions of land usage, which has led to communal anxieties within the traditional areas of the city. Large tracts of land which were expropriated from the Ga by the British colonial government to develop the city have not been returned to the families by the post-colonial administrations, even after the leases expired. Rather, successive governments in the fourth republic (1992 to date) have sold these lands to the political elite and government sympathisers. Land issues have therefore become an area which has fuelled this conflict especially as the powerful Charismatics overlook the allodia custodians, to acquire lands for their ever-expanding ministries. This, coupled

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[11] Per the Census figures, while the Akan make up 1,528,177, the Ga-Dangbe constitutes 1,056,158 of the population of the Greater Accra Region.

[12] Nuumo Ogbamey III, Interview with Sakumo Wulɔmɔ by author, Accra, Sep 25, 2015.

with internal dynamics of the dominance of the Akan groups in the nation-state as well as a history of pre-colonial rivalry between the Akan and the Ga contributes immensely to the conflict between the Ga traditionalists and the Akan dominated Charismatic church groups (Sackeyfio 2012:97). Azar identifies the multicultural composition of a community, brought about by external factors such as the colonial legacies and internal factors like historical patterns of rivalry between the groups as setting the stage for the emergence of a PSC (1990:7).

Unmet Human Needs

Next, I argue that the deprivation of human needs is an underlying cause of this conflict. For Azar, needs, unlike interests are ontological and therefore not negotiable, which if not addressed can lead to extreme violent conflicts. He particularly refers to acceptance needs (including cultural and religious expressions), access needs and security needs as areas of great concern. To begin with, access needs is described as the recognition of a person's identity defined in terms of common cultural values and heritage (Azar 1990:7-9). Identity is a complicated concept because there are diverse ways of conceptualising it namely, primordial, instrumentalist and social constructionist notions (Brown and Langer 2010). Different notions of identity play out among the parties to the present conflict but particularly religion, ethnicity and the region people come from in Ghana have been of particular interest. Typically, when the Ga traditionalists talk about their identity it is in reference to ethnicity and religion in the primordial sense of the word, which is that identities that are linked to their ancestry or kinship. Otherwise, they use identity as a tool for mobilising the youth in the sense of the instrumental notions of the word. Whereas the Charismatic group cannot be said to be entirely free from the assumption of the primordial character of identity, they tend rather to emphasise the born-again experience, which ultimately means a break from tradition and the past. Accordingly, they tend to use identity in the instrumentalist sense as they make use of their multiple identities (ethnicity, religion and region). The Ga Charismatic Christians for example have the propensity to use their Ga identity as and when it is relevant. This can be illustrated with a case in 1999 in which the Victory Bible Church was attacked by the Ga youth and the church's bishop, Nii Tackie Yarboi, used his identity as a Ga native to dialogue with the priests.[13] It is clear then, that at any given point in time one aspect of a person's or a group's identity can become more important to them than other features of it.

One of the grievances expressed by the Ga traditionalists is the issue of the decline of the use of the Ga language in the Greater Accra region. Language is an essential part of a person's identity, what Azar refers to as acceptance need. It is a profoundly emotional aspect of their Ga identity which forms a critical part of their belonging. Several leaders of the GTC have bemoaned the loss of interest in the Ga language in the school system and the media. What makes this issue critical is that in the Ghanaian educational system, schools are by law supposed to adopt the regional language as part of the curriculum for primary education, a practice that is adhered across the country. However, in Accra many of the schools teach Twi, one of the Akan dialects at the expense of Ga, probably because the Ga are not the majority group in the city. As this grievance regarding the lack of use of the Ga language is always presented by its

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[13] Nuumo Ogbamey III, *Interview with Sakumo Wuɔmɔ by author*, Accra, Sep 25, 2015*; The Independent*, May 18, 1999, 3; Nii Tackie Yarboi is a Ga royal and was a potential Ga king.

advocates, the GTC, the priests and the Ga elite as a collective one, it becomes even more important to address it since it borders on the identity of the people as a group. Azar (1990:9) argues that grievances of this nature, that is, those resulting from need deprivation and expressed collectively, if not redressed by the appropriate authorities, 'cultivates a niche for a protracted social conflict.' In this case, the lack of universal acceptance of the Ga language as the dominant language in the multicultural and multi-ethnic environment could be interpreted as need deprivation. The GTC's argument, though, is that their language, their cultural practices and religion, which distinguish them from all other groups in Ghana should remain vibrant in their traditional homeland. It becomes even more crucial because these sentiments are expressed collectively with undertones of ethnicity at the heart of it and always in relation to the treatment of the Akan groups by the authorities.

