



Liberalisation or Liberation?: Economic Reform, Spatial Poverty, and the Irony of Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region

A paper prepared for the international workshop "Understanding and addressing spatial poverty traps: an international workshop" 29 March 2007, Spier Estate, Stellenbosch, South Africa. Hosted by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre and the Overseas Development Institute¹.

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Introduction: Interrogating Conflict and Poverty.

*If the remaining groups regard their position relatively, they may well argue that the spectacle of such improvements elsewhere is the detriment to their satisfaction. This is not a niggling point: a relative improvement in the improvement of certain groups pari passu with an absolute improvement in the position of the rest of the community has often been a feature of economic history, and we know that this has not been regarded by all as ethically or politically desirable.*²

Are economic improvement and poverty reduction, growing equality, and enhanced social service provision mechanisms or drivers of violent conflict? In the current intellectual climate such a question appears analogous to asking if the earth is flat.

In the 1990s, the region of sub-Saharan Africa suffered from a well-documented confluence of sharp economic contraction and an increase in the incidence of violent internal conflict.³ In that decade sub-Saharan Africa (S.S.A.) was the only region that did not see a decrease in the incidence of civil war; by the end of the decade more people were being killed by conflicts there than in the rest of the world put together.⁴ Since the millennium, the incidence of violent conflict has decreased overall in Africa, but this positive trend cannot be assured of continuing. The CIDCM 2005 Peace and Conflict ledger identifies 31 of 161 countries that are at the greatest risk of mismanaging or neglecting emerging societal crises and hence, risk serious violence or government instability. Of these, 17, or more than half, are in S.S.A.⁵

Running in tandem with this well documented vulnerability has been an abiding economic crisis. Immediately preceding the genocidal convulsion in the Great Lakes, economic growth rates were especially anaemic.

¹ With thanks to the workshop sponsors: Chronic Poverty Research Centre, Overseas Development Institute, Trocaire, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

² Robbins, L. L. (1981). *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*. London and Basingstoke, Macmillan.

³ World Bank (2000). *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century*. Washington D.C., The World Bank; Marshall, M. and T. R. Gurr (2005). *Peace and Conflict*. College park, Centre for International Development And Conflict Management.

⁴ "Warfare on the Decline." *African Business*, Jan 2006, p.25.

⁵ Marshall, M. and T. R. Gurr (2005). *Peace and Conflict 2005: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self Determination Movements and Democracy*. College park, Centre for International Development and Conflict Management, p.2.

Thus, between 1990 and 1994, African economies declined at an average rate of 1.8 percent per annum, a rate of growth that was 6.2 percent below the average for all developing countries.⁶ Despite a recent aggregate improvement, in the last decade for which data is available, S.S.A.'s per capita growth rate of GDP per annum remained negative in 13 cases, and lower than 1% in 9 additional cases.⁷ The precise implications of this economic stagnation for household income and consumption is unclear, but most likely both the proportion and the absolute numbers in poverty increased in this period.⁸ The World Bank figures which are considered by some scholars to be an underestimate indicate that from 1990-2000 the percentage of the sub-Saharan population living in absolute poverty (less than 1 dollar per day) increased by 2%. These aggregate trends conceal the extent to which poverty has worsened in regions with poor infrastructure, weak market linkages, and stochastic vulnerabilities such as sharp rainfall variations.⁹

The academic correlate of this dual crisis of violence and growing poverty has been the emergence of a growth industry in the 'political economy' of conflict, in which violent political mobilisation is believed to be shaped by economic change, income and asset distribution, and shifting political and economic opportunity structures.

Given the influence of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in sub-Saharan Africa, it was inevitable that questions would emerge regarding the role that policies of economic reform, stabilisation, and liberalisation play in contributing to or containing violence. In this regard, a literature has grown rapidly on two fronts: First, critics of globalisation believe internal violence to be a fertile ground for Bank and Fund bashing and have published extensively on the subject. Secondly, the International Financial Institutions' increasing engagement with conflict affected countries, and their corresponding need to develop operational and policy responses, has driven their own aggressive research agenda.¹⁰ Within this corpus of work, the most obvious distinction concerns those arguments that IFI sponsored economic liberalisation programmes are actual causes of internal violence on the one hand,¹¹ and those arguments, stemming principally but not exclusively from the IFIs themselves, that liberal pro-market reforms are not implicated, and

⁶ Collier, P. and Gunning, J. W. (1999). "Explaining African Economic Performance." *Journal of Economic Literature*, XXXVII ((March 1999)), 64-1111.

⁷ Author's calculations based on Data from World Bank *Africa Database 2005*.

⁸ Demery, L. and Walton, M. (2000). "Are Poverty and Social Goals for The 21st Century Attainable?" *Waging the Global War on Poverty: Strategies and Case Studies*, R. Halvorson-Quevedo and H. Schneider, eds., OECD, Paris. P.61. For a useful overview of the debate on the incidence of poverty in S.S.A. see Kaplinsky, R. (2005), *Globalization, Poverty and Inequality*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

⁹ Christiansen, L., L. Demery, et al. (2003). "Reforms, Remoteness and Risk in Africa: Understanding Inequality and Poverty in the 1990s." *World Institute For Development Research Discussion Papers 70*.

¹⁰ For background see the World Bank (2004). *The Role of the World Bank in Conflict and Development: An Evolving Agenda*. Washington D.C., Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, Social Development Department, Environmentally Socially Sustainable Development Network, The World Bank.

¹¹ For a tiny sample see Pugh, M. and N. Cooper (2004). *War Economies in A Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation*. Boulder and London, Lynne Rienner; Cramer, C. and J. Weeks (2002). Macroeconomic Stabilization and Structural Adjustment. *The Prevention of Humantarian Emergencies*. E. Nafziger and R. Varynen. Basingstoke, Macmillan; Sandbrook, R. (2005). "Africa's Great Transformation?" *Journal of Development Studies* 41(6); Paris, R. (2004). *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Chossudovsky, M. (1997). *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms*. London and New Jersey, Zed Press; Adedeji, A. (1999). *Comprehending African Conflicts. Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Government*. A. Adedeji. London and New York, Zed Press. Esman, M. J. and R. Herring, eds. (2001). *Carrots, Sticks, and Ethnic Conflict*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press; Adekanye, J. B. (1995). "Structural Adjustment, Democratization and Rising Ethnic Tension in Africa." *Development and Change* 26: 355-374.

are essential to reduce the risk and incidence of violence.¹² For observers concerned with policy relevant information, this range of contradictory value judgments is obviously frustrating. This paper, however, takes issue with the commonalities that run through these three approaches rather than their dissimilarities and divergences.

