
Chiefdom at War with Chiefless People while the State Looks on

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ABSTRACT

This article¹ looks at a situation in modern Ghana when simultaneously existing 'acephalous tribesmen', chiefdom and the state became involved in a conflict which eventually resulted in a local war. The roots of the conflict are not purely ethnic, although differences of language and culture were obvious. The colonial and post-colonial state created the situation in which chiefdoms and 'tribes' were allowed living on the same territory but in a hierarchical arrangement. Once the economy and political order happened to experience a protracted crisis, the perceived inequalities and injustices came to the fore and exploded. The author examines in detail the causes and development of the conflict, and weighs consequences for both the concrete case and the theory of political anthropology.

For Hans Claessen and Michał Tymowski,
to mark their respective jubilees

INTRODUCTION

The anthropological research of politics has until recently concentrated on the origins and early forms of political organization. The emphasis was on what became known as early states (Claessen and Skalník 1978; Tymowski 2009). Chiefdoms were practically ignored in the early state studies for a simple reason that the stage of 'inchoate state' virtually overlapped with that of chiefdom. Although practically all ethnographic studies of early states, chiefdoms and uncentralized polities were carried out during the hegemony of colonial and post-colonial states, few studies were devoted to the simultaneous situations wherein modern states rubbed

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shoulders with early states, chiefdoms and 'acephalous' bands or tribes.² Studies of armed conflicts in what was labelled as anthropology of war followed the same pattern. The modern state, although hiding behind the scene, was not considered in the compendiums such as Bazin and Terray (1982) or Haas (1990). And if yes, then modern states and early states and/or tribes were treated separately (Nettleship *et al.* 1975). Monographs on warfare pretended the modern state did not exist (Chagnon 1968; Lemonnier 1990). The present article examines roots and development of an armed conflict between a northern Ghanaian chiefdom and a settler 'tribe' with full recognition of the modern state ramifications. The research on the early state was an undisputable catalyzer for the present study, although the field experience revealed that the interest is rather in how the modern state articulates with concurrently existing centralized and uncentralized polities that moreover become involved in a serious conflict. While true early states disappeared under the crushing force of modern states, chiefdoms and bands/tribes did not, due to their strikingly different logic and political culture.³ Much more than early states chiefdoms and bands/tribes pose today a challenge to the stability of modern states, especially if these happen to be exposed to periods of economic and political crisis. In a modest way this study is a contribution to the recently launched research on alternatives and analogues to the early state (Kradin and Lynsha 1995; Grinin *et al.* 2004).

THE NEO-TRADITIONAL CHIEFDOM OF NANUD

The Nanumba chieftaincy (*naam*) stands in complementary opposition to the 'regulated anarchy' of the Konkomba. This thesis sounds very unusual because anthropologists, as well as historians, developmental sociologists and administrators, and both the Nanumba and Konkomba themselves believe in the total opposition of these principles of indigenous politics.

The *naam* is a concept which needs elucidation. The data I gathered among the Nanumba⁴ helps this, and can be compared with the findings of other researchers such as Drucker-Brown (1975), Goody (1971) and Fortes (1940). The translation of this native concept is very difficult as it may mean 'power', 'authority' or 'office'. I believe that it can best be described as chieftaincy, as the name for chief *naa* (pl. *naanima*) suggests. It appears that the whole existence of the Nanumba is connected with *naam* while the chiefs are only incumbents of *naam*. They, in turn,

in their capacity as chiefs, depend on the spiritual support of the representatives of the autochthons.

There are four sacred villages in Nanuŋ. They are sacred because they contain shrines which symbolize the relationship between the autochthons and Nmantambu and his retinue. This relationship is ritual, in fact politico-ritual. Nmantambu and his chiefly people did not fight their way into Nanuŋ, except in some places where they met with resistance. The emergence of the common ethnic group, Nanumba, is based on a kind of politico-ritual pact. The ritual specialists, the earthpriests (*tindanima*, sing. *tindana*), accepted the chiefly people with their institution of *naam* on the condition that *naam* can be renewed only with the sanction of the earthpriests. The paramount chief, called Bimbilla Naa, who is a direct descendant of Nmantambu and a member of either of the two chiefly houses, resides in Nanuŋ's capital Bimbilla and enskins (*i.e.* installs) most chiefs in Nanuŋ including those in sacred villages. However, his relationship with the latter is marked by ritual avoidance and fear. The Bimbilla Naa's funeral cannot be ritually – *i.e.* ultimately – performed unless the ritual people from Dalanyili and Binda villages led by their 'chief' Dalana (Yidana) proclaim him dead and perform a series of secret ritual activities on his grave.

According to the founding legend, Dalana was the only leader whom Nmantambu 'met' in Nanuŋ. When I asked the Bimbilla Naa for permission to go to Dalanyili he laughed helplessly and said that such permission was not his to give as he had no direct authority over Dalanyili. Similarly, the Bimbilla Naa enskins his relative as the chieftainess of Ponaayili (lit. female chief's house) but cannot see her again and is not allowed to go to this small place to the north of Bimbilla where some very secret paraphernalia connected with *naam* are kept. The chieftainess, Ponaa (lit. female chief) never comes to Bimbilla during the Bimbilla Naa's lifetime. However she and her male co-chief Kpandigli come to Bimbilla in the time of *naa-kuli*, the Bimbilla Naa's ritual funeral, to supervise the procedure of the funeral. Without them the chief's funeral cannot be performed.

The fourth sacred village, Duuni (lit. room's place), is the place where Nmantambu died, according to the founding myth, and where (according to some versions of the legend) his sister was buried. Nmantambu was to be buried in a sacred room in Duuni, specially kept and renewed by the Duuni people, but he disappeared, pre-

sumably to the pond called Bagri, in Dagboŋ, where the other children of the ultimate ancestor Naa Gbewaa are also believed to rest. Although the Bimbilla Naa officially enskins Duu Naa, the chief of Duuni, he sends his elders with the chiefly gown (*kparba*), which is put on Duu Naa in his own hall. All other chiefs have to come to Bimbilla. The Bimbilla Naa must obey the taboo and not ever see the Duu Naa. If he travels on the road to Yendi, he will be blindfolded when he passes near Duuni. Bakpab Naa, chief of the nearest village to Duuni, is also not allowed to go to Duuni, but he can see the Duu Naa when the latter visits Bakpaba (Bakpab Naa Abudulai Natogmah, Feb. 1980).

The ritual underpinning of the Nanumba political system becomes even more obvious when we realize that the earthpriests (*tindanima*) are warriors (*sapashinima*) as well. This function must have developed from the original occupation of the autochthonous inhabitants of Nanuŋ as hunters. In their dual function, the earthpriests are guarantors of the *naam*-chieftaincy, legitimizing it and defending it. That is why the warrior villages (Jilo, Ganguyili, Pusuga) surround Bimbilla or are situated close to other two important towns of Nanuŋ, namely Nakpaa and Dakpam. The warriors have no claim to the *naam* but they know its rules and are on guard against its abuse.

Another group with politico-ritual status in Nanuŋ are the *naakpamba* (sing. *naakpema*) or chief elders. They are considered senior to the chief of Bimbilla, as is reflected in the terminology. For example, Juo Naa or Wulehe Naa would call Bimbilla Naa *n'yang*a, my grandson. They would be addressed *n'yaba*, my grandfather, by the Bimbilla Naa, who, in turn, is viewed as father to all chieftaincies which are derived from Nmantambu. The Wulehe-Naa and a number of other *naakpamba* occupying important villages to the north-east, east and south of Bimbilla are the electors of the Bimbilla Naa ('kingmakers' in colonial terminology). The most important of these are Juo Naa, Lanjiri Naa (the chief of Kukuo village) and Gambux Naa. Others are Jilo Naa, Chichagi Naa, Dibsi Naa (Nakpayili village chief) and Juali Naa. These chiefly elders meet very rarely, if ever. In their very special position, they do not have the right to compete for the *naam* of Bimbilla. Some of them are probably of autochthonous origin although they do not stress that; the *naakpamba* like to be less conspicuous than ordinary chiefs, but their influence on the whole Nanumba polity is considerable.

Kpatihi (some title him erroneously as Kpatihi Naa) also occupies a very special position. My information indicates that his function of 'skinmaker' – a ceremonialist who technically enskins chiefs on behalf of the Bimbilla-Naa – was only recently introduced into Nanuŋ, probably under the influence from Dagboŋ. But the Kpatihi family is also believed to have come with Nmantambu in his retinue. At any rate, the Kpatihi Ponadoo, enskinned by members of his own family (the only dignitaries to enskin themselves) on 4th January 1983, had more influence on the procedures of the Bimbilla Naa's funeral than any of the electors. The *naak-pamba* live in their own villages with the exception of the Jilo Naa, who resides in Bimbilla (the village of Jilo being situated just one kilometre from the capital town). Kpatihi lives in Bimbilla and has an easy access to the court of the Bimbilla Naa, thus exerting considerable influence upon the decision-making at the centre of the Nanumba polity.

Although all who are ceremonially enskinned bear the same naa after their title – *i.e.* they are considered chiefs, it is only the members of the Nmantambu line-house (divided into two sublines) who can compete for the titles within the hierarchy of chieftaincies. All other chiefs become so by birth, more or less automatically. The ultimate goal of members of the two Nmantambu houses, which have existed for a number of generations, is to assume the *naam* of Bimbilla. Only they are called *naabihi* (sing. *naabia*) or chiefly children, both in the sense of belonging to the Nmantambu chiefly line and of being children of a particular chief. The competition for the *naam* of Bimbilla is open to all members of the Nmantambu *dunoli* (literally gate, *i.e.* lineage), but a special rule is applied here: the *naam* of Bimbilla must alternate between the two sublines, Gbuxmayili (lion's house) and Banyili (house of the bangle). Thus, if the present Bimbilla Naa is from Gbuxmayili (as was the case when I began my fieldwork in Nanuŋ), after his death a member of the Banyili will become the Bimbilla Naa. As the maxim goes, 'If the sceptre of Banyili is put down, that of Gbuxmayili should be taken up. If then the sceptre of Gbuxmayili is put down, that of Banyili should be taken up'. Today, this rule appears to be an absolute imperative. However, tradition tells of a third, Suburi house, which is still officially entitled to the *naam*, but lost its chance at succession in the battles of the past. The last Bimbilla Naa from the Suburi chiefly house was Naa Sulgu (Falcon) who

betrayed the Nanumba and therefore he and his line was condemned to oblivion.

Competition for the paramount *naam* of Bimbilla is now regulated so that the person most likely to win is the incumbent of the *naam* of Nakpaa, in the case of Gbuxmayili, and the *naam* of Dakpam, for Banyili. Bimbilla Naa Dasana (1959–1981) from Gbuxmayili was Nakpaa Naa before he became the Bimbilla Naa. The Bimbilla Naa Abarika (1983–1999) from Banyili was Dakpam Naa before he ascended to Bimbilla. Past cases indicate some divergence, however. For example, Bimbilla Naa Natogmah (1945–1957), older brother of the Bimbilla Naa Abarika, became the Bimbilla Naa directly from the incumbency of the *naam* of a less important village of Gbungbaliga.

The Nmantambu *naam* villages are divided into those traditionally belonging to Gbuxmayili and those belonging to Banyili. The Gbuxmayili villages are located to the north-west of Bimbilla whereas the Banyili villages are situated to the south-west. In fact, the distribution of villages of electors, chief elders (east and south) and the two Nmantambu *naam* houses is amazingly well defined. I could not find anything but an historical explanation for the fact that the eastern part was where the more autochthonous elements were preserved whereas the western part was under the tighter control of the Nmantambu chiefly people.

Seniority plays a very important part in the competition for *naam*. It is almost automatically applied in the selection of incumbents of *naam* which do not lead to the paramountcy of Bimbilla. But it is also applied to competitive chieftaincies of the Nmantambu (immigrant) type. It seems, that originally, seniority was a more important factor than being chief of a gate town. Of course, the coincidence of the two is best, but in practice this rarely happens. There has always been tough competition for succession, even since the turn of the century when the colonial or post-colonial state power has invariably intervened.

I cannot go into detail here about these succession cases. It should be realized however that the competition for *naam* in every village (which 'belongs' to either Gbuxmayili or Banyili) is ideally open to every *naabia* (member of particular sub-line) and their number is far in excess of the number of vacant village chieftaincies. The spirit of competition for *naam* is an integral part of Nanumba political culture, and could not be suppressed by the attempts of the German, British and Ghanaian administrations to

straightjacket it with unqualified decisions or by recording the 'rules'. However, the Nanumba Customary Regulations and Procedures of 1969 by and large determine the primacy of the *naam* of Nakpaa and the *naam* of Dakpam, which means that the incumbents of these 'gate' towns are more or less assured of succession to the Bimbilla *naam* provided it is the turn of their house. Alternation must be safeguarded, and the Nanumba are very keen on observing *kali* – the tradition. My research shows, however, that if a particular custom or procedure is not repeated for whatever reason, it falls out of the customary cycle and a new procedure, with new practices, comes in. So it is with the introduction of the Kpatihi (skinmaker) or *gbonlana* (regent) which is probably an innovation of the 20th century but is presented as an age-old tradition.

The *naam* in Nanuŋ functions on a daily basis as a system of courts – *naayili*. Each village has a court headed by a chief or other leader (*lana* – custodian); non-Nanumba groups (especially those in the Konkomba settlements) have headmen. The most important and also the largest court is at Bimbilla. The courts are composed of various elders – *navilkpamba* (lit. elders of the chief's house). In Bimbilla they are led by the titleholder Worikpamo. The court elders are of various origins; some may even come from outside Nanuŋ. For example, the Yimahi Naa came from Dagboŋ. This, then, is another unusual aspect of Nanumba political culture, *that is* an important function may be performed by a person of foreign origin (although coming from a ritually related polity). The *navilkpamba* have a strong influence on the chiefs because they live in his vicinity. The courts include Muslims and musicians (such as praise singers *lunsi*). The courts meet formally on Mondays and Fridays with more or less full numbers present (depending upon the importance of the period) and this is also when village chiefs come to greet the Bimbilla Naa or other important chiefs. Elders can meet at any time at the request of the chief or if they themselves wish to consult him. The case of the Bimbilla *navilkpamba* is special because the village chiefs see the paramount very rarely and only if they travel to Bimbilla. Thus, they have much less frequent access to the Bimbilla Naa than the elders. It would be possible to speculate about the competition between the elders and the chiefs for the favours of the Bimbilla Naa. However, it seems that this does not happen because the Nanumba political culture, similar to the estate system in medieval Europe, has a strict divi-

sion of competence. Elders have their tasks, chiefs also have theirs and these differ considerably.

The social mosaic which surrounds (and is part of) the *naam* is completed by the inclusion of various professional groups (often of outside origin) and pure stranger groups, for example, learned Muslims, weavers, butchers, barbers, drummers. All professional groups and ethnic minorities (the Konkomba are in fact a majority!) have their chiefs (one per group) and other title holders. These are usually enskinned by the Bimbilla Naa. Whereas all such groups either feel themselves to be Nanumba 'professionals' or strangers recognising the sovereignty of the Bimbilla Naa, the resident Dagbamba may have divided loyalties. Their *naam* does not differ much from that of the Nanumba, they speak almost identical language and their paramountcy is located at Yendi, not far from Nanuŋ. Thus, they feel somewhat ex-territorial in Nanuŋ. Their position is tolerated by the Nanumba, but the Bimbilla Naa does not enskin a Dagbamba chief in Nanuŋ to take care of the Dagbamba minority.

KONKOMBA 'REGULATED ANARCHY'

According to anthropological research published by Tait (1953, 1958 and 1961) and reformulated by Sigrist (1967) and Skalník (1967–1968), the Konkomba were divided into a number of 'subtribes' distinguished themselves by different dialects and facial marks (Tait 1958: 168). Tait mentions that there were at least a dozen of these 'subtribes', but he did not meet a Konkomba who was able to name more than six of them. He himself did not know the names of all of the 'subtribes' (Tait 1953: 220). It seems to me that the reason for this is the changing character of the Konkomba as a composite ethnic unit, *i.e.* the 'subtribes' are not fixed for ever; new ones emerge according to the territorial expansion and fission of the 'subtribes'. Today, the Konkomba consider Kekpokpam – the area around the Oti river between 9° 10' and 10° North, 0° and 1° East – as their core country. In 1948, there were 59,640 Konkomba; in 1960, already 110,000. In the mid-1980s, with the dispersal of the Konkomba to a number of regions of Ghana after the conflict with the Dagbamba in the late 1930s, it is very hard to estimate their numbers (Tait mentions 1944, see Tait 1961: 10).

