

Spatial poverty traps and ethnic conflict traps

Lessons from northern Ghana's 'Blood Yams'

Jay Oelbaum

ODI Working Paper 324
CPRC Working Paper 164

Results of ODI research presented
in preliminary form for discussion
and critical comment

ODI Working Paper 324
CPRC Working Paper 164

Spatial poverty traps and ethnic conflict traps

Lessons from Northern Ghana's 'Blood Yams'

Jay Oelbaum

December 2010



Chronic Poverty
Research Centre

Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
www.odi.org.uk

Acknowledgements

This paper is one of a series on spatial poverty traps that has been published jointly by the Overseas Development Institute and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre. The series has been edited by Kate Bird and Kate Higgins, with support from Tari Masamvu and Dan Harris. It draws largely on papers produced for an international workshop on Understanding and Addressing Spatial Poverty Traps, which took place on 29 March 2007 in Stellenbosch, South Africa. The workshop was co-hosted by the Overseas Development Institute and the Chronic Poverty Research Centre and jointly funded by the Overseas Development Institute, the Chronic Poverty Research Centre, Trocaire and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Extremely valuable comments on this paper were contributed by Kate Bird, Ted Robert Gurr, Benjamin Talton and anonymous referees at the Overseas Development Institute. The paper was also enriched by the helpful comments and questions of participants at the international workshop 'Understanding and Addressing Spatial Poverty Traps'. The author wishes to thank the workshop sponsors.

The author likewise gratefully acknowledges E.O. Laryea Brown, Ben Ephson, Franco Agomma, M.I. Chambas and Jon Kirby for their assistance with fieldwork in northern Ghana. Errors of omission and commission in this paper are the exclusive responsibility of the author.

ISBN 978 1 907288 08 1

Working Paper (Print) ISSN 1759 2909

ODI Working Papers (Online) ISSN 1759 2917

© Overseas Development Institute 2010

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from ODI Working Papers for their own publications, as long as they are not being sold commercially. As copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.

This document is also an output from the Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) which is funded by UKaid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The CPRC gratefully acknowledges DFID's support.

The analysis and views presented in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI, CPRC, DFID or any other funders.

Contents

Acronyms	iv
Executive summary	v
1. Introduction	1
1.1 The Guinea Fowl War	2
1.2 Nanumba district	2
1.3 Spatial poverty as a cause of war	3
1.4 Poverty reduction as a cause of war	4
2. The causes and origins of the Guinea Fowl War	7
2.1 The proximate cause	7
2.2 Demographic, economic and ethnic structure in brief	7
2.3 Patterns of subordination and resistance	8
3. Spatial dimensions of poverty and the Guinea Fowl War	11
3.1 The poverty impact of reform in the NR	11
3.2 Expenditure switching policies	11
3.3 Subsidy removal	13
3.4 Changes in overall strategy	14
4. Reform, poverty reduction and the upending of Ghana's ranked system	16
4.1 Economic change and the benefits of adaptive failure	16
4.2 State versus market-oriented production in Northern Ghana	17
4.3 The growth of the commercial and marketing networks of the Konkomba	19
4.4 The commodification of land	20
References	24

Acronyms

CRISE	Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GLSS	Ghana Living Standards Survey
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
IFI	International Financial Institution
KOYA	Konkomba Youth Association
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NA	Native Authority
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NR	Northern Region
NT	Northern Territories
NTE	Non-traditional Export
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PAD	Policy Analysis Division
PER	Public Expenditure Review
PIP	Public Investment Programme
PNP	People's National Party
PPMED	Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Department
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme

Executive summary

This paper considers linkages between the spatial dimensions of poverty and war in the conflict-prone Northern areas of Ghana. More specifically, the paper focuses on the Northern Region proper. The investigation centres upon one specific conflict, the ‘Guinea Fowl War’ of 1994, which was the most violent episode in the country’s history. The work examines how this conflict relates to changes in the region’s poverty profile. It does so by paying particular attention to agricultural production, consumption poverty and infrastructure accessibility in the Northern Region under economic reforms. The paper produces a counterintuitive conclusion about the relationship between changes in poverty, interethnic inequality and warfare in this region. Many existing arguments about the relationship between remoteness, poverty and insecurity established in the conflict and spatial poverty literature are valid. However, in contradistinction to most analyses, the evidence presented here indicates that the war in question was not caused primarily by the increasing marginalisation of economic agents in the region but rather by pressures related to increasing opportunities for income generation, poverty reduction and national integration under economic reform. These gains created friction in the region’s ranked ethnic system and put local exclusionary tenure and politico-institutional arrangements under strain.

The analysis has important implications for strategies to escape from spatial poverty traps because it finds that the most effective route for escaping poverty – the participation in agriculture markets – also generates conflict. Conflict in turn generates poverty and reverses economic gains. This fact is particularly worrisome because the crop in question in this instance, the yam, is both traded and locally consumed. This crop is thus understood to be an especially valuable vehicle of pro-poor growth.

Notwithstanding the fact that the paper can be interpreted as dismal in its outlook, the analysis holds out useful lessons for stakeholders. Five general recommendations are made here based on the findings laid out in this work. These are cast at a broad level of generality but can direct donor agendas.

1. The literature on pro-poor growth has identified the improvement of land-related property rights and more transparent land markets as critical to pro-poor growth and the diversification of rural incomes. The evidence from Northern Ghana on the relationship of war to issues of land tenure suggests that addressing this issue must be the first priority for stakeholders in the Northern Region. I cannot prescribe here how these conflicts and tenure arrangements can be resolved. It is worth noting, however, that standard notions of private property do considerable violence to traditional tenure arrangements. Simultaneously, the statement that land reforms and titling schemes should respect tradition (e.g. Cord, 2007) is also deeply problematic, given the extent to which exclusion and violence are implicated in ‘tradition’. As a first step, it will be necessary to have a more detailed study of how land markets actually function in practice.
2. A related observation concerns power asymmetries between central governments and remote rural areas. The government’s mixed signals about its intentions for the region played a key role as a driver of conflict, inflaming the aspirations and expectations of acephalous groups, while generating resistance and anger from chiefs to whom the government was ultimately beholden. This observation holds important implications for those concerned with remote areas. It is fair to say that such regions require greater influence to leverage in investment and attention from the centre. At the same time, an important lesson from this case might also be that, in patrimonial states, the centre needs greater infrastructural and possibly coercive power to deal with local notables. As such, any approach to tackling spatial poverty must focus on improving infrastructural capacity and also coercive power at the core as well as the periphery of African states.
3. There is a widespread assumption in the current economics of conflict literature that widening economic inequalities between distinct reference groups cause war (see especially work associated with the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE). In point of fact, this is a deeply problematic assumption. It is difficult to predict *ex ante* what the

conflict impact widening or decreasing economic inequalities will be. The prescription of directing resources to the most deprived areas for security reasons must be qualified. Assumptions of unit homogeneity should be abandoned and the knowledge that distinct ethnic systems have equally distinct dynamics must inform poverty reduction strategies. Donors must make understanding local ethnic systems a priority in poverty reduction.

4. The emergence of conflict should not necessarily be viewed as a development failure. The case demonstrates that conflict emerges as a result of development and poverty reduction. This means that stakeholders should anticipate conflict in zones emerging from spatial poverty and, notwithstanding the high costs, should not be unduly discouraged by its emergence. Such conflicts have been a key part of the historical development process. This is not to say that war is inevitable and institutional arrangements cannot be used to prevent and contain violence.
5. A final lesson to emerge from this case study is the need to have a development strategy that emphasises diverse opportunities for income generation. Even within the same political economic space, distinct groups will respond differently to available opportunities. At the centre of this observation is the understanding that economic actors are also ethno-political actors, and that these are not merely generic individuals pursuing generic preferences but rather different objectives based on divergent historical and institutional backgrounds that have shaped their preferences, orientations and values (Grindle, 2001). A reliance on one crop, for example, may skew benefits towards one group in an ethnic system more disposed, for historical reasons, to success in that endeavour. The search for multiple income-generating activities must be a priority.

1. Introduction

Northern Ghana, or Ghana's Guinea Savannah zone, has been defined quite literally by resource poverty and its social and geographical distance from the Ghanaian core.¹ The historical demarcation of the boundary between Asante and the Northern Territories by the colonial government, for example, was tied to the absence of gold ornaments beyond the eighth parallel, which was regarded as the limit of the mineral rich country (Bening, 1999). In the colonial era, the relative absence of traditional high-value cash crops, the remoteness of the region and its infrastructure deficits were critical to its economic stagnation and general failure to progress beyond subsistence production. Indeed, virtually all schemes for selling Northern products were limited by the cost of getting the product to the railhead at Kumasi or to the coast (Sutton, 1989). Today, despite Ghana's much touted economic recovery, Northern Ghana remains an economic laggard characterised neatly by the markers that identify other spatial poverty traps: poor agro-ecology with a single rainy season, limited infrastructure, weak market institutions with high transaction costs, political isolation, high levels of physical and food insecurity and generally weak claims on central government services.²

Overall, in the 1990s, spatial disparities in Ghana's poverty profile widened. The percentage of Ghanaians defined as poor decreased significantly but poverty reduction was extremely modest in the Savannah (Aryeetey and McKay, 2007; Coulombe and McKay, 2007; GSS, 2000). In the rural parts of the Savannah where poverty reduction occurred, it affected mostly those close to the poverty line. Investments, infrastructure and social amenities necessary for pro-poor growth are inadequate and disparities between the North and spatially advantaged regions are massive. The incidence of poverty in the rural Savannah is double that of the rural forest.³ Fewer than 4% of residents of the rural Savannah, for example, have access to electricity, which is only one-sixth of the level for the rural forest zone (Coulombe and McKay 2007). Adult literacy in the Savannah is only 24%, or less than half the national average.

In comparison with other zones of Ghana (a country that remains a West African outlier owing to the relative absence of violent conflict), the Savannah areas are politically volatile and conflict prone, in terms of both incidence and intensity of communal warfare. At the time of writing (July 2008), the town of Bawku in the Upper East Region is engulfed in violence. In the last week of June, at least 20 deaths occurred in conflicts between cephalous (glossed here as ethnic groups governed by chieftaincy) Mamprusi and acephalous Kusasi tribes there. That town has been under curfew since January, when several days of rioting left multiple people dead and half the town burnt. In recent years, politics in Northern Ghana have been dominated by the murder of the Paramount Chief of the Dagomba, the Ya-Na, in 2002. This has been followed by an extended intra-ethnic lineage-based succession crisis that has caused major investments in the region to be shelved and may yet threaten Ghana's movement towards full-fledged democratic consolidation.

This paper investigates how changes in this area's spatial poverty profile contributed to armed conflict and asks what, if any, lessons can be drawn from this area. In answering these questions, it focuses on the Savannah's most deadly historical conflict, the 'Guinea Fowl War' of February 1994.

1 Northern Ghana refers to the three administrative regions, Upper East, Upper West, and Northern, previously identified as the Northern Territories. Hereafter, the capitalised Northern Region (NR) will refer to the specific administrative district whereas Northern Ghana will refer to all three administrative regions.

2 The economic characteristics of and prospects for Northern Ghana as a whole (as opposed to simply the Northern Region) are discussed extensively in Jebuni et al. (2007).

3 The validity of this statement varies with the choice of poverty measure. With a 900,000 cedi poverty line in 1998/99 the difference is slightly less than double.

1.1 The Guinea Fowl War

This war broke out in Ghana's NR and involved the royal Nanumba, Dagomba, and Gonja tribes on one side and the acephalous 'minority' Konkomba on the other. The grievances on which this conflict was based were long standing. This episode is best understood as merely the most deadly manifestation of a series of clashes between the cephalous and acephalous tribes of Ghana's North. Prior to the Guinea Fowl War, violent conflicts occurred between the Mossi and Konkomba in 1993; the Konkomba, Nawuri, Basare, Nchumuru and Gonja in 1992; the Nawuri and Gonja in 1991; the Konkomba and Nanumba in 1981; and the Gonja and Vagalla in Gonja in 1980.

