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# CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING IN NORTHERN GHANA

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**Abstract**
The complexity of contemporary violent conflicts requires a shift from the traditional notion that preventing conflicts and building peace reside within governments to include the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Using a qualitative research design with 20 in-depth interviews conducted with representatives of CSOs in northern Ghana, the study reveals three broad categories of CSOs namely Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) performing conflict prevention and peacebuilding roles. These CSOs respond constructively to conflict using dialogue and mediation in different ways by using multiple instruments such as early warning systems and peace education for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The study shows that, unlike the state, CSOs worked towards conflict prevention and peacebuilding through local initiatives and partnership with communities. The dominant philosophy guiding CSOs' work is the integrationist paradigm. One serious limitation identified in the conflict prevention and peacebuilding work of CSOs in northern Ghana is the lack of a common peacebuilding framework that can guide them to reduce the duplication of functions within the same space. The paper recommends that CSOs should forge a working partnership to roll out a comprehensive conflict prevention and peacebuilding activity to build sustainable peace for the development of the regions of northern Ghana.

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organisations, Conflict, Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding, Northern Ghana.

## Introduction

Current trends show that the nature of violent conflicts has changed dramatically in recent decades from interstate to intrastate involving diverse actors at different levels. Existing scholarly debate on violent conflicts indicates a complicated picture with many of these conflicts becoming more complex and protracted (PRIO, 2018; Szayna et. al., 2017). The increasing complexity of violent conflicts makes them particularly prolonged, deadly, and intractable. Several factors intersect and exert an influence on the nature and extent of violent conflicts (World Bank & United Nations, 2018; Watts, 2017). Whilst some have traditionally been underpinned by grievance-related drivers of conflict, such as poverty and inequality, others are driven by factors such as climate change, terrorism, extremism and instability (Avis, 2019).

The protracted and complex nature of contemporary conflicts pose a challenge for conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Szayna et. al., 2017). In many conflict situations, the responsibility is on the state to intervene to stop the violence and to prevent it from further escalating or re-emerging. However, this traditional role of the state is gradually waning with limited success due to the complexity and the changing dynamics of these conflicts (World Bank & United Nations, 2018). Many of the state-led interventions fail to adequately consider the deeper structural, cultural, and long-term relational aspects of the conflict due to inadequate resources and the rush to reach agreements between the conflicting parties to establish some normalcy in the conflict area (Elfversson, 2015; Anumel,Kendie and Osei-Kufuor,2021). Also, the state is often not considered a trusted and neutral party in resolving communal, ethnic and political conflicts. As a result, state intervention in conflicts that are rooted in structural and intangible issues, and underpinned by history of hostility has been poor (Braithwaite & Licht, 2020; Eze, 2016; Adejumobi, 2012; Väyrynen, 1991).

The complexity, scale and diversity of violent conflicts makes it impossible for a single entity, on its own, to ensure sustainable peace

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(Lederach, 1997; Weatherbed, 2012). Among state and non-state actors, CSOs are considered pivotal in the process of conflict transformation and prevention due to their ability to constructively engage with three core elements in any conflict: actors, institutions and structural factors, whose interactions influence the pathway to peace (Braithwaite et. a., 2020; Lund, 2009; Barnes, 2006). The emphasis on CSOs is not to relegate the role of state and other non-state actors in conflict prevention and transformation, but to highlight CSOs' ability to use "approaches that seek to encourage wider social change through transforming the antagonistic relationship between parties to the conflict" (Buckley-Zistel 2008, p. 21).

The value of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is reflected in their potential to develop interventions that address the structural causes of conflict and further facilitate dialogue to establish peaceful co-existence among factions in conflicts (Barnes, 2006; Irobi, 2005). Furthermore, the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs), especially Goal 16, has made CSOs valuable in driving progress towards achieving the targets which are crucial in conflict settings, where poverty and insecurity are intense. CSOs are instrumental in lending support to peacebuilding efforts both at the grassroots and middle levels due to their proximity to local and grassroots communities (Barnes, 2006; Weatherbed, 2012).

The character of CSO conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions is based on their guiding philosophies and within a state system of institutional framework. Based on their motivation and values, CSOs consist of different actors that perform a variety of functions that range from provision of public goods or social services, act as a weathervane, and serve as watchdog (Krähenbühl, 2000). The values and interests advanced by CSOs are as diverse and highly variable across societies. Evidence indicates that CSOs have expertise in working closely with communities and providing a diverse range of services to meet the changing needs of their communities (Eze, 2016). Besides, CSOs interventions in conflicts help in transforming the behavour and attitudes of conflicting parties as well as the structure and context of conflicts. Ideally, the activities of CSOs, as the conflict transformation theory posits, are to bring a change in the nature, issues, context and actors in a conflict through sustained dialogue and a process of engagement using conflict prevention, resolution and management strategies.

Realising the role of CSOs, global organisations have underscored their important role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding such that both the United Nations Security Council and the African Union (AU) Assembly in 2005 and 2009 respectively in their peace framework highlight the importance of CSOs in building and sustaining durable peace (Nyuykonge & Singo, 2017; Vines, 2014; Wallensteen, 2012). Aside from their capacity for rapid response in post-conflict situations, CSOs have contributed in preventing violent conflicts through their participation in early warning and response activities, involvement in peace negotiations and mediations as well as peacebuilding (Ekiyor, 2008). Currently, CSOs are central to peace and security architecture of many countries due to their focus on the local level where the majority of the populations that are involved and affected by violent conflicts live and work. The nearness of CSOs to the grassroots level and most often conflict settings provide them with the greatest opportunity to support changes in how people respond to conflict and to direct attention to changing behaviour and attitudes within societies in conflict (Barnes, 2006).

Several CSOs operate in northern Ghana due to two main factors: the many violent conflicts recorded and poor development resulting in high levels of poverty and under-development. Northern Ghana is perceived to be particularly prone to violent conflicts that are often protracted and recurrent (Awedoba, 2009; Kendie, Osei-Kufuor & Boakye, 2014; Tonah, 2012). The characterisation of CSOs in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana reveals different types performing numerous roles with different levels of effectiveness (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013; Kendie et. al., 2014). These include conflict prevention through education and early warning system, promoting intra-community dialogue to reframe perceptions of initial conflict, mobilising constituencies for peace, and helping to address the structural causes and consequences of violent conflicts (Bukari & Guuroh, 2013).

Despite the presence of many CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana, existing conflicts continue to erupt into violence with others becoming protracted over time. The conflict transformation theory is used to explain this situation in northern Ghana by examining the activities of CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Specifically, the study focuses on how CSOs interventions lead to the transformation of actors (in terms of behaviours and attitudes), issues, rules and structure some of

which are constantly changing and influencing each other within the conflict landscape. The works of Galtung (1961), Vayrynen (1991), Burgess and Burgess (1997) and Lederach (2003) meaningfully influence the conversation around conflict transformation. These authors conceptualise conflict transformation as a set of dynamic changes that result in de-escalation in violent behaviour, a change in attitudes and the altering of the contentious issues that are at the core of the conflict. The study drawing on the conflict transformation theory is guided by the following research questions: what are the conflict prevention and peacebuilding functions undertaken by CSOs in northern Ghana? How do CSO interventions address the content, context and structure of the relationships that underlie these conflicts? What guiding philosophies shape the conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities of CSOs in the area?

In the subsequent sections of this paper, the literature review and methodology are presented. These are followed by the discussion of the results, conclusions and policy implications.

## Review of related literature

### Conflict transformation theory

Conflict transformation theory draws on the theories of conflict as well as the concepts underpinning conflict management and conflict resolution, but shows a conceptual departure from the two concepts (Curle, 1990; Kriesburg, 1989; Rupesinghe, 1994). The theory considers the changes in the nature of contemporary conflicts and argue for a reconceptualisation in three areas. First, the theory states that violent conflicts are asymmetric, marked by disparities of power and status. Secondly, it assumes that contemporary conflicts are protracted, often escalating after periods of stability. Finally, that protracted conflicts modify the societies, economies and regions in which they are embedded resulting in complex predicaments fueled, on the one hand, by local struggles and on the other by external factors (Miall, 2004; Austin, Fischer & Norbert, 2004). This reconceptualisation is driven by the need for crucial changes in the nature of conflict response approaches that emphasise the reframing of positions and the identification of win-win outcomes.

The main argument of the conflict transformation theory is that the role and dynamics of contemporary social conflicts require processes of inducing change in the parties' relationship through improving mutual understanding. The theory distinguishes itself from other theories of peace and conflict by first engaging in processes that bring about long-term change, secondly through changing power dynamics that drive violence, and finally focusing on changing behaviours, attitudes and the structural issues underpinning the conflict (Witt & Balfe, 2016). Inherent in the concept of conflict transformation is the notion that personal, relational and structural transformation is essential to deal effectively with conflicts. Miall (2004) explains that the very structure of parties and relationships may be embedded in a pattern of conflictual relationships that extend beyond the particular site of conflict. Therefore, conflict transformation is about the process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses, and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuum of violent conflict. The theory recognises that conflicts are transformed gradually, through a series of smaller or larger changes as well as specific steps by means of which a variety of actors may play important roles. Stressing the need for violent conflicts to be transformed means understanding how conflicts are transformed in dynamic terms with regard to the issues, actors and interests and using the information gathered to work towards finding a solution to mitigate or eliminate contradictions between them (Väyrynen,1991).

Burgess and Burgess (1997) provide four ways in which conflict transformation happens. The first is actor transformation which refers to the internal changes in major parties to the conflict, or the appearance of new actors. This is followed by the transformation of the issues driving the conflict. The third is rule transformation which redefines the norms that the actors follow in their interactions with each other, and demarcates the boundaries of their relationship. Finally, structural transformation is the changes that may transpire in the system or structure within which the conflict occurs, which is more than just the limited changes among actors, issues and roles. Väyrynen (1991) also adds that while conflict transformation happens intentionally, it can also happen unintentionally.

Conflict transformation encompasses peacebuilding as the former focuses on bringing change in the characteristics of the conflict and further serves as a method for inducing change in the conflict parties' relationship (Merry, 2000; Lederach, 2000; Yarn, 1991). Peacebuilding refers to the process of creating self-supporting structures

that remove causes of conflicts and offer alternatives to violence in situations. In essence, peacebuilding involves all actions aimed at bringing about positive peace. This may include but not limited to conflict prevention, efforts to address the root causes of conflict and activities to promote reconciliation (Interpeace, 2010). Peacebuilding is therefore the means by which social order is built through creating the mechanisms, institutions, and structures that address the underlying causes of conflict and prevent their transformation into violence (Galtung, 1969).

Lederach (2003, p.14) considers "conflict transformation to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interactions and social structures, and respond to real life problems in human relationships." As people exercise agency in response to the conflict situations that confront them, they change the conflict dynamics (Weatherbed, 2012; Barnes, 2006). The exercise of human agency makes conflicts susceptible to change even though change may seem elusive where conflict becomes seemingly intractable. Because the process of changing conflict dynamics is entwined with supporting changes in people, CSOs are well-positioned to roll out conflict transformation strategies in conflict affected society (Chigas, 2007; World Bank, 2006).

One of the greatest strengths CSOs bring to working with conflict is their capacity to support changes in how people respond to asymmetric, protracted and complex conflicts and to direct attention to the underlying causes of conflict that need to be addressed if a sustainable and just peace is to be supported. In applying conflict transformation theory, we seek to understand the conflict prevention and peacebuilding functions undertaken by CSOs in northern Ghana.

## Civil Society Organisations, conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Discussion on CSOs starts with an explanation of what constitutes civil society. Civil society refers to the network of social relations found in the space between the state, the market and the private life of families and individuals (Popplewell, 2015). Interwoven with the concept of 'civil society' is the idea of social capital: the values, traditions and networks that enable coordination and cooperation between people (Czike, 2010). Civil society therefore involves qualities associated with relationships, with values, and with organizational forms (Barnes, 2005; Carey, 2017).