The Konkomba Youth Association, in their memorandum on Konkomba Lands (KOYA 1978), refers to a report compiled by Cardinall in 1917 and maintains that they had neutral and inde-

pendent 'states'. Such 'states' were: Kumurjor, Bimba (Gimba), Nayile, Kugnani, Gujoni (Kujoni), Lamo, Kanaafek, Chagbani and Kuncha. The KOYA memorandum says that: 'These have never been under any foreign domination as states by the British. Soon after the 1914–1918 war, the British aided the Dagombas to plant chiefs in some of the Konkomba Territory. Examples of these were: Na-Yusufu at Zagbeli, Gbirmandan at Demon'. The KOYA memorandum also mentions Konkomba 'chiefs and people', 'Chiefs and the Tindanans (landowners) of the Konkomba Traditional Area'. This partly emulates the general use of the phrase 'chiefs and people' of the so-and-so traditional area, which Ghanaian politicians and mass media normally use, having been influenced by the southern pattern which does not have any areas without chiefs.

In its 1981 memorandum on the Nanumba – Konkomba conflict, signed by KOYA's national president Mr Kenneth Wujangi, KOYA rejected the allegation that the Konkomba were fighting for 'chieftaincy': 'The KOYA would like to say that Konkombas do not attach much importance to Chieftaincy as other tribes. They have and respect compound and village heads' (KOYA 1981). This signifies the KOYA leaders' desire to dissociate themselves from the contemporary Konkomba fascination with chieftaincy. The findings of ethnographers support the claim that there was no chieftaincy among the Konkomba. Recent facts, however, indicate that Konkomba preferences are not static, that part of the emancipation of the Konkomba is their quest for recognition within the wider society in the North and all over Ghana. Clearly defined leadership as exemplified by the existence of chiefs is considered by them as a way towards the recognition needed. Interviews with both Konkomba and Nanumba people support this viewpoint as do some documents from both ethnic communities. One could speculate that the KOYA leaders do not want to have chiefs for tactical reasons because the Konkomba youth would have to face competition from them (*oybor*, lit. chief in Likpokpaln).

David Tait describes the situation as it prevailed some forty years ago, when one could hardly talk about the unity of the Konkomba. The 'subtribes' were then distinct legal units within which no fighting was allowed. 'Subtribes' had between 2000 and 6000 members each and were composed of clans and lineages. Clans were combined in three ways in a 'subtribe': a) those with known ancestors, usually in a moiety or dual fashion; b) those with unknown ancestors, usually more than two clans in a 'subtribe';

c) exogamous ‘contrapuntal’ clans of different origin. All clans had their elders (*onikpel*), but ‘contrapuntal’ clans had both elders and earthpriests (*otindaa*, the equivalent of *tindana* among the Mole-Dagbane speakers). Clans were, according to Tait, also residential communities (‘districts’ in Tait’s terminology) and made up the largest political unit. The clans from one ‘subtribe’ were either *mantotib* (with reciprocal duties) or kith. That meant that they ‘bury the fight’. Only ‘subtribes’ fought each other, or individuals from different ‘subtribes’ fought and got the support of their clansmen and co-subtribesmen. Fighting which involved bloodshed was highly esteemed by the Konkomba. Within ‘subtribes’ clans and districts (*i.e.* communities based on clan membership), were units of both ritual and social control: ‘ritual unity and legal unity do... go pari passu’ (Tait 1958: 185–186). Lineage fission within the clans was continuous and resulted from population increase and land exhaustion. The new units found new settlements. The Konkomba are well-known for their scattered settlement pattern which, unlike the Nanumba’s, rarely results in formation of villages.

Seniority was the most important political principle. Elders (*onikpel*) represented clans and lineages, but there were no elders leading each ‘subtribe’. Konkomba elders had no power to impose decisions within the community but used their position in the community to influence morally each important issue. There was no use of force within the community. In cases of violence, like murder, the murderer was ostracised (Tait 1958: 188–189; 1953; 1960: 274–276). The considerable authority of the elders ensured that within boundaries of one Konkomba ‘subtribe’ the relations between clans and communities were more peaceful than warlike. In contrast, endless feuding reigned between ‘subtribes’. Such feuds, which could last for years, usually began after a lover was killed by the future husband of a woman. Subtribes, however, did not help each other in fighting an outside – non-Konkomba – enemy. For example, a war between one Konkomba ‘subtribe’ and a Basare tribe would not involve other Konkomba or Basare units. Another aspect of social control, which could soften hostility between ‘subtribes’, was *nabo* – relationship between men whose mothers came from the same clan. Because women were allowed to marry anywhere, this *nabo* relationship was very widespread.

As we will see below Tait findings are being superseded by new developments which override the division into ‘subtribes’. The co-operation between the Konkomba from various ‘subtribes’ in the

conflict with the Nanumba and especially in the war itself, shows that the 'facts' found by one researcher may be found invalid by another who does research after a period of intensive social change. The tendency of elders to act as chiefs, *i.e.* to be more formalized and powerful over larger units of the Konkomba population, irrespective of 'subtribe' membership, is another aspect which emerges in connection with the Nanumba – Konkomba conflict.

NANUMBA 'STATE' AND KONKOMBA 'ACEPHALOUS' POLITIES

The question now emerges: was the difference in the political culture of the Nanumba and the Konkomba such that it itself contributed to the conflict between these two ethnic groups? To answer this question unequivocally is very difficult. Objectively speaking, there are not as many structural differences as anthropologists of the British structural-functional tradition would like to maintain. The 'segmentary' system existed for centuries in Dagboŋ along with chieftaincy thus making up a clear complementary unity. Especially in the area around Gushiego, to the north of the capital of Yendi, there developed a symbiosis of the Konkomba with the Dagbamba which had already started in pre-colonial times. In the area of Nanuŋ, where the Konkomba settlement was oldest (northeastern Nanuŋ), the Konkomba were equally firmly incorporated into the Nanumba system of chieftaincy, having their own chief – the Kanjo Naa – and a number of mostly military dignitaries at the courts of the Nanumba *naanima*. Thus, it would be wrong to speak about the incompatibility of the two social systems. It was the colonial and post-colonial state which triggered off the formation of political ethnicity and the polarisation of the two political cultures. The boundaries of the two systems are not easily discernible; rather, we can speak about one system with two or more poles.

On the other hand – more on the 'emic' or subjective level – the differences in language and custom, jealously guarded by both ethnic groups, contributed to the formation of intransigence between the two groups in no less an important way than the classifying policies of the modern state. The Nanumba as well as the Dagbamba looked with condescension on the Konkomba, and the differences between Konkomba and Dagbamba were significant enough not to allow a merger between the two. Unlike other autochthonous groups like the Nawuri in Nanuŋ after Nmantambu's migration and politico-ritual conquest, the Konkomba in most

places successfully resisted attempts at assimilation. Meanwhile, they must have internalised some values of chieftaincy because, following their humiliation of the Nanumba, they installed (enstooled, not enskinned!) their own chiefs in Nanuŋ (see below).

Is it possible to oppose stateless and state societies in northern Ghana? I think one cannot because the elements of centralization and decentralization, the use and prevention of violence were present in both 'ideal types'. The Konkomba ('acephalous') as well as the Nanumba (centralized) could unite in a war effort against each other. The centralization of the Nanumba even proved to be a disadvantage for the Nanumba, who lost the war. The problem is rather the relationship between the European state type and these African forms of political culture. The European model tends to classify according to its own criteria and then manipulate the consciousness of people thus classified so that they behave according to the typology.

It seems that in most areas of Northern Ghana the principles of centralization and decentralization, power and 'anarchy' were blurred. The boundaries between these systems did not really exist because there were no such bounded systems. Even the transition from one centralized polity to another, as from Nanuŋ to Dagboŋ but also Nanuŋ to Gonja, was gradual because the distance from centres of chieftaincy allowed for flexibility. To draw exact boundaries is a European obsession of the last few hundred years. Unfortunately, it was quickly internalized by the modern African independent states whose leaders wished to hear nothing about ethnic claims and a revision or abolition of boundaries. The Nanumba and the Konkomba have also internalized this politicized ethnicity and claim their authority over the same territory by emphasizing not their similarities, but rather their differences.

Nanuŋ was certainly not a state in terms of machinery for exercising power over people and territory: nor were the Konkomba headless or without a fitting leadership where the question of power could emerge.

EARLY RESPONSES OF THE NANUMBA *NAAM* TO THE EUROPEAN STATE POWER

My aim here is to document the incompatibility of the two models, the European state model and that of the Nanumba, differences between which were deep-seated from the moment of first contact

in the late 1800s. The result was encapsulation rather than destruction or assimilation of the indigenous polity of Nanuŋ.

Under the pretext that the inhabitants of the Dagboŋ's village of Gbungbaliga had called Dr Gruner, the leader of a small German paramilitary party travelling in 1895 from Krachi to Mango, a 'red monkey', the German Togo government sent an armed expedition against Yendi at the end of November 1896. The German objective was to keep easy access to Susanne Mango, their northernmost outpost in Togo, the way to which led via Bimbilla and Yendi, the respective capitals of the two hitherto independent polities of Nanuŋ and Dagboŋ. The Nanumba who had a ritual pact with the Dagbamba and whose polity was much smaller than that of the Dagbamba, decided to stand against the 200-man German contingent (which was composed of only four German soldiers, the rest being southern Togolese soldiers and porters). The Nanumba felt it would be a betrayal of Dagboŋ if they let the Germans pass.

The Nanumba force consisted of cavalymen, musketeers and other warriors totalling perhaps several thousand or more. The estate-like specialized nature of the Nanumba polity did not allow all the Nanumba to fight the invaders; only the warriors could engage in fighting. The division of labour between the three most important Nanumba chieftaincies was also respected in this desperate situation.

In face of the German advance, Naa Abalsi from the Banyili house, who was then the Bimbilla Naa, decided to vacate Bimbilla, and to keep hidden his warriors from Jilo and other adjacent warrior villages. When the Germans entered Bimbilla, and found no people, they decided to occupy the palace of Naa Abalsi. The high roof of the main hall was used as a lookout post from which the whole area could be viewed. The German commander, von Massow, thus gained a military advantage: the main advantage fell into his lap, however, in the form of the Nanumba style of fighting. The forces of the Bimbilla Naa, Dakpam Naa and Nakpaa Naa did not unite, but fought separately during different parts of the day. Not only could the German unit withstand the attacks, but they inflicted very serious casualties on each army.

This is an eloquent testimony to the looseness of the Nanumba polity, where the Bimbilla Naa was not in a position to decide even the most important questions like defence. The pretenders to the Bimbilla *naam* in Nakpaa and Dakpam decided for themselves how to face an invader. The Germans were a highly centralized military force, which, though weak numerically, was highly efficient thanks

to modern weapons and military art. Against German unity of purpose stood the Nanumba who had never fought together and were banded separately under each important village chief. They would unite only very reluctantly for the defence of Nanuŋ.

Loyalty to the Bimbilla Naa must also have been very weak. Villages on the outskirts such as the village of Tagnamo which passed from Nanuŋ to Dagboŋ in the 1920s were at a loss as to whom they should show their allegiance and sometimes changed loyalties. The village of Yeji wanted to show loyalty to Gonja, but was prevented from doing so by the Nanumba chiefs. The means of coercion at the disposal of the Nanumba chiefs were, meanwhile, not very strong. Access to the chiefs was open to all villagers during the day and the chiefs were farmers like the other villagers. Customary obligations like working on the chief's farm or building of the palace for the new chief were fulfilled without coercion. Tradition was the only mode of coercion, if one can speak of any. In the German *versus* Nanumba conflict, two incommensurable systems stood against each other: a highly organised state *versus* a loosely-knit system of authority based on the sanctity of tradition rather than the willpower of individuals.

Naa Abalsi was not deposed from his position as the Bimbilla Naa and Nanuŋ was not effectively occupied until c. 1900. The Germans, however, misinterpreted the *naam* and the Nanumba political culture. They continued to give orders through the chiefs, especially through the Bimbilla Naa, not realizing that there was no real means of enforcing the orders of the chief. When one of the subsequent paramount chiefs, Bimbilla Naa Salifu (also from the Baŋyili chiefly house), defied what he considered to be unreasonable orders from the Germans (who by then required a vast amount of forced labour for portering, public works and cotton farming near Krachi), he was arrested and taken to Krachi in 1909 and 'de-skinned'. Later he was banished to the village Nasamba, a few miles to the south of Bimbilla.

The Nanumba were adamant that they could not install another chief (as the Germans wanted) because the banished Bimbilla Naa was alive. They solved the problem by making a very young man from the same chiefly house his provisional successor. When this Naa Mahimi suddenly died, the electors decided that it was now time to enskin someone from Gbuxmayili – the other chiefly house. So Naa Harruna became the incumbent of the Bimbilla *naam*. After the British took over the western part of the German

Togo and when Naa Harruna died, Naa Salifu was in 1917 restored to the *naam* which he retained until his death in 1929. This did not change anything for Naa Salifu who, as one British administrator commented, was a weak man.

The *naam* is an essential part of tradition, *kali*. It is important to achieve it but not as a means to exercise power, or to force others to do something for the chief or according to the chief's will. The European concept of power is less symbolic because power is a means of effecting economic, political or social changes in the status quo. For the Nanumba, *naam* is an end in itself; it is identical with the status quo, *i.e.* tradition and continuity. For the sake of its continuity the people who recognize it as their highest value would do many things which they would not otherwise contemplate. They would learn how to face the challenge of the European system, and how to function within it both economically and politically. But their highest value would still remain the *naam*, which is the most precious part of their own identity. Because *naam* belongs to the whole society, it is society's symbol, the meaning of its existence.

THE ROOTS OF THE NANUMBA – KONKOMBA CONFLICT

The pre-colonial history of the area which is now Northern Ghana is not very well known. Only some of the history of Dagboŋ has been recorded from oral sources (cf. Tamakloe 1931; Staniland 1975), as has the history of the Gonja. Of this, what concerns us here is the chain reaction which was probably caused by Asante expansion in the 17th – 18th centuries. This put a sudden pressure on the Gonja, who were eventually defeated by the Asante and forced into a state of dependence upon them. Dagboŋ, in turn, was pushed eastwards by the Gonja. The capital moved to the site of present day Yendi probably in the middle of the eighteenth century or earlier.

This Dagbamba 'Drang nach Osten' caught the Konkomba autochthons by surprise. Their earthpriests were killed and the various subdivisions of the Konkomba were either integrated or almost assimilated by the Dagbamba. Such was the fate of the Benagmin 'subtribe' around Gushiego. In other places, the Konkomba formed a ring of fringe groups on the Dagbamba borders or even surrounded Dagbamba chiefly outposts, such as Sanson, Demon, Zabzugu or Nakpali, in dense concentrations. Most Konkomba over the Oti River and especially those beyond the later border with

Togo escaped non-Konkomba rule. Some Konkomba were exposed to attacks by the Tchokossi (Anufom) from the north (Tait 1961: 4). As Tait shows, the Dagbamba managed to include some Konkomba leaders in their system of rule, using them as warrior title-holders.

KONKOMBA CONFLICT WITH THE DAGBAMBA

The relationship between the Dagbamba and the Konkomba groups ('subtribes') like the Benafiab, Betshabob, Nakpantib or Bemokpen remained tense until well into the colonial period. The Germans, according to Tait (1961: 8), distinguished between independent and conquered Konkomba – the division being the Oti. Although the Germans, and later the British, established 'peace' between the Dagbamba and the Konkomba, on the one hand, and among warring Konkomba 'sub-tribes', on the other, the colonizers acted strongly on their bias towards the chiefly people. They negotiated only with the Dagbamba chiefs and ignored the Konkomba. Thus, it escaped them that Yendi was originally a Konkomba settlement, and that the whole of eastern Dagboŋ was mostly a Konkomba territory. In fact the Konkomba were autochthons who, though conquered, had retained a strong self-esteem and the feeling of hatred towards all, whether African or European, who wanted to order them around from the position of power.

This policy of the European colonial masters had some very negative consequences. The Dagbamba chiefs felt that with the support of the Europeans they could be even more extortionist than before. British rule, in particular, strengthened the Dagbamba chiefs and encouraged them to try to rule more effectively over the western part of 'independent' Konkombaland. The Dagbamba appointed Konkomba subchiefs in Kpaliba, Saangul and Saboba, but these had no authority unless they were also elders. The Dagbamba cavalry, as in the pre-colonial period, proved to be more powerful in confrontation with the diffuse war organization of the Konkomba. The fights continued well into the 1920s (Tait 1961: 8). When the fighting was stopped by the British (the proverbial Pax Britannica), the Dagbamba chiefs tried to extort tribute from the Konkomba under various pretexts, or just robbed the Konkomba traders of their loads at the Yendi market on the grounds that they had not yet paid tribute to the Ya Naa (*Ibid.*).