Virtually all contemporary approaches to this subject emphasise economic contraction, and poverty as a source of conflict and civil war.¹³ One authoritative review of the cross national statistical literature, stated that low levels of per capita income, typically understood as a proxy for poverty, significantly increase the risk of civil war and “this is the most robust empirical finding in the literature.”¹⁴ As a result of these findings many political economists focus exclusively on the demand reducing elements of reform as a possible conflict mechanism. In Morrison’s influential words, this is because, unlike demand reducing stabilisations, “[adjustment] measures never have a large negative social impact and there is no risk of increasing poverty.”¹⁵ The corollary of this finding among scholars and policy makers is the belief that policies that promote economic growth are conflict inhibiting. Even for political economists sensitive to the risks posed by ‘adjustment’ proper, the principal policy relevant advice encourages donors to be more lenient with demand reducing stabilisation conditionalities, and to emphasise policies that will restore economic growth.

Needless to say, poverty is rarely understood to be the only contributing factor to conflict. Other disutilities that are held to generate conflict are growths in inter-regional and intra-regional economic and political inequality.¹⁶ These inequalities can be associated with IFI sponsored reforms, as exchange rate and price liberalisation foster a pattern of development that favours regions of export crop or mineral production at the expense of areas that produce non-tradable commodities. State activities can exacerbate this linkage. Collier observes that where internal rates of return, rather than geographical spread and distribution of benefits drives public investment programs, public expenditure is also likely to focus on areas where private economic activity is reviving most rapidly.¹⁷ This implies that disparities are likely to grow between regions characterised by remoteness, the limited production of tradables, and weak market integration.

This is thought to be a more important dynamic of conflict where regions overlap with ethnicity or tribe. Market driven economic inequality is also seen to be incendiary where affluent market

¹² Obidegwu, C. (2004). "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa: The Challenge of Socio-Economic Recovery and Development." *Africa Region Working Paper Series (73)*; Collier, P. et al. (2003). *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. Washington D.C., The World Bank.

¹³ It is certainly not my intention to suggest that this is the only linkage drawn between economic reform or liberalisation in the literature. For an outline of the multiple causal arguments see Oelbaum, J. (2004), "Ethnicity Adjusted? Elections, Economic Reform and Tribalism in Ghana's Fourth Republic", *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 42(2).

¹⁴ Doyle, M. W. and N. Sambanis (2006). *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

¹⁵ Morrison, C. (2000). Stabilization Programmes, Social Costs, Violence, and Humanitarian Emergencies. *War, Hunger and Displacement: The Origins of Humanitarian Emergencies*. E. W. Nafziger, F. Stewart and R. Varynen. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 1. p. 228; Note stabilisation policies associated with the IMF typically run in tandem with "structural adjustment" or development policy lending, and are demand reducing in that they always place ceilings on credit creation and fiscal deficits.

¹⁶ This issue is strongly emphasised in the most recent World Development Report World Bank (2006). *Equity and Development: World Development Report 2006*. Washington D.C., The World Bank. Nafziger and Auvinen also find a strong correlation between inequality and conflict which contradicts the dominant World Bank Correlates of War Framework. See Nafziger, E. W. and J. Auvinen (2003). *Economic Development, Inequality and War*. Humanitarian Emergencies in Developing Countries, Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁷ Collier et al "Breaking the Conflict trap" p. 166

dominant minorities (e.g. the Chinese in southeast Asia, or Lebanese or Syrians in S.S.A.) are, or are perceived to be, the beneficiaries of reform at the expense of 'indigenous' majorities. Similarly, reforms that reduce social service provision through cut backs or the introduction of cost recovery mechanisms are said to generate conflict, as are policies that distribute these services unequally between groups.¹⁸ But what if improvements along these axes are also conflict generating mechanisms? Given the economic cost of conflicts would that not mean that traps are permanent? This paper does not answer the second question. However, it does point out some of the political complexities associated with market based routes out of poverty in less favoured areas and in politically plural societies.

Section 2: The Argument

2.1 The Argument Outlined

It should be established at the outset that I do not wish to quibble with the claim that there is a general relationship between economic stagnation and conflict. That being said, there are deficiencies in analyses that depend on assumptions of unit homogeneity, or the belief that all conflicts, countries, and ethnic systems work in the same way. It is also critical to distinguish between high per capita GDP (the outcome of growth) and the social tensions associated with growth itself. I argue that in contradistinction to the general claims in the literature, very undesirable events - in this instance ethnic or tribal conflict - also happen, at least in part, as a result of normally desirable processes - economic growth, increasing economic opportunities, growing economic equality, enhanced social service provision, and linkage improvements between marginal and more dynamic economic regions. In sum, all of the supposedly virtuous benefits that one associates with the nebulous category of 'development' can also generate war.¹⁹

Informed scholars are aware that violence can occur in the context of growth, which for example occurred during the early post-colonial history of Africa, where "communal contenders" competed for state power in new and rapidly expanding state apparatus.²⁰ The possibility that an increase in value of state assets under economic recovery could contribute to conflict was acknowledged in early specifications of the Collier-Hoeffler model of civil war risk.

This study, however, goes much further than these observations. I argue that under certain conditions - specifically in **ranked** ethnic systems - there can be a powerful, non-random, and systematic relationship between liberal economic growth and conflict, and I argue that this dynamic played out in Ghana's North. The claim that this link is systematic has important implications. It implies that the probability of conflict under conditions of liberal economic growth is underestimated by the existing 'economics of conflict' models, and that we will have to think much harder about the economic and institutional reforms necessary to make parts of Africa, particularly less favoured and weakly integrated regions safe for liberal economic growth.

2.2 Ranked Ethnic Systems

Ranked ethnic systems, as identified by Horowitz, imply stratified group relations among ethnic categories comprising a single society. The relative rank and worth of these groups is

¹⁸ Michailof, S., S. M. Kostner, et al. (2002). "Post-Conflict Recovery in Africa: An Agenda for the Africa Region." *World Bank Africa Region Working Papers* 30.

¹⁹ I recognise of course that this is redolent of early criticisms of modernisation theory.

²⁰ Scarritt, J. (1993). *Communal Conflict and Contention for Power in Africa, South of the Sahara. Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*. T. R. Gurr ed. Washington D.C, U.S. Institute of Peace Press.

determined ascriptively and is established by institutional arrangements, prescriptions, and taboos, even as there is some permeability to the boundaries between these groups. Following Weber, Horowitz notes that "in ranked systems, the unequal distribution of worth between superiors and subordinates is acknowledged and reinforced by an elaborate set of behavioural prescriptions and prohibitions."²¹ The best known historical ranked ethnic systems in Africa are, of course, those obtaining in Rwanda and Burundi. They also exist elsewhere in the Great Lakes e.g. Tutsi and Babembe in Eastern Zaire. Other ranked systems exist in Oromia, Ethiopia²² and Zanzibar.²³

Attention to Rwanda has overshadowed these other cases, and here too a voluminous literature has implicated IFI sponsored reforms in the genocide.²⁴ But as with the general literature, these writers identify the hardship and social costs of adjustment as a linkage mechanism rather than economic improvement.²⁵ To the extent that the positive egalitarian aspects of donor sponsored liberalism have been linked to the Great Lakes crisis, the transmission mechanism has been liberal democratisation. Lemarchand's analysis of Burundi and Rwanda, is illuminating:²⁶

The threats posed to the state in both instances are inseparable from the introduction of the vote, and more generally from the ethos of democracy. The collapse of their state systems can best be seen as the ineluctable outcome of a head on collision between the "premise of inequality" inherent in their traditional value orientation and the egalitarian message of liberal democracy.