Furthermore, along with access and acceptance needs, there are security needs also at the centre of the clashes. Azar refers to material needs or infrastructural variables for physical security, nutrition, housing and so forth (1990:9). One of the critical security needs that has been expressed in this conflict is the lack of proper housing within the traditional Ga settlements because of widespread poverty within these communities. Most of the Ga youth involved in the annual fracas with the Charismatic churches are unemployed or lack economic opportunities, which contributes to the situation where some of them attack churches and extort money from them without the consent of the Ga priests or the traditional council. Accordingly, the ban period basically becomes a 'harvest time' for these unemployed youths to use as an avenue to make a living. Thus, the youth unemployment, housing deficit, and other security needs in the traditional areas constitute the ground for the Ga youth to foment the chaos that finally leads to a PSC. This then brings us to the centrality of the nation-state's role in these ongoing clashes.

The Role of the State

According to Azar, state governance and the role of the state are fundamental factors in either frustrating or satisfying individual or identity group needs. In a protracted social conflict, a dominant social group's monopolisation of power restricts the ability of the state to meet the needs of all social groups (Azar 1990: 10). While the monopolisation of power by one particular social group might not apply to Ghana, it is significant here to look at how different Ghanaian governments have dealt with the grievances expressed by the Ga traditionalists. From independence in 1957, the Ga nationalist groups such as Ga Steadfast Association (*Ga shifimo kpee*) were formed to protect the general interest of the Ga people on such critical issues as lands and resistance to the dominance of the Akan majority group. The government of Kwame Nkrumah adopted several means to deal with these Ga groups. First, since the group was deemed xenophobic by government, perhaps because they aligned themselves with the opposition parties, the government adopted legislation such as the Avoidance of Discrimination Act (1957), which forbade the formation of parties along regional, religious and ethnic lines; and the Preventive Detention Act (1958), which gave the state the right to detain anyone deemed a threat to national security for five years without trial. This legislation was introduced as a measure to control and coerce groups like the Ga nationalists (Quarcoopome 1992:49). Second, the Kwame Nkrumah led government also formed a counter Ga nationalist group, *Ga ekome feemo kpee* (Ga Unity Group) to nullify the effect of the *Ga shifimo kpee* and to confront its use of violence to express the grievances of the Ga-Dangbe people.

Accordingly, the state apparatus in the first republic employed coercive repression and co-option at the same time to deal with the concerns raised by the Ga-Dangbe group.

When Ghana returned to democratic rule in 1992, pressure groups such as the Ga-Dangbe Council was also formed to press forward with the land issue and the general concerns of the Ga people. During the first government (1992-2000) of the fourth republic led by Jerry Rawlings, there was a renewed nationalism of the Ga people through the implementation of the noise ban by the GTC. The 1998 confrontations between the Charismatic groups and the traditionalists became the first major conflict in Accra to confront the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government, although land issues had been a constant in the region. While the government sought a resolution between the churches and the GTC, there were reports of politicisation of ethnicity by state functionaries. First, the minister of interior, Nii Okaija Adamafio was accused by the Christian groups of siding with his people, since he is Ga and was the Member of Parliament for the *Odododiodio* constituency, which covers central Accra. Second, the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) boycotted the committee that was set up to try and resolve the impasse between the LCI and traditionalists in the Korle-Gonno area because they believed the state was not an impartial arbiter as they had sided with the Ga traditionalists to gain political capital in the Greater Accra region, which over the years has been a 'swing state' along with the Central Region, critical in determining which political party wins power (*Daily Graphic*, Jun 9, 1998; Ghana Pentecostal Council, Press Statement, Jun 3, 1998:1).

The issue of politicisation of ethnicity in the fourth republic came to full expression in the run up to the 2000 elections. News was circulating in Accra that a vote for the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) was a vote for the Akan (Ashanti) to dominate the political landscape and establish cultural hegemony over the other ethnic groups. Some leading members of the Ga-Dangbe Council used the perceived marginalisation of the Ga people to warn people against voting for the NPP. The NPP administration came under even more pressure when some aggrieved members of the Ga-Dangbe Council, who were also leading members of the NDC used the 2001 confrontations between the Charismatic churches and the GTC to incite the Ga people against other ethnic groups as a way of discrediting the NPP government (Asante 2011: 106). Therefore, in addition to the co-optation and repressive strategies adopted by the Nkrumah government to deal with Ga issues, the political elite have also employed demonising propaganda such as capitalising on the conflict to politicise ethnicity at the expense of their opponents.