CSOs are defined as complex political and social systems that are not for profit making or part of the State (Green, 2008). According to Fisher (2006), CSOs are considered as non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Most often, CSOs take their form and character through associational groups. CSOs come in many forms, some informal and some as formal entities such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) (Schwartz, 2003). These groups consist of individuals who come together for a common purpose to fulfil a particular mandate driven by need.

A conflict is a dynamic situation and the intensity of a conflict changes over time. The conflict cycle is simply the various stages that a conflict goes through starting from rising tensions to confrontation leading to the escalation of violence and the post-conflict stage that emphasises peace and stability (Lund & Votaw, 2010; Barnes, 2006). Arguably, the conflict cycle constitutes a useful framework to document CSOs' activities in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and conflict transformation (Paffenholz, 2014; Wohlfed, 2010; Barnes, 2005; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). Unfortunately, the literature provides several models of the conflict cycle that often differ depending on the purpose and features presented. However, many of the conflict cycles recognise at least implicitly, a circular pattern to conflict, Studies on CSOs intervention in conflict prevention and peacebuilding use a conflict cycle where each stage has a specific characteristic. Consequently, the functions of CSOs vary tremendously based on the features considered at the different phases of conflict cycle (van Tongeren et al., 2005; Lund & Votaw, 2010). Similarly, the effectiveness of activities also varies substantially among CSOs depending on their capacity, resource availability and contextual factors.

The division of conflict into various stages or phases and the understanding of conflict as circular provides a starting point for understanding CSO activities in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. CSOs activities usually include early warning activities, preventive diplomacy through third-party intervention, facilitation of dialogue workshops and mediation, negotiations, networking and initiatives for cross-cultural understanding and relationship

building (Barnes, 2006; Fisher, 2006; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). Article 33 of the UN Charter outlines the modes of peaceful third party action in this process, including "negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, [and] resort to regional agencies or arrangements." The CBOs and FBOs due to their proximity to the sites of violent conflicts undertake a lot of capacity building and peace education, dialogue and mediation activities aimed at reframing the positions of the actors in conflict (Clarke, 2011). CSOs are noted to use analytical problem-solving approach to reframe the structural issues driving the conflict differently (Ross, 2000; Fisher, 1991; Burton, 1990).

In peacebuilding and conflict transformation, CSOs engage in different types of activities and work with different sectors of society with the overall aim of sustainable peace (Chigas, 2007). Peacebuilding is about the activities that concentrates on the drivers of the conflict, with the aim to transforms these conditions and prevent the recurrence of the issues flaming the conflict. As a result, peace building is understood as a more comprehensive and long-term approach to peace that involves early warning, conflict prevention, advocacy work and humanitarian assistance (Lederach, 1997; Boutros-Ghali, 1995). Other extended components of peacebuilding include some aspects of peacekeeping, ceasefire agreements and post-conflict reconstruction (Reychler, 2001). Ledarach's (1997) model of hierarchical intervention draws attention to the three levels at which peacebuilding occurs and the different roles that can be played by the different actors. The levels are: the top level, the middle-range and the grassroots. CSOs are dominant at the grassroots level which involves the largest number of people and constitute the level where many of the conditions that generate conflict can be found (Ledarach, 1997). However, effective peacebuilding also requires collaboration and partnership among the various actors in addressing the drivers of the conflict (Stephens, 1997).

In the peacebuilding processes, CSOs carry out activities that are crucial in helping people deal with the aftermath of the violence associated with the conflict (Stephens, 1997). CSO activities that are integral to peacebuilding aim at addressing direct, cultural and structural violence, changing unjust social relationships and encouraging conditions that can establish cooperative relationships and promote reconciliation (Chigas, 2007; Bigdon & Korf, 2005; Darby & McGinty, 2000). Peace education is one such activity that empowers people with skills, attitude and knowledge to create a non-violent society at all levels starting form interpersonal to societal and global (Haris, 2007; Harris & Morrison, 2003). The focus of peace education as demonstrated by CSOs is to create enduring human consciousness about peaceful coexistence helping to transform human values to promote non-violence (Payne, 2020). In line with this, many Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) have entered into peacebuilding programing supplementing their development work with other activities that seek to prevent conflict and build sustainable peace. The grassroots nature of FBO conflict prevention and peacebuilding work has resulted in increased engagement with Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and different forms of partnership and collaboration with state actors (Duff, Battcock, Karam & Taylor, 2016). However, concerns have been raised about the appropriate forms of partnership that are beneficial to peacebuilding (UNHCR, 2014).

The area of operation of CSOs is often informed by the underlying operational philosophy and orientation towards conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In terms of operational philosophy, there are three basic orientations that motivate CSOs to work on conflict-related issues (Eze, 2006; Krähenbühl, 2000). First, the isolationist perspective considers conflict prevention and peacebuilding as not part of their core mandate. CSOs that fall into the isolationist genre are usually pre-existing CSOs that feel compelled to respond to the challenge that violent conflict poses for their constituents (Abiew & Keating, 2004). Secondly, the "nomadic" CSOs focus on addressing the structural causes of the conflict once there exists funding for that purpose. The main motivation of such CSOs is the availability of funding. These CSOs are into other sectors and not necessarily into conflict and peacebuilding related interventions. However, they shift their attention to the conflict and peacebuilding arena once there exist funding for such interventions (World Bank, 2005). Lastly, the integrationists CSOs draw on the inter-connectedness between peace and development to design strategies for their interventions (Appiagyei-Atua, 2002; World Bank, 2005). The integration perspective argues that violent protracted conflicts and rising levels of poverty and inequality, together and separately, account for many of the contemporary conflicts and as such there is a compelling need to address these issues in an integrated manner (Annan, 2006;

UNDP, 2002; McCandless & Abu-Nimer, 2002).

## Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the functions of CSO actors in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana. Based on this research design, the initial approach of this study was to visit all the conflict hotspots identified in Kendie et al. (2014) (see Figure 1) and to engage with CSOs working at the conflict sites and possibly map both their locations and their activities. However, the outcome of the feasibility study forced a change in strategy due to the realisation that some of the CSOs that were in the original sampling frame only existed on paper and could not be traced either physically or even contacted via phone.

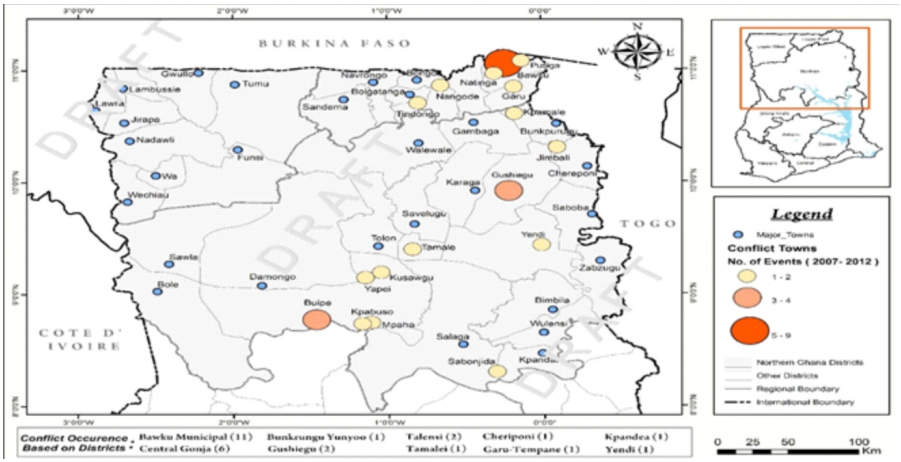


**Figure 1: Conflict Map of Northern Ghana, 2008-2014**
**Source: Kendie, Osei-Kufuor & Boakye, 2014.**

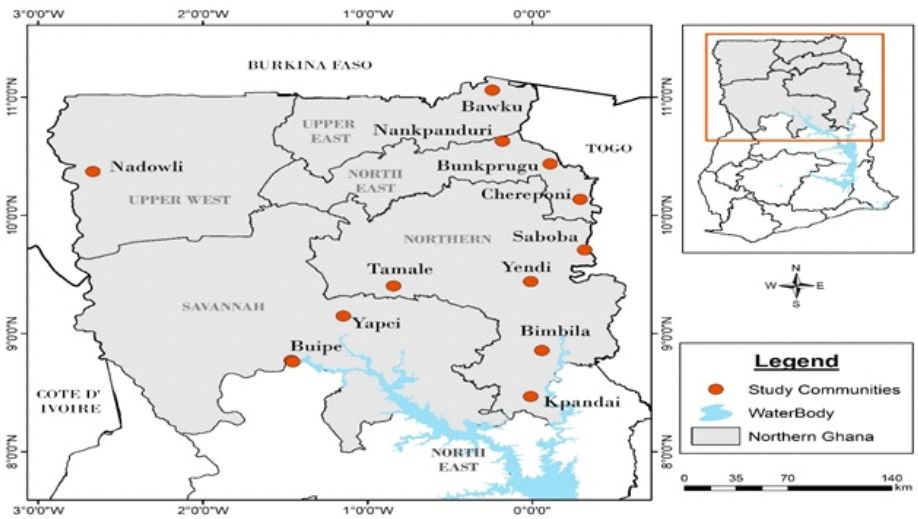


**Figure 2: Map of the Study Areas**
**Source: Cartography Unit, Department of Geography, University of Cape Coast, 2021.**

Consequently, the study adopted a qualitative approach focusing on exploring the operational theatre of CSOs and their attendant experiences with respect to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The specific conflict areas selected in the five regions of Northern Ghana are shown in Figure 2. The qualitative approach allowed for deeper insights and discussions into the activities of the CSOs and enabled us to get a more nuanced discussion of the role of CSOs in northern Ghana. Using the purposive sampling method, a total of 20 respondents were selected for the study. The Northern Regional Executive Secretary of the National Peace Council (NPC) provided a detailed list of CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The NPC was contacted because the regional NGO association had a non-reliable list of CSOs. Besides, the NPC collaborated with CSOs in their peace work.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the representatives of the selected 20 CSOs in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It is worth noting that the study targeted CSOs that worked in conflicts in northern Ghana especially the Dagbon (Yendi and Tamale), Bawku, Bimbilla, Nadowli, Kpemale, Buipe, Yapei/Kusawgu, Chereponi, Bunkprugu, Kpandai, Nankpanduri and Saboba conflicts (see Figure 2). The narrative analysis method was used to analyse the content from the interviews. After the data were transcribed, we generated themes and concepts which were used for the analysis.

**Results and discussions**

This section presents and discusses the ways in which CSOs deal with conflicts. It begins with a discussion of the philosophical perspectives of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. This is followed by an analysis of the roles of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The last section discusses the ways that CSO conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities result in conflict transformation.

**Philosophical perspectives of CSOs in conflict prevention and peacebuilding**

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding is driven by numerous operational philosophies, many of which have been discussed in the literature. The study identified three distinct philosophies that drive CSOs conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities: the isolationist, opportunistic and the integrationist viewpoints.

It was obvious from the interviews that the three perspectives have evolved over time with the integrationist viewpoint being the most recent and dominant paradigm. Early CSOs' activity in northern Ghana was development oriented due to the underdevelopment of the area. In Interviews with both the Head of the Ghana Development Communities Association and Network Coordinator of SEND-Ghana, they both noted that so many of the early CSOs' interventions were into social development focusing on provisioning of basic services such as education, health and food security.

The CSOs were reactional in nature often responding to the eruption of violence with humanitarian and relief services. One of the respondents noted that:

The relief and humanitarian component of peace work was as a result of the numerous conflicts that occurred in the study area. For example, between 1980 and 2002, there were at least 23 conflicts centered on land, chieftaincy and ethnicity. With many of the NGOs in the north doing development work, the church based on it pastoral mission had to supply conflict affected communities with relief services in the form of provision of shelter, blankets and food (Interview with Coordinator of a Faith-Based CSO, 18/10/2016).