But while contemporary political economy analyses have identified this *political* linkage, the harsh economic downturn of Rwanda, questionable assumptions about the economic roots of violence, and the paucity of successful cases of economic reform have distracted us from discovering a parallel *economic* linkage elsewhere. Here I attempt to rectify this gap.

Ranked systems can withstand some 'dissonance' or mismatch between the economic status of groups and that of individual members. As Horowitz observes, "carried far enough, either of these dissonant conditions can prove destabilising to a ranked system: inferior members of a superordinate group threaten the myth of its superiority, and the growth of an elite among a subordinate group sooner or later creates aspirations for mobility and recognitions incompatible with strictly ascriptive hierarchy."²⁷ Given the high economic, political and military and psycho-social stakes involved in ranked systems considerable violence will usually accompany attempts to renegotiate the social order, and the counter efforts to contain such a transformation. In sum,

²¹ Horowitz, D. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California press.

²² See Keller, E. (2005). Making and Remaking State and Nation in Ethiopia. *borders, nationalism and the African State*. R. Laremont ed. Boulder, Lynne Rienner.

²³ Newbury, C. (1983). "Colonialism, Ethnicity and Rural Political Protest: Rwanda and Zanzibar in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* (Apr 1983).

²⁴ Pottier, J. (2002). *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth_Century*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. P. 33; Mann, M. (2005). *The_Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p. 440; Prunier, G. (1995). *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. New York, Columbia University Press. pp159/160; Andersen, R. (2000). "How multilateral development assistance triggered the ethnic conflict in Rwanda." *Third World Quarterly* 21(3).

²⁵ It bears mentioning that the most adequately researched and informed analysis finds economic reforms largely irrelevant to the conflict. See Uvin, P. (1998). *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*. Hartford, Kumarian Press.

²⁶ Lemarchand, R. (1997) "Patterns of State Collapse and Reconstruction in Central Africa: Reflections on The Crisis in The Great Lakes." Paper Prepared for the XVIIth World Congress of the International Political Science Association.

²⁷ Horowitz *Ethnic Groups*. p. 26

in a ranked system predicated on inequality, even a Pareto optimal change in welfare²⁸ can generate conflict.

2.3 Introducing the Case

I illustrate this relationship using the case of the so-called 'Guinea Fowl War' in Northern Ghana. This war broke out in February of 1994 in Ghana's Northern region, and involved the royal Nanumba, Dagomba, and Gonja tribes on one side, and the acephalous 'minority' Konkomba on the other. The grievances upon which this conflict were based are long standing. Although I concentrate on this particular episode, it is best understood as merely the most recent, and most deadly, manifestation of a series of clashes between the cephalous and acephalous tribes of Ghana's North. Prior to the Guinea Fowl War violent conflicts occurred between the Mossi and Konkomba in 1993; the Konkomba, Nawuri, Basare, Nchumuru and Gonja in 1992; the Nawuri and Gonja in 1991; the Konkomba and Nanumba in 1981; and the Gonja and Vagalla in 1980.

The 1994 conflict received its name because the triggering incident involved a violent confrontation between individuals competing over the purchase of a guinea fowl in the village of Nakpayili, roughly equidistant from Wulensi and Bimbilla, which is the district capital of Nanumba (see appendix figure I for location), and simultaneously the capital of the traditional *naam* or kingdom of Nanumba.²⁹

I argue that under Ghana's economic reforms, increasing economic opportunities for those at the bottom of the political hierarchy in Ghana's North sharpened the structural misfit between a chieftaincy based political structure constructed on a "premise of inequality," and the rising and dis-equilibrating wealth of subordinate acephalous tribes. These tribes, particularly Konkomba, were able to benefit from the growing market economy and increasing national market integration associated with economic reform in the period preceding the war.

I should state at the outset that I do not believe that reform based growth is the principal cause of the conflicts between chiefly and acephalous groups. That would be an implausible assumption given that it was but one in a series of conflicts, many of which occurred under conditions of economic contraction. I argue that it was a contributing, but almost certainly non-decisive, factor in what was the most violent political episode in Ghana's history.

The argument is based on field research carried out in the Bimbilla district of Ghana's Northern region in 1997, and additional research in Accra undertaken in December of 2000, as well as many years of research on southern Ghana. Fortuitously, my understanding of the conflict has been further enhanced by the growing interest in this conflict among scholars who have recently generated a treasure trove of quality works.³⁰

²⁸ One where a subordinate group becomes materially better off, without altering the absolute welfare of a superordinate group.

²⁹ "Guinea Fowl Price Caused War Up North" *Ghanaian Chronicle* Feb 10-13, 1994. See Appendix figure 1 for location.

³⁰ van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor (1999). *Building Sustainable Peace: Conflict, Conciliation, and Civil Society in Northern Ghana*. Oxford, Oxfam GB.; Talton, B. (2003). *Ethnic Insurgency and Social Change: A History of the Konkomba of Northern Ghana*; Unpublished doctoral thesis. Department of History. Chicago, University of Chicago; Pul, H. (2003). "Exclusion, Associations, and Violence. Trends and Triggers in Northern Ghana's Konkomba Dagomba Wars." *The African Anthropologist* 10(1): 39-82; Bogner, A. (2000). The 1994 civil war in northern Ghana: the genesis and escalation of a 'tribal' conflict. *Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention*. C. Lentz and P. Nugent. London and Basingstoke, Macmillan; Tsikata, D. and W. Seini (2004). Identities Inequalities and Conflicts in Ghana: *CRISE Working Paper 5*. Oxford, Queen Elizabeth House; Akurang-Parry, K. O. (2003). A National Resolution of Crisis: The 1994 Nanumba-Konkomba Ethnic Conflict in Ghana. *Ghana in Africa and the World: Essays in Honour of Adu Boahen*. T. Falola ed. Trenton and Asmara, Africa World Press.

Section 3: The War

3.1 Description

The Guinea Fowl War affected eight administrative districts,³¹ involved the burning and destruction of 442 separate villages, and resulted in the displacement of 200,000 people. The actual number of deaths is put at 2000 by government sources and many databases, but more accurate accounts multiply this number as much as ten-fold.³²

Crops and livestock were destroyed, and in an already underserved region, at least 155 schools were likewise demolished.³³ The fighting, which was extremely intense for one month, was noted for its grizzly quality. The fighting, as is always the case in what Horowitz deems “deadly ethnic riots”, was also noted for its grizzly quality. According to the National *Daily Graphic*, in the week following the outbreak of the conflict, the Bimbilla-Yendi Road which is a key trunk road in the North, was said to be littered with bodies, and there were “spectacles of pregnant women whose wombs had been opened and the fetuses thrown out”.³⁴ A three month state of emergency was declared by President Rawlings,³⁵ but emergency status remained in place until August. Formal peace treaties and ceremonies were conducted between the Konkomba and Dagomba in December of 1994, between the Konkomba and Gonja in May of 1996, and between the Konkomba and Nanumba in October of 1996.