The riverain Konkomba (if not all the Konkomba) had never wanted to submit to Dagbamba rule. The rebellion of the Benafiab 'sub-tribe' against the extortionism of Zagbeli Naa Yusufu around 1939 or a few years later, in which the Naa, his elder and wives *etc.* were killed by the Konkomba, brought down the vengeance of the Dagbamba. The latter were supported by the British. According to Tait (1961: 10) the Konkomba ringleader was killed by the police and the Konkomba were 'punished' by being compelled to build the Wapuli – Saboba road and a police station at Saboba (cf. NAYA 8/9/81, par. 4).

COLONIAL PACIFICATION AND KONKOMBA EXPANSION

This injustice, jointly perpetrated upon the Konkomba by the Dagbamba chiefs and the British colonial administrators, caused some sections of the Konkomba to move south in search of new lands where they could live and farm in peace. A large number of them came to Nanuŋ in the mid-1940s and asked the Bimbilla Naa Abudulai and other subchiefs in the north-eastern part of Nanuŋ for permission to settle. This was granted on condition that they would respect the rules, which included some customary obligations towards the Nanumba chiefs: paying homage to the chief, occasional labour tribute, giving the hind leg from the first animal slaughtered at funerals, bringing disputes before the Nanumba chiefs and sending them samples of foodstuff from each harvest. The reason was that in Nanuŋ 'land is vested in the chief on behalf of the people. The people in turn have obligations towards the chief just as citizens have towards the Central Government'. The Konkomba were received so well in Nanuŋ because it was thought to be a blessing for a chief if more people came to live under him: 'Our belief is that settlement of strangers in one's land is a sign of luck' (Dasana 11/7/81). The Konkomba were led by the elder Achina, who was instructed by the Bimbilla Naa's elders, Worikpomo and Juo Naa, as to the traditions and customs of *tiŋa* (the land).

The Kanjo Naa, son of the leader of the first Konkomba settlers, recalled (interview 9/11/81):

When we arrived in Nanuŋ the elders and the chiefs did not hide the traditions and the customs of the Nanumba from us. We were made to know by the Nanumba elders that they had their culture and that it is if a stranger is given a land to

farm either guinea corn or yams, as soon as you harvest the yams you have to send a bundle of the yams to the chief. Also if guinea corn is harvested you tie a bundle of it too to the chief. If he calls anybody in the village, not Konkomba alone, for communal labour, we all attend. These things were in existence when we the Konkombas arrived.

In case of performing a funeral you have to make the chief be aware so that the chief sends an elder to come and keep peace during the funeral, because that time there were no police. After the funeral, since the chief has taken part in the performance of the funeral, because his elder helps to keep peace, you the person performing the funeral have to give a leg of the cow killed to the chief to cut some pieces for the elders to taste, showing that you have performed the funeral with happiness. There is a pot of drink too to be added to show the type of food and drink you used to perform the funeral.

In farming time no land is sold or hired to us, any Konkomba can choose any part of the land and farm up to the extent of how one likes. Truly when we are with the Nanumbas, they don't disturb us, we live happily with each other and even live like brothers and sisters.

This close relationship with the Nanumbas made them to enskin my father an elder entitled Gambuga Jahinfo [military leader] because we lived in Gambuga. Many Konkombas started to come to settle with us, so the chief took my father and enskinned him as a chief called Kanjo Naa who was to look after and control all the Konkombas round here.

In an interview soon after the war, the Wulehe Naa's earth-priest described the coming of the Konkomba as follows (interview 30/10/81):

We were here when the Konkomba came to us, they were hungry and asked the Wulehe Naa for food (*bindirga*). He gave them the land (*tengbani*) to farm and when they ate and were satisfied, we were sitting when they came and said that they are now rich, they will kill us and collect this land (*tingbanno*) and we said 'aai' what they have said is not true. They are telling lies for we have no quarrel with them, how can they attack us.

Colonial rule tolerated the division of the conquered territory into traditional ethnic areas, but at the same time created a situation in which any of the subdued people could, in principle, move anywhere. This dualism has been highly contradictory because it

would not take customary sovereignty from the Nanumba chiefs and earthpriests, but superimposed rules that cut into this sovereignty. For example, the Ghanaian North was not considered an area with real property rights in land. Because the land was vested in chiefs on behalf of the people, the colonial administrators did not think it was property (they thought in terms of private property) and therefore proclaimed all lands in the North state property. The Northerners had a very different concept of land as a divinely given resource, at the disposal of people. They did not challenge the colonial state's usurpation because they did not understand it. Only when the state started to take away the land at will for public projects, did the chiefs and other Northerners understand that something was wrong and that their sovereignty had been severely curbed.

Up until 1979, *i.e.* during the first 22 years of Ghanaian independence, the status of land in the North remained unchanged. Only the 1979 Constitution of the Third Republic stipulated that the land belonged to 'landlords', *i.e.* those who have traditional rights to it, *i.e.* in most cases a people or chiefs with rights of historical occupancy. At the same time, the movement of people irrespective of their ethnicity or origin was guaranteed under all colonial and post-colonial regimes. This was in clear contradiction to the rules of the sovereignty of each traditional unit over its land. The Konkomba moved into Nanuŋ with the permission of the Nanumba chiefs, but they knew that they were under the protection of the colonial order, and could not be evicted. They could stay in Dagboŋ and many actually did stay after the conflict following the murder of Zogbeli Naa and his entourage. Those who came to Nanuŋ, and those who moved further to other parts of the North, Brong Ahafo and even Ashanti chose to do so and nobody could prevent them.

The first years of co-existence with the Konkomba in Nanuŋ were happy ones. Mr A. A. Chambas, the first Nanuŋa to be appointed Clerk of the Native Authority Tribunal in 1945, remembered that: 'We all lived in true harmony and peace and did everything in common – we farmed, drank "pito" and went on hunting expeditions together as children of one parent and had nothing to complain against each other'. This peaceful time was disturbed by an accident – the murder of a Nanumba man by a Konkomba, but that was dealt with by the police and was soon forgotten. In 1960 (or 1963), when Mr Chambas held the office of District Commissioner, a group of Konkomba murdered a certain Madam Sanatu

Nanumba, wife of the District Chairman of the then ruling CPP party, Mr Mahama Danger. Even though the suspects were arrested and dealt with by law, only strict security measures prevented a 'civil war' erupting between the Nanumba and the Konkomba. The seed of discord was sown and the Konkomba from this time onwards were given the image of wild, dangerous 'bush' people. At the same time they were considered stupid and gullible by the Nanumba, so they were not really feared by them.

Mr Chambas testified that the endangered relationship between the two ethnic groups in Nanuŋ was exacerbated by the introduction of new prosperity 'fetishes' or gods of Atigeri and Gurmandi by the Konkomba. 'The general belief about these gods is that they are worshipped and pacified with human blood, during the annual yam celebration activities' (Chambas 1981). When missing Nanumba children were found dead with their livers taken out, especially during the new yam festivities, it was believed that the Konkomba killed them for sacrifices. The introduction of new 'gods' to a country populated by shrines of Nanumba boxole (gods or 'fetishes') was in itself a sacrilege; even more abhorrent was the idea of human sacrifice that was unknown among the Nanumba. Meanwhile, the alleged Konkomba need for human blood is not surprising in Ghana where it is widely believed (and there is plenty of positive evidence for it) that some ethnic groups use human blood or parts of the body for special ceremonies. According to Mr Chambas '[t]he Nanumbas became highly suspicious of the Konkomba settlers, particularly the owners of these imported gods'. This tense relationship continued for years between the two groups. The Ghanaian state (the security agents) did nothing to diffuse the dangers of the situation and, 'instead played high politics with it' (Chambas 1981).

The relationship between the Nanumba and the Konkomba moved from tension to hostility when the settlement in Nanuŋ by the Konkomba gained momentum. The Konkomba under the Kanjo Naa, father of the present Kanjo Naa, must have become a majority in Nanuŋ by 1960. The 1960 Census has established that the Gurma language group (Konkomba, Komba and others) comprised almost 50 % of Nanuŋ's population (23,000 people) whereas the Nanumba were less than 30 % in the area of the then Nanumba Local Council. Even with the Dagbamba and the other Mole-Dagbani speakers, they were barely over 40 % of the population of the district. No ethnic census has since been taken in Ghana (neither the 1970

or 1984 censuses registered language or any other kind of cultural characteristic). The general belief is that the Konkomba numbers have grown much faster than the Nanumba ones because according to custom no Konkomba woman is allowed to remain without a spouse and so she constantly bears children. In contrast, Nanumba women observe a special two to three year period of residence with their parents after the birth of the first child and during this period they are not allowed to have sexual intercourse with their husbands. I assume that the population ratio was 1:3 in favour of the Konkomba at the time of the war in 1981.

The spectacular growth of the Konkomba population in Nanuŋ was helped by the continued immigration of members of different Konkomba 'subtribes' into other parts of Nanuŋ, *i.e.* southern and southwestern Nanuŋ. These Konkomba, namely the Kpaljoli, are believed to have come from Togo after having been defeated by the Gur-speaking Kombas (interview with Azara, 8/11/81). The Kanjo Kpalbas were Konkomba who had settled with the permission of the Nanumba chiefs in the 1940s and accepted the Nanumba customary conditions. The Kpaljoli and other 'subtribes' did not bother to ask for permission to stay and thus did not feel obliged to respect Nanumba customs of land and chieftaincy. In addition, they did not respect the Kanjo Naa – the only stranger chief of the Konkomba (each stranger group in Nanuŋ has the right to just one chief).

Even though the various sub-groups of the Konkomba did not cooperate with each other in Nanuŋ, they did not fight either. Fighting was prohibited by the colonial government and gradually eradicated. Under the independent Ghanaian government, hostilities between the Konkomba 'subtribes' stopped altogether and various Catholic and Protestant missionary activities, including the introduction of literacy in the local language, started. The Sambuli sub-tribal dialect was chosen for the literary Likpokpaln. Portions of the Bible were translated into it and textbooks became available. These activities caused a rapprochement between the various Konkomba groups. The next stage in Konkomba emancipation was the emergence of very small but influential Konkomba elite of literates and businessmen. Some of them settled among the Nanumba in Bimbilla town and received government jobs. Mr Batu Tibrum was the richest Konkomba businessman in Bimbilla. He built a 20-odd room rectangular house near the crossing of the Yendi and Salaga roads.

According to the Nanumba, the Konkomba in Nanuŋ, especially those who belonged to 'sub-tribes' other than Kanjo-Naa,

have developed a taste for chieftaincy – they have internalized the idea that a titled chief was a prestigious figure, certainly more than a mere elder. This was confirmed by the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA 1981).

THE KPASALAND DISPUTE: STATE INTERVENTION AND SELF-DEFENCE OF THE NANUMBA CHIEFTAINCY

When the Bimbilla Naa and other Nanumba realized that Kpasaland, some 1500 square miles of land to the south-east of the Oti river, which was traditionally inherited by the Nanumba and served as a hunting ground for them, officially belonged to the Volta region, he had a difficult problem. Two factors had precipitated a massive settlement of Konkomba in Kpasaland. First, the road which was built in the 1960s by the Nkrumah government through Kpasaland and, secondly, the fact that the Juali Naa, who was in charge of the Oti river and lands beyond it (*i.e.* Kpasaland), had on behalf of the Bimbilla Naa promoted a Konkomba, Konjah, to be his warrior in Damanku on the opposite bank of the river. The place where one must take the ferry (now there is a bridge there) when crossing the Oti from the Volta Region into the Northern Region is today generally known as Damanku. Numerous settlements were founded in Kpasaland, some on the road, some in the bush: Sibi, Kpasa, Tindjaasi (interview with Nchula 8/11/1981). The fact of settlement raised the question of who was going to rule the people who settled in Kpasaland, most of whom were ‘headless’ Konkomba. The Kpasa Naa, originally appointed in Kpasa town by the Bimbilla Naa, was there for nine years before Konjah and his people refused to pay allegiance to him.

During the time of the Kpasa Naa's absence – he had to leave Kpasa when the court case over Kpasaland started (interview with the Kpasa Naa 2/11/81) – Local Council collected rates in Kpasaland. The Bimbilla Naa and the people of Nanuŋ were not aware of the appurtenance of Kpasaland to the Volta Region because the area had been administered from Tamale as part of the Northern Territories since the Germans had left in 1914. But after 1950, with Gold Coast autonomy, the Buem Krachi District area was created and included into Trans-Volta Togoland. All the lands to the south of confluence of the Oti and Mo rivers became part of the Buem Krachi District. I have not been able to find the documentation concerning the colonial government's decision to change the boundaries of the Northern Territories, but Bening's research shows that the

boundary was changed shortly after 1950. As at that time there were no people living permanently in the area except some Chala communities, the Bimbilla Naa was not alarmed and continued to consider Kpasaland as hunting territory vested in his skin (the area appeared as 'uninhabited' on the map as late as 1950; cf. Togoland).

In the late 1960s, however, the Bimbilla Naa had to face the problem of the claim to Kpasaland by Nana Oberko Agyei II, Osulewura of Atwode Traditional Area. The Atwode are a very small ethnic group, Guan speaking, related to the Gonja who live in a few villages in the vicinity of Nkwanta. Their distinguishing feature is that they possess the Brukung god at Shiare, believed to be very powerful all over Ghana and over a vast area of West Africa (Pollock 1980: 1). Their highest office was always that of the high priest of this god, (cf. *Idem*) who kept the stool of Brukung and the metal staffs, the paraphernalia of the god. The Atwode never had chiefs similar to those of the Nanumba. They achieved chieftaincy only during the later colonial period, most likely at the time of Nkrumah's autonomous government (1951–1957), in exchange for electoral support (so, at least, report my Nanumba sources). The Atwode enstooled their chiefs in the Akan (Krachi) pattern, thus copying their customs. The Nana Oberko Agyei II, enstooled in 1963, was also referred to as Shiarewura, Chief of Shiare, by my Northern informants. He was a Christian, and thus excluded from the Brukung cult. There is a certain opposition between the chief priest of Brukung and the Shiarewura (*Idem*: 16–17).

The Shiarewura claimed that Kpasaland was 'the property of the Atwode stool who has [had] both Administrative and Traditional jurisdiction over the years' and that only in 1968 'the Nanumba Skin traded the land by taking court action against the Atwode stool' (Nana Oberko 1980). The fact is that it was only after the Bimbilla Naa and his Nanumba councillors realized that there was no other possibility of recovering Kpasaland than by legal action that he put the dispute before the Tamale High Court in 1967. The plaintiff (the Bimbilla Naa Dasana Abudulai) stood against the Atwode chief as the 1st defendant and the Konja Konkomba as the 2nd defendant. Konjah along with other Konkomba elders had been promised chieftaincy in Kpasaland if he supported the Atwode claim. Because Konjah was rejected as a candidate for the *naam* by the Bimbilla Naa, he wholeheartedly organized support for Nana Oberko, of both a moral and financial nature. Needless to say, the Bimbilla Naa had both the moral and financial support of his

Nanumba subjects. The Shiarewura lost the civil case and was made to pay costs. Later he appealed to the Appeals Court, which ruled again in favour of the Bimbilla Naa. Finally, he managed to persuade the Appeals Court that this was a good opportunity to deal with land disputes and the case was referred to the Stool Lands Boundary Settlement Commission which, however, ruled finally in October 1979 that Kpasaland belonged to the Nanumba skin. The ruling was based on the evidence of the Chala people that they, and not the Atwode, neighboured on the Nanumba skin lands across the Oti, *i.e.* that the Atwode had never exercised any authority over the disputed territory. Meanwhile the Krachi (Nkwanta) district council, tried to collect revenue in Kpasaland although the court expressly forbade that until the dispute was settled (NDC Monthly Report, August 1976).

When General Acheampong paid a visit to Bimbilla on January 20, 1978, he was asked by the Bimbilla Naa in his speech (read by an interpreter) to 'expedite action on the Kpasaland dispute', which continued unabated after the decision of the Stool Land Boundary Settlement Commission confirming that Kpasaland belonged to the Nanumba skin. The Nanumba District Council (NDC) asked the Regional Office to support its demand 'for effective local Administration of the area by this Council' (NDC Monthly Report, September 1979). In the October report the District Chief Executive (DCE) urged the Northern Regional Administration to place departments, corporations, the education service, the highway authority and the police under the Northern Administration. Even though the NDC appealed several times to the Northern Regional Office, no action was taken (NDC Monthly Report, December 1979). It was apparently assumed that the matter was only of traditional, customary interest, which, of course, was a total miscalculation. The Bimbilla Naa was equally led in his claim by modern economic and political motivations. At any rate, in the minds of most people in Nanuŋ, the traditional and modern offices overlapped, just as the Nanumba Traditional Area (*i.e.* Nanuŋ as an historical skin territory) overlapped with the modern Nanumba District.