The narrative above shows that relief and humanitarian operations constitute peace work and cannot be separated from developmental work (Abiew et al., 2004). The relief and humanitarian aspect of peace work has not ceased among the CSOs with FBOs going to the aid of displaced individuals and communities when violent conflicts erupt. Violent conflicts drive about eighty percent of humanitarian and relief work (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, conflict prevention and peacebuilding cannot be isolated from relief and humanitarian activities. As a result, many CSOs in this study have moved from crisis management to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The underlying rationale, according to an interview with head of the Assemblies of God Development and Relief Services, is that the pathway to reducing violent conflict is by more effectively tackling the root causes of the tensions.

Some CSOs have also changed their focus due to the changing dynamics of these conflicts. Contextual dynamics and the changing nature of peace work has brought to the fore the need to shift from isolationist to integrationist perspective. The head of Centre for Conflict

Table 1: Overview of CSOs, their mandates and CPMR interventions

| Genre | Specific entity | Key mandate | Specific CPMR-related intervention |
|---|---|---|---|
| Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) | Catholic Church | Evangelism | Capacity building,<br>Enhancing dialogue,<br>Direct mediation,<br>Facilitating Engagement between conflict factions,<br>Establishment of Justice and Peace Committees |
| | Assemblies of God Church | Evangelism | Capacity building,<br>Skills training,<br>Direct mediation,<br>Peace Education |
| | Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission | Evangelism | Peacebuilding,<br>Peace Education,<br>Conflict prevention |
| | Christian Council of Ghana | Evangelism | Peacebuilding |
| Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) | Yendi Peace Council | Mediation in the Yendi conflict | Conflict prevention and Early Warning,<br>Peace Education,<br>Conflict transformation |
| | Bimbilla Concerned Citizens | Specifically into conflict mediation | Intelligence gathering and early warning systems,<br>Conflict management |
| | Kpandai Peace Facilitators | Peacebuilding | Training,<br>Conflict prevention, management, conflict transformation |
| | Bunkrugu Peace Facilitators | Peacebuilding | Training,<br>Conflict prevention and Early Warning,<br>Conflict management,<br>Peacebuilding |
| Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) | West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) | Peacebuilding | Training,<br>Conflict Prevention and Early Warning,<br>Peace capacity building,<br>Direct mediation,<br>Intelligence gathering and early warning systems,<br>Peace monitoring |
| | Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA) | Peace and human security | Peacebuilding,<br>Conflict Prevention |
| | SEND Ghana | Socio-economic development | Peace Education,<br>Conflict Prevention and Early Warning,<br>Development Programing |
| | Youth Empowerment for Life (YEL) | Socio-economic development | Peace Education,<br>Conflict Prevention and Early Warning,<br>Development Programing |
| | Ghana Development Communities Association (GDCA) | Community Development | Peace Education,<br>Collecting Early Warning Signals,<br>Peace Education |
| | The Federation of Muslim Women Association of Ghana (FOMAG) | Community Development | Peace Education,<br>Collecting Early Warning Signals,<br>Development Programing |

Source Fieldwork, 2018

leadership also sends peace messages especially during election periods and religious festivals. In the Upper East Region, the inter-religious peace committees are intervening in different interfaith conflicts leading to changes within individuals' attitudes and perceptions. This finding reflects the views of other studies that considers social change as an important element of interfaith dialogue as it enables people to know and accept each other and in the process build a relationship based on respect, trust and friendship (Greenebaum, 2014; Ahlstrand & Gunner, 2011; Abu-Nimer, & Augsburger, 2009).

An important feature of the Inter-Religious Dialogue group is the decentralisation of the activities to the district and community levels. The presence of the Inter-Religious Peace Dialogue across the different levels enabled them to draw on the services of state actors and vice versa to pursue peace (Duff et. al., 2016). For example, in Yendi and Chereponi, municipal authorities had to rely on the leadership of the Inter-Religious Peace Dialogue group to resolve conflicts that were driven by doctrinal issues. Dialogue was identified as a useful tool for conflict prevention and peace building in the Tamale, Damango and the Churic land dispute in the Northern, Savanah and the Upper-West Regions respectively.

Evidence revealed that in the area of intra-community conflicts, empowering and strengthening the capacities of individuals, communities, and institutions to manage conflicts is essential to peace building. The Inter-Religious Peace Dialogue group intervened in communal conflicts leading to peaceful coexistence. This role reinforces the position that the communal nature of religious leaders makes their peacebuilding activities relevant in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as their reach can surpass that of government (Ahlstrand et. al., 2011).

Another dimension to the FBO conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy is to establish training institutions to bring people together for conflict transformation (Flanigan, 2013). For instance, the presence of CECOTAPS and the Satellite Peace Centres (SPC) by the Catholic Church provided the space for the training of the community volunteers for the early warning groups in the different communities within the study area. The CECOTAPS played a key role in facilitating both dialogue and mediation in the Bawku and Yendi Chieftaincy Disputes. Another notable training institutions is the Yendi Peace Centre (YPC) which contributed to the peacebuilding efforts in the Dagbon and Bimbilla Chieftaincy Conflict.

Available data revealed that the SPCs in particular have intervened in many of the intercommunal conflicts in the study area. Notable examples are the intervention in the Chereponi and Saboba land conflicts, the conflicts between farmers and herders in the Salaga Kpnadai and Konkomba areas and the Kambatiak and Gbankoni communities in the Bunkprugu–Yunyoo district of the Northern Region. In the case of the Kambatiak and Gbankoni, the violence was over a disputed land which led to the loss of lives and property on both sides. The conflict affected the socio-economic life of the community. For example, academic work in the schools in the area was halted while farmers were unable to visit their farms for fear of reprisal attacks. The conflict further led to broken family relations as wives left their husbands to be with family members on each side of the conflict. The intervention of the SPC facilitated a dialogue between the feuding parties that eventually led to both parties resorting to the use of peaceful non-violent means to resolve the conflict. This shows the persuading power of FBOs to influence the conflicting parties to accept peace-making initiatives that focus on changing attitudes and behaviour (Barnes, 2006; Flanigan, 2013).

A comparative analysis of the FBOs revealed that all of them have a close connection to individuals and communities and focus on empowering the former as a route to peace (see Clark, 2011). One of the greatest strengths of the FBOs working in the area of conflict is their capacity to direct attention to the underlying causes of the conflict such as land contestations, marginalisation, injustice and exclusion. A unique characteristic of the FBOs was their capacity to facilitate engagement between the conflict factions in areas such as Bolgatanga, Bimbilla and Gushiegu. As indicated in some studies, CSOs facilitate engagement between conflict factions. This is the case as the local people are often constrained to respond to all the dimensions and drivers of conflict on their own. In addition, the existing unequal power relations affect the agency of the community members to initiate action to bring the feuding factions together and the FBOs served as interlocutors in many of these peace initiatives (Paffenholz, 2014; Paffenholz & Spurk 2006; Van Tongeren et.al. 2005). As indicated by a respondent from one of the FBOs, "there is high regard for religious leaders and they are the guarantors of peace in these areas, so we initiate a lot of engagements among the parties in conflict." This narrative concurs with other findings that suggest that FBOs have a unique position in peace work due to their ability to access and mobilise individuals and communities including both grassroots communities and high-level leaders (Barnes, 2006; Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

Drawing on Fisher's (2006) classification, CBOs in this study constitute local organisations that served a specific population in a narrow geographical area. Examples of CBOs under this genre are the Yendi Peace Committee (YPC), Bimbilla Concerned Citizens Association and the

Peace Facilitators in Bunkrugu and Kpandai. CBOs were prevalent in all the five northern regions with their activities not so different form the FBOs. This is to be expected as like the FBOs, the CBO were community focused and dealt with specific issues that are particular to their communities of operation. The activities of the CBOs cut across the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

With the exception of the emphasis placed on faith and other religious doctrines, CBO conflict prevention and peacebuilding roles were similar to the FBOs. The CBOs as expected were active at the communal level and provided the space for collective agency towards sustainable peace. CBO activities cut cross conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Within the ambit of conflict prevention, CBOs undertook early warning activities aimed at preventing further violence. In the early warning system established in many of the conflict areas, CBOs identified volunteers and with the support of some NGOs such as WANEP and SEND-Ghana provided training on the gathering of information on issues that are likely to lead to violence. In Bimbilla, just before the Supreme Court Ruling on the protracted chieftaincy conflict, it was detected that each faction was mobilising its supporters in response to the ruling. With this information passed to the NPC and forwarded to the security agencies, the Bimbilla Concerned Citizens Association were supported to undertake peace education. The violence that was immanent was avoided after the ruling. Some authors have demonstrated the usefulness of CBOs in early warning system especially its ability to detect impending violence and respond promptly (Eze & Frimpong, 2021; Ekiyor, 2008).

CBOs use peace education for transformative peacebuilding. For instance, the YPC with training support from the Catholic Church, the Municipal Security Committee and the National Peace Council (NPC) have used peace education to persuade the youth from both sides of the Dagbon conflict from engaging in violent acts that will disturb the peace in the area leading to relative peace and stability. The YPC organised over 104 peace related workshops, seminars and fora for the members of the Abudu and Andani Gates including the youths and women's groups. Recent evidence on the activities of the YPC indicates that they have started peace education activities to get the community members to accept the peace process after the mediation by the Committee of Eminent Chiefs.

The NGOs studied undertook a wide range of activities which are in direct response to conflict and the situations that give rise to it. Dominant NGOs are FOSDA, SEND-Ghana and WANEP-Ghana. However, WANEP-Ghana was the NGO with peace work as the core activity. The activities of WANEP as indicated in the interview with the Executive Secretary cuts across the conflict cycle with many activities in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. WANEP-Ghana has a strong working partnership with some state actors including the NPC and the Security Committees of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs).

With the support of the Department for International Development (DFID), WANEP introduced the concept of Community-Based Early Warning System across the northern regions. The conflict early warning activities of WANEP is well noted in the study area as it shows the interactions between NGOs and CBOs. WANEP-Ghana since 2003 has introduced a well-structured programme that involves the use of regional peace committees to implement regional early warning and response platform for conflict prevention. Examples of early warning systems can be found in almost all the conflict hotspots in the study area. However, the system is more reliable in WANEP operational areas, especially in Kpandai, Nakpanduri and Salaga. WANEP, through local leadership, recruits at least five community members with interest and willing to work in peace to monitor and provide credible information on imminent conflict risks. The community informants are trained to pry and explore the possibility of threats that can lead to potential violence in the area. They then pass on any available hint of threat and impending eruptions to key stakeholders such as the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Security Committees or the security agencies. WANEP also has a toll-free number for any member of the community to call if there is any imminent threat of violence. Examples were given where WANEP has partnered with the NPC and the Security Committees of the Municipal and District Assemblies in Yendi, Damango, Bimbilla and Salaga to prevent the incidence of conflict. WANEP-Ghana is promoting dialogue between herders and crop farmers.

WANEP was identified to have the capacity to mediate directly in several conflicts. However, WANEP used FBOs and CBOs in their activities. This strategy was to enhance the inclusion of key conflict actors in the communities. Relying on the mobilisation capabilities of FBOs and the CBOs is considered essential for peacebuilding as it fosters inclusion, ownership and build trust (Bakker, 2001;

Pirozzi & Mikhelidze, 2008).