The war affected eight administrative districts,⁴ involved the burning and destruction of 442 separate villages and resulted in the displacement of 200,000 people. The actual number of deaths is put at 2000 by government sources and many databases, but more accurate accounts multiply this number as much as ten-fold. Massing (1994) suggests that between 6000-10,000 died as a direct result of fighting in rural Nanumba district alone; van der Linde and Naylor (1999) of Oxfam give an estimate of 15,000; and one extremely well informed, if not totally dispassionate, scholar suggests that as many as 25,000 died (Katanga, 1996). The fighting, as is always the case in what Horowitz (1985) deems 'deadly ethnic riots', was also noted for its grizzly quality. A three-month state of emergency was declared by President Rawlings (Daily Graphic, 1994) but emergency status remained in place until August. Formal peace treaties and ceremonies were conducted between the Konkomba and Dagomba in December of 1994, between the Konkomba and Gonja in May of 1996 and between the Konkomba and Nanumba in October of 1996.

Unfortunately, the official report of the government-constituted Permanent Peace Negotiating Team and its recommendations for addressing the conflict were never released. Most observers believe that the shelving and non-disclosure of this report is telling in itself. It is generally considered unthinkable by Northern elites that such a report would be shelved if the conflict occurred within the geographic triangle of economic activity based on Kumasi (Asante Region), Sekondi-Takoradi (Western Region), and Tema (Greater Accra) that are the nodal points within which all major economic activities are concentrated: this is where Ghana's dominant ethnic groups reside. It is also clear that the underlying issues related to the conflict have not been addressed, particularly in Nanumba district, where Konkomba are still considered 'strangers' and peace is extremely tenuous. In 2000, during interviews by the author with three members of the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) at the Agbobloshie Yam Market in Accra, one said that 'there is peace in the region but we fear it will slip' and, as such, "men feel like they should sleep in a hotel'. An overlay between ethnic affiliation and the dominant parties in the 2004 national elections led to violent clashes both before and after the elections in Bimbilla (Ghanaian Chronicle, 2002). A large stock of armaments was seized at Konkomba Market in March of 2006 and the government reports a further build-up of arms in the North (BBC Monitoring Service, 2006).

1.2 Nanumba district

The author's research on conflict in the NR was undertaken in Nanumba district, where the Guinea Fowl War originated and which was the site of a significant war in 1981. The district, of roughly 3200 square kilometres, lies in the Eastern portion of the NR. Nanumba has certain geographical advantages compared with other parts of the North. For example, it lies along the main trunk corridor linking Bawku in the Upper East Region with Southern Ghana. According to German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the district also has the best soil in all of the North, suitable for cultivation of starchy tubers as well as groundnuts and potential tradables such as cashews and teak. Substantial tracts of uncultivated fertile land suitable for rice production also exist in the Jua-Salnaayili and Sabonjida valleys. In addition, rainfall in the district is more stable than in any other parts of the NR.

⁴ Although only seven were placed under a state of emergency, Bogner (1997) states that the majority of Konkomba who died were probably killed near Buipe in East Gonja on the North's principal trunk road, which was not placed under an emergency.

At the same time, the district's prospects should not be overestimated. Like the rest of the North, the district has a long dry season from November to February, during which those who do not participate in dry season migration are rendered redundant. The principal trunk roads are often rendered impassable in the rainy season. Feeder roads are inadequate to link smaller farming communities to market towns. The district is demonstrably incapable of mobilising financial resources and has inadequate personnel to staff the proposed departments of its district assembly. The district has inadequate infrastructural facilities (the nearest hospital at Yendi is 70km away), poor housing conditions, low private sector investment, environmental degradation arising from perennial annual bush fires and a very high incidence of diseases such as guinea worm and malaria. High population growth rates have led to very high dependency ratios. Most importantly, from the point of view of this paper, the district is buffeted by frequent and deeply destructive ethnic warfare.

There is now a substantial literature documenting a relationship between warfare and poverty generation. According to the World Bank (2004), after a typical civil war of seven years duration, incomes are approximately 15% lower than they would be if the war had not happened, thus implying a 30% increase in the incidence of absolute poverty. It is clear that the Guinea Fowl War aggravated social conditions and increased poverty. The Nanumba District Development Plan of 1996 stated that, as a direct result of the fighting, roughly 300 teachers left the district resulting in the closure of eight junior secondary schools, the senior secondary school at Wulensi and a large number of primary schools. In the town of Binchertanga, a rudimentary school structure was visible but no teacher was at post. In 1997, only one town in the district, Bimbilla, had pipe borne water. Previously, the district's second largest town – Wulensi – also had pipe borne water but this infrastructure had been destroyed in the Nanumba-Konkomba war of 1981 and had never been rehabilitated/replaced. In addition, there was no doctor in Nanumba and the health facilities were inadequate. The war had taken a severe toll on existing health facilities, as staff fled and properties were burned, such as a structure to house a health clinic at Juo.

With the destruction caused to property, the per capita income in Nanumba district fell dramatically between the onset of the conflict and the period of fieldwork by the author. Several farmers lost over 60% of their seeds/seedlings or breeding stock. In 1997, the author conducted a food security survey in the village of Binchertanga along the Yendi-Bimbilla corridor, interviewing 20 farmers. Seven had been commercially successful yam farmers prior to the conflict, but all had been reduced to subsistence acreage. (The largest reported farming 24 acres of yams prior to the war compared with the sample average of roughly 2.8 acres in 1997.) This study indicated that, on average, approximately 63% of income was spent on food – extremely high by national standards. In interviews conducted through interpreters from the Bimbilla Teacher Training College, this was said to be much higher than the period prior to the conflict. In sum, many of the preconditions for pro-poor growth were undermined by the Guinea Fowl War.⁵ If short-term indicators that the conflict has hurt the zone's economic prospects are relatively clear cut, our understanding of how spatial dimensions of poverty have caused the conflict is muddled.

1.3 Spatial poverty as a cause of war

In the rapidly growing corpus of work on violence in Northern Ghana, relationships between the spatial dimension of Northern Ghana's chronic poverty and various conflicts are invariably posited – albeit with varying degrees of sophistication. The most cautious scholarship merely identifies a potential link between Northern violence and the absence of economic opportunity in a region dominated by subsistence agriculture and limited non-farm employment opportunities (Shepherd et al., 2004). Less tentative, but extremely well informed, scholars claim that communal conflict in the North is rooted in the 'neglect and marginalisation' of the region (Tsikata and Seini, 2004), and these same authors attribute further marginalisation to policies of economic reform designed to favour more privileged

⁵ For an overview of these preconditions, see Cord, L. (2007).

regions with greater production of tradables (on the latter point see also Langer and Stewart, 2008). A related literature argues that donor-sponsored reforms have been an exacerbating factor in Northern conflicts because they have increased insecurity and economic hardship for the most vulnerable segments of the population (Nnoli 2001; van der Linde and Naylor 1999).

Given Ghana's economic and spatial profile, there are strong theoretical grounds for assuming that sharp regional inequalities would have emerged in reforming Ghana. These can be associated with reforms sponsored by international financial institutions (IFIs), as exchange rate and price liberalisation foster a pattern of development that favour regions of export crop or mineral production at the expense of areas that produce non-tradable crops. State activities can exacerbate this linkage. Collier et al. (2003) observe that, where internal rates of return, rather than the geographical spread and distribution of benefits, drives public investment programmes, public expenditure is also likely to focus on areas where private economic activity is reviving most rapidly. This implies that disparities are likely to grow under market reforms between regions and groups characterised by remoteness, the limited production of tradables and weak market integration, and those groups and regions with spatially superior profiles.

In addition to these putative causes, the limited penetration and relevance of central government and security agencies in the North, as in other zones of spatial poverty, more demonstrably increases susceptibility to violent conflict in four interrelated ways:

1. The generation of security dilemmas (uncertainties of what competing parties and potentially violent opponents will do in the absence of credible enforcement mechanisms). These security dilemmas can encourage rational actors to engage in violence for fear of being victimised in the absence of information about the intentions of other groups and the inability or unwillingness of authorities to disarm combatants and contain violence. In the case of the Guinea Fowl War, the security situation was extremely uncertain prior to the war and this uncertainty was exacerbated when an 'irate mob' in Bimbilla attacked security personnel and set fire to Bimbilla police station and stole more than 500 rifles in January 1994. The fact that the central government did not immediately act to contain insecurity and ignored the self-evident movement towards war at this time reflected the marginality of the NR to the centre of Ghanaian politics.
2. The absence of national institutions and agents encourages actors to emphasise abiding and potentially incendiary parochial identities and places a more substantial burden on institutions such as chieftaincy, about which more will be said below.
3. Similarly this absence is thought to encourage agents at the local level to seek their own (violent) resolutions to grievances.
4. Finally, it is well established that the remoteness of the region and the absence of communication infrastructure impedes the ability of state agencies to respond to conflict when it emerges. Van der Linde and Naylor (1999) note, for example, that the government response to the outbreak of the Guinea Fowl War was slow because there was no means of communication between the districts and central government. It is clear, however, that beyond a number of generalisations, the relationship between spatial dimensions of poverty and violence is poorly understood for this case just as it is for others.⁶ How have changes in the incidence of poverty in the NR related to conflict? How have changes in access to goods, services, markets and infrastructure impacted on conflict and conflict risk there?

1.4 Poverty reduction as a cause of war

My own analysis of this conflict began as a political study of the relationship between economic reform and the Guinea Fowl War. In pursuing this original inquiry, a number of hypotheses relating to increasing poverty and immiseration as a source of conflict and grievance were tested, but were

⁶ On the general confusion, see Goodhand, J. (2003).

ultimately rejected. The research in turn led to the counterintuitive conclusion that the most hopeful route out of chronic poverty – widespread participation in agricultural markets (in this case a phenomenal growth of yam output) – also causes poverty-generating conflict.

To some extent, this finding should not be surprising. Cross-national statistical and comparative case study literature has drawn a link between the production and export of primary commodities and conflict. There are many hypothesised linkages – the simplest being that control of these can provide the means to finance rebellion. Many of the linkages, however, concern specific precious commodities, enclave production and products and regions associated with high asset specificity. These types of commodities are known to lend themselves to rentierism, looting and poor governance (Leonard and Straus, 2003). The commodity at play in this instance, the yam, is a simple food crop. The development of such crops is especially valuable for transforming regions of spatial poverty; being produced for the market and personal consumption, they provide means for income generation while mitigating risk.

This paper thus explores how movements out of spatial poverty traps also pose enormous conflict risks and play an important role as a trigger of violence. I argue, in contradistinction to the general claims in the literature, that very undesirable events – in this instance ethnic conflict – also happen, at least in part, as a result of normally desirable processes, including economic growth, increasing economic opportunities, growing economic equality, poverty reduction, improved connectivity to national infrastructure grids and enhanced social service provision. The road out of spatial poverty is thus likely to be bumpy.

My discussion is confined to one administrative region and one particular conflict. However, this analysis holds general implications and is relevant elsewhere. Drawing tacitly on Ted Robert Gurr's (1993) classic work on relative deprivation, and more explicitly on Horowitz's (1985) now equally classic *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, I argue that, under certain conditions – specifically in ranked ethnic systems – there can be a powerful, non-random and systematic relationship between liberal economic growth, poverty reduction and conflict, and that this dynamic played out in Ghana's NR. By indicating that the linkage is powerful, I am indicating not only that the understanding of the dynamics of ranked systems is well established (see also Esman, 1994), but also that the mechanism has considerable leverage and that the gains to a subordinate group need not be massive or universally enjoyed by its members to facilitate tension and contribute to conflict.