The Bimbilla Naa, upon receipt of documents on the ruling by the Stool Land Boundary Settlement Commission encouraged earlier enskinned chiefs such as Kpasa Naa and Sibi Naa, who had been obliged to flee from Kpasaland in the 1970s, to return to their posts and he enskinned several new chiefs from both chiefly houses as chiefs for various places in Kpasaland. In response, a protest was

sent by the Atwode chief (20/5/80) to the president of the Volta Regional House of Chiefs, with copies to the Volta regional minister at Ho and the DCE at Kete Krachi as well as to Alhaji K. B. Kwao-Swanzy, his lawyer in Accra. Therein, Nana Oberko Agyei II, Osulewura of Atwode Traditional Area, demanded from the Northern Regional House of Chiefs a reversal of the actions of the Bimbilla Naa, who was accused of carrying out the 'indiscriminate enskinment of chiefs within the villages of Sibum (Sibi), Kpasa, Kabre-Akura, Abunyanya and Tinase within the disputed area of Kpassa Lands which lies in the Volta Region'. The Nana advised that the dispute was under appeal and required that the Bimbilla Naa 'should bluntly be told that he cannot claim ownership of the area while there is an Appeal against the judgement'. The Osulewura apparently had better relations than the Bimbilla Naa with the regional and central government, as he was a literate man experienced in the play of politics at a higher level (cf. Pollock 1980: 16-17). He skillfully used the legal fact that Kpasaland belonged to the Volta Region, knowing how difficult it was to change the boundaries of a region in Ghana under a democratic government. (The PNDC regime [1981-1992] ruled by decree and has, for example, created one region - Upper Western. It could, if it really wanted, also change the boundaries between the Volta and the Northern Region, but there is virtually no sign of this happening.) The Osulewura was very active in promoting his political image in the hope of being recognised as a Paramount Chief. He was allegedly in conflict over land with other neighbouring ethnic groups and his ambitions apparently extended over in the whole of the northern part of the region, using the trump card of the Brukung god which was on his territory.

EMANCIPATION MOVEMENTS - KOYA AND NAYA

Another important factor in the Nanumba - Konkomba conflict was the emergence of youth associations. Irrespective of the state's policy against tribalism, most youth associations have ethnic bases and are formed as modernizing counterpoints to existing traditional systems of authority. Age and illiteracy (or semi-literacy) are often the hallmarks of the traditional systems, which exclude young people from rational decision-making although they (particularly young men in the North) have definite ideas about chieftaincy and other traditional matters, feel qualified to take part in decision-making and believe that literacy (however, limited) gives them the right to be heard. Some of these young men hope that once

their literate generation ascends to chieftaincy the ills, with which this institution seems to be ridden, will be easily overcome. However, as we shall see, lack of experience and wisdom can do more harm than the illiteracy of senior traditional leaders.

The youth associations were founded in various parts of Ghana in the 1970s during Acheampong's rule. However, I did find a note on the active existence of the Konkomba Youth Association in the 1950s (Togo 1955). I do not know where their political impetus originated, but they seem to be structured like the other youth associations and are affiliated to the National Youth Council. Each association has its president, secretary and treasurer and other officials and there is at least one meeting per year. Youth associations felt obliged to comment upon the corruption in the country and other cases of mismanagement. For example, the Nanumba Youth Association (NAYA) was involved in public criticism of the underdevelopment of the Nanumba District in 1976. A letter entitled 'Develop Nanumba' appeared in *The Daily Graphic*, one of the two national dailies, imploring the DCE 'to help develop the District for the poor inhabitants' and the NAYA 'to take a serious view of this matter'. The letter, signed by Mr Mohamed Nurudeen, a Nanumba working for the Audit Department in Tamale, concluded: 'Something must be done and done quickly to rescue our poor district'. In a response to this letter Mr M. A. Adam, the NAYA's president (later to become MP for Nanumba in the Parliament of the Third Republic), convened an emergency meeting. Reports were made about several development projects, mainly dams, which were built by a Nanumba contractor, T. B. Damba, who was indirectly accused of embezzlement of money collected by the villagers. T. B. Damba was believed to be in a secret deal with the then DCE, Alhaji Harruna.

To discuss the question of the development projects in the Nanumba District would require a separate study. Here I want only to give an example of the activities of the NAYA. According to its constitution, the NAYA is an association 'comprising all Nanumba folk irrespective of rank and age'. Its aims and objectives are:

- 1) to assist in the promotion of educational and communal labour in the district at all levels;
- 2) to assist individual members in any field;
- 3) to encourage the spirit of hard work so that each Nanumba contributes to 'National Development' and assists in community Development Projects; NAYA also should give help to government cam-

paigns like 'Pay your Levy', 'Educate your children' and 'Health Education';

4) to convene an annual end of the year get together 'to take stock of the achievements and shortcomings and also to plan ahead' (The Constitution of the Nanumba Youth Association Article 3, p. 1).

The Konkomba Youth Association emerged in the district in 1977 on the same principles (apparently induced by the Ghanaian state), but its aims were more cultural than development orientated. In a memorandum to President Limann (KOYA 1981) these aims were formulated as follows:

1. Promoting understanding and sense of oneness among Konkomba both at home and abroad.
2. Promoting the advancement of both formal and informal education among Konkombas.
3. Participating and playing our role in national affairs.
4. Exploring avenues of reforming and updating some Konkomba customs and practices according to the dictates of time.

It seems that the Nanumba Youth Association accepted the general directives which emanated from the National Youth Council more literally than the KOYA leaders, who adapted the directives to the needs of the Konkomba, at least those of the younger generation to change the fossilized traditional structures. The position of the NAYA was much more volatile vis-à-vis the chieftaincy as its president had had very strong personal links with the chieftaincy, as had other officials.

The NAYA directed its first major action against one of its potential (if not actual) members, T. B. Damba, who was known as a retired secretary-general of the Amasachina Youth Movement which was very popular in the 1970s all over Northern Ghana. Damba, along with the DCE, was accused of corruption and embezzlement, but the affair had no outcome because nobody was ready to act. The NAYA had little authority in Nanumba society, especially as those whom it criticised had strong personal links with the chieftaincy and also because it did not have the unqualified support of Mr Attah or Mr Chambas, former modern politicians who now informally dubbed as chiefs' senior advisers. Moreover, the NAYA did not co-operate with the chieftaincy or with senior literates.

KOYA's first publicized action, on the contrary, was their 'Memorandum on Konkomba lands submitted by the Konkomba

Youth Association on behalf of the Chiefs and People of the Konkomba Traditional Area' (KOYA 1978). This memorandum was based on some research concerning the history of pre-colonial and, especially, colonial Konkombaland. It tried to show that the Konkomba, although 'owning' vast lands west of the Oti river, were not respected by the Germans and that the British were more aware of Konkomba land rights. In the 1933 Report on the Mandated Territories of Togoland, it was indicated that the Konkomba were independent. The Konkomba Youth Association noted that:

while historically the Konkombas owned the whole land now known as Eastern Dagboŋ, it will be unrealistic for us to claim all the land... However, we, the Konkomba, would like our present land to be vested in the chiefs and the Tindanas (land owners) of the Konkomba Traditional Area as recognized by our Chief and people.

This proposed traditional area was delineated by a line between the Togo border in the South and Nayile, Sanguli, Sunson, Kitebu (Tekasu), Adare, Tunsung and the Togo Border in the North. This document shows not only that the KOYA (unlike the NAYA) became an effective spokesman for the Konkomba, their elders included; it immediately became the only body uniting all the Konkomba.

Were the Konkomba interested in having their own paramount chieftaincy in the same style as the Atwode? They themselves deny it. The memorandum from the KOYA to the President (KOYA 1981) states: 'The second false impression created is that the Konkombas are fighting because of chieftaincy. The KOYA would like to say that Konkombas do not attach as much importance to chieftaincy as other tribes. They have and respect compound and village heads'. I must say that there is a contradiction between the 1979 Memorandum on Konkomba lands and the 1981 Memorandum to the President. They may have been paying lip service to the usual cliché phrase 'chiefs and people', but I think that the KOYA leaders knew very well that their proposed traditional area would only be recognisable if they had overall leadership in the form of chiefs (*e.g.*, certain elders, perhaps one or more from each sub-tribe).

The Konkomba Youth Association members must have realized that in Ghana, where chieftaincy is such a powerful tool of ethnic legitimation the way to recognition of their elders was to make them into chiefs. Chiefs were made, in many cases, out of

headmen in various parts of the Gold Coast/Ghana and the institution of chieftaincy has definitely contributed to the ethnic consciousness of the people who created these chiefs. So what seemed strange at first became after a while a matter of pride. Those peoples who had chieftaincy from pre-colonial times never failed to point out that the colonial and post-colonial chieftaincies were not genuine. But for the people concerned, they became genuine. There is no need to suppose that the Konkomba, if allowed to have their own traditional area and eventually their own district, would not also create their Paramount chieftaincy and other chieftaincies (the creation of a political district for the Chokossi, Basari and Konkomba was proposed in the Parliament in 1981 by MP for Saboba, Mr U. Dalafu; KOYA 1981).

The foundation of the KOYA must have been precipitated by injustices long felt by the more experienced, literate Konkomba. The KOYA members started a campaign for the enlightenment of Konkomba farmers who, for decades, had let themselves be exploited by Nanumba chiefs. The most blatant cases of exploitation were fees for adjudication, or more properly, arbitration in Konkomba marital disputes. The Konkomba are well-known for their custom of betrothal of young men to little girls (sometimes even to unborn baby girls). According to the custom the groom has to work for years for the father of the girl before the latter matures and may marry. However, young Konkomba women often take lovers and, in the openness of modern society, are able to run away with them. The groom then demands from the girl's father that he brings back his bride for who has worked hard for many years. The father feels obliged to do his best. Disputes between fathers of young women and their bridegrooms or between fathers and lovers are very common. In an area like Nanuŋ, the arbitration of such disputes was, according to Nanumba custom, to be done exclusively by the landowners, *i.e.* the Nanumba chiefs, namely the Bimbilla Naa. The complicated cases were, allegedly, not dealt with fairly by the *naanima* who, moreover, did not know properly either Konkomba customs or their language, and tended to take bribes from both sides without concluding the cases satisfactorily.

This situation was evidently understood by the KOYA members as an abuse of the Konkomba's position as settlers in Nanuŋ. They decided to prevent exploitation by 1) working for change in the custom of betrothal (see their declaration of aims above) and 2) arranging for their own arbitration. Changing the age-old cus-

tom was a difficult affair and unlikely to be acceptable both to the Konkomba elders and to those men who already were in the process of working for the fathers of their future brides. The main emphasis of KOYA activity was thus on their own arbitration. When this began in late 1979, it soon became obvious to the Bimbilla Naa, his court and other Nanumba chiefs that an important source of their income was being denied them. When the Nanumba established that money was changing hands, strong protests were sent out by the Bimbilla Naa and Mr M. A. Adam, MP for Nanumba. They alleged that Cedi 2000 was charged, and the debtor used the Kpatihi as a middleman to pay Ali, the Konkomba elder who was appointed to be the arbitrator. Ali was said to be competing with the Bimbilla Naa. The protesters called Ali's arbitration 'secret tribunals' and charged that the KOYA leaders Batu (leader of the tribunal), Mahama and Harruna harassed fellow Konkomba so that they would bring their cases before their tribunal.

In his letter to the Regional Minister, the Bimbilla Naa also complained that no Konkomba appeared before the Magistrate's Court 'for proceedings on pending cases to continue'.⁵ He also charged that military personnel (Lt. T. M. Nyande and Pvt. Wajimba Williams Amin, both Konkomba) led the KOYA activists in beatings and harassment. Mr Adam's letter, which was sent to the Regional Minister with copies to the Attorney General, the Majority and Minority leaders of the Parliament, the Minister of Defence and the Regional Commanding Officer of the Armed Forces, went almost unnoticed. Mr Adam convened a meeting of government paid officers and personnel on November 20, 1979, at the DCE's office at Bimbilla to discuss 'some secret tribunals that were taking place in Bimbilla town with the help of some army personnel. The Ag. DCE asked the Police Inspector if he was aware of the case and he said he wasn't aware of it'. Ali Konkomba, who was also invited to the meeting, said that the money to be paid to him (which was intercepted by the Kpatihi) was 'to be paid to one Konkomba as a dowry' (DCE monthly report for November 1979). The letters of complaint went more or less unnoticed or perhaps misunderstood as a purely internal 'tribal' affair. Mr Adam commented after the war: 'In the first analysis, I saw that neither the Police nor the District Administration saw matters as I did' (Adam 1981). It seems to me that at that stage Mr Adam's and the Bimbilla Naa's references to harassment by army personnel, *etc.* were used purely as a device to stop the KOYA's activities.

The Bimbilla Naa took matters into his own hands and invited Mr Ali Konkomba to his palace. There the Bimbilla Naa told him that he and the other KOYA activists should leave his traditional area within two weeks. In a letter of 7/1/80 to Mr Ali, the Bimbilla Naa wrote:

I have found it expedient to order you, Ali Konkomba residing in Bimbilla in this the Nanumba traditional area, which is under my Traditional jurisdiction to leave Bimbilla Town and the Nanumba Traditional Area on or before 19th January 1980.

I have taken this action because you have under the guise of the Konkomba Youth Association set up a tribunal in your house, an act which is illegal before traditional and constitutional law with the Konkomba settlers throughout my reign so far and you can see that it is the Konkombas who have refused to submit to your judgement and have been reporting your moves to me.

I am not against any Youth Association so far as it operated within my Traditional norms which are not any different from the constitutional requirements of the country.

I will however not smile on any settler who is trying to disturb the peace in my area.

You have made yourself a chief over the Konkomba settlers. This is against Nanumba custom for none of the skinmakers have enskinned you.

Finally I wish to make it known to you that I have on this day 5th January 1980 withdrawn my traditional protection over you. I will have nothing to answer about you as a traditional ruler after the 19th February, 1980.

The Bimbilla Naa wrote in the same vein to the Regional Minister:

Ali has proved to be a bad grain and if not removed he will one day incite his tribesmen against my people which will result in riots, for that matter I will not sit unconcerned as the Paramount Chief for Ali to cause unrest in my peaceful area. This is why I have ordered him to leave my area.

Ali answered the Bimbilla Naa's letter on January 12, 1980. He regretted that 'a number of false allegations have been levelled against me'. He asserted that the KOYA chose him, as an elder, to 'be their leader in cases of arbitration which does not in any way contravene any law in Ghana'. He further asserted that his services were offered on a voluntary basis. He maintained that Cedi 2000 were

not meant as a payment for his adjudication, but as dowry settlement between in-laws. He concluded with the KOYA desire 'to settle matters among ourselves ... maintain peace among our people and to lessen incidences of litigation in your traditional area, which I think you should be proud of'. He wrote also that the Konkomba did not say that they would not refer matters to the Bimbilla Naa and asked that the decision to banish him from the Nanumba Traditional Area be rescinded.

Subsequently, Ali was taken at knifepoint by tractor to Pusuga, dumped there and compelled to proceed to Yendi by 'armed Nanumba drummers, led by Mr Ponado' (KOYA 1981). The Bimbilla Naa, when confronted by the DCE about the case (DCE to RAO), asserted that he did not approve of the action of those whom he called 'young men'. He asserted that he had asked the Kpihibara Naa, one of the highest dignitaries in Bimbilla, to stop them from evicting Mr Ali but they disobeyed him. As the DCE reported, the Bimbilla Naa:

...disclosed that earlier in the day, he, the Bimbilla Naa, had called Ali Konkomba to his palace and told Ali that he, the Bimbilla Naa has rescinded his deportation order and so Ali could stay. He, the Bimbilla Naa, was therefore shocked that the PNP District Party Chairman should take such action thus disregarding his orders. He therefore dissociated himself from the group's action.

Ali filed a writ at the High Court at Tamale (via Mr Mensah, a legal practitioner) asking the court:

...to determine whether a Konkomba as a Ghanaian has the right to stay in any part of the country and whether Konkombas have the right to elect elders to arbitrate domestic marital and other problems (KOYA 1981).

