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Islam, Politics and Development: Negotiating the Future of Dagbon in Ghana

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Abstract

Dagbon is the territory that is inhabited by the Dagomba people. The Dagomba are part of the Mole-Dagbani speaking people, having descended from a common ancestor with the Mossi, Mamprusis and Nanumba. Dagbon is in the Northern Region of Ghana, lying between latitudes nine and ten and has an area of 9,611 square miles. Dagbon is the largest of the ethnic kingdoms in Northern Ghana. Communal violence erupted in the capital of the Dagomba people on March 25, 2002. This continued for three days, resulting in the death of their king, Ya Na Yakubu Andani on March 27, 2002. The remote cause of this three-day war was a long-standing dispute, relating to the succession to the Dagbon skin. The Dagbon crisis has become a complex web of power play among family members, political manipulation or interference and the politics of justice. But these did not begin in 2002. They have their historical antecedents. Since 1953, nearly all governments have intervened in this dispute in one way or another. But this political involvement has only deepened the rift and accentuated the disagreements. This paper posits that, there can be no political solution to the Dagbon crisis. Since the Dagomba people are predominantly Muslims—and have a huge developmental deficit, this paper advocates a combination of Islamic, traditional and development-based solutions.

Background

The founding of the Dagbon state was borne out of conflict and disagreements. According to the historical accounts, the Dagomba are descended from Na Gbewaa. After the death of Na Gbewaa and subsequently his first son, a struggle ensued between three of his sons as to who should succeed their father's throne. Eventually, they split and founded separate states. Tohugu, founded the Mamprugu kingdom, while Sitobu, the next eldest founded the Dagbon kingdom. The youngest, Ngmantambo founded the Nanumba kingdom.¹ There are disagreements as to the exact date of the founding of the Dagbon kingdom. However, all the accounts would point to a date between 1300-1400 C.E.

Even after the founding of the Dagbon state, the process of accession to the skin has had more than its fair share of dispute and sometimes brutal conflict. For example, after the death of Na Zokuli (1609-1627), there was a struggle between two of his sons to occupy the skin after him. In the end the dispute was submitted to oracle arbitration. The oracles chose Na Gungobli (1627-1677). After the death of Na Gungobli, dispute revisited as to which of his sons would succeed him. This time, they agreed to submit to the arbitration

of the king of the Mamprusis. As has been pointed out, the founder of the Mamprusi state was the elder brother of Sitobu, the founder of the Dagbon state. The Dagomba, therefore, consider the Mamprusis as their brothers. It is on this basis that they agreed to submit to the arbitration of the king of Mamprugu. The then king of the Mamprusis, Na Atabia chose the youngest of the claimants to the skin at that time, Na Zangina (1648-1677), to be their king. It was Na Zangina who was to introduce Islam to Dagbon. Even after Na Zangina, conflict continued to characterise the accession to the skin, which has endured to this day.

Indeed power can and does engender conflict. And in the case of succession to the Dagbon skin, it has been characterised by conflict for centuries. It is this conflict that resulted in the communal violence in Yendi between March 25 and 27, 2002. This paper is a historical survey of this centuries old conflict. The paper particularly details the involvement of governments, from Kwame Nkrumah (1954-1966) to J.E.A Mills (2009 to date). The aim of the paper is to point out the futility of these political involvements and to suggest alternative ways by which permanent peace can be restored to the Dagbon state.

Islam, Politics and Development

Islam, since its introduction into Dagbon, in 1700 through the conversion of Na Zangina,² has exerted great influence on the Dagomba people. Dagomba customs and traditions show considerable Islamic influences. Even the most important festival of the Dagomba people, *Damba*, is celebrated to commemorate or coincide with Prophet Muhammad's birthday. As far back as 1820, Joseph Dupuis, the British Consul to Kumasi, on the testimony of Yendi traders, classified Dagbon among "governments which are either purely Moslem (sic) or countries where the Koranic (sic) law had been received and serves for the civil code of the believer and infidel."³ Dagomba customs and traditions are inextricably interwoven with Islamic ones. Naming, marriage and funeral ceremonies all bear considerable Islamic influences.