Unfortunately, the official report of the government constituted Permanent Peace Negotiating Team, and its recommendations for addressing the conflict, were never released. My own efforts to obtain this report were thwarted, and even the Presidential Advisor on Chieftaincy Affairs was unwilling or unable to provide me with a copy.

Formal peace treaties and ceremonies were eventually conducted between the Konkomba and Dagomba in December of 1994, between the Konkomba and Gonja in May of 1996, and between the Konkomba and Nanumba in October of 1996. However, it is nonetheless clear that the underlying issues related to the conflict have not been addressed, particularly in Nanumba, where Konkomba are still not considered citizens of the traditional state, and peace is extremely tenuous.

In 2000, when I interviewed three members of the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) at the Agbobloshie Yam Market in Accra, one member told me that “there is peace in the region but we fear it will slip” and, as such, “men feel like they should sleep in a hotel.”³⁶ Furthermore, an overlay between ethnic affiliation and the dominant parties in the 2004 National elections led to

³¹ Although only seven were placed under a state of emergency, Bogner states that the majority of Konkombas who died were probably killed near Buipe in East Gonja on the North’s principal Trunk Road. This district was not placed under an emergency.

³² Massing, A. (1994). “Local Government Reform in Ghana: Democratic Renewal or Autocratic Revival.” *Cologne Development Studies* Band 21 suggests the numbers are 6-8000; van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor (1999). *Building Sustainable Peace: Conflict, Conciliation, and Civil Society in Northern Ghana*. Oxford, Oxfam GB give a figure of 15000. Katanga, J. (1996). *An Historical and*

Ethnographic Commentary on the Northern Conflict. Tamale, unpublished manuscript, gives a figure of 20 to 25000.

³³ Bacho, F., E. K. Musah, et al. (1996). *Report On The Assessment Of Rehabilitation Needs Of Victims In The Conflict Area of Northern Ghana*. Report prepared for the Inter NGO Consortium November 1996. Tamale, Inter-NGO Consortium. P. 25

³⁴ “Carnage in the North” *Daily Graphic* (Accra) February 14, 1994.

³⁵ “State of Emergency” *Daily Graphic* February 11, 1994.

³⁶ Confidential interview, Agbobloshie Market Accra Dec. 3, 2007 (Author retains field notes)

violent clashes both prior to and after the elections in Bimbilla.³⁷ A large stock of armaments was seized at the Konkomba Market in March of 2006, and the government and press recently reported a further build-up of arms in the North.³⁸

3.2 The Historical and Geographic Context of the War

A. The Proximate Cause

The most important proximate cause of the Guinea Fowl War was the petition launched by KOYA, and a Konkomba sub-chief, to the National House of Chiefs, which sought the elevation of the Chief of Saboba (a Konkomba) to Paramount status.³⁹ This petition was rejected by the Dagomba Paramount. The environment surrounding the petition was exacerbated by the actions of the central government, in particular President J.J. Rawlings, who had indicated in 1991 that 'minority groups' would be justified in taking up arms to defend their autonomy.⁴⁰ In December of 1994, immediately prior to the conflict, the Presidential Advisor on Chieftaincy Affairs addressed the Northern Regional House of Chiefs. He implied that if the 'majority' tribes did not elevate a Konkomba paramount, the government's hand would be forced and it would take measures to do so.⁴¹

The 1992 Constitution, however, removed the government's authority to interfere in chieftaincy matters and to recognise or derecognise 'traditional' authority. Furthermore, the autonomy of the post-colonial Ghanaian state and its regimes has always been sharply circumscribed by the North's dominant chiefs, who have historically monopolised linkage institutions between state and society. As Pul rightly notes, a combination of signals of official permissiveness, rumours of war, the intractability of the issue, and the seeming inability to find alternatives to violence, gave rise to a security dilemma that manifested in a deadly ethnic war.⁴²

In order to comprehend this proximate cause, however, one must gain a better understanding of the social structure of the North, the dimensions of spatial poverty there and the significance of chieftaincy. One cannot comprehend this conflict without understanding the extent to which the latter institution is, and has been, imbricated in ideological, economic, military and political power. This power reflects the limited social transformations in a region which has undergone only limited commercial and capitalist transformation. However, it also reflects the limited authority and fiscal health of the Ghanaian state as a whole.

Section 4: The Social Structure of the Northern Region

4.1 Demographic, Economic, and Ethnic Structure (in brief)

Ghana is divided into ten administrative regions that, for the most part, mirror internal colonial boundaries, and were drawn with an emphasis on maintaining the coherence of traditional states and tribes.

The Northern region comprises the southern portion of what was formerly known as the Northern Territories (NTs), which were incorporated in the Gold Coast and proclaimed a protectorate with

³⁷ "Bloody Clash at Bimbilla" *Ghanaian Chronicle* (Accra) March 14, 2002.

³⁸ "Ghanaian Radio Reports "stockpiling of arms in north" BBC Monitoring Service U.K. March 14, 2006

³⁹ In the North chiefs in Ghana sit on skins and hence the assumption of office refers to enskinment. In the South chiefs sit on stools and as such are enstooled.

⁴⁰ "Konkomba Attacks Unabated" *Ghanaian Chronicle* (Accra) March 28 1994

⁴¹ Ofori, R. (1994). 'Rawlings' Biggest Challenge.' *Africa Report* (U.S.A.),. May/June pp.53-57.

⁴² Pul, is I believe the only author who has considered the war in terms of a security dilemma see *Trends and Triggers*. P. 51

effect from January 1, 1902.⁴³ According to the most recent Ghanaian census there are roughly 1.8 million people who reside there, which is approximately 10% of the national total. The region is resource deprived and poor, both in absolute and relative terms, and is also politically marginal. Adult literacy in the Savannah, for example, is only twenty four per cent, or less than half the national average. National income distribution is likewise asymmetrical. The incidence of poverty in the rural savannah is double that of the rural forest. In this respect Ghana mirrors a pattern found along the entire West African coast, and clearly documented among its immediate neighbours to the East (Togo) and West (Ivory Coast) where the Savannah regions to the North have disproportionate shares of extreme and chronic poverty.⁴⁴

In Ghana the regions of the North have been dominated historically by subsistence agriculture and has lagged behind southern regions in infrastructural amenities. Issues of soil variability and appropriate crops, a single rainfall season, and distance from the ports all combined to contribute to the relative deprivation of the area. The methods of pre colonial transport via caravans and by canoe on the Volta, were unsuitable for large scale transport of such food crops.⁴⁵