I am introducing this correspondence between illiterate dignitaries to show that young literate people, members of the KOYA and the NAYA, were behind these actions. The KOYA leaders were much more influential than the NAYA leaders. The official traditional leader of the Konkomba, Kanjo Naa, was not really recognized other than by members of his 'subtribe' and some other Konkomba groups living in the north-eastern part of Nanuŋ, *i.e.* those groups which came to Nanuŋ in the 1940s. It would be wrong, however, to underestimate the zeal of the members and leaders of the NAYA. Not well treated by the chiefs of Nanuŋ, they

turned to voluntaristic actions like the deportation of Ali from Bimbilla. The NAYA cooperated in this violent act with the PNP – the ruling party of the day. The leader of the deportation action was Mr Ponadoo, the PNP district branch chairman and member of the NAYA. It should be noted that Mr Ponadoo was the younger brother of the Kpatihi, the ‘chief linguist’ or ‘skinmaker’ of the Bimbilla Naa. Thus, power from several sources, both traditional and modern, was concentrated in his hands. In January, 1983, Mr Ponadoo succeeded his deceased brother as the new Kpatihi. The regional office in Tamale was said to have ‘amicably resolved’ the conflict between ‘a section of Konkomba residents in Bimbilla and the Bimbilla Naa on February 4, 1980’. ‘Peace and tranquility now prevail and there is a harmonious co-existence among all ethnic types’ (Regional Administrative Officer to Asst. Commissioner of Police).

The Konkomba living in some parts of Nanuŋ (e.g., around Nakpa and Juanayili) had for years disregarded the fulfilment of customary obligations. They had seen that the Nanumba themselves, and along with them most minority groups, did not like to work on chiefs' farms or supply chiefs with the hind legs of cattle slaughtered at ritual funerals. Many ceased to offer these tributes, although the Nanumba chiefs continued to demand them. By 1980, the KOYA's meetings and other activities had sensitised the wider Konkomba community in different parts of Nanuŋ, so that the majority of the Konkomba started to ignore the customary obligations towards the Nanumba chiefs. The KOYA called the communal labour on chiefs' lands ‘forced labour’ and customary tribute was designated ‘contribution’. The KOYA Memorandum to President Limann (1981) clearly stated:

Konkombas in the Nanumba District for many years have been used as slaves. They have been made to work on chiefs' farms while at the same time providing their own food, water and accommodation during this period of working. We feel that if a chief should need a worker on his farm the work should be purely communal, in which case all tribes including the Nanumbas would have to send hands. What happens in the Nanumba District is different, only Konkomba do the work.

Those who did not turn up were beaten, like the Konkomba elder near Nakpayili who failed to send young men to finish work on a farm. The Konkomba, according to this document, were also forced by the Nanumba chiefs to give contributions in yams and

other farm produce whenever a VIP paid a courtesy visit to the Bimbilla Naa or other Nanumba chiefs. The memorandum added:

We know that traditions and customs die hard but to achieve peace and tranquility, Nanumba tribal prejudice that Konkombas must always work for them on farms for nothing must be shelved.

This concluding statement, like the whole memorandum, was of course written in the wake of the war. There is, however, no reason to suppose that the KOYA had a less strong position on this matter in 1980. KOYA arbitration of mostly marital cases evidently continued in 1980, and the relationship between the two ethnic groups grew even more tense after the Konkomba farmers began refusing to sell yams to Nanumba and Ashanti middlewomen and middlemen directly from their farms and organized themselves into marketing groups instead. This culminated in the foundation of a completely separate yam market in Accra, where prices competed with those at the Timber Market where mostly Nanumba sold their yams. This meant the end of exploitation of the Konkomba who, as immediate producers, used to sell yams to Nanumba middlewomen at prices up to ten times lower than the price realized on the Accra market.

A new impetus for the conflict came from an unexpected source. When President Hilla Limann visited Bimbilla on February 5, 1981, the writ which Mr Ali Konkomba had filed in the Tamale High Court in 1980 had still not been dealt with. The Bimbilla Naa complained to the President about 'a group of alien farmers in the Kpasa area who have been stirring up trouble'. The President replied that:

...no Ghanaian was alien so long as the fellow was living within Ghana and there was no cause for any dispute to rise out of ownership of land between any groups of people since all land in Ghana is vested in the President in trust for the people (DCE Monthly Report, February 1981).

Each group in the conflict interpreted the President's statements differently. The Konkomba now felt assured of their right to live wherever they liked, whereas the Nanumba got the idea that Batu and other KOYA leaders were Togolese Konkomba who were thus double aliens, aliens in the district and non-Ghanaians (cf. M. A. Adam 1979), who could be ousted from the district. The President, meanwhile, was apparently echoing Nkrumah's as-

surance that any African was at home in Ghana if he chose to come to live there, one aspect of Nkrumah's megalomaniacal Pan-Africanism (cf. *Africa Now* October 1981: 49).

The ambiguity of the President's reply to the Bimbilla Naa must have prompted the KOYA to more meetings in which defiance of the Nanumba was discussed and approved. The Nanumba in various villages like Dakpam, Chamba, Chichaxi and Juanayili, led by their chiefs, also convened and drafted resolutions demanding the expulsion of particular Konkomba from Nanun (cf. Nanumba Traditional Council letter to the Dakpam Naa, 19/2/1981 which urges the Dakpam Naa to exercise patience). The situation became increasingly tense. On the 18th March a KOYA meeting at Juanayili was dispersed by the Nanumba led by the Jua Naa. The full house of the Nanumba Traditional Council (NTC) met on March 19, 1981. The resolution demanded that the KOYA activists Batu, Ali and Harunah leave Nanun with immediate effect. In a letter of March 18, 1981 to the Regional Minister Alhaji Harruna, whom he addressed as 'My Good Friend', the Bimbilla Naa charged that the three Konkombas 'incite their fellow Konkombas in my jurisdiction to flout the traditional customs of Nanun'. He cited the example of arbitration and the alleged installation of 'Chiefs/Heads in my villages without the consent of my sub-chiefs'. The Bimbilla Naa concluded his letter to Tamale with the following:

My Good Friend, I can foresee that the continuous stay of these Konkombas in Nanun will surely cause unrest in the near future. And in order to avert this unrest and to maintain the already existing peace and tranquility in Nanun, the three Konkombas and their families should leave Nanun forthwith.

I remain, Your Good Friend

Bimbilla Na Dassens Abudulai
President Nanumba Traditional Council

The letter shows that the Bimbilla Naa still relied fully on the usual collaboration between chiefs and state administration. That is why the Regional Minister was his 'friend'. At that time the Police, for example, had been asked to protect the Konkomba from being intimidated by the Nanumba. The Police seem to have had some understanding of the Konkomba's problems in face of the Nanumba's arrogance and boasting that they could easily subdue the 'stupid' and gullible Konkomba 'tribesmen'. The KOYA's activities were obviously underestimated by the Nanumba, even though

the Bimbilla Naa (and his literate advisers) rightly predicted the outbreak of open hostilities. The DCE N'yel assured the Northern Regional Officer in his Monthly Report for February 1981 (apparently filed in the middle of March) that he had addressed the full house of the NTC and had warned of 'repercussions about the banishment of people since these are likely to infringe on their fundamental human rights'. He also warned the KOYA members that they should abide by the law.

The KOYA leaders were invited to the Bimbilla Naa's palace 'to explain certain issues to the Chief and elders', but they refused and instead went to the police station to ask for protection. This they received. The DCE then gave assurances that the situation was calm and urged the Regional Administrative Officer to take up seriously the problems raised by the conflict. If not given proper attention 'it may explode one day'. The DCE decided to summon the three recalcitrant Konkomba leaders to the Regional Office on March 31, 1981 to meet the Deputy Regional Minister to settle some of these issues and to try to reduce tension in the area. The Deputy Regional Minister was Mr Baba, a Nanumba – a highly untactical choice. There is no evidence that this meeting ever took place.

There was, however, a meeting of the NAYA (23/3/1981), apparently in reaction to the NTC meeting six days earlier. Again, the Nanumba youth were at the tail end of events, reacting to the initiative of the *naam* holders. The NAYA meeting proposed that KOYA executives be met with to discuss 'Recent Nanumbas/Konkombas Relations'. This meeting took place on March 25, 1981, and five representatives from each association were present. The NAYA committee was led by Mr Alhaji Iddi, the NAYA President, and the Executives of the KOYA were led by Mr E Y Mahama, Chairman of the KOYA (Bimbilla Branch). The 'terms of reference' were:

- a) the refusal of Ali, Batu and Harruna to meet the Bimbilla Naa on March 17, 1981;
- b) the activities of the KOYA in Nanuŋ;
- c) the encroachment of the Customs and Usages of the Nanumba Traditional Area.

Mr Alhaji Iddi was made chairman of the meeting. He stressed the brotherly purpose of the meeting and said that 'Youths are the future leaders' and therefore should find a solution to the problems facing the two groups. It was agreed that the meeting should review the two groups' differences in order to come to a compromise.

The KOYA leaders explained that the reason why Mr Ali did not honour the invitation by the Bimbilla Naa was that they had been scared away by the Kanjo Naa (the Konkomba elder who was enskinned as a chief by the Bimbilla Naa) who threatened to kill Ali, Mahama and Harruna if the Nanumbas did not do so. Mr Mahama asserted that no arbitrations were carried out by any Konkomba, against which the NAYA claimed that one had recently taken place in Ali's house. Mr Mahama also assured the Nanumba Youth leaders that they had never advised Konkomba not to contribute to communal labour and that the Konkomba had never elected any chiefs. The KOYA representatives pleaded for a change (reduction) in the tribute of a hind leg from the first animal slaughtered during a ritual funeral because the cost was too high in inflation-ridden Ghana. The KOYA chairman also explained the case of the village of Sakpe, where the Konkomba had not finished their communal labour for the Sakpe Naa. He said that a relative of the people concerned had died and they had had to go into mourning. Finally, the two parties agreed to re-establish cordial relations and the KOYA leaders recognized that they owed the Bimbilla Naa an apology for failing to honour his call.

This meeting of the 25th March, 1981, was apparently the last to be held between the two associations and between the representatives of the two ethnic groups in Bimbilla. Previous events came to their logical outcome in an outbreak of hostilities, as had been predicted by all sides, *i.e.* the NTC, the KOYA, the NAYA and the DCE. I would not hesitate to say that the people simply waited for the right pretext to reconcile their opposing viewpoints by force. The Nanumba as 'landowners' felt fully justified in their demand for loyalty and customary duties from the Konkomba. To the latter, however, this was unreasonable, partly because of the high costs involved and partly because they felt they were not being treated in a fair way by the Nanumba. The KOYA had assumed undisputed leadership among the Konkomba all over Nanuŋ. It had branches in many villages, although it did not find support in north-eastern Nanuŋ where the Kanjo Naa was strong. The KOYA strength was a triumph for the Konkomba youth,⁶ but the KOYA was not militant at this stage and its leaders did not want conflict with the Nanumba. However, its very existence and aims were contrary to the Nanumba political culture and could not be tolerated by it. The KOYA activities were seen as subversive by the Nanumba – especially in view of the long

period in which the Konkomba had remained docile and had fulfilled all the demands and expectations of the Nanumba.

The Nanumba, meanwhile, were led by the rather inflexible 'old guard', composed of illiterate chiefs and a few literate expoliticians among whom Mr Attah and Mr Chambas especially stood to profit from the situation. The Nanumba Youth Association did not have, and did not dare to have, an independent stance. This was caused by the unequivocal subordination of the younger generations to the traditional chiefly system based on seniority and social status derived from membership of the chiefly houses. Thus, the Nanumba were less united than it appeared at first sight because their leadership was neither strong nor dynamic. The Nanumba were very self-assured and believed in the state's support of their claims of traditional sovereignty over their district and traditional area. Theirs was the arrogance of power. They underestimated the Konkomba to the point of denying that the district's population contained a clear Konkomba majority. Their illusion was partly supported by the ratio of Nanumba to Konkomba in Bimbilla, where there were only a few Konkomba families. The Bimbilla clash supported this illusion, but the Kpasaland counter-attack was soon to teach the Nanumba a bitter lesson.

THE APRIL CLASH AND JUNE WAR

Tension between the Nanumba and Konkomba in various parts of Nanuŋ was not as apparent as at Bimbilla, where the situation was very dangerous. Finally, on the evening of Thursday, April 23^d, a little over a month after the NTC meeting which had not achieved its goal of evicting the KOYA leaders from the Nanuŋ Traditional Area, a violent clash took place.

THE APRIL CLASH IN BIMBILLA AND KPASALAND

Several versions of the clash exist. The Nanumba version is that one of the Bimbilla Naa's sons was stabbed that evening, with a weapon made of iron, by one of Ali's sons, who was possibly drunk. The Bimbilla Naa sent his secretary, Mr H. Salifu (also a member of the NAYA Secretariat) to find out from the Konkomba what had really happened. When Salifu arrived at the house of the KOYA activist, Mr Batu, he was shot dead. The Nanumba then 'became aggressive' and attacked the houses of the Konkomba, setting them alight. The Nanumba also attacked nearby Konkomba settlements and set fire to their houses (cf. Adam 1981).

The Konkomba version is that Nanumba youths, among them one of the Bimbilla Naa's many sons, had been provoking Konkomba youths in Ali's house, and the latter, in self defence, had injured the chief's son. The young Konkombas then fled to Batu's house. The Nanumba, led by Hamilton Salifu, formed a large mob and surrounded Batu's house demanding vengeance. The Konkomba shot Salifu in self-defence after he ordered the mob to break through the doors (interview with K. Wujangi). The mob then started to beat and kill Konkomba and loot their homes. Konkomba women with small children fled to the Catholic Mission where Rev. Father Golla alone helped them. In Gaburuya (Kabuliya), a Konkomba village near Bimbilla, 27 houses were burnt to the ground. One person and a number of livestock were killed. All Konkomba had to flee from Bimbilla and surrounding settlements (KOYA 1981).

According to another Nanumba source (Mr W. Salisu's letter of 11/6/81), the KOYA at their annual Easter meeting at Saboba in 1980, decided on secession from the Nanumba since they, the Konkomba, produced the bulk of Nanun's wealth (*i.e.* yams). They decided to stop selling yams to the Nanumba middlewomen. They were discussing this defiance of Nanumba supremacy 'when one of the sons of the Bimbilla Naa passed by and told them that they were holding an illegal meeting since the chief was not informed about it. It is alleged that a quarrel ensued between them and the boy and when he went home to inform the father, they [the Konkomba] broke into Batu's house...' The same source gave the number of Konkomba victims that night as six. Officially it was reported that there were seven dead in Bimbilla (*West Africa* 4/5/81).

Patti Waldmeir, who wrote two articles about the war, introduced a new version of the story, which was that the two sons (of the Bimbilla Naa and Ali) fought in a beer bar over a woman (*International Herald Tribune* 29/6/81). Alhaji Harruna, Northern Regional Minister, testified before the Commission of Inquiry in September 1981 that

...the immediate cause of the breach of peace was the result of an incident at a Bimbilla 'pito' bar on April 23 this year. He said it was reported that the son of one Ali Konkomba had a quarrel with the son of the late⁷ Bimbilla Naa, Dasana Abudulai, which resulted in a scuffle in which the Bimbilla Naa's son was allegedly stabbed (*The Daily Graphic* 18/9/81).

The KOYA testimony to the Commission asserted that

...on the night of April 23, this year, unprovoked Nanumbas attacked one Mr Ali Kamshegu's house at Bimbilla... Mr Kamshegu's son, Emmanuel Ali Abukari, repulsed the attackers and wounded one of them, resulting in the looting and burning of all Konkomba houses by Nanumbas who went on a rampage (Report 1981).

There are several other reports from people who, whatever their sympathies, were neither Nanumba nor Konkomba. Rev. Fr. Gerard Golla, SVD priest at the R. C. Mission at Bimbilla (letter of 19/10/81; interview 30/10/81), learned about the conflict from the Konkomba who sought refuge in the mission. Later that night, the 23rd April, he was asked by the Ghanaian Police inspector to drive him to Yendi for reinforcements. Fr. Golla intimated that at the police station they had no vehicle and only one rifle. (Mr Chambas disputed this by saying that there were at least 10 or 12 rifles at the District Police Headquarters). The policemen were afraid of Nanumba attack because some Konkomba were hiding at the police station (among them Mr Abukari Ali). The Nanumba mob, led by the mother of the deceased Mr Salifu, accused Fr. Golla of sympathising with the Konkomba and of smuggling Batu out of town even though Batu was in Accra at that time, which suggests that Batu suspected what might take place. According to Mr Chambas, a Nanumba and former DC, it was 'Afrifa', a young Konkomba man, who had killed Mr Salifu and therefore was smuggled out of Bimbilla. Fr. Golla helped to bring four policemen to Bimbilla before dawn. He was called to the police station again to be witness to the case of a Konkomba teacher, son of the Damanku Konkomba headman, who was discovered hidden in a police toilet and was almost beaten to death. According to Fr. Golla, Nanumba warriors did not allow him to see the teacher. Nobody was allowed to take him to the hospital, although, supposedly, he lived for another 24 hours. The headman soon learned about his son's death. The most wanted Konkomba (Ali, Batu, Mahama and Harruna) all escaped, Harruna with a slight injury.