Indeed, to this day, the Dagomba themselves, hardly refer to one of their own as *chefira*, a corruption of the Arabic word, *kafir*, which means unbeliever. Thus the Dagomba distinguish three levels of commitment to Islam. First, *afanema*, that is those who have literacy in Islam and Arabic and therefore preside over birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies. Secondly, there are those who say the Muslim ritual prayer, called *jing puhriba*, meaning "those who pray." Lastly, *Dagbang dabba* that is, those who are nominal Muslims and who also actively participate in traditional rituals. The 2000 Population and Housing Census of Ghana also put the Muslim population of Dagbon at 79%.⁴ Since we cannot divorce a people from their religion, any objective analysis of the Dagbon situation, and any search for a solution to the Dagbon crisis, must involve their religion. That religion is Islam.

According to C.R Gaba, "religion for the African, is a twenty-four hour-a day affair."⁵ And according to Mbiti, "... there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion ..."⁶ Scott Appleby also has this to say about the role of religion in people's lives.

Indeed, literally millions of people structure their daily routines around the spiritual practices enjoined by a religious tradition, and they often do so quite 'publicly'. Dress, eating habits, gender relations, negotiations of time, space, and social calendar-all unfold beneath a sacred canopy. Around much of the world, politics and civil society are suffused with religion.⁷

It is on the basis of this, that I postulate that Islam should be factored into the search for a solution to the Dagbon crisis. Perhaps what makes this proposition even pertinent is the fact that "humans interact with the supernatural in order to cope with life's crisis."⁸ Dagbon is in crisis. So, religion and for that matter Islam, becomes an important part of finding a solution to this crisis.

Politics (as defined by the chieftaincy institution) was the basis of the crisis. Aristotle avers that "all humans are by nature political."⁹ Neil Omerod also states that "all human activities have a political dimension."¹⁰ Besides, as I have stated from the beginning of this paper, the Dagbon succession dispute has seen the political involvement of all governments from the first republic to date. Indeed in the run-up to the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Ghana, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) made the Dagbon crisis a major part of its electoral campaign. It accused the then ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) government of complicity in the killing of the Dagbon king, and promised to "set up a new and truly non-partisan professionally competent and independent Presidential Commission to re-open investigations into the murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and his elders in March 2002."¹¹

This politicisation of a purely traditional dispute between brothers has been largely responsible for the perpetuation of the conflict. The NDC since coming into office in January 2009 has repudiated its manifesto promise of setting up a Presidential Commission to re-open investigations into the events of 25-27 March, 2002. Instead, in July 2010, the NDC government arrested and put 15 members of the Abudu royal family before a High Court. On March 29 2011, all 15 were set free for lack of evidence. This sparked off violence in the northern regional capital, Tamale, where offices of the ruling NDC were burnt by rampaging Andani youth. They accused the NDC of deceiving them to vote for it in the hope that it would apprehend the killers of the Ya Na when it was voted to power. The government appealed the decision of the High Court. But whether the appeal would succeed or not, remained to be decided.

Development is the goal of every human society, even though states would differ from one another in terms of the ingredients of development and the benchmarks of development. In fact, Na Zangina converted to Islam because he perceived Muslim clerics as having the power to induce development for the Dagbon state. According to Ivor Wilks, the cleric who converted Na Zangina to Islam made Dagbon prosperous with the aid of the Qur'an. Na Zangina is reported to have uttered the following prayer at his conversion: "I pray to God to build my kingdom as compact as clay... I pray to God to allow travelers in this area to have safe journeys to their destinations". Ivor Wilks writes that following this prayer which was performed in the nature of the Muslim ritual prayer of *Salat*, 'the roads opened and many traveled by them'¹²

Contrary to the expectations of Na Zangina, the conflict that has bedeviled the Dagbon state has retarded development in the state. Indeed the development situation in Dagbon is dire. Some 240 children die in the Savelugu-Nanton District out of 1,000 live births. This far exceeds the national average of 100 to 1,000 live births. 227 die in Yendi out of 1,000 live births and 208 die in Tolon- Kumbungu. In Tamale, 50.8% of the population has never been to school. In Gushegu-Karaga, 84.3% of the population has never been to school. In Zabzugu, 79.6% are unlettered, while in Yendi, 73.7% have never stepped into a classroom. In Savelugu, 74.5% have had no formal education, and in Tolon 79.9% have also never been to school.¹³ Over 72% of the people of Dagbon list their occupation as farming,¹⁴ but there is virtually no serious agricultural activity going on in Dagbon. This is what has led to the massive migration of the youth to the south to become labour hands on cocoa farms and head porters. This paper suggests that addressing these developmental challenges would help in reducing the incidents of violent conflict in the area.