WANEP organised mediation sessions at the community level. Recent interventions were in Bimbilla and Nakpanduri. With respect to peacebuilding, WANEP has achieved temporal success in the Konkomba and Bimoba land dispute in Nakpanduri in the Bunkrugu YunYoo District of the North East Region. WANEP mediated the conflict and managed to bring the leadership of the feuding parties to a unification durbar at the palace of the Nayiri, the overlord of the Mamprugu Traditional Area in Nalerigu in the East Mamprusi District of the North East Region. Chiefs and the youth from the two feuding ethnic groups chewed a ritual kola nut from the Nayiri to seal their unity and peaceful coexistence with each other. The chewing of the kola nut symbolises the resolve of the factions to stop fighting and the invitation of the spiritual realm into peace-making among them. With the ritual performed, the Bimobas in Nakpanduri have agreed to welcome back the Konkombas to resettle at Kpemale after they fled the community to neighbouring areas following the conflict. However, others are yet to return as they await the 'blood burial ceremony' to be held on the land where the conflict started. The 'blood burial ceremony' is an indigenous ritual that is supposed to bring the conflict to closure. This finding supports Bukari and Guuroh's (2013) observation that WANEP is the most active NGO in mediating peace in northern Ghana, using the Bawku and Yendi chieftaincy conflicts as examples. In the West Gonja Municipality, WANEP-Ghana is promoting dialogue between herders and crop farmers

**CSOs and conflict transformation**

Our study equally supports the argument that CSOs conflict transformation activities are slow in bringing about changes at the actor, relationship and structural levels (see Barnes,2006). It was evident that in some conflicts, the hostile relationship between some feuding parties had improved with time but had not reached normal. Behaviour and attitude had seen some improvements in some of the conflicts. In the Bimbilla, Gushiegu and Yoyo Conflicts, the conflict factions through the support of WANEP and the National Peace Council had started to engage each other on the issues driving the conflict. In the Yendi conflict, both parties (gates) that were in conflict have started working on a new Dagbon Constitution to prevent any succession disputes in the future. Lederach (2003) and Barnes (2006) both caution peace actors that, such activities take time and should be undertaken with circumspect as historical memories may come back to harm the restored peaceful relations.

In other conflicts, indigenous conflict mechanisms such as the ritual of blood bath had been performed to signify the end of hostilities. These ceremonies that were facilitated by WANEP had brought about gradual changes in attitude and relationships. Examples were given to demonstrate that ceremonies such as the blood bath had been performed to bring the conflicts to closure and restore the relationship to earlier times of peaceful coexistence. In the Nanton, Yendi, Bawku and Bimbilla conflicts, the set of actors continue to change but the issues, goals and relationship seldom change. A member of the Yendi Peace Committee noted that:

In many of these conflicts, the leadership that come for mediation changes depending on the availability of the person. As you are aware, the leaders also have to pursue their livelihood interest. Therefore, combining their role in the peace process and their livelihood was challenging (Interview with a member of the Yendi Peace Committee, 13/10/2016).

The narrative reinforces the position that changes of leadership are often crucial to achieving conflict transformation. This was supported in an interview with the WANEP representative who states that "When there are changes, the new leadership become very cautious in their decisions as they do not want to be perceived as weak in comparison with the previous leaders and this makes peacebuilding difficult." According to Miall (2004), changes in leadership comes with two outcomes: progress in transformation efforts or stagnation and decline. Alongside the change, leadership will have to be supported to reframe the issues driving the conflict anew. All these occurrences affect the transformation work of CSOs. For Miall, context, relationships and memories are all part of the tissue connecting the contradictions, attitudes and behaviours in the conflict formations, and their transformation cannot be measured in the short term.

Although CSOs working on conflicts in northern Ghana have achieved some degree of success in changing the behaviour and attitudes of protagonists, our study question this conflict transformation potential (see also Flanigan, 2013; Interpeace, 2010). A key position is that despite the presence of CSOs in northern Ghana, new violent conflicts continue to emerge with dormant conflicts

re-escalating. The implication is that work of CSOs rarely transform the structural issues driving the conflict. According to the respondent for SEND-Ghana and FOSDA, many of the conflicts are being managed with little transformation. This finding reinforces Ledarach's (1997) position that peacebuilding is a long journey and therefore it will be very difficult to measure short term success that are focused on the transformation of the underlying issues as well as changes in the context, behaviour and attitude of the conflict actors. For Barnes (2006), it is extremely difficult to determine the effect of specific initiatives on the wider conflict dynamic as transformation occurs across different domains: relationships, actors, leadership and structural.

**Conclusion**

This study explored CSOs' operations in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in northern Ghana. CSOs were involved in all the stages of the conflict cycle playing roles in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. FBOs undertake a lot of peacebuilding initiatives with CBOs placing more emphasis on early warning activities. CBOs were seen as peace engines in the communities that had experienced violent conflicts in the past. The NGOs performed a wide range of activities which were in direct response to conflict and the situations that give rise to them. The study found that the CSOs are mainly involved in the primary and secondary levels of operational conflict prevention. CSOs have achieved some major successes in the operational zone, key amongst them is the creation of early warning and intelligence gathering systems. The study found that CSOs conflict transformation activities are dull and not much seen in the peacebuilding activities of the CSOs along the context, structural, actor as against personal changes. In terms of the philosophical perspectives and operations of CSOs, the integrationist philosophy was the most common among the CSOs operating in northern Ghana mainly because of the history of early CSOs being development-oriented due to the underdevelopment of the area. The partnership among CSOs for peace work was observed to be pronounced in the region especially between CBOs and NGOs. Theoretically, this study argues that transformation of conflicts involves changes in the context and the structural issues underpinning the conflict as well as the behaviour and attitude of the conflict actors. Therefore, CSOs role in transforming conflict must focus on all these key issues to ensure 'real peace.'

The study recommends that CSOs should draw on indigenous methods in their intervention activities to ensuring peace. This is because indigenous interventions often result in 'real' transformation of conflicts as they delve deep into totality of issues surrounding the conflict. Besides, early warning systems need to be developed by all CSOs in their conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. CSOs can do this by working with state security agencies and MMDAs to institutionalise early warning systems into peace activities. CSOs must continue to educate citizens on the use of non-violence strategies for conflict prevention and peace education and continue to make it an integral part of their programming. CSOs must build their capacity to ensure working partnerships for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Finally, given the sensitive and costly nature of maintaining peace, it is recommended that active CSOs such as the Catholic Church and WANEP be supported by the state to roll out peace education to reduce the strains on the communities.

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# THE PERSON OR THE ISSUE? RELATIONAL PROCESS, PERSON- AND IDEA-TARGETED QUESTIONS IN UK AND GHANAIAN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Kwabena Sarfo Sarfo-Kantankah[1]

**Abstract**

Using parliamentary questions as data and a corpus-assisted systemic functional approach through Wordsmith Tools, this paper, with specific reference to relational processes, explores yes/no interrogatives in order to establish how MPs encode in their questions issues of attitudes, commitments, personalities and ideas of (Prime) Ministers during Ghanaian Minister's and UK Prime Minister's Questions. The paper finds that MPs use yes/no interrogatives with relational processes to describe (Prime) Ministers as carriers of certain attributes relating to their positions and responsibilities, while some of the questions are issue-focused. To achieve this, MPs employ two main questioning strategies: person-targeted and idea-targeted pragmatic strategies, thereby raising issues of (Prime) Ministers' credibility and commitment to duty. The paper has implications for parliamentary questions, party politics and MPs' and (Prime) Ministers' duties as representatives of their constituents.

**Keywords:** corpus-assisted, relational process, Ghanaian Minister's Questions, UK Prime Ministers Questions, person-targeted questions, idea-targeted questions

## Introduction

Studying parliamentary questions, in particular, and parliamentary discourse, in general, has the potential to offer insights into the behaviour, attitudes and motivations of parliamentarians (MPs) when they are engaged in their constitutionally-mandated task of legislating and scrutinising government policies and actions. In principle, MPs ask questions of the executive/government for several reasons: for information, action, personal publicity; or to defend/promote constituency/sectoral interests, inform/question policy, hold executive/government accountable, and enhance/undermine government's image (Proksch & Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996). This paper explores an aspect of parliamentary questions, namely: yes/no interrogatives that are constructed with relational processes (Halliday 1994, p.112) in order to uncover the focus of MPs' questions. The limitation is based on the need for in-depth analysis and lack of space. The paper looks at the following in turn: parliamentary questions, theoretical approach (interrogatives and relational processes), research design and data, analysis and discussion, and conclusion.

## Parliamentary questions

Parliamentary questions (written or oral) are one major way by which MPs hold the executive and governments accountable for their political decisions, actions and inactions (Akirav, 2011; Ilie, 2006; Proksch & Slapin, 2010). The questions considered for this study are oral questions, which are spoken requests for information or action. Parliamentary questions, which follow question-response sequences representing the default adjacency pairs (Ilie, 2015), have been variously studied, especially in the western world. These include the roles and functions of parliamentary questions (Cole, 2007; Rosenberg & Martin, 2012); the effectiveness of procedures of questioning in various European parliaments (Russo & Wiberg, 2010); parliamentary questions as a means of raising alarm over national governments' failure to implement European Union policies (Jensen, Proksch & Slapin, 2013). Others include parliamentary questions as a means of measuring constituency focus (Martin, 2011a; Russo, 2011); and as a means of understanding the preferences and the behaviour of parliamentarians (Martin, 2011b; Rosenberg & Martin, 2011).

One parliament that has received substantial scholarly attention is the UK parliament, with particular attention on Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs), due to its status as the mother-of-all parliaments (Ilie, 2006; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). While the practice of questioning Ministers dates back to the late 17th or early 18th century, the current form of questioning is as recent as the 1960s (Harris, 2001; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Being adversarial in nature, PMQs has been investigated from pragmatic perspectives employing speech act theory (Ilie, 2010), face-threatening acts (Bull & Wells, 2012) and politeness theory (Harris, 2001; Murphy, 2014). During PMQs, questions are often planted for political purposes (Inside the Commons – Lifting the Lid 2015), and, PMQs

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become more confrontational when questions are asked by the opposition; for which reason it has been labelled as "a facethreatening genre", even though "the high frequency of face-threatening acts is counterbalanced by a wide range of politeness strategies" (Ilie, 2006, p.192). Wilson (1990, p.146) has stated that yes/no interrogatives are the most frequent type of interrogatives among UK parliamentary questions. This is corroborated by Harris (2001, p.457), adding that yes/no interrogatives in PMQs are usually designed in such a way that they are followed by a "proposition oriented in a broad sense either to information or … to action", as for example: will the Prime Minister send + a proposition. Harris (2001, p.457; see also Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018) further states that, sometimes, the questions "seek expressions of opinion" in contravention of the parliamentary rules of questioning. In the context of parliamentary questions, such propositions are very significant, as they affect the meaning and implication of the questions and sometimes indirectly make the questions appear as offering information.

Unlike the PMQs, Ghanaian Ministers Questions (GMQs) has received very little scholarly attention (see Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). The research gap on Ghanaian parliamentary questions makes the current study highly relevant. The relative lack of such studies may emanate from the fact that Ghana has had unstable republican parliamentary systems, with the current republic (which is 25 years old) being the most stable republican system in Ghana's history (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Since the Ghanaian parliamentary system is modelled on the Westminster system, comparing an aspect of the practices of an old Westminster parliament and a young Westminster-modelled Ghanaian parliament allows for introspection and retrospection for both parliaments. The current study is substantially different from the previous ones as it looks at the questions from a multilevel theoretical and methodological approach: a corpus-assisted discourse analysis.

## Theoretical approach: interrogatives and relational processes

Interrogatives can be recognised structurally. They are typically constructed with a subject-operator inversion (e.g. Is he your father?) or introduced with a "wh" item (e.g. What is the Minister going to do?) or even through the use of a minor sentence (e.g. Any ministerial response?). Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) have identified five types of interrogatives:

i. *yes/no* questions (truth-seeking questions),
ii. wh-questions (information-seeking questions),
iii. alternative questions (choice-making questions),
iv. tag-questions (confirmation-seeking question and
v. declarative questions (a declarative structure, a type of *yes/no* question).

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985, 1972) identify three main types: yes/no (with declarative and tag-questions being sub-categories), wh-questions and alternative questions. There are also open (wh-questions, indirect questions and requests) and closed questions (*yes/no*, declarative, tag and non-sentence questions) (Tkačuková, 2010). For want of space and the need for in-depth analysis, this paper examines only yes/no interrogatives that involve relational processes. It should, however, be noted that, pragmatically, it could be misleading to label interrogatives as above, since form and function of clauses do not always coincide (Biber et al., 2002; Downing & Locke, 2006, p.197). Pragmatically, interrogatives function as directives/commands, statements and exclamations (Biber et al., 2002, p.249; Downing & Locke, 2006, p.211), including question, rhetorical question, rebuke, exclamation and directive (order, request) (Downing & Locke (2006, p.211; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Questions can reveal attitudes and preferences of the questioner as well as his/her level of knowledge towards the issue at stake (Heritage, 2010).