Another 'neutral' source, a report by Mr Jiwah, a teacher of Balsa origin stationed at Bimbilla, confirms that four Konkomba were killed on the night of April 23, 1981 at Bimbilla. One of them was 'a prince of the Konkomba chiefdom over the bank of the River Oti, the town popularly called Damanko'. They were reportedly killed by a 'large mob' of more than 2000 Nanumba who sur-

rounded Batu's house armed with 'cap guns, pistols and rifle barrels including codgels (sic), cutlasses, and spears'. They also looted the property of Batu and other Konkomba. Batu was a transport owner, a rich man by Ghanaian standards. He later reported the loss of Cedi 150,000 in cash, Cedi 61,000 worth of yams, 150 bags of rice, 1 drum (approx. 200 litres) of akpeteshi (strong homemade alcoholic beverage), many cartons of beer, 30 bags of guinea corn and 12 cows. Also, the Konkomba gods in the house were destroyed (Jiwah 1981).

Another 'neutral' witness who wrote down his impressions of the conflict was Mr Tiah, a teacher in Bimbilla, who asserted that the mother of the stabbed boy went to the Bimbilla Naa and forced him to take action by touching his chiefly pride. When his interpreter Salifu was killed, the Bimbilla Naa asked his *akarima*, talking drummer, to gather the Nanumba warriors together and tell them in the drum language that: 'the chief commanded to leave no Konkomba in and around Batu's house alive'.

Next day, Friday, April 24, there were rumours that the Konkomba from surrounding villages (esp. Kpalga) were to attack Bimbilla in retaliation. A Peace Committee was formed comprising Mr M. A. Adam, MP, DCE Mr N'yel, Mr Attah, Mr Jejitei (a Konkomba lawyer) and another lawyer (an Ewe). Fr. Golla was not a member because he was deemed pro-Konkomba by Mr Adam. The committee found out that the Nanumba and Konkomba youngsters were preparing for another fight and managed to prevent hostilities. However, the Konkomba lawyer felt so threatened by Nanumba youths that he was obliged to escape in a hired taxi, which took off in the direction of Salaga instead of Yendi (Golla interview 30/10/81).

Meanwhile the Nanumba warriors attacked the village of Kabuliya (Gaburuya). The pretext for this was the report of the Nanumba chief of Kabuliya, who told the Bimbilla Naa that the Konkomba from Kabuliya wanted to attack Bimbilla on Friday 24/4/81. The Bimbilla Naa sent his chief warrior Yidana alias Kambonaa Kpema from Jilo, to check this out in nearby Kabuliya. He went with his men, and his younger brother, Modoo, followed by himself. The Konkomba ambushed Modoo and killed him while Yidana reached the village, where he found nothing amiss because the Konkomba warriors were hidden in the bush. When he returned with some fellow Nanumba to collect the dead body, the Konkomba started to shoot at them with guns as well as arrows. An-

other Nanumba, Kalahi, was killed. 'The Nanumba also became aggressive and so they started to fire them till they all ran away. They [the Nanumba] went and burnt their houses' (Mr Ponadoo interview 1/11/81). 'Neutral' reports (such as Tiah 1981; Golla interview 30/10/81) assert that it was the Nanumba who decided to attack the Kabuliya village but were repulsed by a well-organised Konkomba defence. The Konkomba were dug in holes and, heavily armed with single and double barrel rifles (hunting type), awaited the Nanumba warriors. The Konkomba were led by an ex-serviceman who wore a pot on his head in place of a helmet! The fighting lasted all day until the Nanumba overpowered the Konkomba. It was alleged that many Konkomba were killed at Kabuliya. However, the Konkomba, unlike the Nanumba, take their dead with them, so it is difficult to know exactly how many were killed. One report (Jiwah 1981) asserts that about 800 Nanumba warriors fought at Kabuliya, whereas Tiah (1981) emphasises that there were less than fifteen 'or even ten who made the massacre at Kabiriya'. The KOYA memorandum mentioned only one dead Konkomba and 27 burnt houses (KOYA 11/7/81). Many of the numbers, which are not from first hand sources, are exaggerated, each side wanting to minimize its own losses and maximise the losses of the enemy.

Meanwhile, news about the Bimbilla clash reached Damanku, the gate to Kpasaland. The Konkomba, allegedly, captured the ferry pontoon. The Konkomba headman at Damanku rushed to Bimbilla to collect the body of his son, but the police would not allow this and instead told him that the corpse had to be sent to the Tamale Regional Hospital for a post-mortem examination. The father returned terribly upset and vexed, and mobilised his people that night (Friday 24/4/81) for retaliation. First, a butcher was killed. Then, the Damanku Nanumba chief, Chicheli Naa, was surrounded in his palace and, although he offered strong resistance and allegedly killed 15 Konkomba (Tiah reports that 'bullets diverted their direction whenever he was shot at'), he had to give himself up and was slaughtered together with his whole family. The Konkomba then marched towards other villages in Kpasaland: Sibi, Kpasa and Pisigu (Kabulikura). The Kpasa Naa (who is of Nawuri origin, from the Siburi chiefly house, *i.e.* autochthonous) had to flee his town, via Nkwanta (Osulewura refused him refuge on the grounds that the Konkomba would also attack him). The Sibi Naa fled across the river to Gbungbaliga and Pisigu-Lana managed to cross

the Oti at Kajeso. He reached Wulehe, while some of his people crossed the Mo River to Woribogu and Nakpali and women took refuge at the police station at Damanku. The Kpasa Naa warned the police who cabled to Nkwanta and Ho, but to no avail. The Bimbilla police were notified about the fighting over the river but could not go there because Kpasaland was officially part of the Volta Region.

The Pisigu Lana informed the Bimbilla Naa about the conflict, but the latter did not want to hear anything about it (*di pa taali*), saying that this was a matter between children, we should be patient (Pisigu Lana interview, 12/10/81). Apparently the Bimbilla Naa did not want to believe that real war had started between the Nanumba and the Konkomba. When he had competed for the Bimbilla *naam* in the late 1950s, the electors were against him (they wanted Bakpab Naa Dawuni who was the eldest in the Gbuxmayili house) because the soothsayer (*baga*) found that there would be tragedy, war or trouble during his reign. Jiwah (1981) tells a story marked by superstition: before the Bimbilla Naa was installed, lions, leopards and even an elephant appeared in Nanuŋ, which was the reason for the current clash. But Naa Dasana was a very fierce candidate, who wanted to be the paramount chief at any cost. He managed to win the support of the regional commissioner Abavana and was recognised as the Bimbilla Naa. The people in Nanuŋ who remembered the case asserted that the chief must have been frightened by the fulfilment of the soothsayer's predictions and chose to ignore it.

Many people were killed in Kpasaland. Reports of casualties varied between 50 and 600. Rev. Golla told me that at least 80 people were killed at Damanku but a truck brought only about 50 dead bodies. Agence France Press reported from 'Tinjassi' (near Ghana-Togo border) that the refugees who fled to Togo from Kpasaland reported 600 dead (*NRC Handelsblad* 19/5/81; *The Guardian* 21/5/81). There was no official confirmation of any fighting by the Ghanaian media or other official organs. The only official statement which intimated that the conflict had not been confined to Bimbilla was made by Hon. U. Dalafu (a Konkomba), MP for the Saboba-Chereponi constituency, who said in the parliament on May 7, 1981 that 'the fighting has spread to many towns and villages within and without the Nanumba district resulting in men being ambushed and killed. It was no longer safe to go to the farms; and deaths were neither reported nor detected by the Security Agencies'. The Speaker then called on the Northern Regional Minister 'to take urgent action to resolve the conflict'. The Hon. M. A. Adam,

MP for Nanumba, was not present (Votes and Proceedings, 7/5/81). West Africa wrote on the 1st June that the fighting was 'more serious than first reported' and that *The Daily Graphic* in Accra reported that 'about over 1000 people had fled the area out of fear'.

The Zangbalin Naa, one of the chiefs enskinned in 1980 to go to Kpasaland (Abdulai-Kura), took refuge in Togo. He told me (27/4/82) that when he first arrived at Abdulai-Kura he was well received by the Dagbamba, Moshi, Kotokoli, and Chokossi. When he asked them to help him with a small maize farm, they came and cleared a field for him. The Konkomba, however, ignored his call. The maize did well. When the conflict broke out, the Konkomba took part of the harvest and burnt the rest even though the Zangbalin Naa had no quarrel with them. Saturday 25/4/81 was the day of the Kpasa market, and the Nanumba men at Abdulai-Kura met and decided to send a messenger to Bimbilla to find out the cause of the 'quarrel'. At that moment they heard that the Kpasa Konkomba 'were wild and were armed to kill all the Dagombas across the Oti'. The Zangbalin Naa's position was characteristic of the situation:

We were still sitting there when one Salifezie came and told us that one of his friends who was a Konkomba man came and told him that they, the Konkombas, had met and decided to kill all the Dagombas, so he should escape with the wife and children. We were still doubtful about all we had heard because there was no quarrel among us, the quarrel was at Bimbilla.

Then came the news that 'the Konkombas had killed all the Dagombas at Sibi, Kpasa, Damanko and even killed Chicheli-Na'.

The men quickly sent their wives and children on a bush path toward Togo. They themselves pretended that they would not run. Later, they escaped unnoticed by the Abdulai-Kura Konkomba but while on the way to Tinjaasi in Togo were warned that the Togo Konkomba in Tinjaasi were armed and would kill them. They moved through the bush alone, sending the women ahead.⁸ The refugees came to Sayibu Kura, which is already in Togo. On Sunday, at about 3 a.m., the village chief sent three messengers to fetch soldiers from Fazao. The Fazao commander telephoned Bassari and Lome to tell of the incident in Kpasa. The soldiers arrived only on Tuesday 28/4/81. Meanwhile, however, the Konkomba at Tinjaasi had fought with other Nanumba/Dagbamba who arrived there and killed them all including the Tinjaasi-Naa, a Na-

numba chief who was enskinned at Bimbilla on the same day in February 1980 as the Zangbalin Naa. They also killed another Nanumba chief, the Azwaa Naa. The Togolese took good care of the refugees whose numbers reportedly reached 1000–1200 (*The Guardian* 21/5/81; *West Africa* 1/6/81; *The Daily Graphic* 8/6/81).

The Zangbalin Naa and his people who numbered 65, stayed in Togo until later in 1981. When he heard about the fighting in Nanuŋ (Pudua, Wulehe, Dakpam), the Zangbalin Naa wanted to return but was not allowed to do so by the Togolese authorities. He reported the fact that there was free movement of the Konkomba between Ghana and Togo. The Konkomba ‘chief’ at Sayibu-Kura was arrested for a week because he passed the information about the Nanumba/Dagbamba staying at Sayibu-Kura to the Kpasaland Konkomba, who subsequently planned to cross the border and kill the Nanumba/Dagbamba refugees. It was a shock for this chief to realize that ‘all the Konkombas came together’. The Zangbalin Naa also reported the volatile position of the Nanumba chiefs in Kpasaland where they were sent by the Bimbilla Naa. ‘But nobody could come from the Bimbilla Naa’s land to collect some taxes, so I feel the land was not fully released to Bimbilla Naa. We were also there to listen to the Court Appeal filed by the Siyare-Na’ (*i.e.* Siarewura).

The official reaction in Ghana was to hush up the events in Kpasaland and the refugee question in Togo. Nothing was reported. Only when the Nanumba insisted a delegation consisting of the Volta Regional Minister and the Northern Regional Minister was despatched to both Nanuŋ and Kpasaland. Prior to that, on May 4, the Alhaji Harruna called a meeting between the KOYA leaders and the DCE and Regional administration because the Bimbilla Naa had complained officially about the April conflict in Bimbilla and accused Ali, Batu and Harruna of causing it. The KOYA district leaders were not to be found in Nanuŋ as the whole Konkomba population had fled Bimbilla in the wake of the conflict. The DCE suggested that the Regional Minister consult the Tamale KOYA leaders, especially the lawyer ‘Jejite’ (correctly Jejitey). The DCE added in his wireless message: ‘This youth association which has a wide support of all the Konkombas can then appeal to their people here to live in peace’. This meeting apparently did not take place until June 18, 1981.

The ‘peace mission’ consisting of the Volta Regional Minister, Northern Regional Minister and their entourages arrived in Bim-

billa on 21/5/81. The Bimbilla Naa Dasana Abudulai's speech (rendered in English by his deputy secretary) stressed that the incident in Bimbilla should not have been allowed to spread to Kpasaland. He explained (Abudulai 1981): 'I therefore saw no reason why the Konkombas at Damanku and its villages including Kpasa took arms against the Nanumba across the River Oti and even went to the extent of murdering innocent settler farmers from the Dagomba Traditional Area who were not Nanumbas'. He accused the 'Volta Regional Police' of incompetence in maintaining peace and charged that they had 'sided with the Konkombas to kill most of my people'. He also said 'with firm conviction' that Shiarewura was involved 'in murdering of my people across the River Oti. My belief is that the Kpasaland Dispute which came on for hearing at the High Court, the Appeal Court and the Stool Lands Boundaries Settlement Commission of which all the judgements were given in my favour might have tempted the Shiarewura to involve himself in the killings'.

Finally, the Nanumba paramount chief made a vigorous plea for the inclusion of Kpasaland into its Northern Region. He argued that 'for communication reasons and for the same of distance this area of my land across the Oti cannot be effectively administered from the Volta Region. When the uprising started the Police from Bimbilla and reinforcements from Tamale could have crossed the Oti to maintain order from Damanku to Kpasa but due to administrative reasons they could not do so'. He called for the culprits responsible to be brought before the law. He pledged that he would not lose a piece of that land (Kpasaland) to any individual or group of individuals and appealed to the Volta Regional Minister 'to co-operate with me in the administering of my land in the Volta Region ... [and] ... to clamp down on the Konkomba in the Kpasa area to forestall any further loss of lives and properties in that area' (Abudulai 1981).

This was perhaps the most passionate speech ever made by the Bimbilla Naa. However, the ministers left, nothing changed, no Konkomba or Nanumba were ever questioned about the conflict and nobody was arrested. Meanwhile, it was rumoured among the Nanumba leaders at Bimbilla that a file with the KOYA meetings' minutes was found in the room of Mr Harruna after it was pillaged. Minutes, compiled by the secretary, Mr Harruna, allegedly revealed that the KOYA planned a takeover of Nanuŋ on July 15, during the fasting month when Nanumba Muslims would be weak.

The documents also allegedly suggested that the Nanumba would be subdued, killed or chased away from the fertile lands of Nanuṅ. Also, the Yendi area would be taken subsequently and Batu would become the new Bimbilla Naa.⁹ According to these minutes, Ali would become chief of Yendi and Namwanja chief of Wulensi (Wulehe). The Nanumba led by Mr M. A. Adam (MP) and Mr Amin (District Council Chairman) made reports to the police about the minutes. These reports are said to have reached the President's office eventually (Jiwah 1981). Police reinforcements were sent to Bimbilla but were soon recalled.

The Nanumba Youth Association, especially Mr T. B. Damba and Mr Ponadoo with the help of Major Nantogmah, who was Ponadoo's brother,¹⁰ prepared for the Nanumba revenge. The major allegedly organized warriors and hunters to fight for Nanuṅ in order to recover Kpasaland. The Konkomba who moved on the roads of Nanuṅ at that time were harassed by the Nanumba patrols. Mr Dalafu, MP for the PFP for the Konkomba-Basare-Chakossi constituency of Chereponi-Saboba, warned in parliament that 'tension in the area had still not subsided and said there were indications of a possible breakout of another clash'. *The Daily Graphic* reported (8/6/81): 'The MP stated that as of now Konkombas travelling through Bimbilla were molested, manhandled and deprived of their valuable property by the Nanumbas'. Dalafu charged that the police were unable to cope with the situation because they were ill-equipped. He criticized Alhaji Harruna for siding with the Nanumba and said that 'the Northern Regional Minister could have averted the clash had he taken action on the monthly security reports covering the past 18 months which were sent to him'.