The claim that this link in ranked systems is systematic implies that the linkage mechanism identified is non-random and is related to the structure of ethnic relations that pertains in a given setting. As such, the mechanism is not exclusive to the case and is likely to recur across cases with similar ethnic structures. Because of this systematic quality, the probability of conflict under conditions of liberal economic growth, national integration and poverty reduction is almost certainly underestimated by the existing 'economics of conflict' models, and the analysis indicates that we will have to think much harder about the economic and institutional reforms necessary to make parts of Africa safe for the elimination of spatial poverty traps.

Ranked systems, as identified by Horowitz, usually occur where ethnic categories have interacted through conquest, and imply stratified group relations among ethnic categories comprising a single society. The relative rank and worth of these groups is determined ascriptively. Following Weber, Horowitz (1985) notes that 'in ranked systems, the unequal distribution of worth between superiors and subordinates is acknowledged and reinforced by an elaborate set of behavioural prescriptions and prohibitions'. In unranked systems, by way of contrast, the relative worth of groups is always contestable and at issue.

Ranked systems can withstand some 'dissonance' or mismatch between the economic status of groups and that of individual members. As Horowitz observes, 'carried far enough, either of these dissonant conditions can prove destabilising to a ranked system: inferior members of a superordinate group threaten the myth of its superiority, and the growth of an elite among a subordinate group sooner or later creates aspirations for mobility and recognitions incompatible with strictly ascriptive hierarchy'.

Given the high economic, political, military and psycho-social stakes involved in ranked systems, however, considerable violence will usually accompany any attempt to renegotiate the social order, and the counter efforts to contain such a transformation. In sum, in a ranked system predicated on inequality, even a Pareto-optimal change in welfare can generate conflict.

Political science's most sophisticated understanding of ethnic politics predicts that economic gains for those groups, most marginalised by markers of stigma, political irrelevance and spatial poverty, are likely to be conflict generating. To the extent that my analysis attempts to query and expose the connections between spatial poverty and conflict, it thus raises a frightening dilemma. In Northern Ghana, peace is a prerequisite for poverty reduction (Jebuni et al., 2007). However, the most effective vector of poverty reduction in the region identified to date (market cultivation of yam) has been a cause of warfare. Answering the question of whether the potentially competing goals of poverty reduction and peace building can be made compatible in Northern Ghana is the key to that area's long-term escape from its spatial poverty trap. While it is not possible to answer this question conclusively, this study does provide some sign posting for policymakers and donors who must tackle this conundrum in Ghana and elsewhere.

1. In order to understand what conflicts are likely to emerge alongside an escape from a spatial poverty trap, donors and policymakers must avoid the fallacy of unit homogeneity when assessing conflict risk. Not all social systems operate in an identical fashion. In ranked ethnic systems such as those that obtain in Ghana's North, growing equality, rather than widening inequality, is a vector of conflict. In this regard, this paper raises some questions about the prescriptions of Jebuni et al. (2007) in this series, and by conventional conflict analysts concerned with horizontal inequality. I illustrate here how growing economic equality systematically generates conflict in a ranked ethnic system. This is a well-established principle in political science but has been neglected in the development field.
2. It is necessary to deal with foreseeable politico-institutional issues – in this instance conflicts over land tenure arrangements and citizenship rights – prior to embarking on an economic development strategy for Northern Ghana. Politics must take precedence over economic strategy.
3. In this regard, addressing spatial poverty traps may involve strengthening the political centre vis-à-vis regional notables who may block necessary reforms. This runs counter to prescriptions about the need to increase regional bargaining strength vis-à-vis the centre in addressing spatial poverty.
4. While the notion of spatial poverty traps is a useful construct, it is critical to recognise that extra-economic factors and socio-cultural dispositions may condition responses to market opportunities even within the same 'space'. Geography matters but, as a construct, spatial poverty needs to be unpackaged.
5. Relatedly, any strategy for addressing spatial poverty should recognise the need for participation in a range of activities (as recommended by other participants in this series) and product markets, since group and ethnic specialisation in any given crop may lead to distributive conflicts.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 discusses in greater detail what is known about the Guinea Fowl War and identifies its established and hypothesised causes. Where possible, it relates these causes to spatial dimensions of poverty. Section 3 proceeds by considering the evidence of changes in the poverty profile of the conflict zones prior to the war. This section demonstrates that economic reforms in the NR appear to have been beneficial, having fostered significant if modest poverty reduction in the conflict zone. Section 4 discusses how such improvements led to conflict. The final section then returns to the five lessons above and hopes to strengthen the case for these propositions.

2. The causes and origins of the Guinea Fowl War

2.1 The proximate cause

The most important proximate cause of the Guinea Fowl War was the petition launched by KOYA and a Konkomba sub-chief to the National House of Chiefs, which sought the elevation of the Chief of Saboba (a Konkomba) to paramount status. This petition was rejected by the Dagomba paramount. The environment surrounding the petition was exacerbated by the actions of the central government, in particular President J.J. Rawlings, who had indicated in 1991 that 'minority groups' would be justified in taking up arms to defend their autonomy. In December of 1994, immediately prior to the conflict, the presidential advisor on chieftaincy affairs addressed the Northern Regional House of Chiefs. He implied that if the 'majority' tribes did not elevate a Konkomba paramount, the government's hand would be forced and it would take measures to do so (Ofori, 1994).

The 1992 Constitution, however, removed the government's authority to interfere in chieftaincy matters and to recognise or derecognise 'traditional' authority. Furthermore, the autonomy of the post-colonial Ghanaian state and its regimes had always been sharply circumscribed by the North's dominant chiefs, who had historically monopolised linkage institutions between state and society. As Pul (2003) rightly notes, a combination of signals of official permissiveness, rumours of war, the intractability of the issue and the seeming inability to find alternatives to violence, gave rise to a form of security dilemma that manifested in a deadly ethnic war.

In order to comprehend this proximate cause, however, one must gain a better understanding of the social structure of the North and the significance of chieftaincy. One cannot comprehend this conflict without understanding the extent to which the latter is, and has been, implicated in ideological, economic, military and political power.

2.2 Demographic, economic and ethnic structure in brief

Ghana is divided into 10 administrative regions which, for the most part, mirror internal colonial boundaries and were drawn with an emphasis on maintaining the coherence of traditional states and tribes (Bening, 1999).

Officially, 16 major ethnic groups have been designated in the NR. Of these, 10 are considered 'minority' acephalous tribes and have historically lacked organised political authority and stateness. These are the Anufo, Basare, Bimoba, Builsa, Konkomba, Mo, Nawuri, Nchumuru, Tampolensi and Vagalla. Four ethnic groups (or tribes) are chiefly, and may be referred to as kingdoms. These are the ritually related Mossi-Dagomba states of Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba, and the Gonja. The extent to which acephalous groups are integrated into the authority structure of chiefly states is variable and contested. As a general principle, it is fair to say, following Skalnik (1986; 1987), that the acephalous tribes of the region were neither fully absorbed into, nor expelled entirely from, the segmentary states.

The relationship between acephalous and cephalous groups has the character of a classic ranked system. This system developed over four historical periods: i) the period of conquest by the Northern kingdoms; ii) the intensification of subordination in the period of Asante hegemony in which Dagomba and Gonja had tributary status, roughly from 1774-1874; iii) the era of colonial rule (1902-1957); and iv) the post-colonial era.

2.3 Patterns of subordination and resistance

2.3.1 Conquest

The political history of the Northern chiefly states is essentially one of migrant cavalry moving south, and either absorbing or expelling the stateless autochthones of the region. The Gur-speaking Mossi, Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba royals trace their lineage to a common ancestor and, organisationally and culturally, there is little to distinguish these states. The fourth majority state is Gonja, whose history can be traced to the migration of a band of warriors from Upper Niger sometime in the 16th or 17th century (Goody, 1964).

Interactions between these groups of invaders and autochthones at this time were extremely complex. There is insufficient space here even to give a brief outline of the history of these conquests and the complexity of autochthonous responses and patterns of absorption, which have been described elsewhere (Brukum, 1997; Katanga, 1996; Staniland, 1975; Skalnik, 1986; 1987; Talton, 2003). It is sufficient to say that this period marked the beginnings of the formation of a ranked ethnic system.

2.3.2 Asante dominance

In 1732, Asante overran a portion of Gonja, and in 1744-1745 likewise invaded Dagomba, with the result that Dagomba accepted tributary status. The demand for tribute associated with Asante hegemony also sharpened the oppressive character of the Northern kingdoms as they raided acephalous groups for slaves. Estimates on the size of the tribute vary, and the number of required slaves and livestock almost certainly ebbed and flowed in relation to punitive expeditions and legal reforms (Arhin, 1987). It is clear, however, that the main source of slaves entering Asante did so from the Savannah societies to the North.

2.3.3 Colonial rule

The period of colonial rule ended tributary slave raiding. However, it also ushered in a period of undermining the autonomy of Konkomba, who had managed to retain an independent existence beyond the slave raiding outposts at the periphery of Eastern Dagomba (Tait, 1961). Colonial practice elevated the status of chieftaincy and institutionalised the subordinate status of acephalous groups.

The policy of indirect rule established in Northern Ghana in the 1930's further sought to consolidate the administrative authority of the chiefly states. Native authorities (NAs) became the basis of local government. They were responsible for the maintenance of law and order and had their own court and treasury. These ordinances, and the NA system as a whole, made chieftaincy and ethnic belonging the building blocks of modern state institutions while denying representation to the acephalous tribes. The laws also gave chiefs the power to collect taxes and exact tribute from Konkomba, along with control over the disposition of resources in Konkomba areas. Militarily, chiefly states were given the power to disarm the Konkomba. Unlike previous periods, in these instances Dagomba assertions were backed by British authority (Talton, 2003). Regulations were broadcast through NAs. This generated a monopoly of information for 'majority' tribes and enabled chiefs and citizens of chiefly states to step up the exploitation of Konkomba.

Economic development (or non-development) in the Northern Territories (NT) also set the stage for the current conflicts, as a result of the isolation of the NT and the colonial government's unique approach to land tenure issues there. The limited 'relevance' of northern Ghana – except as a source of migrant labour – and the paternalist desire to avoid reproduction of the 'negative' (often simply meaning 'detrivalised') social consequences of development experienced in the South led successive colonial governments to employ what one governor referred to as a 'national parks' approach. This had enormous ramifications for the institution of chieftaincy and its continued salience in the North.

Whereas in Asante and the Gold Coast Colony, chiefs in resource-endowed areas granted concessions and received rents for the development of their areas, in the NT the government monopolised this

privilege (Adeetuk, 1991; Bening, 1998). Government ownership of land in the NT almost certainly aided the popularity of chiefs in the North. There were no unscrupulous sales that generated resentment against chiefs as a whole, and no waves of land purchasing outsiders with loyalties to other traditional authorities outside their region of residence. Nor in practice did colonial legislation undermine the traditional tenure system and these customary laws still entailed considerable advantages for chiefs. Similarly, deep intra-ethnic class cleavages did not emerge that might have created alternative economic, as opposed to communal, poles of identity. These factors contributed to the contemporary situation where the 'traditional' sphere of politics dominates the political arena to a greater extent than it does in Southern Ghana.⁷

Vesting land ownership in the crown bequeathed a legacy of complications for post-colonial governments. Successive regimes were faced with pressure to unify land tenure arrangements in the North and South. This issue became central to the courting of Northern chiefs whose opinions and support are often key determinants of voting behaviour in their traditional areas.