By way of contrast, Forest regions of Ghana were richly endowed: virtually all the key foreign exchange earners in Ghana - gold, timber and beverage crops - come from the Forest Zone. Even in the precolonial period, state revenues in the mineral rich polity of Asante were startling. Wilks estimates the weight of gold in the great chest of Kumasi in the mid nineteenth century at 400 000 oz of gold or about 11 mill pds sterling at 19th c. prices. The Gold Coast colonial transformation has been much celebrated, as the colony was transformed in only two decades- 1891-1911- from an agricultural economy based on subsistence production, into the world's largest producer of cocoa. Total exports rose from nil 1891 to 13 tons in 1895, 536 tons in 1900-22,629 in 1910 over 50 000 tons in 1913.⁴⁶

Thus in 1910 when the revenue from the Northern Territories was less than 2000 pounds, Asante accounted for 37,631 pounds with the Gold Coast as a whole generating about a million pounds.⁴⁷ As the Colony and Asante were already generating a much larger revenue than the North, so they attracted much greater expenditure that in turn sealed the North's fate. Colonial patterns of infrastructure development, were given a huge boost in the 1920s and forged a triangle of economic activity with Kumasi, (Ashanti region) Sekondi -Takoradi (Western region) and Greater Accra as the nodal points within which all major economic activities are now concentrated. This period cemented the North's role as what governor Guggisberg would call the "Cinderella" of the Gold Coast. The NTs were consigned to the role of subsistence agriculture, labourers on farms and mines, the latter commencing with a major labour recruitment drive in 1906. As a result nearly a century later at the inception of the adjustment era the regions of destination with the lowest percentage of the migrant population were the

⁴³ During its post colonial history, the NTs were divided when an Upper region was created in 1960, and again when these were in turn subdivided into an Upper East and Upper West region in 1983. While these three regions share similar history and circumstances, and a strong sense of collective identity, my discussion here focuses on the Northern region proper which is distinct from Northern Ghana.

⁴⁴ Oduro, A. and I. Aryee (2003). "Investigating Chronic Poverty in West Africa." *CPRC Working Paper 28*(April 2003).

⁴⁵ Sutton, I. (1989). "Colonial Agricultural Policy: The Non-Development of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22(4). P. 643

⁴⁶ Meier, G. (1975). *External Trade and Internal Development. Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960: Volume 4 The Economics of Colonialism*. P. Duignan and L. Gann. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. P.446

⁴⁷ Sutton op cit p. 645

Volta and the three northern regions, while Ashanti, Western and Greater Accra are respectively, the destinations with the highest share of in migration.⁴⁸

Officially, sixteen major ethnic groups have been designated in the Northern region. Ten are considered 'minority' acephalous tribes and have historically lacked organised political authority and stateness. These are the Anufo, Basare, Bimoba, Builsa, Konkomba, Mo, Nawuri, Nchumuru, Tapolensi, and Vagala. Four ethnic groups (or tribes) are chiefly. These are the ritually related Mossi-Dagomba states of Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Nanumba, and the originally Mande Gonja. The extent to which 'acephalous' groups are integrated into the authority structure of chiefly states is variable and contested. As a general principle it is fair to say, following Skalnik, that the 'acephalous' tribes of the region were neither fully absorbed into, nor expelled entirely from, the segmentary states.

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

4.2 Patterns of Subordination and Resistance

A. Conquest

The political history of the Northern chiefly states is essentially one of migrant cavalry moving south, and either absorbing or expelling the stateless autochthones of the region. The Gur speaking Mossi, Dagomba, Maprusi, and Nanumba trace their lineage to a common ancestor Na Gbewa, who settled at Pusiga near Bawku. The children of Gbewa established the Mamprusi Kingdom at Nalerigu, and moved to establish the branch that subsequently came to be Dagomba. During the conquest of Eastern Dagomba, sometime in the seventeenth century, the Dagomba capital moved to present day Yendi. According to both Dagomba drum history and Konkomba understanding, this had been a Konkomba town called Chare or Tchare. From Yendi, the Dagomba advance went east to Zabzugu, northeast to Sunson, and north into Gushiegu. Subsequently these migrations led to the founding of Nanumba.⁴⁹

The royal lines of the Mamprusi, Dagomba, and Nanumba are thus related and, although the Ya Na of Dagomba is considered a more important authority in contemporary Ghana, ritual primacy is accorded to the Na Yiri or Paramount Chief of Mamprusi. Organisationally there is little to distinguish these states, and the social distance between these polities is minimal. Nanuni and Dagbani are virtually indistinguishable as languages, and citizens move freely between these two entities. According to Skalnik, many Nanumba identify themselves as Dagamba even though they recognise a chief who has been installed by the Bimbilla Naa.⁵⁰

The fourth 'majority' state is Gonja, whose history can be traced to the migration of a band of warriors from Upper Niger sometime in the sixteenth or seventeenth century.⁵¹ According to Goody, it was from here that the Gonja moved to conquer the land they now occupy, which was then populated by a number of small groups speaking the Gur and Guang languages.

⁴⁸ Ghana Statistical Service, *Migration Research Study in Ghana Volume 1: Internal Migration*. (Accra: Ghana Statistical Service 1995), 128-129.

⁴⁹ Skalnik, P. (1987). "On The Inadequacy Of The Concept Of The 'Traditional State' Illustrated with Ethnographic Material on Nanun, Ghana." *Journal of Legal Pluralism*(25 and 26): 301-325. p. 307

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 305

⁵¹ Goody, J. (1964). *Gonja: A Locally Autonomous Kingdom*, Institute of African Studies: University of Ghana. PP. 6-7.

Interactions between these groups of invaders and autochthones at this time were extremely complex.⁵² While these groups do not share a myth of common ancestry, the Dagomba symbolically refer to Konkomba as their “mothers” and apparently both groups accept a myth that to accede to a skin⁵³ as Paramount Chief of Dagomba, one must have Konkomba blood in him.⁵⁴

A distinction can also be drawn between the invasion of Eastern Dagomba and Gonja on the one hand, and Western Dagomba on the other. In Gonja the *Tindana* or earth priests of the previous inhabitants were retained, although some Konkombas were taken as labourers to grow foodstuffs for the Gonja chiefs. In Eastern Dagomba, the riverine Konkomba were either driven from or gave up their lands, and it is generally believed that Dagomba was never able to exercise authority over Konkomba here.⁵⁵

In the Mamprusi areas of eastern Dagomba, Konkomba were actually awarded positions of some authority.

In Western Dagomba, violence towards the original inhabitants was said to be much greater. Many *Tindana* were killed and a large share of the local population was absorbed into the Dagomba political system. It is not clear how many slaves Dagomba and Nanumba royals were able to obtain, but clearly some were kept to grow food for chiefs. This contributed to the limited social differentiation that did exist between Dagomba chiefs and commoners.⁵⁶

B. Asante Dominance

In 1732, Asante overran a portion of Gonja, and in 1744/45 likewise invaded Dagomba with the result that Dagomba accepted tributary status. The demand for tribute associated with Asante hegemony also sharpened the oppressive character of the Northern kingdoms as they raided acephalous groups for slaves. Estimates on the size of the tribute vary, and the number of required slaves and livestock almost certainly ebbed and flowed in relation to punitive expeditions and legal reforms.⁵⁷ The main source of slaves entering Asante did so from the Savanna societies to the north. In most sources the vast number of slaves are stated to be ‘Grunshi’; a category that is a portmanteau designation for the North’s acephalous groups.⁵⁸

C. Colonial Rule

The period of colonial rule ended tributary slave raiding. However, it also marked a period of undermining the autonomy of Konkomba who had managed to retain an independent existence

⁵² With respect to the difficulty of treating Konkomba and Dagomba as discrete entities see especially Katanga ‘An Historical and Ethnographic Commentary’ pp. 9-11

⁵³ Southern chiefs in Ghana sit on stools. Northern chiefs sit on skins. Chieftaincies or Kingships are often referred to as skins. To be installed as a chief is referred to as being enskinned.