While the tension between the two groups was escalating amid rumours about armament and war preparations, and the government at the same time was evidently underestimating the gravity of the conflict, the Nanumba had to face a serious loss. At the end of May, the Bimbilla Naa Dasana Abudulai and the Kpatihi Wumbei Natogmah died almost simultaneously under rather mysterious circumstances. The deaths were reported on May 31, but could have occurred earlier. It was alleged that the Bimbilla Naa and the Kpatihi were strongly against the war with the Konkomba but were being pressed by NAYA activists to give consent to the warriors to cross the river and re-conquer Kpasaland. Apparently, the Bimbilla Naa, a man of advanced age accustomed to alcohol, could not bear the

weight of his predestined responsibility for the tragedy that had occurred. Feeling sick and weak, he called the Kpatihi to his bedroom and there, with reference to the general situation in Nanuŋ and the threat of annihilation, asked him to take over the leadership (Tiah 1981). The Kpatihi declined and chose rather to follow the chief and die. He stayed with the Bimbilla Naa till his death which is against the custom. Such a person who witnesses the chief's death must die. The Kpatihi was seen vomiting on the way from the Bimbilla Naa's palace to his compound after having helped to bathe the dead body of the chief. He died soon afterwards in the early hours of Sunday, May 31. The Kpatihi was buried that day, and the Bimbilla Naa on the next day. Both men were believed to have taken poison.

As reported in *The Daily Graphic* (4/6/81) the Regional Minister, Alhaji Harruna, came to Bimbilla to mourn and present the customary drinks and traditional burial fee on behalf of the President Hilla Limann. Alhaji Harruna addressed the people of Nanuŋ and said that 'the greatest tribute they could pay to the memory of the Bimbilla Na and his chief kingmaker was to maintain an everlasting peace and tranquility' (DCE Monthly Report, May, 1981).

After a period of interregnum – during which time any loose domestic animals and other property left unguarded or not locked up could be confiscated (a lot of people lost sheep, goats, chicken, *etc.* in this way) – his eldest son Mahama was installed as the *ghonlana* (lit. custodian of the skin or regent) on 12th June. The chiefs from most villages moved to Bimbilla until the ritual funeral would be performed.

The power vacuum created by the death of the Bimbilla Naa – who had not wanted to attack the Konkomba after the April 1981 clash (Mr Attah interview, 8 May, 1982) – was used by partisans of the military solution. Nanumba warriors under the leadership of NAYA activists secretly prepared for an invasion of Kpasaland via the lands around Chichagi and Pudu. There were serious misgivings, however, about the whole plan. The Bimbilla Naa was dead and Nanuŋ lacked leadership. Nevertheless, a meeting was organized with the Juo Naa (chief elector) who, according to tradition, was the highest dignitary when the paramount chief was absent. From among the senior politicians, Mr Attah and Mr Chambas were present. Mr Ponadoo, the PNP chairman and younger brother of the deceased Kpatihi (he was to become the new Kpatihi in January, 1983) in conjunction with T. B. Damba (who may not have been

present at the meeting) urged that the Konkomba be attacked via the river and Kpasaland recovered for Nanuɲ. Mr Attah said that it was ‘illegal to fight other citizens in such a state like Ghana’. He left the meeting in protest. Mr Chambas also tried to persuade the young leaders that it was wrong to fight and that they had no experience as warriors. They had guns but did not know how to use them. Apparently emotions ran high, but the NAYA faction, led by Ponadoo and Damba, won over the experienced old politicians and traditional leaders who favoured a peaceful solution with the help of the government, which they believed was on their side.

THE JUNE 1981 WAR

A meeting was called for Thursday 18th June 1981 by the Regional Security Committee (REGSEC) at Tamale where the leaders of the KOYA and the NAYA were to meet and discuss ways of reconciliation. While the youth leaders negotiated with REGSEC, about 400 or more (Jiwah 1981, mentions 600; KOYA 1981 – 1000) Nanumba warriors, armed with hunting rifles and some other modern weapons, left Bimbilla on the night of 18–19th June in four HINO seven ton trucks in the direction of Salnayili. They reportedly crossed the Oti river at Bandiyili and attacked the area around Chichaxi and Pudua. The pretext was the call for help from the Chichax Naa who was allegedly being harassed by the Konkomba living in his area and felt that the Konkomba planned a large-scale attack on Chichaxi. The departure of the best warriors left central Nanuɲ vulnerable to attack. At the Chichaxi area the rains and the guerrilla tactics of the Konkomba warriors caused the Nanumba forces to be bogged down.

At the same time, *i.e.* 19th June, a very tense situation developed at Kanjo near Lungni, a larger village south of Wulensi (Wulehe in Nanuni), on the Bimbilla – Krachi road. A driver from Wulensi was killed on the road by an arrow, and his dead body was brought to Wulensi by his co-driver (Lungni Naa interview 2/11/81; Tiah 1981). According to the Konkomba, the reason for this incident was the death of Mr Makapo, a Catholic Konkomba, at Wulensi on the 19th June. He had been chased and killed near the police station by the Nanumba. The Nanumba at Wulehe were very angry and organized for revenge against the Konkomba. They allegedly tried to attack Kanjo and loot this Konkomba settlement (Jiwah 1981). Tiah (1981) reports that, on the 20th June, ‘unbalanced’ forces of about 80 Nanumba warriors were put together in

Bimbilla on hearing reports of an imminent Konkomba attack from a south-westerly direction on the Sabonjida-Chamba-Dakpam-Nabayili-Bimbilla road. At both places – in and around Wulensi and around Nabayili – the Konkomba forces were far stronger than the Nanumba forces. The Nanumba soon felt their lack of guns and ammunition.

The Konkomba warriors, naked to the waist, fought mostly with bows and arrows, adopting guerrilla tactics of dispersed advances and taking cover in the bush. They were organized in groups of five and twenty, led by ex-servicemen with guns (some suggested that there were regular servicemen among them). The Konkomba warriors were reportedly pushed into battle by their women who would bring food to advance positions and threaten that their male organs would be cut off if they retreated without winning. The dead and wounded were immediately taken away from the battlefield so that the warriors could undisturbed continue fighting. War drums, tooting and war songs gave them courage (Rev. Fr. Renner interview 15/11/81).

Unlike the Konkomba, the Nanumba left their dead on the spot. At the Nabayili area, they were obliged to flee from the front when they realized that the Konkomba forces were several times more powerful. In Wulensi on Saturday, 20th June, it seemed as if the Konkomba were retreating but in reality they were regrouping. Konkomba reinforcements allegedly came from all possible directions, including the Volta Region, Togo, Gonja, Afram Plains, Atebubu and even southern towns, with members of a dozen ‘subtribes’ pouring in. On the 20th, fighting was resumed around Wulensi. A police armoured car was despatched to Wulensi, but its machine gun got stuck and only smoke bombs were fired in the direction of the approaching Konkomba hordes. The Wulehe Naa was rescued just before his palace was set alight, and he returned to Bimbilla.

Meanwhile, Bimbilla was receiving terrible reports from all sides, including the news about the Nanumba invasion across the Oti. People – especially ‘workers’¹¹ and their families, women and children of Nanumba and other origin – gathered on the grounds of the Catholic mission and the E. P. Teacher Training College. Fearing an imminent attack by the Konkomba, several thousand people sought refuge on the grounds of the two public institutions. Meanwhile, the police tried to get reinforcements and convince the army commander in Tamale of the gravity of the situation.

The regrouped Konkomba forces attacked Wulensi in the early morning of Sunday, June 21. Nanumba warriors had run out of ammunition by that time and a large number of women and children and 'workers' took refuge in the police station. The Konkomba set fire to the whole Nanumba section of the town. All men, all male children and pregnant women were killed on sight. The Wulehe god Naa Paga, which was located in a corner of the Wulehe Naa's palace, was plundered. Finally, those hidden in the police station were summarily executed after a Nanumba warrior sought refuge there or, as was also alleged, after a shot came from the building. In the morning alone, at least 500 people were lying dead in the central part of Wulensi. Hundreds ran away towards Bimbilla, and were joined by people in nearby villages so that, by Sunday afternoon, Bimbilla had become a large refugee camp (cf. Patti Waldmeir in *West Africa* 20/7/81).

After the fall of Wulensi, the Konkomba forces attacked Dakpam, which was also without its chief (who, according to custom, was in Bimbilla waiting for the ritual funeral of the Bimbilla Naa). A few Nanumba warriors were killed and the rest of the men ran away. In Taali, traditionally warrior village for the Dakpam Naa, all the young men ran away leaving 12 old men who were hiding in the houses of local Konkomba. The warrior elders were found by the advancing Konkomba and were killed mercilessly on the spot and buried by the local Konkomba. The killers came from faraway places and the Taali Konkomba did not join them in killing the elders.

About 30 soldiers of the Ghana Army reportedly arrived in Bimbilla on Sunday, June 21, in two patrol vans. This was, obviously, not sufficient, and the Konkomba continued attacking without fear and retreated only temporarily in the afternoon of June 21, after a salvo of warning shots was fired by the handful of soldiers. On Monday, June 22, 1981 Bimbilla was surrounded by Konkomba forces especially in the south and the east of the town, *i.e.* the area between the roads leading from Salaga and Wulensi, but also from other directions. It was reported that up to 15,000 Konkomba participated in the attack on Bimbilla where terrified refugees, concentrated in the grounds of the E. P. Teacher Training College began to shout 'Be paana' (they are coming). This quite threatening invasion was forestalled at the last minute by a busload of some 70 soldiers who arrived from Tamale at 4.30 p.m. and im-

mediately placed themselves between the lines of the attacking Konkomba and a small number of Nanumba warriors, and shot salvos in the air. The warriors dispersed. Bimbilla was saved. The Konkomba tried to attack again the next day, but were relatively easily rebuffed by the army. Allegedly (Tiah 1981), the Konkomba tried – unsuccessfully – to sign a treaty with the Nanumba. On 24th June the last armed incident took place in Nakpaa, where the Konkomba attacked and set alight the Nanumba section of the town, including the Nakpaa Naa's palace. The death toll in Nakpaa was four.

Government-employed 'workers' of non-Nanumba origin fled their posts on hearing that the Konkomba were approaching Bimbilla and were still leaving after the Ghanaian armed forces stopped the Konkomba advance. Life in the town was paralysed for weeks. The army was strengthened on June 24, by several armoured transport vehicles of the RECCE squadron from Sunyani under the command of Lt. Tetteh. The army and the special operations police started regular patrolling of the main roads and after a ban on arms was declared by the government, they co-operated in the confiscation of firearms, bows and arrows and other hand weapons. It appeared as if the army would stay for a prolonged period of time. The area of Nanuɔ, Kpasaland included, was now calm on the surface. But, beneath, in the minds of the Nanumba and the Konkomba, hung the question of what would happen and what would be the solution to their irreconcilable positions in the conflict. It was obvious that except for Bimbilla, the Konkomba had a majority everywhere in the district and Kpasaland.

The Konkomba had, de facto, won the war. The Nanumba warriors returned humiliated from the Pudua area across the Oti because they had not achieved any of their main goals. They attacked the Konkomba around Pudua, preventing them from destroying that village, but allegedly let themselves fall into the trap of self-indulgent victorious euphoria. While roasting meat from animals which had belonged to the Konkomba, they were ambushed and many, allegedly, were killed by the Konkomba. According to Mr Salisu Wumbei, however, it was against Nanumba custom to eat war booty. The most horrible war report stated that these Nanumba warriors were all surrounded and slain one after another on the Konkomba Atigeri fetish, the rest being then set on fire in a large hut (Jiwah 1981). But Mr Chambas reported that only one man was killed at Chichaxi. One Nanumba was sent to Bimbilla with his

hand cut off, to excite horror among the Nanumba in the town (Fr. Golla: letter of 19/10/81 and interview 30/10/81). The trans-Oti Nanumba were completely taken by surprise by the mighty Konkomba resistance and their villages were burnt down after the inhabitants fled. Bimbilla, as indicated above, was saved only at the last minute by the Ghana Army.

THE GHANAIAN STATE ACTIVITIES DURING THE WAR AND AFTER

The agencies of the Ghanaian state were guilty of gross underestimation in dealing with the conflict, especially with regard to the violence which took place between April and June 1981. The District Chief Executive N'yel and his subordinates had to deal with the hostilities themselves prior to April 23 as well as after this crucial date. The DCE warned the Regional Office about the dangers of conflict in February 1981, but as usual, the Regional Office did not pay any attention to Mr N'yel's monthly reports. Subsequently, the Northern Regional Minister, Alhaji Harruna, was not even aware of the fighting in Kpasa; the Volta Regional Minister was equally oblivious. Underequipped and understaffed, the police could not prevent the killings and looting at Bimbilla and Kabiliya. The situation at Kpasaland on 25–26/4/1981 was equally marked by police incompetence and helplessness. The Bimbilla Police were prevented from going to Kpasaland because it was in the Volta Region. After the Nanumba chief Kpasa Naa demanded help in Accra at the Presidential office, some police were sent by the Volta Region to Kpasaland but that was days after the massacre at Kpasa. (Mr Chambas suspected deliberate negligence on the part of Ghana Police at Damanku, Kpasa and Nkwanta.)

There was no official recognition of the fact that the heaviest fighting and greatest number of casualties were in Kpasaland. Ghanaian sources reported about only seven victims whereas foreign sources mention 600 dead in Kpasaland. One explanation is that Alhaji Harruna was motivated to keep quiet about the violence and the dead so that he would not be accused of incompetence by the opposition. Most importantly, being from the chiefly people – the Gonja – who also have tense relations with the Konkomba (*The Daily Graphic* 16/6/81; *West Africa* 29/6/81), he personally underestimated the Konkomba. The MP for Saboba, U. Dalafu (a Konkomba), accused Alhaji Harruna of creating 'the impression

that he supported the Nanumbas' because of Harruna's statement that 'the Konkombas had no right to prevent Nanumba refugees from returning to the area around Kpasa and Damanko', without mentioning that the Nanumbas also had no right to prevent Konkomba refugees from returning to the area (*The Daily Graphic* 8/6/81).

Evidence of the underestimation of the conflict can also be seen in the lack of reaction to the appeals of the DCE N'yel (and his predecessor Nsor N'yabire) and the Bimbilla Naa to include Kpasaland under the Northern administration. The May 1981 Regional Security Committee's visit and another peacemaking visit to Nanuŋ and Kpasaland by the Northern and Volta regional ministers were limited to talks with the Nanumba and the Konkomba exhorting them 'to live in peace' (DCE Monthly Report, May, 1981). Reports about the arming of both sides, rumours about weapon buying in towns, even reports of plans to procure weapons from Lebanon via Ghanaian members of the UN peacekeeping force there, all this highly alarming news was not investigated. Only a total lack of judgement or total irresponsibility could allow the hostile factions to go ahead unchecked. Nobody even considered a ban on firearms at that stage. Only when a full scale 'tribal' war was raging and the lives of thousands of people were either lost or in acute danger was the Army and Police mobilised and 'saved Bimbilla from collapse. An attempted invasion on Monday, June 22, was neutralised by the army' (DCE Monthly Report, June 1981). Information from reliable sources indicates that the commander of the Ghana Army at Tamale did not want to send his troops to Bimbilla. This was because he did not receive the right instructions from the Regional Administration and did not believe the information about the gravity of the conflict which reached him via Mr M. A. Adam, MP for Bimbilla, and directly from informal channels in Bimbilla.

The handling of the health problems arising from the conflict was also scandalous. Instead of sending extra personnel to cope with the number of injured, the Ministry of Health sent a vehicle to evacuate the staff of the Bimbilla Health Centre which was 'first to close down when the staff ran away'. The doctors and staff of the Tamale Hospital formed a mobile medical team but could not cope with the numbers and left for Tamale although there were hundreds of injured (DCE Monthly Report, June, 1981). *The Daily Graphic* reported (2/7/81) that: 'The staff of the health centre have also fled leaving the casualties to their fate. A 19 member medical

team from Tamale returned home after treating one patient'. As DC conservation workers did not want to bury the bodies of the dead left by the Nanumba at Wulensi, dogs and pigs were feeding on the human flesh.