2.3.4 The post-colonial era

Transformation of the ranked ethnic system in Ghana's NR in the post-colonial era is complicated. The legacy of prior periods is obviously relevant. However, new strains and contradictions emerged. First, there were obvious tensions inherent in the pluralist nature of the post-colonial Ghanaian state. Pluralism in this sense implies 'two or more social systems incorporated into a political framework dominated by one of them' (MacGaffey, 2006). The domination of the latter is, as one would expect in a patrimonial polity, extremely partial.

While we need not wade too deeply into social theory here, it is important to understand that conflicts centred around local power brokers are especially likely in infrastructure-deficient remote localities that are culturally distinct from the national core. Weber, whose work on patrimonial authority underpins nearly all contemporary analysis of African politics (and incidentally all the contemporary debates on aid effectiveness and the so-called new fiscal sociology), emphasised the extent to which the construction of binding authority to the centre of large states or empires is tenuous 'particularly where the patrimonial ruler confronts not a mere mass of subjects, but where he stands as one landlord (*grundherr*) above others (*honouraires*) who wield an autonomous authority of their own. The patrimonial power disapproves of independent authority but cannot dare to destroy autonomous local powers, unless he has an organization of his own which can replace them with approximately the same authority over local populations.' Indeed, central dependence on local authorities to govern, administer and politically mobilise remote regions with limited state presence is as much a cause of conflict in remote poor regions in West Africa as is central government indifference.

This is far removed from conventional wisdom in Western analyses of Africa, where Kwame Nkrumah's relatively lenient treatment of Northern chiefs was thought to simply reflect the absence of resources there, and thus the limited autonomy and threat of Northern traditional rulers. In fact, it must be recalled that there were simply limits to how far Nkrumah could push around chiefs in the North. One reason, for example, that Nkrumah never de-skinned the Dagomba paramount Ya Na Abudulai, which he had wanted to do, was because the Yagbum Wura (paramount chief of Gonja) advised him that if he did so no other paramount chief would support him (Ladouceur, 1979). This was apparently sobering.

The post-Nkrumah period was characterised by repeated attempts to unify land tenure throughout the North and South and to restore land ownership to the skins (chiefs) of the Northern regions. A lack of Konkomba political representation made it impossible for them to sway the outcomes of these attempts in their favour. In the course of extensive political shredding, however, attempts to draft or implement the required amendments were thwarted by changes of governments. The Constitution established in 1981 for Ghana's Third Republic again vested land ownership with chiefs of dominant tribes. According to Skalnik (1986), who provides the most detailed account of the 1981 Konkomba versus Nanumba conflict, the war 'was prompted by this constitutional recognition of traditional land

⁷ For a recent overview which dwells on this issue, see Kelly and Bening (2007).

rights'. Once again, however, the appropriate legislation that would have affected this constitutional change was thwarted when the People's National Party (PNP) was abruptly overthrown in 1981.

As indicated earlier, Ghana's democratisation process once again placed the matter of land tenure and chieftaincy in the Northern region on the front burner. The new Constitution entrenched the legal authority of the chiefs of 'majority' tribes over the disposition of land, and effectively disenfranchised 'minorities.' This set the stage for a recurrence of the 1981 conflict but on a larger scale.

One still must question, however, why ownership of land has become important in a region historically lacking important cash crops and where land has historically been a relatively free good. It is here where the economic changes immediately preceding the war become relevant. We consider these changes in the next two sections – focusing on the question of how economic contraction or growth contributed to the war.

3. Spatial dimensions of poverty and the Guinea Fowl War

On the basis of recent poverty data, a group of extremely well-informed scholars wrote that ‘the conflicts in the north which have escalated since 1980 may have partly been the result of the absence of a dynamic economy capable of absorbing and easing the energies of youth’ (Shepherd et al., 2004). Similar sentiments regarding the increasing cleavages between Northern and Southern Ghana, and the relative neglect of the North as a source of violent conflict, have also been identified by Tsikata and Seini (2004). Such commentary is not insensible and should be taken seriously.⁸ But while we might look for coherence between past and present in linking these most recent data to the Guinea Fowl War, doing so would be misleading because what evidence we have indicates that poverty dynamics in the NR have been non-linear under economic reforms.

3.1 The poverty impact of reform in the NR

My approach to understanding economic change and poverty in the Savannah was filtered through the prism of economic reform that dominated Ghana’s political economy throughout the 1980s and 1990s. There is inadequate space here to extensively address the general theoretical and empirical debate on the relationship between reform and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. Without wading into this debate, however, we may simply note that aggregate figures conceal wide variations in outcomes, and that increases in poverty in some instances and regions have clearly been registered. Literature on reform and spatial poverty has established that the distributional effects of reform vary owing to a range of factors, including changes in relative prices, geographical location, the variation in risks confronted by different producers and regional variations in access to infrastructure and markets (Bird et al., 2007; Christiansen et al., 2003; Cord, 2007; Kanbur and Venables, 2005). Across this entire range of variables the prospects for Ghana’s NR under reform would appear to be poor.

How has adjustment affected poverty in the NR prior to the conflict? Helleiner (1989) has emphasised expenditure switching, economic contraction and changes in overall strategy as areas where linkages between reform and poverty (as well as regional inequality) in sub-Saharan Africa can be sought. I consider these issues presently.

3.2 Expenditure switching policies

The core instrument of Ghana’s economic reform was currency devaluation. Ghana’s devaluation has had the effect of favouring the prices of tradable goods relative to non-tradable goods. As a result, early studies on poverty and reform in Ghana noted the probability of a widening North/South inequality and emphasised that the principal gainers from Ghana’s economic growth have been the cocoa farmers, who do not inhabit the Savannah. These studies also noted that changes in the food/non-food barter terms of trade have made smallholders, particularly subsistence agriculturalists (disproportionately represented in the disadvantaged North), worse off (Pearce, 1992; Sahn and Sarris, 1991; Sarris and Shams, 1991). These studies were well researched, technically sound, and alarming. They have strong limitations, however, in that they are based on the assumption, which in Ghana is extremely improbable, that inputs and consumer goods purchased by farmers were available at official prices if used at all. Moreover, because none of the studies were able to account for changes in farmers’ output, real gains (or potential losses) to farmers were unaccounted for. Fortunately these studies are not our only sources of evidence.

⁸ These are just two of many publications drawing a relationship between conflict and the widening income and poverty disparities between Northern and Southern Ghana. I cite these because these are the most economically competent. Additional literature, much of which is in the anachronistic dependency tradition, has tended to be more scholasticist and some has even attributed pre-adjustment conflicts such as the Nanumba-Konkomba war of 1981 to adjustment. This work is better ignored.

Data on poverty and consumption in Ghana have been systematically collected in the context of a National Household Survey by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). Known as the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS), four rounds were conducted between 1987 and 2000 with the purpose of monitoring the social cost of adjustment. Changes in agricultural output should be better reflected in these income and expenditure data. The principal limitation of these studies for our purposes, however, is that region is not used as a stratifying variable in the sample design. Instead, ecological zone is the organising principle of this survey so that it becomes difficult to disentangle the Northern from the Upper East and Upper West regions, which are all included in the Savannah designation. To make matters worse, the GSS data conflicts with Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) data on production. However, when these data are crosschecked against additional primary material collected by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) at the regional and district levels, plot surveys carried out with microeconomists, my own micro-level food security study and interviews with policymakers, government officials and researchers at the regional level, it is possible to make some judgments about the social impact of reform in the NR and to relate this material to the conflict.

The GLSS data indicate a significant reduction in poverty in the Savannah in the period immediately prior to the conflict. In contrast with the first two rounds of the survey, which indicated a marked increase in poverty, the third round, collected in 1992, noted very significant increases in several categories of real food expenditure. Taking a poverty line of two-thirds of 1998 mean expenditures, the headcount index of poverty fell 11% between 1988 and 1992 and more than 20% between 1989 and 2002 (World Bank, 1995).

This significant and anomalous reduction in poverty in the Savannah in the period immediately prior to the conflict raised eyebrows among World Bank economists, who sought to interrogate this surprising data. Of particular concern to observers familiar with the data was the fact that changes in the survey recall period had biased expenditures upward for the 1992 survey, particularly for the Savannah. There were also concerns that seasonal changes in prices were inadequately accounted for because of a sampling defect, as in any given locality the number of households surveyed in a given month varied significantly throughout the year. Coulombe and McKay (1995) have corrected these factors to produce data that increase the comparability across the three GLSS surveys prior to the conflict. Adjusting for differential recall error, the fall in the headcount index of poverty between 1998 and 1992 was still 10%. Adjustments for seasonality did not change the impact significantly in any direction.

Because this finding was surprising, Bank economists subjected these data to additional scrutiny and sought to see if income and output data could be found to corroborate the large increases in household expenditure. Jones and Ye (1995) noted that, when rural producer prices were deflated by the consumer price index, real prices for the predominant food crops were falling in the period immediately preceding the conflict. However, using GSS production data between 1989 and 1992, it is clear that increases in production outweighed the drop in real prices. Bank studies concluded that sharp increases in agricultural revenues in the North were real, related in large measure to the growth in starchy tubers. Xiao and Ye concluded that 'what seems to be driving the increase in agricultural revenues is the sharp increase in yam production and to a lesser extent cassava production'. Not only were increases in yam output greater than for other crops, but also prices for this crop fell less precipitously than others.

Detailed plot history surveys carried out in Dagomba on behalf of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) also acknowledge the large growth of cassava output in the North, which those researchers attribute to its tolerance to low nutrient soil (Al-Hassan et al., 1996; Shepherd and Onumah, 1997). Data from the GSS and MOFA more clearly demonstrate a substantial growth in yam output, particularly from the rich yam growing belt of Nanumba, where the 'minority' Konkomba constitute a majority of the population. In fact, yam output in the NR doubled in volume between 1986 and 1992. More than one quarter of this output came from Bimbilla, where the Guinea Fowl War originated and where volumes actually tripled. In this district, Skalnik (1987) estimated that Konkomba comprised at least two thirds of the population and the 2000 Census indicates that 59.6% of the population are Konkomba. There was also a very large output growth of yams in East Gonja – where 2000 census figures indicate an

extremely large concentration of Konkomba (roughly equal to the number of Guan [Gonja]) – and Gushiegu, where roughly one-quarter of the population is Konkomba.⁹

When these production figures are considered, they indicate an even brighter picture for the NR. Yam is not extensively grown in the Upper East and Upper West Regions and substantial consumption, income and food expenditure gains were therefore concentrated in the NR and were more limited elsewhere in the Savannah. In this respect, the GLSS probably understated gains in the NR and proportional gains to Konkomba.

Table 1: Northern Region yam production estimates, 1992-1994 (metric tonnes)

District	1992	1993	1994
Damango	9000	10,500	12,600
Yendi	58,500	74,250	31,250
Bimbilla	214,500	249,600	78,000
Gushiegu/Karaga	94,800	108,420	31,500
Gambaga	700	700	750
Savelugu/Nanton	19,000	14,980	17,550
Salaga	243,600	252,170	61,000
Tamale	35,000	44,000	31,200
Bole	45,600	34,290	37,536
Saboba/Chereponi	35,200	40,460	29,750
Tonlon/Kumbugu	1400	3200	6400
Walewale	1120	1200	900
Zabzugu/Tatale	147,000	161,600	38,500
Total	905,420	995,370	376,936

Table 2: Northern Region agricultural production estimates, 1986-1993 (metric tonnes)

Crops	Maize	Rice	Cassava	Millet	G/corn	Yam	G/nuts	Beans	Pepper
1986	102,100	36,100	122,950	106,400	115,520	453,964	86,300	12,100	72,400
1987	90,000	31,000	140,000	35,530	59,470	300,000	85,957	5797	4169
1988	134,600	46,000	108,000	90,000	89,460	624,200	99,000	6700	1100
1989	87,000	19,500	122,400	112,000	121,000	447,000	91,000	13,400	1000
1990	106,700	44,696	56,000	38,710	68,040	352,000			
1991	159,460	50,160	140,400	35,050	120,360	1,185,900	23,000	32,775	
1992	130,560	43,360	155,890	43,850	112,850	905,420			
1993	167,889	60,212	197,345	60,980	127,032	995,370	32,650	43,871	

Source: Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Department (PPMED) (Statistics Division), MOFA.