However, the NPP government not wanting to be perceived as opponents of the Ga people, shifted the focus of the conflict from one of religion and ethnicity based, to an environmentalist discussion from 2002, where noise was now treated as an environmental hazard. This enabled the government to use a task force of officers from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the police to enforce the existing by-laws on abatement of noise nuisance. This shift of discourse while it minimised the clashes can be framed as a form of suppressive strategy by the government to deal with the conflict as well as move away from the distrust shown by some members of the Ga community towards the Akan dominated political party. The discursive shift meant that the government made the issue a matter of national law enforcement which strengthened its position as the impartial arbiter.

International connections

The fourth underlying source of the conflict is what Edward Azar refers to as *international linkages*, that is, the economic, political, and military relations that keep PSC laden states economically and/or politically dependent upon states that are richer and stronger than themselves (Azar 1990: 10). Ghana's economic dependency on the Bretton Woods institutions: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for so many years has been criticised as a source of stifling economic growth (Kanbur 2002). The country has been on and off IMF programmes since the resumption of the multi-party democracy in 1992. As recently as April 2015, the country went back to the IMF for a three-year extended credit facility to stabilise its economy.[14] These facilities usually come with conditions that are arguably harsh on the local economy because they normally include austerity measures meant to instil fiscal discipline. These measures have often led to high taxation and recently, a freeze on employment especially in the public sector. This makes the country almost always unable to create adequate employment opportunities for its citizens and consequently, dependent on the more powerful Europeans and North Americans who control the Bretton Woods institutions for grants and aid (Boafo-Arthur 1999a, 1999b). This state of affairs coupled with corruption leaves many people in poverty especially in places like Accra where there is keen competition for jobs and housing. Additionally, unemployment leads to a general increase in frustration among the youth not only in the Ga areas but also in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, in the traditional areas of Accra, we see unemployment as contributing to the increase in the number of Ga youth involved in the attacks on the churches during the period of the ban.

Besides the impact of the austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions on the country, there is what I refer to as *'external insiders'* whose presence have a direct effect on the conflict over the noise ban. That is, the role played by the various Ga associations in the diaspora, who although outside the country, still inspire bodies like the GTC and the Ga-Dangbe Council to stand up for the right of the Ga people in matters such as land issues and enforcing the ban. There are Ga associations in many cities across North American and Europe who are constantly bringing the land issues and the noise ban into public discussions. They do that by sponsoring leaders of the Ga traditionalists and other Ga pressure groups and encouraging them to stand up for the cause of the Ga people. Due to the resources they pour into the activities of the pressure groups, their impact on the whole conflict is enormous and this very much fuels the clashes.[15]

Conflicting Parties and the State: Significance of Actors' Actions

The question really is how these four underlying sources, unlike the overt sources of the conflict, contribute to the protractedness of the same. In that sense, Azar argues that for any one of the underlying sources, which he calls, *clusters of preconditions for a PSC*, to start off overt conflicts, it will be dependent on the process dynamics, that is, communal actions and strategies; state action and strategies and the built-in mechanisms of conflict (Ramsbotham 2015:116). That suggests that any one of the underlying sources can trigger conflicts but the likelihood of protracting the conflict is dependent on how the

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[14] https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2015/cr15103.pdf, Accessed Apr 15, 2016.
[15] https://www.gadangmeinternational.org, Accessed Apr 16, 2016.

conflicting communities and the state (and by extension its institutions) approach all four preconditions. First, we look at the actions of the GTC and the Charismatic churches that have led to the present conflict. The two communities have taken entrenched positions, each appealing to the national constitution to justify their actions – the GTC insists the churches should respect their time-honoured tradition of the noise ban and the Charismatic churches insisting on their right to freedom of worship. The GTC sees this perceived lack of respect by the Charismatic churches for their tradition as a threat to the identity of the Ga people as an ethnic and religious group. Therefore, the GTC and mostly the *Wulɔmei* use ethnic and religious sentiments to organise and mobilise the Ga youth to enforce the noise ban. Since the reasons border on such identity needs as belief systems and culture, they incite passion which triggers violent responses from the Ga youth towards the Charismatic churches, who are considered being in contravention of the noise ban. On the other hand, the actions of the Charismatic group such as the disregard for the noise ban and the stigmatisation of indigenous religions deepens the tension between the parties.

Second, the approach of the state in dealing with the conflict, in particular and the grievances of the Ga people in general, have basically verged on coercive repression and instrumental co-option. Since the conflict assumed violent proportions in 1998, successive governments have taken several steps to mitigate it. They have done that by setting up various commissions of enquiry to ascertain the trigger factors. For instance, in 1998, the Awortwi Commission[16] was established in the aftermath of the clashes between the LCI and the residents of Korle-Gonno. Thereafter, there were parliamentary commissions as well as the formation of the Greater Accra Permanent Conflict Resolution and Management Committee (GAPCRMC) to look into issues of land, chieftaincy, custom and religious based conflicts in the region. However, it is significant to state, that consecutive governments have not shown a total commitment to implement the findings of these commissions they set up. They have tended to put together committees at the height of the clashes but once the tension subsides and the reports are out, they were not implemented until the next year, thus, going round in circles.