History of the conflict

As has been stated already, succession to the Dagbon skin has always engendered conflict. However, the root of the current crisis can be traced to 1948 which was after the death of Mahama I (1938-1948), who was a member of the Andani family. He was succeeded by Mahama II (1948-1953), an Abudu. After Mahama II's death, the first born son of Mahama I, called Mahama Andani, sought to succeed Mahama II. But, in March 1954, the British intervened and gave the kingship to Abdulai III, who was an Abudu and a regent of Mahama II.

Indeed, it was the policy of the British colonial government, through its indirect rule policy to remove chiefs that they considered not pliable. Lieutenant Colonel Sir Matthew Nathan, British colonial Governor to the Gold Coast from 1900-1904 is reported to have told an assembly of chiefs in Kumasi that "...I will allow no one to sit on a stool if I know him to be disloyal, and I will remove anyone from his stool who behaves badly to government."¹⁵

Mahama Andani was then enskinned as chief of Mion.¹⁶ Mion, Savelugu and Karaga are the gate skins from which a person can ascend to the Yendi skin. The succession of Abdulai III generated dissatisfaction within the Andani royal family. Thus by the rotational principle, the Andani royal family had been short changed. The dissatisfaction that this generated was to endure for a long time. Indeed, it still lingers to this day and was a remote factor in the events of March 25-27, 2002.

Abdulai III was enskinned as Ya Na in 1953. The year 1954 was an election year. The Northern People's Party (NPP) had been formed a year earlier and was the strongest political force in the Northern Territories. The Dagomba elite, with sympathies for the different sides of the chieftaincy divide, took advantage to exploit the political authority for their respective sides. Prominent among these elite were J.H Allasani, a Ministerial Secretary in Nkrumah's office and Yakubu Tali, Tolon Na an activist and founding member of the Northern People's Party. Ya Na Abdulai III was a supporter of the Northern People's Party which commanded the allegiance of the majority of chiefs in the Northern Territories. J.H Allasani in particular made the deskinning of Na Abdulai III a part of his political agenda, arguing that his aim was "a desire to see justice done and tradition respected."¹⁷

By tradition he meant a respect for the rotational system of succession. Ladouceur further states that J.H Allasani spearheaded a major campaign to have the Ya Na deskinned shortly after independence. He is reported to have stated openly at a rally in the Yendi market that the Ya Na would be deskinned.¹⁸ The charges against the Ya Na were that he was blind in one eye and it was against Dagbon custom to have a deformed person as Ya Na; that he had six toes on his foot; that he had not been properly installed; that he had not held one of the three skins from which a Ya Na could be elected and finally, that he was ruling despotically.¹⁹ Allasani and others made noise enough to engender a certain demand for the deskinning of the Ya Na. Paradoxically at a conference of Dagomba chiefs, held in 1930, it was agreed that "the holder of a chieftainship cannot be deprived of his office except by death."²⁰

In the end the government of the Convention People's Party (CPP) set up a commission to look into the affair. The commission was under the chairmanship of S.D Opoku-Afari. The report of the commission was never made public. But J.H Allasani who was a member of Nkrumah's cabinet had this to say about what took place in cabinet regarding the contents of the Opoku-Afari report.