3.3 Subsidy removal

One of the factors thought to have been damaging to farmers in the Savannah has been the elimination of input subsidies under structural adjustment (Whitehead, 2006). In the conflict zone, it has been argued that this is reflected in declining soil fertility and in crop switching away from nutrient-intensive crops such as maize (van der Linde and Naylor, 1999), and that these associated hardships are said to have contributed to conflict.

The Oxfam analysis, however, provides no data to demonstrate declining maize yields, and likewise provides no evidence to support a related claim that there has been considerable crop switching away from maize in favour of root crops. A detailed and rigorous plot survey from the conflict-affected districts of Gushiegu, Karaga, Savelugu, Nanton and Salaga indicates that the proportion of surveyed

⁹ The data on district-level relative populations shares of Gurma (Konkomba) were obtained from the 2000 census. Mr. Assemsuro Selase, the Northern Region statistician provided me with these figures on 6 September 2007. I am extremely grateful for his assistance. It should be noted that many Konkomba advocates believe that the census figures grossly undercount the Konkomba.

farmers' plots planted with maize increased steadily since 1984 (Al-Hassan et al., 1996). Regional statistics from PPMED of MOFA also contradict Oxfam's claims.

A substantial increase in yam production is also difficult to reconcile with claims of huge declines in soil fertility. Yams are extremely nutrient intensive and are not grown on land immediately prior to being fallowed (Langintuyo, 1989). There is considerable variation in land fertility declines across regions, but in areas where the conflict was initiated and where extremely vicious fighting ensued – Bimbilla and the Salaga area of Gonja – there was a huge output and yield increase for yams. Discussions with senior officials at the district agricultural extension office (Nanumba) and agronomists at the Nayankpala research station in Tamale also confirmed that there had been large yam output increases prior to the war. Although it may seem difficult to reconcile the withdrawal of fertiliser subsidies with large food crop output increases in the North, the regional output data is consistent with national figures, which show large post-1990 yield per hectare of food crops (Nyanteng and Seini, 2000).

In sum, with respect to the impact on agricultural producers, it is not credible to argue that economic reform generally increased poverty in the NR in the period immediately preceding the war, and this is especially true of the conflict hot spots and those areas where obstacles to resolution have been most obdurate. These data indicate rather that growth in agricultural incomes lowered the regional incidence of poverty in the run-up to the Guinea Fowl War.

3.4 Changes in overall strategy

I have indicated above that, for Ghana's North, characterised by spatial poverty, there are sound theoretical reasons to predict that the region would have suffered from a dearth of both private and public investment as a result of economic reform. What does the evidence suggest about the period before the conflict? Here I focus on public investment.

In 1986, as part of its structural adjustment programme (SAP), Ghana undertook to prepare a three-year rolling public investment programme (PIP). The purpose was to provide 'a rationalized basis for the planning, analysis, selection, implementation, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of development projects' (Republic of Ghana, 1994). Critics note with respect to the PIP that a specific poverty focus was applied only to social sector projects. Otherwise, the criterion for project selection was an effective rate of return of at least 15% for projects costing more than \$5 million. On this formal criterion, the North may have stood to lose out, but market principles alone have not shaped the PIP. In the preparation of the PIP, 'adequate consideration was to be given to the regional distribution of projects to ensure equitable and balanced development of all regions'.

In the early 1990s, the government of Ghana began analysis of the distribution of current and capital expenditure by region and by programme. This responsibility was delegated to the Policy Analysis Division (PAD) of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, which turned this work over to the Social Dimensions of Adjustment desk. In reality, there is no way to tell to what extent the PIP principles were followed in advance of the conflict. The Ghanaian budget process suffered from opacity, data lapses and weak coordination. The 1992-1994 Ghana Public Expenditure Review (PER) written by the World Bank indicated that PAD studies were extremely hampered by a lack of available data. Bank staff noted that 'centralized programs are booked under the ministries concerned... [and] that actual payments cannot be spatially disaggregated from the national accounts, either on a district level or on a regional level' (World Bank and Republic of Ghana, 1992).

The PAD study did, however, attempt to examine regional expenditure across three ministries – Agriculture, Education and Health. While all of these studies were severely hampered, the conclusions suggest that in reality the emphasis on regional balance has not materialised. The health sector study acknowledged that it was impossible to obtain information on actual PIP expenditures, but on the basis of budget estimates noted that 'there is no spatial poverty focus in the health development budget. The

under-endowed regions do not receive a larger share of the investments than those which are better off' (World Bank and Republic of Ghana, 1992). In the education sector, actual expenditure on projects was more adequate. These data also indicated that Northern Ghana continued to lag behind the rest of the country. According to PAD, 'the Upper West, Upper East, and Northern Regions continued to do badly. Between them they have 19% of the total population but only 11.6% of actual PIP expenditure' (ibid).

It would appear, therefore, that in terms of public investment and social spending, the North continued to lag behind other regions on the eve of the conflict. However, the claim based on the best available data that there is 'no spatial focus in public expenditure' hardly supports widespread claims that almost no public investment went to the Northern regions. These figures, moreover, are relative: they must be seen in the context of large increases in overall public investment, which is an anomalous, though well-established, aspect of Ghana's reform experience, and has much to do with the extraordinary tax elasticity of Ghana's devaluation.

In absolute terms, the Savannah also received significant infrastructural upgrading in the period immediately prior to the conflict. The Tamale-Kintampo Road was surfaced between 1986 and 1991; major power plants were upgraded in Wa, Yendi and Bawku; the Tamale (NR capital) roads were improved and said to have improved the marketing network (Massing, 1994). Hospitals were completed at Tamale, Yendi and Bole prior to the conflict as well.

Unfortunately, there is no discussion of regional spending in the 1993 PER, which would have given a better idea of developments immediately preceding the war. However, the budget estimates for 1994 indicate that, in terms of development expenditure, the NR received the highest in percentage and per capita allocations, both of which were twice the national average (Republic of Ghana, 1995). Although almost all of this development was spent on the road from Tamale to Kintampo, this is the principal artery of increased national integration. It is worth noting that the conflict emerged at a period when more, rather than less, development expenditure was headed to the NR from the central government.

This section has looked at the available evidence and concludes that the conflict occurred in a poor region that had, at an earlier period, suffered a spell of economic decline. The best evidence, however, supports a conclusion that cuts against the grain of conventional wisdom. The Guinea Fowl War emerged at a time of improvements in social welfare and a reduction of poverty in the conflict areas. These improvements, while not massive, appear to have been widespread and were determined both by state investment and market forces. The incidence of earlier conflicts during times of economic contraction demonstrates clearly that growth is not the principal source of the Guinea Fowl War. I hope to demonstrate how this growth was important as part of the conflict dynamic.

4. Reform, poverty reduction and the upending of Ghana's ranked system

In order to understand how reform has contributed to the 'dissonance' of the ranked system of the NR, one must comprehend that the claims of the 'majority' tribes on the state have always ensured continued political subordination for acephalous groups. In general, dominant national parties have selected candidates from 'majority tribes', even when they were minorities in their constituency (Saaka, 1998). At the local level, political dominance of the 'majority' tribes is demonstrated by the government's decentralisation programme, which commenced in 1987. Because the central government is constitutionally required to allocate a minimum of 5% of national revenue to the districts, substantial benefits can accrue to district chief executives and assembly persons.

Unfortunately, during my time in Bimbilla, it was impossible to examine the operation of the District Assembly, as the district chief executive had been removed and the governing party was seeking a replacement. According to Massing, whose fieldwork preceded my own, 'in the Nanumba District Assembly, there are but a few Konkomba representatives who are considered irrelevant' (Massing, 1994). The absence of representation on district assemblies was an important grievance of the Konkomba that I interviewed in Nanumba and Accra, one of whom said of the government that: 'currently they are taking the British way of indirect rule'. According to van der Linde and Naylor (1999), the issue was also important to the Nawuri in the Salaga district.

Two facts about this discussion about local government are relevant. First, local government reforms have generated conflict as they have brought more resources to district capitals from the centre. Second, and more significantly, the competitive strength of the 'majority' tribes in the contest over authority and resources is tied in to their access to the state. It is here that the issue of liberal growth models becomes relevant.

4.1 Economic change and the benefits of adaptive failure

Unlike in the better-known ranked ethnic system of Rwanda, there is no Gini coefficient available that would tell us the relative income shares of 'majority' and 'minority' tribes. However, there are very sound grounds to believe that historically the Konkomba have been poorer than their neighbours. Head taxes imposed by the colonial state via NAs on the Konkomba were levied at half the rate of those of the Dagomba (Staniland, 1975). Based on field research in the 1950s, Tait (1961) argued that 'it is probable that Konkomba are always on the verge of hunger', although it seems unlikely that the Dagomba were much more food secure. As their settlement patterns are more widely dispersed than 'majority' tribes, they have had less opportunity in general to benefit from government-provided amenities, limited as these are in the NR. It is at least in part on this basis that many Christian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have directed their attention to Konkomba-dominated areas (van der Linde and Naylor, 1999).

The principal arena of economic activity where Konkomba have excelled is as yam farmers, an activity that is deeply bound up with Konkomba identity. The opening of road networks in the NT in the 1920s enabled Konkomba to begin to market substantial yam surpluses. Yam exports from Yendi, Bimbilla and Krachi to Asante and the Gold Coast Colony increased 50% in 1929 alone (Brukum, 1997). According to Talton (2003), by 1949-1950 some 200,000 yams were exported South annually from Nanumba, and this created profitable opportunities for middlemen (non-Konkomba) in the transport business, who were able to supplant Nigerians and Southerners.

Some Konkomba and other acephalous minorities were forced to grow foodstuffs for the Gonja and Dagomba royals, and there may be some path determination that explains their current pursuits. Esther Goody noted in the 1970s that ruling Gonja royal elements had negative views of farming and that this

also affected Gonja commoners. She stated that ‘this attitude seems responsible for the failure of Gonja farmers to take up this opportunity offered by the growing market for foodstuffs in the South. Instead it is the largely immigrant Lo Dagaa and Konkomba population who supply the lorry loads of yams which head for Kumasi and the coast’ (cited in Katanga, 1996). Katanga (1996) claims that this same attitude obtained for Dagomba and Nanumba. This has resulted in the increasing wealth of at least some Konkomba relative to the ‘majority’ tribes and, along with the effects of a small educated elite, this has brought enormous ‘dissonance’ to the ranked system, in which Dagomba view Konkomba as ‘wild animals’ who, in one respondent’s words ‘breed kids like rats’.¹⁰

These events in Northern Ghana cannot, in one important sense, be considered unique. This apparent failure of majority groups to take advantage of these markets is simply one example of the liabilities of success, and the advantages of adaptive failure, that occur across a range of cases. In an important but now neglected article on ethnic politics in Africa, Skinner (1975) observed as follows: ‘Groups with more effective strategies and tactics normally gain advantages over the other groups within their societies. Yet their success is not without liabilities; for the very factors that give groups differential advantages often inhibit their adaptation to changing conditions. The result is that the most successful economic groups are ill prepared for change and often surpassed by the formerly less successful groups within the ethnic system.’

This assessment accurately describes events in Ghana’s North. However, this story does not end in the 1970s, and these reversals described by Goody have been accelerated under reform. Adjustment in Ghana’s NR brought the benefits of adaptive failure into relief.