Parliamentary questions are meant to hold governments accountable by criticising their policies, exposing abuses, and seeking redress (Ilie, 2015). Sometimes, questions are used either to attack or praise a government depending on whether they are asked by opposition or position MPs. Thus, questions may have either positive, negative or neutral orientation, each of which determines the question's focus and implication (Downing & Locke, 2006; Quirk et al. 1972, 1985). Ilie (2015, p.9) further states that "parliamentary questioning strategies are not intended to elicit specific answers, but rather challenge or embarrass the respondent into making uncomfortable, damaging, or self-revealing declaration". Questions that seek information or action are likely to focus on the subject matter, whereas those intended to challenge or embarrass are likely to target the person. One of the strategies for attacking persons is to employ interrogatives involving relational process constructions, hence the deployment of the principle of relational process for analysis in this paper.

Relational process is the category of

transitivity that generally concerns things "of being", with the "central meaning ... that something is" (Halliday, 1994, p.112) and are "typically realized by the verb be or some verb of the same class (known as copular verbs)" (Bloor & Bloor, 2013, p.122). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p.215), there are two "modes of being" that characterise relational processes, viz: attributive "(Is he aware?", where aware indicates an attribute of he) and identifying "(Is he the Minister?", where the Minister identifies he). In "Is he [the Prime Minister] proud of his legacy…?" (UK 6 Jun 07/Col 252), "is "is a relational process and "proud" is an attributive adjective. The question raises some reservation about the Prime Minister (PM); it targets the person. Attributives can express "emotion/attitude" (e.g. proud, sad), "cognition/probability" (e.g. doubt, certainty) or "desideration/obligation" (e.g. desirability, acceptability) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.223). Thus, [i]n the "attributive" mode, an entity has some class ascribed or attributed to it. Structurally, we label this class the Attribute, and the entity to which it is ascribed is the Carrier — the "carrier" of the "attribute" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.219). In asking (Prime) Ministers questions that involve attributives, MPs are ascribing to them certain qualities of attitude and behaviour. Oftentimes, instead of directly questioning an attribute of the (Prime) Minister, the question is designed in such a way that an idea is made the entity, in which case the question becomes idea-targeted, as for example, Is the information right?, where the focus is on "the information". Thus, relational process interrogatives bring to bear two question types: person- and idea-targeted questions (Gibbons, 2003, p.112), which are explored in this paper.

## Research design and data

The paper employs a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis, that is, the study of "the form and/or function of language as communicative discourse which incorporate[s] the use of computerised corpora in their analysis" (Partington, Duguid & Taylor, 2013, p.10). Employing Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2012), the study uses concordances to observe words in context by examining their collocates, and interpreting them qualitatively (Adolphs 2008; MacEnery & Wilson, 2001). For instance, Figure 1 is a sample concordance output of "is the Minister" from the Ghanaian data.

| N | Concordance | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | have been given contracts to undertake, | is the Minister | aware that the highways are still |
| 2 | is, if there is no managerial problem here, | is the Minister | sure that the contractor has |
| 3 | I will proceed to my next question. Mr. Speaker, | is the Minister | aware that at the time the |
| 4 | roads in every district capital; my question is, | is the Minister | supposed to tar all roads within |

Figure 1: Concordance of "is the Minister" from GMQs

The words on both sides of "is the Minister" are collocates, which allow us to see the words to the left and right of "is the Minister" in each line so that we can decipher what is attributed to the Minister in each line. For example, in line 2, "sure that the contractor has…" may indicate an expression of doubt by the MP who asked the question.

While the concordance tool provides words (and expressions) in context, it is not able to indicate syntactically wrong structures or identify mistakes. Also, the tool provides only the strings of linguistic patterns in the corpus without giving any interpretation; it is the corpus linguist who does the analysis and interprets the data (see Woolls, 2011). However, these limitations are offset by the fact that the corpus-assisted approach helps to draw on the concept of situational context to identify the pragmatic functions of MPs' questions (Adolphs, 2008). While the corpus tools allow us to observe words within their co-texts, the interpretation of such words goes into the social, cultural and political contexts.

The UK data (obtained from www.parliament.uk) are Hansards of parliamentary proceedings between 2005 and 2014 inclusive, comprising about 178,581 tokens (running words) from 33 PMQs sessions, 11 each from Labour PMs Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and Conservative PM David Cameron administrations. The Ghanaian data, which comprise about 148,461 tokens, are Hansards of 29 sessions of GMQs. They include 14 from the J.A. Kufuor (2005-2008, excluding 2007, which was unavailable) and 15 from the J.E.A. Mills/J.D. Mahama administrations (2009-2013). The periods

of 2005-2013/14 were selected purposively so as to obtain a broad range of corpus data spanning different governments' administrations as well as acquire data that could "be considered to 'average out' and provide a reasonably accurate picture" of UK PMQs and GMQs (McEnery & Wilson, 2001, p.30).

It is known that Hansards transcribers either omit or change certain lexical items used by MPs, including the generic you, speaker, give way, make sure, look at, have to (Mollin, 2007, p.207; see also Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). However, the lexical items that are usually affected do not appear among the words that are the focus of this paper. Therefore, the said changes and omissions do not affect the analysis .

**Analysis and discussion**

The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part examines person-targeted questions, while the second part looks at idea-targeted questions. Table 1 represents the forms and the number of operators (will, would, can, does, be) used in forming the relational process interrogatives in the two datasets. The Table also indicates the number of relational process interrogatives (115 in GMQs, 208 UK PMQs), the number of person- and idea-targeted (Tgt.) questions involved, including their normalised frequency (NF) distributions, which demonstrate which items under reference (operators, person- and idea-targeted questions) were statistically more frequent in the two datasets.

**Table 1: Operators, person-/idea-targeted questions and their normalised frequencies**

| | GHANA | Person- | Idea- | UK | Person- | Idea- |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Operator** | **Freq. %** | **Tgt. %** | **Tgt. %** | **Freq. %** | **Tgt. %** | **Tgt. %** |
| **Will** | 4 (3.48) | 3 (75) | 1 (25) | 43 (20.67) | 40 (93.02) | 3 (6.98) |
| **Would** | 4 (3.48) | 2 (50) | 2 (50) | 0 | | |
| **Can** | 3 (2.60) | 2 (66.67) | 1 (33.33) | 19 (9.13) | 19 (100) | 0 |
| **Does** | 5 (4.35) | 2 (40) | 3 (60) | 22 (10.58) | 11 (50) | 11 (50) |
| **Be** | 99 (86.09) | 60 (60.61) | 39 (39.39) | 124 (59.62) | 66 (53) | 58 (47) |
| **Total** | **115** | **69 (60)** | **46 (40)** | **208** | **136 (65.38)** | **72 (34.62)** |
| **NF** | 7.75/10k | 4.65/10k | 3.10/10k | 11.65/10k | 7.62/10k | 4.03/10k |

The NF was calculated as:

x/10,000 (i.e. base of normalisation) = raw frequency/corpus size where x represents the normalised frequency for each corpus (see McEnery & Hardie, 2012, pp.48-50). Thus, the NF distribution indicates that all the items were stylistically more frequent in the UK data than in the Ghanaian data. The UK data recorded 11.65, 7.62 and 4.03 per 10,000 tokens for the operators, person-targeted and idea-targeted questions respectively, as against Ghana's 7.75, 4.65 and 3.10 per 10,000 tokens respectively. The overall picture is that there were more person-targeted questions in the PMQs than in the GMQs (a difference of 3.9/10,000 tokens). In both parliaments, the person-targeted questions were more frequent than the idea-targeted questions, which shows that the MPs' relational process yes/no interrogatives were more personality-focused than issue-focused. However, the PMQs were more person-focused than the GMQs (a difference of 2.97/10,000 tokens). The implication is that the UK MPs targeted personalities of their PMs more than their Ghanaian counterparts did.

It must be noted that the examples provided for the subsequent discussions are prototypical of the various types of person- and idea-targeted interrogatives as well as the categories (desideration/obligation, emotion/attitude and cognition (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp.223-224)) found in the data. This was done to save space. Note also that some of the examples are concordance lines. Since the relational process interrogatives appear more similar than different in the two datasets, the analysis is intertwined, pointing out differences between the UK and Ghanaian data as and when necessary.

### Person-targeted yes/no interrogatives

Person-targeted questions are questions that focus on the person(ality) of an addressee. The questions target and ask about the addressee's attributes and behaviour, often raising doubts and reservations about the addressee's personality, character, disposition, and qualities, among others. These questions are mostly constructed with relational process verbs called copular verbs, the most common among them being the verb "to be", with various adjectives as complements indicating various categories of attributes (see Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p.225). Table 2 represents the various categories of attributes contained in the two datasets.

**Table 2: Categories of attributes and their frequencies in the GMQs and PMQs**

| Category | GMQs | | | UK PMQs | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cognition/probability** | Aware | 57 | Aware 31 | have (any idea) | 6 |
| | Supposed | 2 | (to) ensure 22 | *Feel* | *2* |
| | Sure | 1 | Guilty 4 | confident | 2 |
| | Fair | 1 | Wonder 3 | sound | 2 |
| | Possible | 3 | Surprised 2 | relaxed | 1 |
| | | **64 (92.75%)** | Convinced 2 | familiar | 1 |
| | | | | ***78 (57.35%)*** | |
| **Emotion/attitude** | | | | | |
| | Kind | 2 | Proud 8 | Satisfied | 1 |
| | | **(2.90%)** | Concerned 7 | ill-judged | 1 |
| | | | Right 6 | Petrified | 1 |
| | | | Afraid 6 | Bovvered | 1 |
| | | | In favour 5 | Bothered | 1 |
| | | | Pleased 5 | Able | 1 |
| | | | Embarrassed 2 | | |
| | | | | **45 (33.09%)** | |
| **Desideration/obligation** | | | | | |
| | Willing | 1 | Prepared 9 | | |
| | Required | 1 | Willing 3 | | |
| | Prepared | 1 | On 1 | | |
| | | **3 (4.35%)** | **13 (9.56%)** | | |

As can be observed from Table 2, in both parliaments the words of cognition/probability were the most frequent in the person-targeted questions, which means that the majority of the questions in both parliaments (GMQs, 92.75%; PMQs, 57.35%) were knowledge seeking. The questions concentrated more on the (Prime) Ministers' knowledge of events, actions, policies, among others. However, there were more emotive/attitudinal questions in the PMQs (33.09%) than in the GMQs (2.90%). This implies that the UK MPs were more emotional in their questions than their Ghanaian counterparts. In other words, the UK MPs demonstrated more strong feelings or agitations about the attitudes and behaviours of their PMs.

### Portraying (Prime) Ministers as carriers of attributes and attitudes

Relational process interrogatives in the parliamentary questions foreground (Prime) Ministers' personalities and their attitudes towards their responsibilities. They are used to describe (Prime) Ministers as carriers of certain qualities or values relating to their positions. This is achieved mostly by employing attributive adjectives. For example, the concordance lines in Figures 2 and 3 illustrate some of the descriptive adjectives used in such interrogatives: Figure 2 – "is the hon. Minister aware" (line 1), "is she willing" (line 4) and Figure 3 – "Will he be able" (line 1), "Will my right hon. Friend be kind enough" (line 4). These mean that "the hon. Minister", "she", "he" and "my right hon. Friend" carry the attributes of awareness (cognition), willingness (desideration), ability and kindness (emotion) respectively, which portray qualities and characteristics of the (Prime) Ministers.