The Minister responsible brought the report to cabinet. And after introducing it by saying that the Commissioner had found the Abdulai family guilty and given his verdict to the effect that the installed person should step down, he said, 'But I suggest that the verdict be reversed. For if it is carried, our party will suffer a severe setback in the whole of the

north.' When he concluded, the Prime Minister, without allowing any other to speak, said, 'Yes I agree with the Minister. I declare the verdict reversed. And I take responsibility for it upon myself.'²¹

The Ya Na was grateful for this and even though up until that point he was anti-CPP, he converted to the CPP, and urged his ally, Yakubu Tali, to cross from the opposition to the CPP side in parliament, which the Tolon Na did. But this did not end the matter. The Andani family continued to protest to the government in order that the right thing be done. That prodding eventually led to a meeting in Accra between Nkrumah and Dagomba chiefs in order to find an amicable settlement. That settlement or the attempt thereof was what gave birth to a legislative instrument, which has come to be known as L.I 59 of 1960. The highlights of L.I 59 were that, if the sitting Ya Na, Abdulai III died, the chief of Mion, Mahama Andani, was to become Ya Na. But if Mahama Andani died before the Ya Na, then the next chief of Mion who should be an Andani was to become Ya Na. Also that, in the event that Mahama Andani died before becoming Ya Na, his sons, could still ascend the Yendi skin. Finally, that since the Abudus had ascended the skin twice in succession, the Andanis were to also ascend the skin twice in succession.²² With L.I 59, the matter was settled, or so it seemed.

Then the coup of 24 February 1966 occurred. Once again, the issue was revived. Significantly, both the Abudus and the Andanis had friends in high places. The Abudus had B.A Yakubu, a member of the National Liberation Council (NLC), while the Andanis had Ibrahim Mahama who had just finished his law training and was appointed to various positions in the NLC government, including that of Commissioner for Information. With the overthrow of the CPP, the Abudus again petitioned for the repeal of L.I 59. On the 14th of September 1967, Ya Na Abdulai III died and his son Mahamadu Abdulai who was then 19 years old and attending Tamale Secondary School became regent and immediately put forth his candidature. The chief of Mion, Mahama Andani, who was then an old man, also put forth his candidature.

In a series of strange decisions, L.I 59 was repealed, then restored, then repealed and restored again. Meanwhile both the Abudus and the Andanis were moving to install their respective candidates. The funeral of Ya Na Abdulai III was performed on 7th November 1968. The following day, both sides declared their candidates as duly elected. Mion Lana Andani was selected by the original selection committee of four and supported by the Savelugu Chief and the Karaga Chief. Gbon Lana Mahamadu on the other hand was selected by the seven divisional chiefs. Before 1948, four traditional authorities selected a Ya Na. These were Kuga Na, Zohe Na, Tugrinam and Gagbindana. These are the people that I refer to as the original selection committee. Then in 1948, the British authorities added seven divisional chiefs to the selection team, which made it 11. These were Gushie Na, Sunson Na, Tolon Na, Nanton Na,

Kumbung Na, Karaga Na and Mion Lana. The District Security Committee suspended the installation ceremony to avert trouble. Finally, on 21st November 1968, Mahama Andani was installed as Ya Na Andani III with the support of the District and Regional Administrations, the army and the police.²³

The Abudus protested and the government set up yet another commission to look into the matter. This commission was called the Mate Kole Commission. While the Commission's work was in progress, the government thought it necessary to recognise Andani III as Ya Na. It was during the Commission's sitting that Ya Na Andani III died on 14 March 1969. His son, Yakubu Andani, became regent. Not long after, the NLC announced a plan to return the country to civilian rule. The Progress Party (PP) of Prof. K.A Busia won the election. Before the election results were announced, the NLC announced that it had accepted the Mate Kole Commission's report. The Mate Kole Commission stated among other things, that "the alleged enskinment of Mahama Andani was repugnant to Dagomba custom and that therefore Mahamadu Abdulai was properly selected and directs that the ceremony of installation as Ya Na should be performed on Mahamadu Abdulai as soon as possible."²⁴

The protests which greeted the release of the Mate Kole Commission led to the shooting of the protesters by security forces. Twenty-three people died and several others injured.²⁵ After the inauguration of the Busia government, the Mate Kole Commission Report, which had already been accepted by the previous regime, was implemented. Subsequently, Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai was appointed to the Council of State, basically putting the seal to any opportunity of meaningful protestation against his kingship. But had it?