4.2 State versus market-oriented production in Northern Ghana

I claimed above that the historical competitive advantage that majority tribes have had over the acephalous tribes has been their ability to cultivate linkages with the state. I have also suggested that the relationship between Konkomba and the dominant tribes in the NR represents an example of the ‘benefits of adaptive failure’. These benefits of adaptive failure were magnified by the later shift from state to market in agricultural production, which was both explicit and implicit in Ghana’s economic reforms.

The best way to demonstrate this relationship is by briefly comparing the experiment with capitalist rice farming in the NR in the 1970s. At that time, Ghana’s second military regime (1972-1979) engaged in the extensive promotion of a strategy for the development of capitalist rice farming. The scheme was underpinned by guaranteed markets and prices, along with extensive subsidies including tractors and combine harvesters, subsidised bank credit and subsidised fuel. Not surprisingly, those who were able to benefit from this development model were those tied to the centre of the political arena. Shepherd (1981) noted that the rice farmers who took advantage of this strategy have been mainly Northerners, mainly ‘majority’ Dagombas and mainly residents of Tamale, Savelugu and Yendi.

The principal beneficiaries of this strategy were chiefs. These included the Gushie na and Navoropio or chief of Navorongo (Gariba, 1989). As demand for commercially valuable land grew, so did the acquisitive opportunities for chiefs. Shepherd (1981) documented a growing, monopolistic and largely covert market in which chiefs sold land use rights to stranger farmers.

The state’s ability to maintain an ISI model faltered. The large-scale rice scheme collapsed in the economic malaise of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Massive import compression resulted in an absence of fuel or spare parts for machinery, and hyperinflation eroded farmers’ abilities to repay their bank loans, causing credit to be withdrawn (Shepherd et al., 2004). The policies of economic reform have further vitiated this model.

¹⁰ This chilling statement, redolent of many instances of ethnic cleansing, was made by one of the most distinguished residents of Ghana’s North. This elder also had extremely close ties to the central government.

In a model in which statist interventions and subsidies are largely irrelevant to peasant agriculture, it is logical that relative gains would be greater for those economic agents whose strategies have not depended on state support. In the case of the conflict zone, these are yam farmers who are disproportionately Konkomba. Although their history as the country's dominant yam farmers is deep rooted, in the contemporary period yams have never been subject to price and marketing controls and do not require fertiliser. As one KOYA member advised me in Accra in 1997: 'anyone can go into yam.'

I cannot account entirely for the dynamic growth of starchy tubers in the conflict zone during adjustment. Studies on relative price changes in the early years of adjustment under reform indicate that cassava farmers were the exception to the rule that subsistence food farmers were net losers from reform (Pearce, 1992). A growth in cassava in some districts is also consistent with an erosion of soil fertility, since it is extremely low-nutrient tolerant and, as noted above, cassava has received support from the national and regional research system. Starchy tubers are also in extremely high demand in the South, and budget shares for roots and tubers are consistent across all income groups (Maxwell et al., 2000).

Increased output can also be accounted for by the restored incentives for commercial output that accompanied the return of necessary consumer goods – such as cloth, matches and kerosene – to local markets in the wake of liberalisation. Official export statistics on non-traditional exports (NTEs) have not been sufficiently disaggregated in the past for me to know exactly when Northern yams emerged as an international export crop. By 1993, however, yams' share of Ghana's NTEs was increasing, thus implying that commercial yam farmers and a disproportionate number of Konkomba had become major beneficiaries of Ghana's expenditure switching policies. Outside of frozen fish and pineapples, yams had become the largest NTE in value terms by the time of the conflict. By 2002, yam exports from Ghana had a value of over \$8 million dollars (Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research, 2004). No other food crop grown in the NR enjoyed a similar growth and export profile.

For commercial yam farmers, the large output growth is accounted for in part by improvements in the marketing networks and the renewed availability of commercial transport. Key roads in the Northern Region – Yendi-Bimbilla-Salaga, Yendi, Nakpanduri, Damongo-Bole, Tamale-Bolga and Gushiegu-Karaga – became subject to regular biannual maintenance. The gains from road rehabilitation and the restored availability of transportation in the reform era are key elements in the crop's pre-1994 growth trajectory. These have reduced spatial price differentials, improved farm gate prices and reduced the share of transport margins to levels where production for the market remains profitable. Although infrastructure remains inadequate, it has certainly improved from the crisis era immediately prior to adjustment.

The new wealth associated with profitable yam farming and marketing contributed to the Guinea Fowl War in five interrelated ways.

First, the increasing wealth of Konkomba, and the emergence of some Konkomba 'big men', intensified the misfit between their economic and political status.

Second, as a result of the growing opportunities associated with Ghana's economic recovery, Konkomba invested increasingly in productive assets. To some extent, this plays out as a modern equivalent of defying sumptuary laws. This new propensity for accumulation was tied to the development of their own yam marketing chain. This has been a key component of their liberation from Nanumba and Dagomba, and has generated sharp resistance.

Third, the growing commercial value of land, both rural and urban, led to attempts by traditional authorities to undermine tenure arrangements, and intensified the disadvantage of 'minority status'. It also led to the increasing hostility of the Konkomba towards a system in which they were not guaranteed land, and which imposed sharp cost penalties on them when they tried to secure it.

Fourth, the growth of commerce and government-provided amenities in more populated settings also increased the incentive for greater concentration in the towns. Fees for acquiring urban land became punitive for ‘minorities’.¹¹ These economic factors dramatically intensified the stakes in the attempt by the Konkomba leadership to install a paramount chief and to rebel against ‘majority’ dominance.

Fifth, yam profits provided a means to finance war, while the Konkomba yam market in Accra became a principal site for the collection and transshipment of war material.

4.3 The growth of the commercial and marketing networks of the Konkomba

One of the foundations for the ‘majority’ tribes’ supposition of superiority was the Konkomba tendency not to invest the wealth obtained from sales of their marketed surplus (Skalnik, 1986). A division of labour between food growing and marketing is a classic feature of ranked ethnic systems. According to one influential Konkomba respondent in Accra, Konkomba who attempted to market their own goods suffered expropriation and were told that marketing their own products was a violation of customary law.¹²

Prior to the 1981 Nanumba-Konkomba conflict, KOYA organised farmers to boycott ‘majority’ middlemen in the yam trade. This was documented in all published accounts as a major source of grievance in the 1981 war. As one of my respondents noted: ‘Originally, Dagombas were coming to buy and often deceiving us over the price. We started trading in the 1980s. We realised that they cheated us and started to put out ideas. Opportunities were coming and our eyes were getting open.’

Van der Linde and Naylor (1999) heard from one Nanumba workshop participant: ‘Whoever is strong to farm should be allowed to farm ... But the problem, one of the things that triggers problems, is the marketing of this produce. Konkombas are the dominant producers of yams. They go to the market and arrange yam in heaps for a particular price. Somebody else goes in to turn them away and says “no you can’t do that, you people are not from this place. This is our land. You can’t come and produce here and sell it at that price.” And it created a lot of friction a number of times and people fought over that.’

With respect to the national marketing chain that developed after the boycott, Nanumba and Dagomba dominance was undercut on two fronts. One front involved the growth of marketing networks and transport arrangements among the Konkomba themselves. This included the development of the large Agbobloshie market in Accra, and a second market in Kumasi. This development further strengthened the perception, held by the Konkomba and their neighbours, of growing Konkomba prosperity (see evidence presented in Dawson, 2000) and of ‘liberation’ from the dominance of majority tribes. This spirit is summed up nicely by a quote obtained by Dawson (2000) in Namong, who overheard a Konkomba farmer that he was assisting make the following statement upon harvest: ‘Today is Yam day and it is good for me and not Na Yiri.’ (Na Yiri refers to the Mamprusi paramount chief). In the same location, Dawson interviewed Mamprusi who resented not only the prices Konkomba got for their late harvest yams, but also the fact that Konkomba yams were now considered to be superior and in much higher demand in the South.

With respect to transport, I am not certain of the volume moved by Konkomba. However, transport owners and drivers appear to make up a significant portion of KOYA members. In 1997 in the town of Chamba, I interviewed a gathering of Konkomba men organised by the Konkomba ‘chief’, Bijiba Iyaar. When I asked these farmers if they were better off than they had been in the pre-crisis era, they claimed they were not sure, but now were much more interested in trading and investing. I was informed that

11 Bogner (2000) addresses this matter in much greater detail as does Pul (2003). Interested readers are encouraged to consult these works. In my interviews in Chamba, Konkomba complained that, in terms of land access, the real punitive costs also occurred when they tried to acquire land ‘in town’.

12 Interview, Agbobloshie Accra, August 2000, with Edwin Balidin Ndjonah, Accra. Note, however, that a more recent and excellent Masters dissertation by Dawson (2000) draws attention to the fact that, at least for many Konkomba, the struggle to break the stranglehold of Dagomba and Mamprusi middlemen in the Yam trade dates back to the 1950s.

‘the number of grinding mills is uncountable, and that there were more than 20 Konkomba-owned lorries in the area’.¹³ I cannot confirm this figure – and it is clear that most Konkomba lorry owners reside in the South – but even half of this number would mark a large shift in Konkomba ownership of capital goods. Dawson, who studied the Konkomba yam market in Accra far more extensively than I did, states that virtually all the lorries transporting yams to that market are Konkomba owned, and noted that on some days as many as 35 five-tonne lorries would deposit their yams in the market, which rapidly cleared (Dawson, 2000). Even though these Accra-based transport owners are not resident in the region, their impact in their home areas is real. Dawson notes that, in the Mamprusi area, in nearly every Konkomba village, there was at least one distinct, square brick house owned by more affluent members of the lineage who found their fortunes in the yam or construction business in Accra.

A second front on which ‘majority’ marketers have been undercut has been the growing attraction of Konkomba yams for larger middlemen from the South who, Katanga states, ‘broke the hold chiefs had over their former slaves’. Because Konkomba marketing activities around Bimbilla galvanised in 1981 (and arguably sooner), it is impossible to state that they are a direct result of reform. However, the emancipatory and destabilising qualities of this development have been magnified significantly by the growing returns to commercial production that followed the removal of the pre-adjustment import constraint and the growing integration of national markets enabled by recovery in the transport sector.¹⁴ The effects would have been dampened if the interregional transport of food had not recovered from the pre-reform crisis period. Nor would these changes have been possible if the state had dominated food crop marketing.

The fact remains that, notwithstanding the ability of ‘majority’ tribes to benefit from state-based allocations and their ability likewise to participate in commercial agriculture, rising Konkomba income, accumulation and investment in the yam production and marketing sectors exposed some of the more obvious contradictions inherent in Ghana’s ranked system. As some disadvantages for the previously marginal Konkomba were removed by liberalisation, greater fissures emerged in the ranked system of Northern Ghana, generating precisely the dynamic predicted by Horowitz.

4.4 The commodification of land

As the yam market grew, conflict escalated over who would benefit from this. Following the war, a Nanumba spokesman claimed that the Konkomba simply ‘don’t want us to farm yams.’ The President of KOYA has countered that ‘before the Nanumbas didn’t want to farm because they had us do everything. Now it’s profitable and they want to take it all’ (Sly, 1995). At issue here was not simply two parties fighting over ownership of land but rather the meaning of the term ‘ownership’ itself.

Historically, Northern Ghana has been a labour- rather than land-scarce economy. As in the South, this relative factor endowment created the basis for slavery as a mode of production and political stratification, rather than feudalism. Chiefly jurisdiction was political and over persons, and did not imply ‘ownership’ of land in the modern sense. Traditionally, all villages had a *tindana*, or earth priest, who played the principal role in land allocation. While payments in the form of a basket of millet or corn to the *tindana* were required at harvest time, this was understood to be a gift rather than rent (Adeetuk, 1991). In the conquests of the acephalous groups, many *tindana* were killed. Over time, and largely through their role as intermediaries between state and society under colonialism, political chiefs usurped the privileges of the *tindana* in land allocation (Goody, 1980). However, within this system, land still largely remained a free good.