Furthermore, while local government participation in the form of the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) is considered critical in the resolution of the conflict, there seems to be a conflict in the roles played by each of these groups. For example, whereas the GTC publicly announces the noise ban annually, there have been occasions where both the RCC and the AMA have gone ahead with separate announcements. Therefore, there would seem to be no coordination among the local government agencies. Although the AMA is one of the metropolitan assemblies under the RCC and the confrontations mainly take place under its jurisdiction, there appears to be a conflict on whether the RCC or the AMA is directly responsible for the security of the area. Moreover, the Charismatic churches have from time to time pointed fingers at the AMA for taking the side of the traditionalists because most of its senior officers are Ga people. But this notion of bias is challenged by the fact that there are equally significant numbers of Charismatic Christians, who are Ga natives, working for the AMA.

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[16] The Awortwi Commission was headed by a Commissioner of Police and members from the traditional council, the Christian community and civil service. Significantly, the Ghana Pentecostal Council boycotted the sittings citing issues of bias on the part of the committee.

Additionally, some state institutions like the Ghanaian Police Service have not shown the interest required from a law enforcement agency. Despite the heated nature of the clashes on several occasions, the police either refused to make any arrests or they released culprits without pressing charges, usually after the intervention of senior government officials. This situation breeds impunity as culprits are allowed to go scot-free. A senior police officer at the police headquarters, however, revealed that since this conflict is religious they do not want to be seen to be taking sides and therefore, once the cases are reported they try to deal with it at a community level. As a result of this, although the conflict has been lingering they have no records of incidents of the clashes.[17]

Besides, successive governments have approached the conflict differently since 1998. The first NDC government led by Jerry Rawlings, which had a Ga native, Nii Okaija Adamafio as the minister of interior politicised ethnicity to make political gains in the traditionally Ga dominated areas of Accra such as Ga Mashie, Osu, La, Teshie, Nungua and Tema. This is a form of an instrumental cooption which worked for the Ga traditionalists as well as the NDC as a party. The John Kufuor led government shifted emphasis on the noise ban from one of religious to environmental protection by employing civil servants as a task force to abate noise nuisance. This shifted the focus from the government to local assembly by-laws and therefore, the government could not be accused of taking sides. However, because of the winner-takes-all political practice that is prevalent in Ghana, this change of focus away from government can be understood as a type of repression rather than an accommodation of the conflicting parties. To put it differently, the shift to clamping down on noise pollution was the government's way of employing legal means to contain an otherwise sensitive subject for both the traditionalists and the churches. This repressive approach by the NPP ultimately led to a reduction in the clashes between 2002 and 2008. This demonstrates that there have been fluctuations in the clashes depending on which political party is in power. For instance, from 1998 to 2001 the clashes were more intense, then it subsided between 2002 and 2008 and then from 2009 to 2016 it was reinvigorated, although not to the same intensity as the first period. These periods however, coincide with the NDC-NPP-NDC political regimes, which shows clearly that when the NDC is in power, the clashes are more intense, perhaps because they are friendly to the Ga traditionalists since they dominate in the traditional areas, occupying most parliamentary seats.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have looked at how some covert factors have combined to protract the conflict over the noise ban between the Ga traditionalists and Charismatic churches in Accra, Ghana. I have argued that the following factors have contributed considerably to the enduring nature of the conflict. First, is the need based grievances expressed collectively by the Ga people, such as identity related concerns including the growing perception among them that their culture, religion and language are under threat. Also, the state's inability to address the land question, poor housing conditions, youth unemployment and poverty in the traditionally Ga neighbourhoods of Accra. Second, the political elites' penchant to use the conflict for propaganda purposes including politicisation of ethnicity for political capital. Therefore, while this conflict has nominally been considered religio-cultural based, we see that, it also reflects an intersection of

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[17] DCOP Ampah-Benin, *Interview with the head of Ghana Police Public Relations Director*, Jan 15, 2015.

identity issues, resource based grievances, basic need deprivation and governance issues. These underlying factors, along with the entrenched positions assumed by the parties because each group believes they have rights and freedoms guaranteed by the national constitution, only leads to increased insecurity and social fragmentation in the city. The insistence of rights and freedoms from both communities *vis-à-vis* the posture of the state institutions and political elite means this conflict will persist or at best, fluctuate.

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