Attributive clauses normally have carrier (i.e. the participant), relational process and attribute (Flowerdew, 2013, p.18), as in: He (carrier) is (relational process) prepared (attribute). However, in an interrogative form, we will have requested carrier,

| N | Concordance |
|---|---|
| 1 | . Mr. Agbesi: Mr. Speaker, my question is, as at today, is the hon. Minister aware that the roads in Middle |
| 2 | of tarring roads in every district capital; my question is, is the Minister supposed to tar all roads within the |
| 3 | Answer is, if there is no managerial problem here, is the Minister sure that the contractor has been paid, |
| 4 | was not answered. My question to the Hon Minister. Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon? |

Figure 2: Sample concordance lines of relational processes in GH MQs

| N | Concordance |
|---|---|
| 1 | kind of formal recognition for those brave men. Will he be able to bring that to a conclusion |
| 2 | to do whatever we can to relieve their tragedy? Will he be good enough to have a word with the |
| 3 | review of the voting systems in this country. Will that be yet another pointless exercise, or can |
| 4 | threatening their energy and fuel supplies. Will my right hon. Friend be kind enough to tell |

Figure 2: Sample concordance lines of relational processes in GH MQs

relational process and attribute (see Examples 1 and 2, Table 3 below). In Example 1, "the Hon Minister" is cast as a requested "Carrier" of the "Attribute" of preparedness (Flowerdew, 2013, p.18).

The main purpose of Dr. Osei's question is to request evidence from the Minister whether he secured approval for his action. As a former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MFEP), Dr. Osei knows that Gen Smith "must seek approval from" that Ministry. He wants to know whether Gen. Smith (Minister for Defence) followed standard procedures to acquiring approval for funding from the MFEP. Dr. Osei sounds sceptical about Gen. Smith's handling of securing funding and presupposes a contravention of procurement procedures. In his response, Gen Smith implies that he has not received funding yet, as he has not had time to apply for approval from the Ministry because the reports were received only "some few days back". Gen. Smith also responds to the assumption of contravention of procedures, indicating that, when the approval is obtained, "we will do the right thing".

In his question, Dr. Osei implies a lack of commitment and sincerity on the part of the Minister, as expressed in the use of "be prepared to", a semantically negative expression. It indicates a desire/willingness (desideration) to act. The concordance shots (see Figures 3 and 4) of "be prepared to" from the International Corpus of English-Ghana (ICE-Gh) and the British National Corpus (BNC) show that it has a negative semantic prosody, the "consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates" (Louw, 1993, p.157). Figure 4 indicates the only five collocates of "be prepared to" in the ICE-Gh; while Figure 5 indicates the first ten (10) per 1000 collocates of "be prepared to", which amounts to a frequency of 10.17 instances per million words in the BNC.

The collocates show that "be prepared to" occurs mostly in negative contexts, such as to make concessions, yield or give something away. For example, in the ICE-Gh, to "actually offer free services …" (line 1), "you must have the ability to accept change … learn and seek help when necessary" (line 2), "share powers, functions and resources" (line 3) and "take private accommodation for the week" (line 4) imply making compromises and forfeitures. In the BNC, "sentence someone to death" (line 2), "risks some indulgence" (line 3), and "budge on the issue even now" (line 9) connote negativity. Thus, "be prepared to" means being ready to accept some negative consequences. This demonstrates that Dr. Osei is pessimistic about the Minister's handling of procuring funds for the recruitment exercise. The MP is not only interested in requesting information, but also questioning the Minister's commitment, trust and sincerity in the performance of his political duties. As noted by Bull, Fetzer and Johansson (2008, p.326) political commitment is essential in politics, and, as a basis of their decision to vote for one political leader or another, "voters may question the extent to which politicians can be trusted to keep their word or to implement their promises". Therefore, Dr. Osei raising a question of trust has some political point-scoring implications.

Example 2 (Table 3 above) performs two functions. First, it requests confirmation or otherwise

| Preface | Operator | Requested Carrier | Relational process | Attribute | Circumstance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Example 1: GH 10 Jun 09/Col. 444/5:**<br><br>**Dr. Osei [NPP]**: Madam Speaker, in his Answer and with your permission, I quote: "Recruitment funding would therefore be used to improve physical conditions in the training school". What I want to know is that, has the Hon Minister sought approval for moving from item 3 to item 4 for this purpose? The requirement is that he must seek approval from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. If such approval was sought and it was given, | would | the hon. Minister | be | prepared | *to provide the evidence that he got the approval?* |
| **Lt. Gen. Smith (retd) [NDC]**: Madam Speaker, we received the reports just some few days back and if I say I directed, the process will take its course and the necessary approvals will be sought and we will do the right thing. Thank you | | | | | |
| **Example 2: UK 20 Jun 07/Col 1373**<br>**Gordon Banks (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Lab)**: My right hon. Friend will be aware that since being elected to this House I have campaigned for formal recognition of the Bevin Boys and the role that they played in our world war two success and the defeat of Nazism. In January, the Prime Minister acknowledged their role and said that he would make progress on some kind of formal recognition for those brave men. | will | he | be | able | *to bring that to a conclusion before he leaves office next week?* |
| **The Prime Minister [Lab]**: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the campaign that he has mounted for some recognition for the Bevin Boys and the extraordinary work that they did in world war two, without which our war effort would have been seriously hindered. We will have a special commemorative badge for the Bevin Boys, and we will announce that later today. It will provide some recognition for the tremendous work that they did, express the sense of gratitude that the country has for them, and show why it is a good idea that on this day we should commemorate their work. | | | | | |

Table 3: Participants in the relational clause

| N | Concordance |
|---|---|
| 1 | S2: [mm]\par S9: [So] I think that lawyers must sometimes be prepared to actually offer free \cf1 regard *legal \cf0 |
| 2 | you must have the ability to accept change, be a self-starter be prepared to learn and to seek help when necessary. |
| 3 | the light of these expectations, the District Assembly should be prepared to share powers, functions and resources with |
| 4 | our own postgraduates do not get it. I will try for you, but be prepared to take private accommodation for the week or |
| 5 | submit to full treatment within the three months period and be prepared to testify to the public after treatment. It called |

Figure 4: Semantic prosodies of 'be prepared to' from the ICE GH

| N | Concordance |
|---|---|
| 1 | he liked. And we both knew that hardly anyone would be prepared to speak out and argue my case. I remember |
| 2 | all jurors have to believe in capital punishment, and be prepared to sentence someone to death. Since black |
| 3 | you can bring something of your own imagination to it, and be prepared to risk some indulgence. Keep Titania tough, |
| 4 | that pictures are part of a tradition; finally, children may be prepared to make a judgement going beyond an |
| 5 | the biggest problems If you're up for a 'tart' part you must be prepared to present a flavour of the role as you see it. If |
| 6 | that you may face longish periods of unemployment and to be prepared to deal with this constructively. Isolation is one |
| 7 | just sit around waiting for the telephone to ring. Actors must be prepared to create their own work. Anywhere — on the |
| 8 | a forthcoming forum. 'Facing the Financiers'. Would you be prepared to contribute? If so, please write to Amanda |
| 9 | of divorce in a future united Ireland, indeed that they might be prepared to budge on the issue even now. But the |
| 10 | nearer the mark. I think that many of his readers would be prepared to bear witness to the sense that somewhere |

Figure 5: Semantic prosodies of "be prepared to" from the BNC

of the PM's ability to, before leaving office, bring "formal recognition for those brave men", the "Bevin Boys", young British men who were conscripted to work in the UK coal mines between 1943 and 1948. Second, it politely requests the PM to do so before his departure. Asking a question of capacity, when Gordon Banks assumes Tony Blair is able, is designed to reveal Blair's competence as a PM; it also allows Blair to express his desire to attend to the needs of and recognise the contribution of those who have contributed to the course of Britain as a country. In asking the question, Gordon Banks takes the opportunity, in his preface (initial statement), to do personal publicity (Proksch & Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996), portraying himself as someone who represents the interest of the Bevin Boys: "since

being elected to this House I have campaigned for formal recognition of the Bevin Boys ...". The PM accordingly congratulates him "on the campaign". This shows that when MPs are asking questions, they are not only putting the (Prime) Minister on the spot, but also projecting themselves as serving the interest of their constituents and the citizenry as a whole. This is politically prudent as the MP has "social ties" with the constituents and, as a representative, "belong[s] to the same social community" as the constituents (Manin, 1997, p.203). Given that Gordon Banks has engaged in a campaign for the recognition of the Bevin Boys, and he being a government MP, it would be highly surprising if he did not know that Tony Blair was going to announce a special commemorative badge later that day. This confirms the view that he was doing some publicity for himself by asking the question.

Questions of attitude display interesting features of parliamentary questions when they are constructed with forms of "be" (is, are, was, and were), as discussed in section 4.1.2.

**Be-operator yes/no interrogatives and person-targeting**

Person-targeted yes/no interrogatives are clearly demonstrated by the use of be-operator interrogatives. In person-targeted constructions, the (Prime) Ministers are usually made the requested carriers. For instance, out of 99 be-operator questions in the GMQs, 60 (60.61%) were constructed using "the Minister" (9, see Figure 6, line 3), "the hon. Minister" (13, lines 1 and 2), "he"/"she" (38, lines 5-11) as requested carriers.

| N | Concordance |
|---|---|
| 1 | . Mr. Agbesi: Mr. Speaker, my question is, as at today, is the hon. Minister aware that the roads in Middle |
| 2 | not comment on. Col. 1969, 7 Jul 10 But Mr Speaker, is the Hon Minister aware that the President promised |
| 3 | of tarring roads in every district capital; my question is, is the Minister supposed to tar all roads within the |
| 4 | Answer is, if there is no managerial problem here, is the Minister sure that the contractor has been paid, |
| 5 | august House to establish any unit within her Ministry? Is she required by law to come before this House to |
| 6 | was not answered. My question to the Hon Minister. Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon? |
| 7 | , 2008 commenced the process on 4th March 2008. Is he aware? Is he aware of it that this letter from the |
| 8 | establish police stations in the newly created district. Is he aware that some of the established, existing old |
| 9 | 424. Mr Speaker, my question to the Hon Minister is, is he aware that a bunch of the added staff of 283 are |
| 10 | is not working ever since it was moved to that place? Is he aware that it lacks accessories because the |
| 11 | , he did not get it and he was transferred there. So, is he aware that a lot of — [Interruptions.] Mr First |

Figure 6: Sample concordance lines of person targeted questions in GMQs

| N | Concordance |
|---|---|
| 1 | the Prime Minister support such an investigation, or is he afraid that there is something to hide? The Prime |
| 2 | the problems of global warming and climate change, is he convinced that, following the comprehensive |
| 3 | Is he proud of his legacy on the state of our children, or is he just not "bovvered"? The Prime Minister: I think |
| 4 | months, if not years, for their cases to be determined. Is the Prime Minister proud of the service that his |
| 5 | top—in the top five poorest regions in western Europe. Is the Prime Minister at all concerned, or is he, like |
| 6 | is to force four-year-olds to take exams in mental health. Is he proud of his legacy on the state of our children, or |
| 7 | , we see the threat, and the time for action is now." Is my right hon. Friend confident that he can persuade |
| 8 | sure that they do. Anne Snelgrove (South Swindon) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend able to use his influence in the |

Figure 7: Sample concordance lines of person targeted questions in UK PMQs

In the UK PMQs, 136 (about 65.38%) of the 208 relational process interrogatives had "the Prime Minister" (79, e.g. Figure 7, lines 4 and 5), "he" (45, lines 1-3), "my right hon. Friend" (8, lines 7 and 8), "the Government" (1), "we" (1), "people" (1) or "parents" (1) as requested carriers. The implication is that by means of person-targeted questions, MPs normally touch on the attitudes and personalities of (Prime) Ministers.

Let us examine in detail Example 3 from the GMQs.

Example 3: GH 2 Jun 09/Col. 95:

**[Qi] Mr. Yaw Maama Afful [NPP]:** Since the Hon Minister is telling us and she has agreed that the lagoon is polluted, yet she is not going to ban fishermen from fishing from it, is she telling us she will be willing to eat fish from that lagoon? [Interruptions.]