¹³ Group interview organised by Bijiba Iyaar, J.K. Munkaila, Bijiba Barnabas, 5 June 1997, Chamba.

¹⁴ Alderman’s (1996) work indicates that price movements in North-produced grains are consistent with improvements in transport from the Northern regions to Southern markets. Prior to reform, Ghana’s transport sector had effectively collapsed, owing to the erosion of infrastructure and, most importantly, the absence of spare parts. Some discussion of the impact of this on the interregional transport of food from the North is found in (Clark, 1994).

In Nanumba, Adeetuk has demonstrated, the allodium is vested in the paramount chief, the Bimbilla na, and is administered through four-sub chiefs. These chiefs, however, are fundamentally trustees of land and are not 'owners' in the strict sense. Citizens of Nanun have automatic rights to convert any virgin land into a farm. Non-citizens (Konkomba) lack these rights. Instead, they must seek the permission of the Bimbilla na to establish farms. They must also pay a fee and may be subject to dispossession. A 'stranger' is also required to provide larger annual quantities of grain and yams to the chief. By all accounts, these exactions, along with the Konkombas' recent unwillingness to pay them, have been a historically important source of friction and conflict (Adeetuk, 1991).

The exploitative nature of tenancy arrangements might always have generated conflict. Goody (1980) notes, however, that while stranger farmers have always had vulnerability in this system, there has been little incentive for dispossession in the context of land surplus. He adds that the costs to strangers (e.g. Konkomba) of vacating farms that required little investment were not overwhelming. However, the growth of commercial agriculture has clearly changed relative factor endowments. Ghana's ranked equilibrium has been caught in a pincer of the increasing need for Konkomba to obtain security of tenure, and the 'majority' interest in taking advantage of the opportunities associated with commercial yam farming.

It is obvious that, in the context of the large investments referred to above, Konkomba would wish to strengthen and clarify their land security. The development of yam futures, in which farmers are paid in advance for next year's crop by Southern traders, is one example in which the Konkomba insecurity of tenure is problematic. For similar reasons, it is understandable that 'majority' commercial farmers attempt to assert ownership. In the context of increasing land values, the attempt by royals to privatise land transactions is hardly surprising.

Royal assumption of private 'ownership' over land held in trust in the context of increasing prosperity and land value is a familiar story in Ghana. During the cocoa boom in Asante and the Gold Coast Colony, this activity was widespread. Here too, the process could be violent, and led to the exploitation and redefinition of strangers and citizens (Rathbone, 1996). But unlike the context of the Guinea Fowl War, these transformations did not occur in a stratified ethnic system. Moreover, these transformations did not occur in a political environment of populist mobilisation in which the normative framework centred on democracy.

I do not wish to assert that the tie between land and chieftaincy was the only reason that the Konkomba leadership petitioned to obtain a paramount chief. This act was also clearly bound up with the psychological need for recognition. And land issues were not the only reason that 'majority tribes' reacted to this request with hostility. After all, the vast majority of Nanumba, Dagomba and Gonja have not generally benefited from chiefs' land privatisation (Bogner, 2000; Nabia, 2006). As Horowitz points out (1985), 'lack of group autonomy in leadership selection is a sure sign of ethnic subordination'. Konkomba requests to have their own paramount chief installed who could then enskin subordinates on his own implied a redefinition of the Konkomba position within the Ghanaian hierarchy, and violated 'majority' conceptions of the 'natural' social order in which Konkomba are deemed to be profoundly inferior. The Konkomba request for autonomy also implied an assault on the territorial and proprietary sovereignty of Dagomba and Nanumba. Having said this, for many Konkomba, particularly those involved in commercial farming, transport and marketing at the elite level, and those who have played a critical brokerage role in the war, the core issue has been one of land rights.¹⁵

As I have argued, and these belligerents have openly stated, this desire to secure land ownership has resulted from increasing commercial opportunity associated with yam farming. This relative improvement in the lives of those who have not been as successful in historically cultivating ties to the state is not random in the context of liberalisation and pro-poor growth and has systematic qualities.

¹⁵ Konkomba commercial transport owners I interviewed in Accra strongly abjured any interest in chieftaincy. For these individuals, the basis of the conflict was land access exclusively. For a contrasting but nonetheless interesting perspective see Jönson (2007).

Economic reform, and the liberal market growth it encouraged, has emphasised reversing urban bias and has sought to eliminate the role of the state in the administrative allocation of resources. It is directed, at least in theory, at improving the lives of those who have been politically weak and whose primary avenues of survival have been rural. That is to say, in ranked systems where political dominance is institutionalised through state institutions, market forces are *likely* to benefit subordinate groups. National market integration, migration and the growth of remittances, recommended as key components of a growth and poverty reduction strategy by the knowledgeable participants in this series, also enables subordinate groups, ethnic and otherwise, to network outside of their closed and ranked communities which leads to a challenging of the hitherto accepted status quo. This has clearly occurred among the Konkomba big men in the south. A similar experience occurred with rubber traders in the class, but not ethnically ranked, polity of Asante a century earlier (Arhin, 1972; Lewin, 1978). In ranked systems, the outcomes of such benefits generate dissonance and war. Unfortunately, such warfare ends up eroding the gains that incited the violence in the first instance. Poverty trap indeed.

Can this paper extend beyond the warning that all silver linings have a cloud? Unfortunately, I do not have the answers necessary to resolve the arresting dilemma that this paper has raised. However, the study does identify some problems with existing analyses of the requirements and strategies for poverty reduction and, with this in mind, I believe that this paper can identify key priorities for stakeholders in Ghana's North and other remote poor regions in sub-Saharan Africa.

1. The literature on pro-poor growth has identified the improvement of land-related property rights and more transparent land markets as critical to pro-poor growth and the diversification of rural incomes (Cord, 2007; Jebuni et al. 2007; Klump, 2007). The evidence from Northern Ghana, discussed also in Jebuni et al., quite clearly supports this observation. Indeed, the evidence from Northern Ghana and the relationship of war to issues of land tenure suggests that addressing this issue must be absolutely the first priority for stakeholders in the Northern Region. I cannot prescribe how these conflicts and tenure arrangements can be resolved. It is worth noting, however, that standard notions of private property do considerable violence to traditional tenure arrangements. Simultaneously, the statement that land reforms and titling schemes should respect tradition (e.g. Cord, 2007) is also deeply problematic, given the extent to which exclusion and violence are implicated in 'tradition'. As a first step, it will be necessary to have a more detailed study of how land is actually acquired in practice. This type of study merits donor funding.
2. A related observation concerns the relationship of power asymmetries between central governments and remote rural areas. As noted in the introduction, the government's mixed signals played a key role as a driver of conflict: inflaming the aspirations and expectations of acephalous groups, while generating resistance and anger from chiefs to whom the government was ultimately beholden. This observation holds important implications for those concerned with remote areas. It is fair to say that such regions require greater influence to leverage in investment and attention from the centre. At the same time, an important lesson from this case might also be that in patrimonial states the centre needs greater infrastructural and possibly coercive power to deal with local notables. As such, any approach to tackling spatial poverty must focus on improving infrastructural capacity and also coercive power at the core, as well as the periphery of African states.
3. There is a widespread assumption in the current economics of conflict literature that widening economic inequalities between distinct reference groups causes war. In point of fact, this is a deeply problematic assumption. Decreasing inequality will also cause war in a ranked ethnic system. It is difficult to predict *ex ante* what the conflict impact widening or decreasing economic inequalities will be. The prescription of directing resources to the most deprived areas for security reasons as a general strategy must, therefore, be qualified. Assumptions of unit homogeneity should be abandoned and the knowledge that distinct ethnic systems have equally distinct dynamics must inform poverty reduction strategies. Donors must make understanding local ethnic systems a priority in poverty reduction.

4. The emergence of conflict should not necessarily be viewed as a development failure. The case demonstrates that conflict emerges as a result of pressures associated with development and poverty reduction. This means that stakeholders should anticipate conflict in at least some zones emerging from spatial poverty and, notwithstanding the high costs, should not be unduly discouraged by its emergence. Such conflicts have been a key part of the historical development process. This is not to say that political/institutional change cannot assist in the prevention and containment of conflict.
5. A final lesson to emerge from this case study is the need to have a development strategy that emphasises diverse opportunities for income generation. Even within the same political economic space, distinct groups will respond differently to available opportunities. At the centre of this observation is the understanding that economic actors are also ethno-political actors, and that they are not merely generic individuals pursuing generic preferences but rather are pursuing different objectives based on divergent historical and institutional backgrounds that have shaped their preferences, orientations and values. A reliance on one crop, for example, may skew benefits towards one group in an ethnic system more disposed, for historical reasons, to success in that endeavour. The search for multiple income-generating activities must be a priority.


References

- Adeetuk, T.U. (1991) 'Land Tenure and Food Production in Northern Ghana 1900-1985'. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin.
- Alderman, H. (1996) 'Economic Reform and Food Prices: Evidence from Markets in Ghana'. *World Development* 24(3): 521-534.
- Al-Hassan, R.A., J. Kidd and J. Warner (1996) *The Dynamics of Smallholder Agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone of West Africa, with Particular Reference to the Northern Region Ghana*. Briefing Paper 4. Ashford: ODA Natural Resources Research Continuum.
- Arhin, K. (1972) 'The Ashanti Rubber Trade With the Gold Coast in the Eighteen Nineties'. *Africa* 42(1): 32-43.
- Arhin, K. (1987) 'Savanna Contributions to the Asante Political Economy', in E. Schildkrout (ed.) *The Golden Stool: Studies of the Asante Center and Periphery*. Washington, DC: American Museum of Natural History pp.51-59.
- Aryeetey, E. and A. McKay (2007) 'Ghana: The Challenge of Translating Sustained Growth Into Poverty Reduction', in T. Besley and L. Cord (eds) *Delivering On The Promise Of Pro Poor Growth*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan and World Bank.
- Bacho, F., E.K. Musah et al. (1996) 'The Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs of Victims in the Conflict Area of Northern Ghana'. Report prepared for the Inter NGO Consortium, November 1996.
- BBC Monitoring Service (2006) 'Ghanaian Radio Reports Stockpiling of Arms in North', 14 March.
- Bening, R.B. (1998) 'Land Policy and Administration in Northern Ghana 1898-1976'. *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 16(2): 227-266.
- Bening, R.B. (1999) *Ghana Regional Boundaries and National Integration*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Bird, K., A. McKay and I. Shinyekwa (2007) 'Isolation and Poverty: The Relationship between Spatially Differentiated Access to Goods and Services and Poverty'. Paper presented at ODI and CPRC international workshop on Understanding and Addressing Spatial Poverty Traps, Spier Estate, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 29 March.
- Bogner, A. (2000) 'The 1994 Civil War in Northern Ghana: The Genesis and Escalation of a "Tribal" Conflict', in C. Lentz and P. Nugent (eds) *Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Brukum, N. J. (1997) 'The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Under British Colonial Rule, 1897-1956: A Study in Political Change'. Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.
- Christiansen, L., L. Demery and S. Paternostro (2003) *Reforms, Remoteness and Risk in Africa: Understanding Inequality and Poverty in the 1990s*. Research Discussion Papers 70. Helsinki: UNU/WIDER.
- Clark, G. (1994) *Onions are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Collier, P., V. Elliott, H. Hegre, A. Hoeffler, M. Reynal-Querol and N. Sambanis (2003) *Breaking The Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Cord, L. (2007). 'Overview', in T. Besley and J. Cord *Delivering on the Promise of Pro Poor Growth*. Washington, DC and Houndsmills: World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coulombe, H. and A. McKay (1995) *An Assessment of Trends of Poverty In Ghana 1988-92*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Coulombe, H. and A. McKay (2007) 'Growth with Selective Poverty Reduction', in Q. Wodon *Growth and Poverty Reduction: Case Studies from West Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Daily Graphic (1994) 'State of Emergency', 11 February.
- Dawson, A. (2000) 'Becoming Konkomba: Recent Transformations in A Gur Society of Northern Ghana'. MA dissertation, University of Calgary.
- Esman, M. J. (1994) *Ethnic Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gariba, S. (1989) 'The Peasantry and the State in Ghana: The Political Economy of Agrarian Stagnation and Rural Development in Northern Ghana'. Doctoral Dissertation, Carleton University.