⁵⁴ Pul, H. (2003). “Exclusion, Associations, and Violence” p.57.

⁵⁵ Konkomba claims however, that they voluntarily gave up their land to the Dagomba as a gesture of good will seems far fetched.

⁵⁶ Staniland (1975) *Lions* p. 34/35

⁵⁷ Arhin, K. (1987). Savanna Contributions to the Asante Political Economy. *The Golden Stool: Studies of the Asante Center and Periphery*. E. Schildkrout ed. Washington D.C., American Museum of Natural History. p. 55.

⁵⁸ Austin, G. (2005). *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante 1807-1956*. Rochester, University of Rochester Press. pp. 116-117. Austin however, notes that where La Torr  was able to identify the ethnic origin of captives purchased in Ashanti by the Dutch, that the share of Dagomba of the sample (10.7%) was higher than the share of ‘Grunshi’ (6%). Ibid. p. 116 This may help support the historical claim that the Dagomba were unable to dominate the Konkomba.

beyond the slave raiding outposts at the periphery of Eastern Dagomba.⁵⁹ Colonial practice elevated the status of chieftaincy and institutionalised the subordinate status of acephalous groups. As this period laid the template for post-colonial administrative and representative organs, it became the basis for a subordinate and exploitative incorporation of acephalous tribes into the modern Ghanaian state.

As a result of colonial attempts to rationalise administration, acephalous groups were made formally subject to the authority of the larger kingdoms. Fra Fra, Kusasi, and Bimoba were made subject to the Mamprusi paramount; Nawuri, Nchumuru, Mo and Vagala to the Gonja; and Konkomba and Chokosi to the Dagomba and Nanumba. The policy of indirect rule established in Northern Ghana in the 1930's further sought to consolidate the administrative authority of the chiefly states

Native authorities became the basis of local government. They were responsible for the maintenance of law and order, and had their own court and treasury. These ordinances and the Native authority system made chieftaincy and ethnic belonging the building blocks of modern state institutions, while denying representation to acephalous tribes. The laws also gave chiefs the power to collect taxes and exact tribute from Konkomba, as well as control over the disposition of resources in Konkomba areas. Militarily, chiefly states were given the power to disarm Konkombas. Unlike previous periods, in these instances Dagomba assertions were backed by British authority.⁶⁰

Regulations were broadcast through Native Authorities. This generated a monopoly of information for 'majority' tribes, and enabled chiefs and citizens of chiefly states to step up the exploitation of Konkomba. The latter were not aware that many of the directives they were said to have violated (and hence forced to pay fines for), were fabrications. Inevitably this form of exploitation led to major backlash incidents.⁶¹ As illustrated by Talton, after the most significant of these incidents - an attack on the village of Jagbel and the murder of the Chief's family - the administrative response included a law making it illegal for Konkomba to carry weapons, and the establishment of a police station in Saboba. This had the effect of strengthening a broader pan-Konkomba identity attached to geographic location and of heightening insecurity; and led to extensive migrations including a large influx into Nanumba. In that district today, the Konkomba 'minority' greatly out-number their 'majority' hosts.

Economic development (or non-development) in the NTs also set the stage for the current conflicts, as a result of the isolation of the NTs and the colonial government's unique approach to land tenure issues there. Whereas in Ashanti and the Gold Coast Colony chiefs granted concessions and received rents for the development of their areas, in the NTs this privilege was assumed by the government.⁶²

Government ownership of land in the NTs almost certainly aided the popularity of chiefs in the North. There were no unscrupulous sales that generated resentment against chiefs as a whole, and no waves of land purchasing outsiders with loyalties to other traditional authorities outside

59 Tait, D. (1961). *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

60 Talton *Ethnic Insurgency* p.94

61 Pul identified 4 significant conflicts between Konkomba and Dagomba in the colonial period: 1914, 1917, 1940, and 1946. *Trends and Triggers* p.42

62 Adeetuk, T. U. (1991). *Land Tenure and Food Production in Northern Ghana 1900 -1985*. Land Tenure Unpublished doctoral dissertation Centre. Madison, University of Wisconsin; Bening, R. B. (1998). "Land Policy and Administration In Northern Ghana 1898-1976." *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* XVI(ii).

their region of residence.⁶³ Nor in practice did colonial legislation undermine the traditional tenure system, and these customary laws still entailed considerable advantages for chiefs. Similarly, deep class cleavages did not emerge that might have created alternative economic, as opposed to communal, poles of identity. These factors contributed to the contemporary situation in Northern Ghana, where the "traditional" sphere of politics dominates the political arena to a greater extent than it does in Southern Ghana.⁶⁴

The issue of vesting land ownership in the Crown, however, created a hornets' nest legacy for the post-colonial area. Successive regimes were faced with pressure to unify land tenure arrangements in the North and South. The issue became central to the courting of Northern chiefs whose opinions and support are often key determinants of voting behaviour in their traditional areas. This tie between land and chieftaincy has made access to royalty the *sine qua non* of economic and social reproduction, and the core symbol of success for groups and their constituent members. This has repeatedly generated tension, which ultimately manifested in the petition for chieftaincy and the Guinea Fowl War.

D. The Post-Colonial Era

Transformation of the ranked ethnic system in Ghana's Northern region in the post-colonial era is complicated. The legacy of prior periods is obviously relevant; however, new strains and contradictions emerged. First, there were obvious tensions inherent in the pluralist nature of the post-colonial Ghanaian state. Pluralism in this sense implies two or more social systems incorporated into a political framework dominated by one of them.⁶⁵ The domination of the latter is, as one would expect in a modern patrimonial state, extremely partial.⁶⁶

Despite the belief that Nkrumah's tenure, first as prime minister (1951-1960) and then president (1960-1966), was characterised by a general assault on the authority of chiefs, it must be recalled that there were limits to how far Nkrumah could push this policy in the North. The post Nkrumah period, was characterised by repeated attempts to unify land tenure throughout North and South and restore land ownership to the skins of the Northern regions. Konkomba's lack of political representation made it impossible for them to sway the outcomes of these attempts in their favour. In the course of extensive political shredding, however, attempts to draft or implement the required amendments were thwarted by changes of governments.⁶⁷

The Constitution established in 1981 for Ghana's Third Republic again vested land ownership with chiefs of dominant tribes. According to Skalnik, who provides the only detailed

63 On land alienation undermining chiefly authority in the South, see: Addo-Fening, R. (1990). "The Native Jurisdiction Ordinance, Indirect Rule and The Subject's Well Being: The Abuwakwa Experience." Institute of African Studies Research Review 6(2), p. 36; Dumett, R. (1998). El Dorado in West Africa: The Gold Mining Frontier, African labour and Colonial Capitalism in the Gold Coast, 1875-1900. Athens and Ohio, Ohio University Press and James Currey, p.272; Owusu, M. (1970). Uses and Abuses of Political Power: A Case Study of Continuity and Change in the Politics of Ghana. Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, p. 82.