**Ms. Ayittey [NDC]:** Madam Speaker, we will still not consider banning it but we will intensify the public education. [Interruptions.]

**[Qii] Mr. Afful [NPP]:** Madam

Speaker, I think my question was not answered. My question to the Hon Minister. Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon? [Interruptions.]

**Ms. Ayittey [NDC]:** Madam Speaker, I reserve my comments — [Interruptions.]

Example 3 relates to Ms. Ayittey's willingness (desideration) to eat fish from the lagoon under reference. The question is both illocutionarily a challenge and an accusation. Mr. Afful questions the Minister's decision not to ban fishing in the polluted lagoon and raises doubts about the Minister's genuineness/sincerity. Mr. Afful implies that the Minister is being inconsiderate to the general public: if the Minister agrees that the lagoon has been polluted, then it is sensible that fishing in the lagoon is banned. To put the Minister on the spot, Mr. Afful asks her readiness to eat fish from the lagoon. Mr. Afful imputes irresponsibility on the part of the Minister. Notice that the question is in two parts: [Qi] is the main question and [Qii] a follow-up which comes as a result of the Minister evading [Qi]. Ms. Ayittey evades the surface meaning of the question ("yes" or "no") and responds to the inverted meaning of challenge and accusation by stating that they "will still not consider banning it" because they "will intensify public education". However, thinking that his question has not been answered, Mr. Afful, dropping the telling part, changes the question to a more coercive form: "Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon?" Even though question [Qi] raises mistrust about the Minister, its illocutionary force is mitigated by the interrogative structure, which is that the relational process of "willingness" is embedded in a verbal process of "telling". The verbal process of "telling" allows the Minister to give some explanation to what she has said earlier. But question [Qii] is direct and, therefore, illocutionarily more coercive; it directly puts the Minister on the spot. Realising the embarrassment in the question, she decides not to comment anymore. This is an indirect admission of guilt in her decision not to ban fishing in the lagoon because the Minister knows that she will not eat fish from the lagoon and that being the case she must ban others from fishing in it. The question succeeds in exposing the contradictions in the Minister's position not to ban fishing in the lagoon. This corroborates Harris' (1991, p.93) statement that "[e]vasiveness is most likely to emerge in response to questions which expose contradictions in a position".

The be-operator interrogatives create direct relationships between (Prime) Ministers and their attitudes, thereby heightening the illocutionary force of such interrogatives. Let us consider Example 4, an emotive/attitudinal question.

Example 4: UK 6 Jun 07/Col 252:

**Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con):** Fifteen per cent. of school-age children are obese, and under-age drinking has doubled. Yesterday, the Children's Society said that 43 per cent. of parents are scared to let their children go out with their friends. Schools have become exam factories, contributing to the one in 10 children suffering mental health problems, to which the Prime Minister's solution is to force four-year-olds to take exams in mental health. Is he proud of his legacy on the state of our children, or is he just not "bovvered"?

**The Prime Minister [Lab]:** I think that the hon. Gentleman is exaggerating the situation a trifle. Of course, there are pressures on children today: pressures through exams and through the type of things to which they have access a lot earlier than generations past. The majority of young people whom I meet are working hard and are extremely responsible, decent members of society who behave very well. There is a minority who either misbehave or are socially excluded and we need specific measures to help them. However, I do not think that the debate is helped by that type of hyperbole, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind my saying so.

Example 4 relates to the attitude of PM Tony Blair towards children's welfare. The question is emotionally loaded. It is an alternative question, with two parts representing opposite ends of a spectrum. It gives two impossible alternatives, that is, failure to deliver on children's welfare and not being "bovvered" about it, each of which mocks Blair. The use of "or is he just not 'bovvered'", especially, is humorous, ironic and mocking. "Bovvered" (a colloquial form of "bothered") is associated with aggression, violence, hooliganism and comedy. "Bovvered" was popularised by The Catherine Tate Show (2015), a BBC Two comedy sketch series that was first performed in 2004. In the show, Lauran Cooper, "an argumentative and idle teenage girl ... gets out of awkward situations by asking" repeatedly, "Am I bovvered?" Thus, "Am I bovvered?" has come to represent a generational expression of teenagers and their speaking style. Using "bovvered" to describe Blair is, therefore, an attempt to ridicule him, as it somehow aligns him with disaffected, troublemaking and rowdy street

gang youths and comic characters, who do not care about anything. The question cannot, therefore, be said to be neutral. Based on the statistical information provided in the preface ("Fifteen per cent. of school-age children ..., 43 per cent of parents ..." and "one in 10 children suffering mental health problems ..."), Tim Loughton infers that Tony Blair has failed to offer proper support for children's wellbeing. The implication is that a competent PM will not be "proud" of such a "legacy on the state of our children". Political leadership such as being a PM concerns caring attitudes towards the governed. If a leader has a positive attitude towards the citizenry, the better it is for his/her political success. Thus, when MPs ask questions of attitude, it is an attempt to portray to the citizenry their (Prime) Ministers' attitudes, opinions and feelings towards the citizenry. Again, the statistical information makes it difficult for Tony Blair to respond either as "yes" or "no" to the question. If he says "Yes, I am proud of my legacy", he would appear to be insensitive to the plight of children; and saying "no" could also imply that he has failed as a PM. Each of these responses will be damaging. For Wilson (1990, p.137) the design of political questions makes it difficult for politicians to answer them in that questions are rarely straightforward, but are, rather frequently prefaced by a variety of statements (often controversial). If politicians attend to the propositions contained in these pre/post statements they may be seen as trying to avoid the question. On the other hand, if politicians fail to attend to such propositions they may be seen as accepting certain controversial claims as matters of fact.

Such is the paradox facing (Prime) Ministers during parliamentary questions. No wonder, in the above question, Blair admits that "there are pressures on children today". This admission makes Blair appear a responsible, sincere leader who has empathy for children. Tony Blair's statement that "the hon. Gentleman is exaggerating the situation a trifle" is a reproach, which is an attempt to counter the face-threat in Tim Loughton's question (see Bull & Wells, 2012).

It is noteworthy that the majority of the be-operator interrogatives in the UK PMQs form part of multipart interrogatives as in Example 5. In such cases, the ¬be-operator interrogatives seek to ask about the PMs' knowledge or awareness (cognition) of a situation or their attitudes towards that situation, and then the other interrogative is used to ask what the PMs are going to do about such situations.

Example 5: UK 3 Jun 09/Col 274:

**Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) (Con):** [Qi] *Is the Prime Minister aware that his departing Home Secretary leaves a legacy of 342,000 cases of domestic violence in this country every year?* [Qii] May I ask him to ensure that he re-examines the effectiveness of policies in that area, because of the cost in human misery on the victims and the cost to our caring services?

**The Prime Minister [Lab]:** I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be fair and acknowledge that the Home Secretary has also led the way on tougher sentences on domestic violence, including in domestic violence courts. This Government, led by the Leader of the House as well as the Home Secretary, have a record in taking on domestic violence by also funding centres for women throughout the rest of the country. That is vital public expenditure, and we believe that it is important for the health of this country. We will continue to support that measure to help women in our country.

Example 5 [Qi] asks whether the PM is "aware that his departing Home Secretary leaves a legacy of 342,000 cases of domestic violence in this country every year" and [Qii] implores the PM to re-examine the situation regarding his "policies in that area". [Qi] is an assertion that seeks to establish a condition for Mr Jack to request the PM to take action. Establishing the PM's awareness of the situation is a kind of information control (Gibbons, 2003, p.103), which is a coercive measure to put pressure on the PM to act. Ascertaining awareness appears to be a key feature in the discourses of the two parliaments, as "aware" is the most frequent word among the words in the person-targeted questions in both parliaments. For instance, if the PM denies knowledge of the situation, he would be deemed to be not in control of affairs as a PM, and if he answers "yes", he is admitting to failure. Consequently, the PM defends the Home Secretary while accusing Mr Jack of being unfair to the Home Secretary. He goes ahead to state the record of his Government in fighting domestic violence. He defends his Government's record because Mr Jack attacks the Government. Mr Jack's first question is ironic, as it creates a semantic conflict and opposition between "legacy" and "342,000 cases of domestic violence in this country every year". The word "legacy" has a semantic feature and a positive value of wealth, wherewithal, money, a bequest or a gift. So, to say that the Home Secretary's legacy is "342,000 cases

of domestic violence ... every year" is being ironic and imputative because this is a truly unwanted gift in anybody's imagination.

However, Example 6 from the GMQs is not part of a multipart question. The question asks the Minister's awareness of "the said market" being initiated by "the traditional chiefs".

Example 6: GH 13 Jul 05/Col. 1873/4:

**Mr. Kyeremeh [NDC]:** Mr. Speaker, *is the hon. Minister aware that the said market was started by the traditional chiefs and as a result they are demanding some percentage of the market proceeds to initiate projects of their choice for the well-being of the people?*

**Mr. Bintin [NDC]:** Mr. Speaker, that is so and we are in consultation with them. We are talking with them to get the issue resolved.

This is a yes/no interrogative but it does not just demand a "yes" or "no" as a response; such a response would be pragmatically inappropriate. It performs two functions: one, a surface realisation, seeks a(n) (dis)affirmation of the Minister's awareness of the situation and the other, an inverted/indirect realisation, is a request for action (see Grosz & Sidner 1986:178). Mr. Kyeremeh inferentially requests Mr. Bintin to say what he, as a Minister, is doing about the traditional chiefs' demand for "some percentage of the market proceeds". In the context of parliamentary questions where MPs ask questions either for information or to push for action (Harris, 2001; Proksch & Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996), it would be strange to assume that Mr. Kyeremeh only wants to know if the Minister is aware or not aware of the situation. Accordingly, the Minister does not only confirm his knowledge of the situation but also responds to the inverted realisation by telling the House what is being done, that is, they are in "consultation with them".

So far, we have observed person-targeted yes/no interrogatives. As demonstrated in Examples 1 to 6 and Figures 2 to 7, we have indicated that the person-targeted relational process interrogatives describe (Prime) Ministers as carriers of certain qualities or values relating to their positions, and question or praise their attitudes and commitment towards their duties as (Prime) Ministers. The categories of attributes expressed in the questions include cognition/probability, emotion/attribute and desideration/obligation. The next section examines idea-targeted relational process yes/no interrogatives.

## Idea-targeted questions

The majority of the idea-targeted questions in both parliaments were identifying clauses, with the copular being complemented by noun phrases/clauses. This is understandable because nouns and nominals are idea-denoting structures. In the GMQs (see Table 4), 38 (82.61%) out of the 46 questions contained identifying complements, while eight (8 (17.39%)) were attributive complements. Also, 39 of the questions involved the use of the be-operator, one (1) involved will-operator (will that amount be enough …?). There were six (6) do-operator constructions involving the verb "mean", all of which connote "symbolization" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.235). All the idea-targeted questions in the PMQs were identifying clauses (see Table 4), eighteen (18 (25%)) of which perform a "demonstration" function (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:235). These eighteen verbs were intensive verbs; they were verbs of proving (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.648). This implies that the UK MPs asked questions that sought evidence of issues more than their Ghanaian counterparts. The high concentration of identifying clauses in the idea-targeted questions supports Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004, p.238) view that "interpreting evidence" is one of the uses of identifying clauses.