Then came 13th January 1972 and the government of Prof. Busia was overthrown. The Andani family again saw in this an opportunity to state their case once more. And they did. In response, the new government again set up a committee to take another look at the affair. This was called the Ollenu Committee.²⁶ The Ollenu Committee declared that the installation of Mahamadu Abdulai was not in accord with Dagbon custom and was therefore null and void. It also asserted that the late Ya Na Andani III was properly elected Ya Na and directed that his funeral be performed as such. The government then invited Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai to Accra, prevented him from returning to Yendi and ordered the removal of his wives from the palace to pave the way for the performance of the funeral of the late Ya Na Andani III.

After the performance of the funeral of the late Ya Na Andani III, his son and regent, Yakubu Andani, was installed the Ya Na. Later on Mahamadu Abdulai was allowed to return to Yendi, but was cautioned to be of 'good behaviour' and not to do anything to disturb the reign of Yakubu Andani II. After the overthrow of the Acheampong regime and subsequently, the election of President Hilla Limann as President, there was a lull in hostilities regarding the Yendi skin affair. This remained so until the coming into power of the

Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). On coming into office, the PNDC enacted the Yendi Skin Affairs Amendment Law, 1985, PNDC Law 124.²⁷

This law declared that any of the parties who felt aggrieved by the ruling of the Ollenu Committee could seek redress in a court of law. The Abudu family then proceeded to the Appeal Court, seeking to set aside the decision of the Ollenu Committee. They got judgment in their favour, basically restoring the right of Mahamadu Abdulai as Ya Na. The Andani family appealed the decision of the Appeal Court at the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court, in 1986, overturned the decision of the Appeal Court, but added that henceforth, the rotational system be scrupulously observed. That henceforth, only sons of former Ya Nas shall ascend to the skins of Savelugu, Karaga and Mion; that since deskinment is unknown to Dagbon custom, all persons who have ever occupied the Yendi skin shall without regard to how they ceased to be Ya-Na, be regarded as former Ya Nas. Consequently, that their sons shall qualify for appointment to the gate skins of Karaga, Savelugu and Mion; finally, that to give effect to the rotational system, all three skins should not be occupied by one family.²⁸

Now, for the first time in Dagbon history, there was a living former Ya Na. However, less than two years after the Supreme Court ruling, Mahamadu Abdulai died. The performance of his funeral or the lack thereof, was perhaps the lead remote cause of the events of March 25-27, sixteen years after the Supreme Court ruling.

So this far, I have tried to trace the long history of struggle for succession as far as the Yendi skin is concerned. I have done this, principally to drive home the point that politicians, political parties and governments have not been able to find a permanent solution to the Yendi skin affair and will probably never be able to do so. This is because no matter how well-meaning a government's intervention is, it will leave one side of the divide bruised. So they sit and lick their wounds and wait for a more 'friendly' government. And the cycle continues. Indeed none of the sides has ever perceived any government as an independent arbiter.

These decades of haggling over succession in Dagbon, built up frustration on both sides of the chieftaincy divide. The Andani family had always been frustrated by the fact that twice in succession, they were denied the occupation of the skin in favour of Abudu candidates. The Abudus on the other hand, have since 1988, been frustrated by their inability to perform the funeral of the late Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai. The government White Paper that was issued on the report of the Wuaku Commission had this to say; "that the remote cause of the disturbances in Yendi is the longstanding chieftaincy dispute between the Andani and the Abudu Gates, including the non-observance of the funeral of the late Mahamadu Abdulai IV."²⁹

Well before 2002, therefore, Dagbon was virtually sitting on a powder keg, which was waiting to explode. Explode it did between March 25-27, 2002.

This is explained by sociologists in what is known as the frustration-aggression theory. According to this theory, if there is a difference between what people feel they deserve and what they actually get, in other words, 'expected need satisfaction' and actual need satisfaction, aggression results. According to Ted Robert Gurr's relative deprivation thesis, the greater the discrepancy between what is sought and what seems attainable, the greater would be the chances that anger and violence would result.³⁰ The frustration on both sides of the divide was what resulted in the aggression of March 25-27, 2002, which claimed the lives of 29 people, including that of the Ya Na.