64 Ladouceur, P. (1979). Chiefs and Politicians: the Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana. London, New York, Longman. Staniland, M. (1975). The Lions. Saaka, Y. (1978). Local Government and Political Change in Northern Ghana. Washington D.C., University Press of America.

65 MacGaffey, W. (2006). "Death of a king, death of a kingdom? Social Pluralism and Succession to High office in Dagbon, northern Ghana." Journal of Modern African Studies 44(1), p. 80.

66 On patrimonialism in Ghana see Sandbrook, R. and J. Oelbaum (1997). "Reforming Dysfunctional Institutions through Democratisation? Reflections on Ghana." Journal of Modern African Studies 35(4): 603-646.

67 Only five countries in the entire developing world had more transitions between dictatorship and democracy between 1950 and 1990 than Ghana, and only one of these, i.e. Sudan, was in Africa Przeworski, A., M. Alvarez, et al. (2000). Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World 1950-1990. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. p. 76

documentation of the 1981 Konkomba versus Nanumba conflict, the "...conflict was prompted by this constitutional recognition of traditional land rights."⁶⁸ Once again, however, the appropriate legislation that would have affected this constitutional change was thwarted when the PNP was abruptly overthrown in 1981.⁶⁹

As hinted at the outset of this paper in the descriptive section on the War, Ghana's democratisation process and its new Constitution once again placed the matter of land tenure and chieftaincy in the Northern region on the front burner. It entrenched the legal authority of the chiefs of 'majority' tribes over the disposition of land, and effectively disenfranchised 'minorities.' As stated in the Constitution:

(3) For the avoidance of doubt, it is hereby declared that all lands in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana which immediately before the coming into force of this Constitution were vested in the Government of Ghana **are not public lands** within the meaning of clauses (1) and (2) of this article.

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, all lands referred to in clause (3) of this article shall vest in any person who was the owner of the land before the vesting, **or in the appropriate skin** without further assurance than this clause. (emphasis added)

This set the stage for a recurrence of the 1981 conflict but on a larger scale.

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

Section 5: Macroeconomic Disaster and Recovery

Following independence Ghana immediately emerged as a paradigm case of statist import substitution industrialisation (ISI). However, the benefits of this approach were quickly exhausted. According to the World Bank, Ghana's policy distortions ranked as the worst in the entire developing world between 1970 and 1980. In the thirteen years preceding Ghana's adjustment effort, per capital income fell by 30%; import volumes contracted to 1/3 of their previous level; real export earnings declined 52%; and the rate of investment fell from 14% to just 2% of GDP.⁷⁰

In the North, the output of large-scale capitalist farming, which took off in the early 1970s, collapsed. Simultaneously, risk averse peasants confronting transport shortages and empty markets retreated into subsistence farming.⁷¹ The country faced localised famine and a national

⁶⁸ Skalnik, P. (1986). Nanumba Chieftaincy Facing the Ghanaian State and Konkomba 'Tribesmen': An Interpretation of the Nanumba-Konkomba War of 1981. *State and Local Community in Africa*. W. van Binsbergen, F. Reyntjens and Hesseling. Brussels, CEDAF pp. 104-5.

⁶⁹ Adeetuk, *Land Tenure*, p. 32-33

⁷⁰ World Bank (1984). *Ghana: Policies and Programs for Adjustment: A World Bank Country Study*. Washington D.C., The World Bank.

⁷¹ See especially Gariba, S. (1989). *The Peasantry and the State in Ghana: The Political Economy of Agrarian Stagnation and Rural Development in Northern Ghana*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation Political Science. Ottawa, Carleton University. esp. p. 223

agrarian crisis. From 1972-79 there was a fall in per capita food production of over 30%⁷², and annual food price increases averaged 53% from 1973-83.⁷³ By this time, one half of the urban population, and two thirds of the rural population, was below the poverty line.

In 1983, Ghana commenced an IFI sponsored reform program and dramatically reversed its economic fortunes (see Appendix table II). Thereafter, Ghana remained an adjustment frontrunner for two decades with a strong record of implementation.⁷⁴

The reform effects have generally been salutary. The rising tide, however, has failed to lift all boats. Overall in the 1990's, the percentage of Ghanaians defined as poor has decreased significantly. However, over the last decade as a whole, major reductions in the incidence of poverty have been restricted to the capital (Greater Accra) and forest ecological zones. Poverty reduction was extremely modest in the Savannah (Ghana's North);⁷⁵ and in the rural parts of the Savannah where poverty reduction has occurred, it has mostly affected those close to the poverty line. As such, the very poorest have not gained.

As has been the case throughout the West African sub-region food crop farmers have in general experienced a less than proportionate share in poverty reduction, and given the extremely high share of this category in the Northern region, it is not surprising that the recent aggregate figures for the North are so disappointing. On the basis of these recent poverty data, a group of extremely well informed scholars wrote that "the conflicts in the north which have escalated since 1980 may have partly been the result of the absence of a dynamic economy capable of absorbing and easing the energies of youth."⁷⁶ Such a qualified approach is reasonable. But while we might look for coherence between past and present in linking these data to the Guinea Fowl War, doing so would be misleading because what evidence we have indicates that poverty dynamics in the Northern region have been non-linear under economic reforms.

A. The Poverty Impact of Reforms

Most readers will be aware that a major controversy associated with the implementation of IFI backed reforms concerned claims that these reforms were poverty generating. At the outset, it should be stated that the bulk of evidence demonstrates that these claims, which argue that on balance adjustment increased poverty in S.S.A., are unsubstantiated.⁷⁷ That said, aggregate figures conceal wide variations in outcomes, and increases in poverty in some instances and

72 Kraus, J. (1986). The Political Economy of Agrarian Regression in Ghana. *Africa's Agrarian Crisis: The Roots of famine*. S. Commins, M. Lofchie and R. Payne. Boulder, Lynne Rienner. Pp. 104-107

73 Sarris, A. and S. Shams (1991). *Ghana Under Structural Adjustment: The Impact on Agriculture and the Rural Poor*. New York, New York University Press for the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

74 Up to 1994, the year of the Guinea Fowl war, approximately 80 percent of policy based loans to Ghana received a satisfactory rating. This result was higher than Bank wide average of 73% and the mere 59% reported for the Africa region Tsikata, Y. (2001). *Ghana. Aid and reform in Africa*. S. Devarajan, D. Dollar and T. Holmgren. Washington D.C., The World Bank