Table 4: Categories and their frequencies in the GMQs and PMQs

| Category | GMQs | | UK PMQs | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Identifying** | | | | |
| | Is + identifying | 32 | Is (not) + identifying | 54 |
| | (*see Figure 8)* | | *(see Figure 9 )* | |
| | Does + identifying | 6 | Does + identifying | 18 |
| | ***Symbolization*** | | ***Demonstration function*** | |
| | Mean | | Show | 7 |
| | | **38 (82.61%)** | Sound | 4 |
| | | | Represent | 2 |
| **Attribute** | | | Demonstrate | 2 |
| | ***Cognition/probability*** | | Illustrate | 1 |
| | Is it + Possible | 4 | Prove | 1 |
| | Fair | 2 | Go to | 1 |
| | Advisable | 1 | | |
| | Will (be) + enough | 1 **8 (17.39%)** | | |
| **Total** | | **46** | | *72* |

Figures 8 and 9 represent examples of the "is"-constructed interrogatives that are identifying clauses. We have not provided examples of these types of clauses in Table 4 for lack of space and the difficulty in classifying them due to the vastness of items functioning as identifying complements. Thus, concordance lines are used to exemplify them. In Figure 8, "is it a one-time supply to an individual" (line 2) has "is" as the process, "it" as the value/identified, and "a one-time supply to an individual" as the token/identifier (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.215, 235).

MPs use idea-targeted questions to ask about specific policies, practices and actions of the (Prime) Ministers, governments or Ministries. Such interrogatives use as requested carriers nominal groups or reference items such as: "it" (see Figure 8, lines 1-9; Figure 9, lines 1, 3-5), "that…" (Figure 8, lines 11, 13; Figure 9, lines 12-13), "this…" (Figure 9, line 2), "the idea…" (Figure 9, line 6).

| N | Concordance | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | whether we should be discussing it the way we are doing it here | Is it not sub judice? | Madam Speaker: Well, I have been watching the |
| 2 | from the Hon Minister how often a child would receive a uniform. | Is it a one-time supply to an individual? | Mr Tettey-Enyo: Mr Speaker, |
| 3 | out with "the following", but there are no time lines. Is it six months? | Is it a year? It looks very vague. | So I would like the Minister to give |
| 4 | Col. 1830, 5 Jul 10 of lands for use by the Ghana Armed Forces? | Is it a practice that settlements, that is, villages are acquired? | Lt. Gen. |
| 5 | which are being acquired. Madam Speaker, I want to know from him, | is it a practice in the acquisition | Col. 1830, 5 Jul 10 of lands for use by |
| 6 | . Mahama: Mr. Speaker, this incident happened in 2002; we are in 2005. | Is it the case that three years after the incident, | the advice of the |
| 7 | of the uncompleted projects, how many are left now uncompleted? | Is it that it is only Juapong Health Centre which was discriminated | |
| 8 | Buah: Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Hon Deputy Minister: | is it not a fact that the NPA has already taken some punitive action | |
| 9 | says it will come out with "the following", but there are no time lines. | Is it six months? | s it a year? It looks very vague. So I would like the |
| 10 | Messrs Abudulai Alhassan Company Limited on the 30th of June 2005. | Is the sum involved ¢3.4 million or ¢3.4 billion? | Dr. Anane: Mr. Speaker |
| 11 | or that they were corrupted to the extent that they inserted these — | is that what you are pointing out to us? | I would want an answer. I |
| 12 | refered to. Q118. Mr. H. Iddrisu: Mr. Speaker, this is my final question. | Is it a firm assurance that the Minister is giving this House | that |
| 13 | Deputy Speaker: On behalf of the Committee. Mr Owusu-Agyemang: | Is that the right thing to do? | Mr First Deputy Speaker: Hon Member, it |

Figure 8: Sample concordance lines of idea-targeted questions in the GMQs

| N | Concordance | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2008 : Column 1308 May I ask the Prime Minister what his priority is? | Is it to put bioethanol in a Range Rover's fuel tank | or to put |
| 2 | advice being the exclusive preserve of the rich and the privileged | Is this by design or accident? | The Prime Minister: First, everyone |
| 3 | be spending on public services. The issue for the country is this: | is it public services for the many | or inheritance tax cuts for the |
| 4 | resources. The Conservative party really has to make up its mind: | is it going to deny families and businesses real help in difficult | |
| 5 | patients. What is the Prime Minister doing about that situation, or | is it case of going to jail if you want dental treatment? | The Prime |
| 6 | will support it. But I asked the Prime Minister a specific question: | is the idea of offenders in orange uniforms Government policy | or |
| 7 | people face economic uncertainty and high youth unemployment? | Is youth unemployment a price worth paying? | The Prime Minister: It |
| 8 | will be raised in the course of the G8. Sir Menzies Campbell: | Is it not time not only for tougher sanctions against the | |
| 9 | it will be lower in this country over each of the next five years? | Is it not the case that the actions of this Government prepared | |
| 10 | waiting for their education maintenance allowances? However, | is it not right that the Learning and Skills Council has today | |
| 11 | frank about the past, no one will believe him about the future? | Is that not one of the reasons why it is so difficult to get | |
| 12 | families claiming housing benefit in the Stockton borough. | Is that not further proof that the jobs that the Prime Minister | |
| 13 | say and he must be heard. 4 Sep 2013 : Column 315 John Mann: | Is it not the case that real wages have fallen by nearly £1,500 a | |
| 14 | announced a delay in the UK climate change review programme. | Is it not the case that Britain is becoming the dirty man of | |

Figure 9: Sample concordance lines of idea-targeted questions in the UK PMQs

As noted earlier in Table 1, there were 39 (39.39%) idea-targeted yes/no interrogatives in the GMQs, while there were 58 (47%) instances of them in the UK PMQs. Idea-targeted questions, to some extent, depersonalise issues, as illustrated in Example 7 below. In this question, "is it a practice" shows a focus on the "practice" of acquiring land by the Ghana Armed Forces. Even though Mr Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu indicates some reservation about the "practice", he does not target the personality of the Minister, Lt. Gen. Smith. The question seeks a confirmation from the Minister if indeed "settlements are ... acquired" for use by the Ghana Armed Forces.

Example 7: GH 5 Jul 10/Col. 1829/30:

**Mr Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu [NPP]:** Madam Speaker, the parcels of land are acquired for use by the Ghana Armed Forces. In the second paragraph of the Hon Minister's Answer, he refers to sections within the Nkaakom village which have been acquired or which are being acquired. Madam Speaker, I want to know from him, is it a practice in the acquisition of lands for use by the Ghana Armed Forces? Is it a practice that settlements, that is, villages are acquired?

**Lt. Gen. Smith (retd.) [NPP]:** Madam Speaker, I think before the Ghana Armed Forces takes any steps to acquire a piece of land, we make sure that there are no settlements on the land. At the time we started the process to acquire the piece of land, there were no settlements in the area. As I said in my statement, there have been encroachers; so there has been encroachment since we started the process to acquire the piece of land.

Depersonalising the question reduces interactional confrontation and conflict. It does not necessarily mean that idea-targeted questions are always non-confrontational. To attack a policy or practice may entail or imply an attack on the person who instituted the policy or practice. Gibbons (2003, p.112) acknowledges that the boundary between "person targeted" and "idea targeted" questions can be fuzzy. For instance, contextualization cues, "any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions" (Gumperz, 1982, p.131) can make idea-targeted questions even more confrontational than person-targeted ones. Example 8 illustrates this.

Example 8: GH 14 Jul 05/Col. 1903/4:

**Mr. Mahama [NDC]:** Mr. Speaker, I will just make a point. Mr. Speaker, Question time for Ministers is a very serious exercise and when we ask Questions in this House, we require detailed Answers... — [Interruption.] ... so that this House carries out its mandate to the people of this country. Mr. Speaker — [Interruption.] ... Mr. Speaker, this incident happened in 2002; we are in 2005. *Is it the case that three years after the incident, the advice of the Attorney-General has not yet been procured in order that action can be taken on this matter?*

**Papa Owusu-Ankomah [NPP]:** Mr. Speaker, I also with due diligence crave your indulgence to say that indeed as Ministers, we take this House extremely serious and certainly, for me who has occupied the Majority Leader's seat, I take this House seriously; and we endeavour to do our best. Unfortunately, we cannot anticipate all details and because we seek to be fair and candid with this House, we try as much as possible to be sure of our Answers.

Even though Mr. Mahama's question focuses on the "incident" that happened, the preface (initial statement) to the question makes it abrasive. To say that "Question time for Ministers is a very serious exercise" and, therefore, Ministers should give required details when demanded implies that the Minister, Papa Owusu-Ankomah, is not serious about Minister's questions. This raises a credibility issue, and, therefore, it is no wonder that Papa Owusu-Ankomah rebuts and defends Ministers, "we take this House extremely serious[ly] ..." Example 9 from the UK data has a similar feature.

Example 9: UK 23 Apr 08/Col. 1307/8:

**Mr. Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con):** The first stage of the renewable transport fuel scheme came into operation last week. May I ask the Prime Minister what his priority is? *Is it to put bioethanol in a Range Rover's fuel tank or to put bread in an African's stomach?*

**The Prime Minister [Lab]:** We had a seminar on food yesterday in Downing street, with all the different organisations that are involved, and I think there is a general recognition that the policy on bioethanol has got to be reviewed ... But there is also a determination that we do more to increase the supply of food in the world. ... That is why we discussed yesterday emergency measures that could both increase food supply in the short term and avoid famine ... in every country in the world...

This is an idea-targeted question; it concerns what the PM's "priority is". However, the co-text of the question makes it inferable that Mr. Goodwill thinks the PM has got his priorities wrong. Thus, even though the question is primarily on "bioethanol" and food security, it ironically questions the PM's credibility and commitment to fighting hunger in Africa. Therefore, the question is also person targeted – which, in fact, has a stronger interactional effect than the idea targeting. Note that, being an alternative question, the question employs grammatical parallelism for rhetorical emphasis. It gives two opposite points, one undesirable and the other desirable. Both points concern consumption, but while the former is an aspirational consumption, the latter is consumption for human survival. Thus,

Mr. Goodwill controls the information to coerce (Gibbons, 2003) the PM to choose the desirable option, "to put bread in an African's stomach". By giving a choice between a(n) undesirable and desirable choices, Mr. Goodwill aligns himself with the desirable choice, thereby casting himself into a positive light. Consequently, the PM is forced to tell the House the measures he has taken to respond to food insecurity, while acknowledging that "the policy on bioethanol has got to be reviewed". He attempts to debunk the idea that he has got his priorities wrong by stating the measures he has taken so far on food security. The aforesaid shows that while we can identify person- and idea-targeted questions as different, the boundary between them in terms of their pragmatic focus can be blurring and difficult to pinpoint.

## Conclusion

This paper sought to investigate the focus of relational process yes/no interrogatives in UK Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) and Ghanaian Minister's Questions (GMQs). The paper finds that MPs use relational process yes/no interrogatives to question (Prime) Ministers' personalities and attitudes towards their responsibilities as well as inquire about specific policies, practices and actions. The questions, thus, can be either person or idea targeted, which attempt to question, undermine or enhance the (Prime) Ministers' image and attitudes towards their responsibilities. The questions in the two parliaments are more similar than different in orientation, which suggests that some aspects of their parliamentary practices are related. The differences depend on the frequency and density of the categories identified in the two datasets. For example, in both parliaments, there are more person-targeted relational process yes/no interrogatives than idea-targeted ones. However, the PMQs are more person targeted than the GMQs. Among the person-targeted questions, three classes of attributes are identified, namely, cognition/probability, emotion/attitude and desideration/obligation. Cognition/probability is the most frequent in both datasets. This implies that the majority of the person-targeted questions are knowledge-seeking. In other words, they ask about (Prime) Ministers' awareness of various policies, situations and events, including the actions being undertaken to deal with them. Again, the UK dataset contains more emotional/attitudinal categories than the Ghanaian dataset. The assumption is that the UK MPs appear to be more emotional in their questions than their Ghanaian counterparts. Whereas all the idea-targeted questions in the PMQs are all identifying clauses, there are 82.61% identifying and 17.39% attributive clauses in the GMQs. Identifying clauses are evidence-seeking and evidence-interpreting clauses. Thus, there are more evidence-seeking questions in the PMQs compared to the GMQs. Through the use of verbs of demonstration and proving, the UK MPs often appear seeking proof of policies, issues, actions, etc., which seems to be a more compelling way of demanding accountability.

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