- Ghana Statistical Services (1995) *The Pattern of Poverty in Ghana: A Study Based on the Ghana Living Standards Survey*. Accra: GSS.
- Ghana Statistical Services (2000) *Poverty Trends in Ghana In The 1990s*. Accra: Ghana Statistical Service.
- Ghanaian Chronicle (2002) 'Bloody Clash at Bimbilla', 14 March.
- Goodhand, J. (2003) 'Enduring Disorder and Persistent Poverty: A Review of the Linkages Between War and Chronic Poverty'. *World Development* 31(3): 629-646.
- Goody, J. (1964) *Gonja: A Locally Autonomous Kingdom*. Accra: Institute of African Studies: University of Ghana).
- Goody, J. (1980) 'Rice-Burning and the Green Revolution in Northern Ghana'. *Journal of Development Studies* (16)2: 136-155.
- Grindle, M. (2001) 'In Quest of the Political: The Political Economy of Development Policymaking', in G. Meier and J. Stiglitz (eds), *Frontiers of Development Economics*. Oxford and Washington: Oxford University Press and the World Bank.
- Gurr, T.R. (ed.) (1993) *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*. Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press.
- Helleiner, G. (1989) 'Stabilization, Adjustment and the Poor', in R. Bird and S. Horton (eds) *Government Policy and the Poor in Developing Countries*. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press.
- Horowitz, D. (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (2004) *The State of the Ghanaian Economy in 2003*. Accra: University of Ghana-Legon.
- Jebuni, C., R. Al-Hassan, A. McKay, C. Poulton, A. Whitehead, J. Kydd and A. Shepherd (2007) 'Economic Growth in Northern Ghana'. Paper presented at ODI and CPRC international workshop on Understanding and Addressing Spatial Poverty Traps, Spier Estate, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 29 March.
- Jones, C. and X. Ye (1995) *Accounting for the Reduction in Rural Poverty in Ghana 1998-1992*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Jönsson, J. (2007) *The Overwhelming Minority: Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region*: CRISE Working Paper No. 30. Oxford: CRISE.
- Kanbur, R. and A. Venables (eds) (2005) *Spatial Inequality and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Katanga, J. (1996) 'An Historical and Ethnographic Commentary on the Northern Conflict'. Unpublished manuscript.
- Kelly, B. and R.B. Bening (2007) 'Ideology, Regionalism, Self Interest, and Tradition: An Investigation into Contemporary Politics in Northern Ghana'. *Africa* 77(3): 180-206.
- Klump, R. (2007) 'Pro-Poor Growth in Vietnam: Miracle or Model?' in T. Besley and L. Cord (eds) *Delivering on the Promise of Pro-Poor Growth*. Washington, DC and Houndsmills: World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kraus, J. (1986) 'The Political Economy of Agrarian Regression in Ghana', in S. Commins, M. Lofchie and R. Payne (eds) *Africas Agrarian Crisis: The Roots of Famine*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Ladouceur, P. (1979) *Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana*. London and New York: Longman.
- Langer, A. (2007) *The Peaceful Management of Horizontal Inequalities in Ghana*. Working Paper 25. Oxford: CRISE.
- Langer, A. and F. Stewart (2008) *Macro Adjustment Policies and Horizontal Inequalities*. Working Paper 50. Oxford: CRISE.
- Langintuyo, A. (1989). 'Yam Production in Northern Ghana: A Case Study In Farming System Research'. Tamale: Nyankpala Agricultura Research Station.
- Lemarchand, R. (1997) 'Patterns of State Collapse and Reconstruction in Central Africa: Reflections on the Crisis in the Great Lakes'. Paper Prepared for the XVIIth World Congress of the International Political Science Association. Seoul, South Korea, 17-21 August.
- Leonard, D.K. and S. Straus (2003) *Africa's Stalled Development: International Causes and Cures*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

- Lewin, T. (1978) *Asante Before the British: The Prempean Years 1875-1900*. Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas.
- MacGaffey, W. (2006) 'Death of a King, Death of a Kingdom? Social Pluralism and Succession to High Office in Dagbon, Northern Ghana'. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44(1): 79-99.
- Mann, M. (2005) *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge, Cambridge: University Press.
- Massing, A. (1994) *Local Government Reform in Ghana: Democratic Renewal or Autocratic Revival*. Cologne Development Studies, Band 21. Cologne: KGFE.
- Maxwell, D., C. Levin, M. Armar-Lemusu, M. Ruel, S. Morris and C. Ahiadeke (2000) *Urban Livelihoods and Food and Nutrition Security in Greater Accra, Ghana*. Washington, DC: IFPRI.
- Nabia, S. (2006) 'Why do Chiefs Sell our Land?' *Accra Mail*, 17 January.
- Nafziger, E. W. and J. Auvinen (2003) *Economic Development, Inequality and War: Humanitarian Emergencies in Developing Countries*. London and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Newbury, C. (1983) 'Colonialism, Ethnicity and Rural Political Protest: Rwanda and Zanzibar in Comparative Perspective'. *Comparative Politics* 15(3): 253-280.
- Nnoli, O. (2001) 'The Cycle of 'State-Ethnicity State' in UNESCO/ENA *African Politics. Africa At The Crossroads: Complex Political Emergencies in The Twenty First Centuries*. New York: UNESCO/ENA.
- Nyanteng, V.K. and A.W. Seini (2000) 'Agricultural Policy and the Impact on Growth and Productivity 1970-95', in E. Aryeetey, J. Harrigan and M. Nissanke (eds) *Economic Reforms in Ghana: The Miracle and the Mirage*. Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Oduro, A. and I. Aryee (2003) *Investigating Chronic Poverty in West Africa*. Working Paper. Manchester: CPRC.
- Ofori, R. (1994) 'Rawlings' Biggest Challenge'. *Africa Report US*, May/June.
- Pearce, R. (1992) 'Ghana', in A. Duncan and J. Howell (eds) *Structural Adjustment and the African Farmer*. London: ODI.
- Pul, H. (2003) 'Exclusion, Associations, and Violence. Trends and Triggers in Northern Ghana's Konkomba Dagomba Wars'. *The African Anthropologist* 10(1): 39-82.
- Rathbone, R. (1996) 'Defining Akyemfo: The Construction of Citizenship in Akyem Abuakwa, Ghana 1700-1939'. *Africa*, 66(4): 506-525.
- Republic of Ghana (1994) *Public Investment Programme 1994-96: Volume I main Report*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Republic of Ghana (1995) *Public Expenditure Review 1994: Effective Planning and Execution of the Development Budget*. Accra: Ministry of Finance.
- Saaka, Y. (1998) 'The 1996 General Elections in Ghana: Analysis of Electoral Surveys of the Bole/Damboi and Damongo/Daboya Constituencies of Northern Ghana', in J. Ayee (ed) *The 1996 General Elections and Democratic Consolidation in Ghana*. Legon: University of Ghana Press.
- Sahn, D. and S. Sarris (1991). 'Structural Adjustment and the Welfare of Rural Smallholders: A Comparative Analysis from Sub-Saharan Africa'. *World Bank Economic Review* 5(2): 259-289.
- Sarris, A. and S. Shams (1991) *Ghana under Structural Adjustment: The Impact on Agriculture and the Rural Poor* New York: New York University Press for IFAD.
- Scarritt, J. (1993) 'Communal Conflict and Contention for Power in Africa South of the Sahara', in T.R. Gurr (ed.) *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*. Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press.
- Shepherd A. (1981) 'Agrarian Change in Northern Ghana: Public Investment, Capitalist Farming and Famine', in J. Heyer, P. Roberts and G. Williams (eds) *Rural Development in Tropical Africa*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Shepherd, A. and G. Onumah (1997) *Liberalized Agricultural Markets in Ghana. The Role of Government in Adjusting Economies*. Report no. 12. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.
- Shepherd, A., E. Gyimah Boadi, S. Gariba, S. Plagerson and A. Musa (2004) 'Bridging the North South Divide in Ghana?' Background Paper for the 2005 World Development Report. Draft, 23/12/04.
- Skalnik, P. (1986) 'Nanumba Chieftaincy Facing the Ghanaian State and Konkomba "Tribesmen": An Interpretation of the Nanumba-Konkomba War of 1981', in W. van Binsbergen, F. Reyntjens and G. Hesselings (eds) *State and Local Community in Africa*. Brussels: CEDAF.

- Skalnik, P. (1987) 'On the Inadequacy of the Concept of the "Traditional State" Illustrated with Ethnographic Material on Nanun, Ghana'. *Journal of Legal Pluralism* (25&26): 301-325.
- Skinner, E. P. (1975) 'Competition within Ethnic Systems in Africa', in L. Despres (ed.) *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Society*. Mouton: The Hague.
- Sly, L. (1995) 'Dispute Reflects Clash between Old and New Ghana'. *Chicago Tribune*, 20 August.
- Songsore, S. (2001) 'The Economic Recovery Program/Structural Adjustment Program: Its Likely Impact on the "Distant" Rural Poor in Northern Ghana', in Y. Saaka (ed.) *Regionalism and Public Policy in Northern Ghana*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Staniland, M. (1975) *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stewart, F. (2000) 'The Root Causes of Humanitarian Emergencies', in E. W. Nafziger, F. Stewart and R. Varynen (eds) *War, Hunger and Displacement: The Origins of Humanitarian Emergencies*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stewart, F. (2002) *Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development*. Annual Lecture 5. Helsinki: UNU/WIDER).
- Straus, S. (2006) *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sutton, I. (1989) 'Colonial Agricultural Policy: The Non-Development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast'. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22(4): 637-669.
- Tait, D. (1961) *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Talton, B. (2003) 'Ethnic Insurgency and Social Change: A History of the Konkomba of Northern Ghana'. Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago.
- Tsikata, D. and W. Seini (2004) *Identities Inequalities and Conflicts in Ghana*. CRISE Working Paper 5. Oxford: Queen Elizabeth House.
- van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor (1999) *Building Sustainable Peace: Conflict, Conciliation, and Civil Society in Northern Ghana*. Oxford Oxfam GB.
- Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Whitehead, A. (2006) 'Persistent Poverty in North East Ghana'. *Journal of Development Studies* 42(2): 278-300.
- World Bank (1984) *Ghana: Policies and Programs for Adjustment: A World Bank Country Study*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank (1995) *Ghana: Poverty Past, Present and Future*. Washington, DC: World Bank).
- World Bank (2000) *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: World Bank).
- World Bank (2004) *The Role of the World Bank in Conflict and Development: An Evolving Agenda*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- World Bank (2006) *Equity and Development: World Development Report 2006*. Washington, DC: World Bank).
- World Bank and the Republic of Ghana (1992) *Public Expenditure Review 1992-1994*. Accra and Washington, DC: West Africa Department, World Bank.



Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD
UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300
Fax: +44 (0)20 7922 0399
Email: publications@odi.org.uk
Website: www.odi.org.uk

ISBN 978 1 907288 08 1
Working Paper (Print) ISSN 1759 2909
ODI Working Papers (Online) ISSN 1759 2917