President Kufuor

The President of Ghana at the time of the communal violence in Yendi was John Agyekum Kufuor. Among other things, he set up a commission of enquiry to,

make a full, faithful and impartial inquiry into the circumstances of and establish the facts leading to the events and the resultant deaths and injuries in Yendi in the Dagbon Traditional Area of the Northern Region between 2th and 27th March, 2002; to identify those responsible for the events and the resultant deaths and injuries of persons and to recommend appropriate sanctions or actions against any person found to have caused, been responsible for or been involved in the violence and the resultant deaths and injuries; to inquire into any matter which the commission considers incidental or reasonably related to the events and the resultant deaths and injuries; and to submit within one month, its report to the President, giving reasons for its findings and recommendations.³¹

The Wuaku Commission found out that due to the frustration that both sides had been facing regarding one unfulfilled need or the other, they had been stock-piling arms to attack each other, if the opportunity arose. The opportunity arose in March 2002 when disagreements over the celebration of the fire festival (*bugum*) led to an outbreak of war. The Wuaku Commission went on to recommend two people for prosecution for the killing of the Ya Na. They were prosecuted but the court ruled that there was not enough evidence to convict them.

In addition to the judicial process, President Kufuor set up a committee of eminent chiefs, made up of the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, the king of the Mamprusis, Na Mahamadu Gamni, and the king of the Gonjas, Yagbonwura Bawah Doshie. Their mandate was to reconcile the two royal families and to broker a permanent solution. While the committee of eminent chiefs was carrying out its mandate, the party of President Kufuor lost the 2008 election.

President Evans Atta Mills

As has been stated already, the Yendi affair was a major part of the NDC's campaign in 2008. On coming into power, the concentration of the NDC turned towards arraigning alleged killers of the Ya Na before a criminal court, even abandoning the idea of the commission of inquiry which they promised in their manifesto. They also showed little or no interest in any simultaneous pursuit of reconciliation. The arbitration effort of the Asantehene and the two eminent chiefs suffered in the process. Indeed, hitherto, it had been the staunch position of President Mills that there was no point in seeking reconciliation between these brothers, if the one whose trigger caused the death of the Ya Na was not found. Even after 15 people were set free on March 29, 2011, the President continued to make the point that reconciliation was not possible until the alleged killer of the Ya Na was found.³²

In fact the President was so incensed by the release of the 15 suspects that he declared that finding the killers of the Ya Na was more important than building roads or bridges or even protecting the independence and sanctity of the judiciary.³³ This opened the flood gates for an attack on the judiciary, including 10 members of parliament, representing the NDC in the Northern Region, calling the judge's ruling "jaundiced."³⁴

However, the President got a change of mind and on April 10, 2011, he asked the Vice President, John Mahama to persuade Otumfuo Osei Tutu II to revive the reconciliation talks that had been abandoned. Hopefully, that process would resume and once again, offer the people of Dagbon an opportunity to restore peace to their broken state.

The way forward

I envisage four ways by which the Dagbon crisis could be resolved. There are the traditional methods of resolving conflicts, one of which is already embodied in the work of the three eminent chiefs. The pursuit of restorative justice is another path to peace; Islam, the religion of the majority of the Dagomba people, must have some value and finally, pursuing a comprehensive development plan for Dagbon.

Since the Dagbon people had some time ago in history submitted themselves to arbitration by the king of Mamprugu, it is hoped they will cooperate with the work of the eminent chiefs to ensure that lasting peace is restored to Dagbon. Before the work of the eminent chiefs stalled, a road map had been agreed upon, but which suffered a hitch. While the Abudu family insists on performing the funeral of their late king, Mahamadu Abdulai in the Gbewaa Palace, which is the customary way of performing the funerals of Ya Nas, the Andanis are opposed to any such move. They contend that since he did not die in the palace, his funeral should be performed where he died. Unless a compromise is reached on this matter, it will be difficult to make progress as far as the search for lasting peace in Dagbon is concerned.

It is also my contention that the Dagbon constitution of 1930 should be revised. The process of revising the constitution would itself provide an opportunity for sober reflection and reconciliation. In 1930, all Dagbon chiefs came together to formulate a constitution for the Dagbon state. That constitution has been so badly mutilated that it is hardly even referred to by Dagombas today. There is an urgent need for a new set of codified rules of succession that would be respected by all. In so doing, regents should be debarred from ascending to skins immediately following their fathers.