The REGSEC, led by Alhaji Harruna, visited the district on 24/6/81 only after Archbishop Dery, alarmed by the news, arrived bringing clothing and medication. The Nanumba, however, complained that R.C. priests were pro-Konkomba (*The Daily Graphic* 26/6/81; cf. Dery in *The Standard* 26/6/81). A four member parliamentary fact finding team arrived in Tamale on 27th June where it met the Regional Minister Alhaji I. Harruna. After seeing the worst affected places in Nanuɲ and speaking to people involved in the conflict, the team estimated that 1500 people had died and that 27 villages had been destroyed. The team recommended setting up a Commission of Enquiry which 'will lead to the finding of a long-term solution to the remote causes of the conflict' (Report 1981). Food relief, bombastically advertised in the press, disappeared after being offloaded from aeroplanes to trucks in Tamale. The Catholic Relief Services considered suing the state for embezzlement of this valuable foodstuff shipment (Rev. Fr. Golla, pers. comm).

Following debate in parliament on the report of the team, on July 7, 1981, the Nanumba District was declared a disaster area and the Police and Army were ordered to seize arms from unauthorised persons. The arms ban was at long last declared by a Legislative Instrument of July 7, 1981. It covered the three districts of Nanumba, Eastern Gonja and Krachi (*The Daily Graphic* 8/7/81). In the first search, 119 guns were seized (two from the Regent of Bimbilla when he went to farm) and 500 bows and arrows. The July 1981 Monthly Report of the DCE, Bimbilla, mentions seizure of 90 cap guns, 19 single barrel guns, 5 double barrel guns, 34 flint guns, 304 bows, 1371 arrows, 16 cudgels, 6 spears, 248 cartridges and 19 rounds of ammunition.

The Army also arrested Lt. J. M. Nyande (or Yande), of the Sixth Battalion Infantry, who was accused in various quarters of the 'act of genocide' because he was allegedly mobilising the Konkomba to be more efficient fighters. Other rumours singled out Nyande as the person who was supposed to have procured firearms from the Middle East for the Konkomba while he was a member of the UN peace keeping forces in Lebanon (Jiwah 1981). Nyande was released but received some anonymous messages from people

at Tamale threatening him with death ‘on the guillotine’ (sic!). The same unknowns placed announcements on the walls of Tamale giving all Konkomba an ultimatum of 96 hours to leave the town or face death (*The Daily Graphic* 7/7/81; cf. *West Africa* 6/7/81).

In response to the report of the four-man fact finding team of parliamentarians – all Northerners – under the chairmanship of Mr Harry Gandaa (PNP Lawra-Nandom), the parliament also expressed ‘grave concern about the hostilities between the two ethnic groups’. The opposition MP Mr S. Asante-Fosuhene (PFP) criticized the President and the Council of the State for ‘failure to make any public utterances on the conflict’. He characterized the conflict as ‘fratricidal’ and remarked that some foreigners call it ‘a war between two regions of Ghana’. Other members of parliament ‘felt that the Northern Regional Minister and his Deputy seemed to be emotionally involved in the conflict and that they should be transferred from the region’. Mr Gandaa said that in view of the fact that both parties in the conflict believed fully in their versions of the causes of the conflict, a commission of enquiry was necessary in order to find out the objective truth.

Dr Abubakar Al-Hassan, the SDF leader in the parliament, criticized the government for disregarding MP U. Dalafu's warning in May about the explosive situation in both the Nanumba District and Kpasaland. He proposed a motion which blamed ‘the Northern Regional Administration for not giving the President the actual information on the gravity of the situation’. This motion was, however, defeated by 41 to 36 votes. His party colleague, O. S. Mahmudu (MP for Mion-Nanton) ‘blamed the security agencies for negligence and inefficiency which had led to the genocide’. Another member of the fact finding parliamentary team Mr P. O. Anala (PNP Sandema) ‘called for concerted efforts by traditional rulers to diffuse all tensions so as to help the government to concentrate on practical solutions to our economic problems’ (*The Daily Graphic* 8/7/81).

While the Ghanaians, and especially Northerners, discussed the conflict and the Southerners at last learned where Bimbilla and the Nanumba District were situated, the President, Dr Hilla Limann (a Northerner) with a high powered delegation including PNP National Chairman, Ministers of Defence, Interior and Health, First Deputy Speaker of the parliament, a Supreme Court judge and the Northern Regional Minister, visited Bimbilla and the Nanumba

District on 12–13 July. This was after speaking in Tamale with leaders of both youth associations and addressing the Regional House of Chiefs. The President with his entourage spent a night at Bimbilla, which no head of state had ever dared to do before. The vacant principal's lodge at the E. P. Teacher Training College was hastily carpeted and furnished for the purpose. The organisers of the President's trip must have had great trouble in overcoming the usual problems of Bimbilla: no drinking water, unreliable electricity supply at the college, no catering facilities.

The President came with a fixed idea of himself as peace-maker. He wanted the two warring factions to forget the recent past (1500 estimated dead, mostly Nanumba, enormous damage to houses, livestock and other property!) and live in peace with each other. He did not realize or did not want to respect the fact that there were no proper leaders on either side with authority to accept binding decisions. The gbonlana, or regent, of Bimbilla, Mahama Dasana, was a weak man with only temporary authority. The KOYA leaders, meanwhile, had all fled the district. Thus, the organisers had to import Nana Nandi, a Konkomba elder and diviner from Banda, a town in the Krachi District situated some 80 kilometres to the south of Bimbilla, deep into the Volta Region. The two quasi-leaders, not authorised by anybody, were made to shake hands as a sign of peace. Perhaps the handshake was possible only because it meant nothing to either side in the conflict. The President certainly disappointed the Nanumba who, apparently, had hoped that he would order all militant Konkomba out of the Nanumba District (and Kpasaland) as they had demanded. Instead, he showed displeasure at their insistence on the forceful expulsion of the Konkomba (DCE Monthly Report for July, 1981; Rev. Golla interview 30/10/81).

The speech of the regent, evidently compiled with the help of Mr Adam, MP for Nanumba, and other young Nanumba literate activists, stressed that the tragedy was a result of the 'invasion of Konkombas on us' and gave an historical overview of the relationship between the Nanumba and the Konkomba both in Nanuŋ and elsewhere in the North. It rejected Konkomba accusations of forced labour, *etc.* The regent argued that: 'If they claim suppression from the Nanumbas, how could they also claim to be richer. A slave can never be richer than his master'. He reiterated his right to enskin the chiefs in his traditional area and denied that right to the Kon-

komba residing in Nanuŋ. He stressed that only when it was discovered that the KOYA wanted to undermine Nanumba customs their meetings had become intolerable in the eyes of the Nanumba. The address, similar to the statement of the MP Mr Adam (6/7/81), characterized the Konkomba as a 'sociological case' of strangers without a cultural home who were the instruments of Togolese subversion and secessionist movements within Ghana.

The speech was clearly aimed at winning President Limann's support for the Nanumba. A longer quotation is useful here:

Your Excellency, do not let international intrigue to frustrate your efforts to develop Ghana. We Nanumbas are a peaceful people, devoted and loyal to every Government and also committed to farming. By their activities, the Konkombas have scared away all other Ghanaians from the District, they paralysed all schools and public services. Since the arrival of the military the Nanumbas have laid down their arms but the Konkombas have gone on burning small Nanumba settlements. These villages can be enumerated if requested.

We regard this as a war on the Republic of Ghana and not Nanumbas. They even engaged members of the regular Armed Forces of which you are the Supreme Commander. All over the place the Konkombas were on the offensive as can be seen (Dasana 1981).

The President, however, tried to be neutral, and did not accept any of the arguments that the Bimbilla regent presented to him. The Nanumba felt dejected and betrayed by the Government. The latter did not make any arrests and did not intend to punish anyone for the bloodshed (cf. Mr Adam's demands in this regard in *West Africa* 13/7/81).

The President, besides making two unrepresentative persons shake hands as a sign of peace, arranged to send blankets and clothes to the victims of the fighting. Government food relief was distributed to the refugees (1000 bags of rice, 1100 bags of maize and 640 bags of sugar). One million Cedi was voted by the parliament for relief. As I mentioned earlier, the food that had been donated by the Catholic Relief Services and was sent from Takoradi by air to Tamale (*The Daily Graphic* 11/7/81) where it should have been loaded onto Bimbilla-bound trucks, was allegedly diverted and embezzled, *i.e.* sold on the black market. When the Wulehe Naa Natogmah mentioned publicly that a new Wulensi town must

be built to avoid being haunted by ghosts, the Regional Minister Harruna raised his own spectre of a 'new modern township' which might be built by the Government for the people of Wulensi (*The Daily Graphic* 18/7/81). A downpour of 'familiarisation' visits by different military and civilian personalities during July and August made Nanumba District more known to the Ghanaian public but otherwise did not bring anything positive to the people of the district. These dignitaries came mostly out of curiosity to see a disaster. Military commanders from Tamale and Accra came to review the troops stationed in the Nanumba District. Alhaji Harruna, accused from various sides of mishandling the situation, was dismissed by the President in October 1981. His deputy Alhaji Baba, a Nanumba, became the new Regional Minister.

The Commission of Enquiry began work on August 31, 1981 under the chairmanship of Justice George Lamptey, a High Court judge based at Kumasi, with two other members to help him (*The Daily Graphic* 2/9/81; DCE Monthly Report, August, 1981). A considerable number of people fulfilled their wish to testify before the commission, which had simultaneous sittings in Bimbilla and Tamale. The work of the commission was to be completed before the end of the year, but was delayed by some additional interviews. However, the coup d'état of December 31, 1981, meant the indefinite suspension of the work of the commission (along with that of all other commissions of enquiry). The other consequence of the coup for the affected area was the recall of the army and police units deployed in the Nanumba and Krachi districts in January 1982. The new PNDC¹² regime of Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings, capable of mobilising strong military deterrents, was apparently confident that no new fighting would take place. On January 5, 1982, in one of his first public speeches, Rawlings commented on the Nanumba – Konkomba conflict:

The objective of national defence includes the ensuring of national unity which began to be threatened not only by tribal campaigns sponsored by the government but also by the total ineffectiveness of the former government to curb tribal strifes of the kind that took thousands of lives in the Nanumba – Konkomba conflict as well as in a number of other similar outbreaks.

The PNDC wishes to make it clear that while we respect our traditional heritage of chieftaincy we shall not al-

low this hallowed institution of our forefathers to be used to fan pointless conflicts with resultant loss of lives (*The Daily Graphic* 6/1/82).

Very little if anything happened in 1982 towards finding a solution to the conflict. There were attempts, all unsuccessful, by the KOYA and the NAYA to institute a joint committee or have meetings for the settlement of the conflict. There were also mutual accusations of not keeping the armistice (Dasana 1982 February and March; KOYA 1982). The Kanjo Naa, a Konkomba chief loyal to the Nanumba, travelled on a 'peace mission' to Accra to see Rawlings and presented him with new proposals for the solution of the conflict. With explicit references to the meetings and resolutions of the KOYA and the NAYA, the Kanjo Naa stated 'point-blank that any solution to the Konkomba – Nanumba dispute which is not purely traditional would not materialise'. He also argued that 'the cause of the war was TRADITIONAL and can only have a traditional solution' (Kanjo Naa 1982). I shall dwell on the problem of the causes and solution in the last section.

Here, I would like to comment on one point: the Nanumba were not only weakened by the war and its economic and moral consequences, they also lost their paramount chief, the chief skin-maker, and several other chiefs. This meant that important chieftaincies such as Bakpaba, Chamba, Nakpaa and Dakpam became vacant during the year 1981–1982. The Dakpam Naa¹³ did not die but, according to custom he and other chiefs had to wait in Bimbilla for the *naakuli*, the Bimbilla Naa's ritual funeral before the election and enskinment of the new Bimbilla Naa. Up to that point, the Nanumba were 'headless' because the regent was not entitled to take any substantial decisions and, when he tried to usurp the right to nominate chiefs to the vacant chieftaincies, he was stopped by his elders and reminded that he was only serving on behalf of the *naam* but otherwise had no power. The Juo Naa, who traditionally had to lead the electors and de facto should have taken the place of the Bimbilla Naa, was a very old person without energy to carry out the task.

The regent managed to stay in office until January 1983 on various pretexts and by attaching unrealistic conditions to his father's funeral. Thus, no solution to the conflict could be sought in 1982 because there was no effective and unified leadership among the Nanumba. The NAYA could only file letters of reminder to the Reg-

istrar of the Nanumba Traditional Council, urging the council to proceed with the funerals of the deceased chiefs, especially that of the Bimbilla Naa. The NAYA stressed that 'the youth call on the Nanumba Traditional Council to have such funerals performed is purely in the interest of Nanuŋ and not partisan. The youth feels that there is the urgent need for leadership in Nanuŋ so as to bring peace to the land'. The youth, however, could recommend but not insist. Again the very weak position of the Nanumba youth vis-à-vis the chieftaincy was demonstrated (NAYA 1982 April and May).

CONCLUSION

What lesson could be taken from the above exposé? The political arrangement allowing for the co-existence of politically diffuse ethnic groups, neo-traditional chieftaincies and the modern imported post-colonial state, has been fairly fragile, and under certain circumstances such as those created in Nanuŋ could even become dangerous for the political stability of Ghana. Whereas the two ethnic units residing in the Nanumba District, namely the Nanumba and the Konkomba, proved how difficult it is to live and work on the same territory while one insists on privileges and the other becomes richer and more numerous, the Ghanaian state was the main loser. It failed to recognize the possible trends and consequences of the conflict that it viewed as mostly traditional in nature, was unable to introduce timely preventive measures and intervened only when a major bloodshed already took place. President Limann's Third Republic was nominally democratic but economically weak thus allowing the parties in the conflict to resolve their grievances by using force. Temporarily the monopoly of the use and threat of use of physical coercion, usually reserved for the state, was seized by anarchistic Konkomba and by nominally chiefly but actually chiefless Nanumba (Skalnik 1989). The military regime that followed the overthrown parliamentary democracy was almost immediately able to restore order in Nanuŋ. That was however achieved at the high price of suppressing the animosities between the Nanumba and the Konkomba and pretending that with economic improvements which indeed took place during the PNDC decade the reasons for ethnic conflicts would wither.

That the state economic weakness was not the decisive trigger for the outbreak of hostilities is exemplified by the subsequent and much more devastating conflict of 1994 when not only Nanumba

and Konkomba in Nanuŋ but chiefdoms and chiefless people in seven districts of the Northern Region fought each other bitterly resulting in many more dead than in 1981 (Skalník 2002, 2003). Thus the opacity of democracy facilitates opening of old wounds and flaring up of ostensibly ethnic clashes. The point here, however, is that ethnic structure is not only cultural but predominantly political. If the state government divides the country into ethnically privileged landowners and those who have to respect this order, an explosive situation is created because the chiefdoms feel constitutionally supported by the state but chiefless people increasingly claim their universal rights of citizenship which are valid irrespective of the legal existence of privileged landownerships. The legal pluralism, pluralism of identities and political culture, and ambivalence of belonging are at the root of such conflicts like the one analyzed in this article. The attempts at labelling one of the groups in the conflict as foreigners (*i.e.* not citizens of Ghana) are further steps in creating the preconditions for a civil war such as that which recently unfolded in Côte d'Ivoire.

NOTES

¹ The bulk of this text is based on data collected in Ghana during my anthropological fieldwork, mostly in the years 1978–1983.

² There were exceptions such as Mair 1934 or Fallers 1965.

³ See Skalník 2004, 2009.

⁴ I carried out my intensive anthropological fieldwork in the years 1978–1983, with subsequent field visits in 1986, 1994, 1997 and 2003. My first field report is available in Skalník 1979. The conflict under study was submitted to less extensive analyses in Skalník 1983, 1986, 1987, 1989. Subsequent publications by other authors that refer to the topic of this study will be analyzed in a forthcoming monograph. That will take into account also the developments since the 1981 conflict.

⁵ The cases which could not be resolved by traditional court were referred to the lowest level of state judicial system.

⁶ One might argue that the young literate leaders managed so well because the political culture of the Konkomba allows for those who assume authority by merit.

⁷ The Bimbilla Naa Dasana died on 31st May 1981.

⁸ It was known that the Konkomba do not, as a rule, kill women unless they are pregnant – the reason being that pregnant women can bear baby boys, future possible avengers. Women who are not pregnant can still bear children for the Konkomba.

⁹ Batu was nicknamed 'Konkomba DC' because he was the most influential Konkomba businessman in Nanuɔ.

¹⁰ Died in January 1982 in Accra among those military personnel who were opposed to Rawlings' II takeover.

¹¹ In Ghana 'workers' are the people employed by the state, irrespective of the work they do.

¹² Provisional National Defence Council ruled in Ghana between 1981–1992. See Jeffries 1982; Pieterse 1982; Konings 1983; Pellow 1983; Skalnik 1992.

¹³ He subsequently became the paramount chief in February 1983.

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