In fact the root of the crisis lies in the accession of Abdulai III to the skin as a regent immediately after his father and subsequently, the accession of Mahamadu Abdulai also as regent after the death of his father Abdulai III. The Dagomba would do well to emulate the examples of Mamprugu and Gonja where regents do not become chiefs immediately following their fathers. That is what accounts for the peace in these areas where successions to skins are concerned.

Secondly, the government's insistence on retributive justice for the Ya Na would in my view only accentuate the conflict and open new wounds. Retributive justice is to do unto others as they have done unto you in equal measure for the sake of it. It is akin to the Mosaic concept of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Stripped to its barest, retributive justice actually means vengeance. Rather, the government should seek restorative justice for the people of Dagbon. Restorative justice takes into consideration the needs of both victim and perpetrator in finding peace and reconciliation. Besides, seeking justice exclusively for the Ya Na is itself against the main ingredients of justice. Many people died in Yendi between March 25-27 when the communal violence took place. All the people who died that day in Yendi have mothers, fathers and perhaps wives and children. So what will be justice for these people? For example a certain woman went to the Wuaku Commission to testify about how her son Deeba, was recruited by Ibrahim Mahama (a prominent Andani royal and key player in the Yendi chieftaincy affairs) to go and be a warrior for the Ya Na. Her son died in the hostilities. And all Ibrahim Mahama did was to give her a bag of rice and a piece of cloth. Her appearance at the Wuaku Commission showed that she was not satisfied. She wanted justice for her son too. So what do we envisage will be justice for her?

John Rawlings states that justice envisages a situation where "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others."³⁵ So justice envisages a situation where we would be seeking to restore the right of every family whose member lost his life on that day. That is what justice is, irrespective of whether it is restorative or retributive.

The stability and growth of Ghana's Fourth Republic, which has become the model of emulation for most of Africa, have been achieved largely through the principles of restorative justice and development in freedom. The Fourth Republic is so far the most stable period in Ghana's political history and

has brought about the longest enduring period of social and economic growth. It came after a long period of human right violations. But, the nation was determined to turn a new leaf; this required some painful but necessary compromises. This the nation did mainly through the indemnity clauses that insulate the perpetrators of human rights abuses from harm. On coming into office, the government of President Kufuor set up the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) which took into account, the needs of the abused. This completed the process of restorative justice and has allowed Ghana to put the painful past behind it. The government should pursue a similar measure for Dagbon and abandon the retributive methods of seeking justice, especially considering that the Ya Na died in battle. Indeed forgiveness can be the most dignified and enhanced form of justice, but that can only be possible if the Dagomba people are constructive and dedicated to focusing their minds and emotions on actions that serve their collective interest.

Regardless of the government's best efforts, there can be no guarantee that the alleged killers of the Ya Na can ever be found having regard to the circumstances of his death. However, with sincere commitment from all sides, especially between the Abudus and Andanis, they can guarantee genuine reconciliation which is necessary for moving Dagbon forward. It is important to state that the Dagbon state was fully on the march for nearly 300 years before Osei Tutu I put the Asante state together. For it to be reduced to such rubble is a sad commentary on all the actors in this affair.

The pursuit of development for Dagbon should be a major part of the search for peace in the area. Northern Ghana generally and Dagbon in particular has always faced a development deficit. It was in recognition of this that the northern elite founded the Northern People's Party in 1953. The aim of forming the Northern People's Party was to among other things, "fight for accelerated developments in all fields for the northern territories."⁶ The reality is that Dagbon cannot give hope to its teeming youth to win the respect of others if it does not make the socio-economic development of the area central to its survival.

Young men and women busy acquiring skills in school, earning money, creating wealth, moving up in their professions and owning property, would have little time or no tolerance for conflicts and violence. Government must therefore tackle the development deficit in Dagbon with urgency. Indeed the New Patriotic Party proposed a Northern Development Authority (NDA) to accelerate the pace of development in the North generally. In the words of its Presidential Candidate in the 2008 elections, "we have an emergency as a nation regarding the development of the North... the difference that exists today between the North and the South is not a gap, it is a chasm. It is a blight on the honour of our nation that must shame and then spur us all to action."⁷ A chasm it is. Mfantshipim School in Cape Coast was founded in 1876. Tamale Secondary School, the first secondary school to have been established in the North was founded in 1951. The North therefore has a deficit of 75 years to erase if not more, considering other indicators of development.

The government of the NDC on coming into office also set up the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) to tackle the development challenges of the North and the savannah areas of the country generally. Hopefully, this will help to engage the energies of the youth and turn their attention away from violence and destruction.

Islam

Finally, whatever value is in Islam must be exploited for restoring peace to Dagbon. When I wrote my M.Phil thesis in 2003, I dedicated it “to the people of Dagbon, that hopefully, they will make the Qur’an their arbiter.” For a people who profess Islam as their religion and for a people who have a court Imam in every chief’s palace, the value in Islam must count for something. The *Ulama* in Dagbon ought to stand up and be counted as true heirs of the Prophet Muhammad. When the Aws and the Khazraj (two clans in Madina) were feuding, it took the intervention of the Prophet Muhammad to make peace between them. Subsequently, he drew up what has come to be known as the Madinan Charter that ensured peaceful co-existence amongst the inhabitants of Madina.¹⁸

Umar ibn Khattab, the second caliph of Islam was stabbed to death. While dying, he prayed the Muslim community never to revenge his death by killing the one who stabbed him to death, Abu Lulu’a. Can the Dagomba people emulate this great example of Umar? Even so, I find it puzzling that people who profess Islam as their religion would draw swords against one another. Let the Dagomba people be reminded, of Qur’an 4:92-93. It states, “never should a believer kill a believer; but (if it so happens) by mistake, (compensation is due): If one (so) kills a believer, it is ordained that he should free a believing slave, and pay compensation to the deceased’s family, unless they remit it freely. If the deceased belonged to a people at war with you, and he was a believer, the freeing of a believing slave (is enough). If he belonged to a people with whom ye have treaty of mutual alliance, compensation should be paid to his family, and a believing slave be freed. For those who find this beyond their means, (is prescribed) a fast for two months running: by way of repentance to Allah, for Allah has all knowledge and all wisdom. If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein (for ever): And the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.”

Amr Abdallah, a lecturer at the University of San Jose, conducted his doctoral research on conflict. As part of this, he visited Rwanda and Burundi in 1999. He found that the Muslim areas of Kigali and Bujumbura served as the safe havens for people during the genocide. The Muslims explained to him that because they were Muslims, they should not and could not fight each other or fight others, because of ethnic differences: Islam they said, prohibited that.¹⁹

We may be determined to seek vengeance for whatever wrongs that we perceive must have been done to us. But whatever vengeance we seek, will it be enough to assuage the hurt that we suffered? Or would we be able to seek equal

vengeance for whatever wrong we perceive must have been done to us? Again the Qur'an points the way. "The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for Allah loves not those who do wrong." (Q: 42:40).

Dagomba youth cannot carry into the future, the baggage of their ancestors and forebears. They are Muslims, at least the majority of them. In Islam, there is no concept of original sin by which the fathers eat the sour grapes and set the children's teeth on edge. The youth cannot spend time feuding or feeding on politicians' ego. Let the Dagomba people seek justice by all means. At the same time, let them seek peace and reconciliation.

Conclusion

The Dagbon chieftaincy crisis has been raging for a long time now. It threatens to continue for a long time to come if the parties to the conflict and state actors do not work at ending it. So far, political solutions have failed to end this decades old conflict. Alternative measures of dispute resolution must be pursued. These include traditional and Islamic modes of conflict resolution. In addition to these, the development deficit in Dagbon ought to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Dagomba people themselves ought to do a lot of soul searching, compromise and sacrifice. It is only when the Abudu and Andani royal families themselves make a genuine commitment to ending this decades old conflict, would there be a solution. In spite of the present obstacles however, there is hope for peace, reconciliation, and an ultimate restoration of the dignity of the Dagbon state.

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