75 Ghana Statistical Services (2000). *Poverty Trends in Ghana In The 1990s*. Accra, Ghana Statistical Service. P. 7

76 Shepherd, A., E. Gyimah Boadi, et al. (2004). *Bridging the North South Divide in Ghana? Equity and Development*, World Development Report 2006 Background Paper. Draft P. 8. (location not noted)

77 See the evidence for example in Killick, T. (1998). *Adjustment, Income Distribution and Poverty in Africa: A Research Guide CR-2-7*. London, ODI; Sahn, D., P. Dorosh, et al. (1997). *Structural Adjustment Reconsidered: Economic Policy and Poverty in Africa*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Christiansen, L., L. Demery, et al. (2003). "Reforms, Remoteness and Risk in Africa: Understanding Inequality and Poverty in the 1990s." World Institute For Development Research Discussion Papers 70; Green, R. H. (1991). *Reduction of Absolute Poverty: A priority of Structural Adjustment: IDS Working Paper*. Brighton, Institute for Development Studies; Maasland, A. and J. van der Gaag (1992). *World Bank Supported Adjustment Programs and Living Conditions. Adjustment Lending Revisited: Policies To Restore Growth*. Corbo, Fischer and Webb. Washington D.C., The World Bank.

regions have been registered. Distributional effects vary due to a range of factors including changes in relative prices, geographical location, the variation in risks confronted by different producers, and regional variations in access to infrastructure and markets.⁷⁸

Helleiner has contributed one of the most helpful frameworks for examining the impact of both stabilisation and economic reform on the welfare of the poor.⁷⁹ His framework emphasises three facets of the reform process that are likely to have a serious bearing on their welfare.

1. Expenditure switching policies which involve reorienting the economy towards the production of relatively more (and the consumption of relatively less) tradable goods and services. This is achieved principally through adjustment of relative product and factor prices through a real exchange rate devaluation.
2. Macroeconomic contraction.
3. Changes in overall economic strategy, such as reduction in the size of the public sector and financial and trade liberalisation.

Expenditure switching policies such as devaluations may be demand deflationary. There are theoretical reasons, and some empirical evidence that rapid price inflation will generate faster increases in food prices than in the general price level. The elimination of subsidies is also known to have poverty implications, although these normally have more of an urban impact. Changes in overall strategy can also be harmful to poor segments. Trade liberalisation and divestiture can add to the burden of unemployed as inefficient operations are driven out of business. Furthermore, private economic investment is likely to concentrate in areas least constrained by a lack of publicly provided goods and services. In a market driven economy, inhabitants of marginal areas may then be further marginalised increasing levels of poverty.

Determining the social and economic impact of reforms in Ghana is an arduous task. Unfortunately, most sophisticated studies of this matter in the period prior to the conflict emphasised the *sectoral* rather than *regional* composition of the economy. Some agricultural economists have depended on smaller plot surveys, and these make it possible to estimate changes in welfare and cropping patterns in specific districts. Since these data are localised, however, it is difficult to utilise them for generalisations across the entire region.⁸⁰ One should tread gingerly when investigating these data.

Ghana's devaluation has had the effect of favouring the prices of tradable goods relative to non-tradable goods. As a result, studies on poverty and reform in Ghana have emphasised that the principal gainers from Ghana's economic growth have been the cocoa farmers. No cocoa is grown in the Northern region. These studies have also noted that changes in the food/non-food barter terms of trade have made smallholders, particularly subsistence agriculturalists (disproportionately represented in the North), worse off.⁸¹ These studies were well researched,

⁷⁸ Christiansen, L., L. Demery, et al. (2003). *Reforms, Remoteness and Risk* provide an excellent overview of this subject.

⁷⁹ Helleiner, G. (1989). 'Stabilization, Adjustment and the Poor.' *Government Policy and The Poor in Developing Countries*. R. Bird and S. Horton. Toronto, Buffalo, London, University of Toronto Press.

⁸⁰ See for example Al-Hassan, R. A., J. Kidd, et al. (1996). *The dynamics of smallholder agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone of West Africa, with particular reference to the Northern Region Ghana Briefing Paper 4*. Ashford Kent.

⁸¹ Pearce, R. (1992). *Ghana. Structural Adjustment and the African Farmer*. A. Duncan and J. Howell. London, ODI
Sahn, D. and A. Sarris (1991). "Structural adjustment and the welfare of rural smallholders: a comparative analysis from sub-Saharan Africa." *The World Bank Economic Review* 5(2): 259-89; Sarris, A. and S. Shams (1991). *Ghana Under Structural Adjustment: The Impact on Agriculture and the Rural Poor*. New York, New York University Press

technically sound, and alarming. They have strong limitations, however, in that they are based on the assumption that inputs purchased by farmers were available at official prices, if used at all. Moreover, none of the studies were able to account for changes in farmers' output - thus real gains to farmers were unaccounted for. Fortunately these studies are not our only sources of evidence.

Data on poverty and consumption in Ghana has been systematically collected in the context of a National Household Survey by the Ghana Statistical Service. Known as the *Ghana Living Standards Survey* (GLSS), four rounds were conducted between 1987 and 2000 with the purpose of monitoring the social cost of adjustment. Changes in agricultural output should be better reflected in these income and expenditure data. The principal limitation of these studies for our purposes, however, is that region is not used as a stratifying variable in the sample design. Instead ecological zone is the organising principle of this survey, so that it becomes difficult to disentangle the Northern from the Upper East and Upper West regions. To make matters worse, the Ghana Statistical Service data conflicts with UN FAO data on production.⁸² However, when these data are crosschecked against additional primary material collected by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) at the regional and district levels, plot surveys carried out with microeconomists, and my own micro level food security study, it is possible to make some judgments about the social impact of reform in the Northern region and to relate this material to the conflict.

The GLSS shows a fairly dramatic reduction in poverty in the North in the period immediately prior to the conflict. In contrast to the first two rounds of the survey, which indicated a marked increase in poverty, the third round, collected in 1992, noted very large increases in several categories of real food expenditure. It also noted that the headcount index of poverty fell some 11 percentage points between 1988 and 1989, and 16 percentage points between 1989 and 1992.⁸³

The very large and anomalous reduction in poverty in the Savannah in the period immediately prior to the conflict raised eyebrows among World Bank microeconomists who sought to interrogate this surprising data. Of particular concern was the fact that changes in the survey recall period had biased expenditures upward, particularly for the North. Attempts to correct for this, however, led analysts to conclude that that there was still a significant fall in poverty over that period but the magnitude was slightly more credible.⁸⁴ While attempting to account for this result these authors noted that when rural producer prices were deflated by the consumer price index, real prices for the predominant food crops were falling in the period immediately preceding the conflict. However, using Ghana Statistical Service Production data between 1989 and 1992, it is clear that increases in production outweighed the drop in real prices. Bank studies concluded that sharp increases in agricultural revenues in the North in the period prior to the conflict were exaggerated, but nonetheless real, and attributable to a sharp increase in the output of yams, groundnuts, and cassava prior to the conflict.⁸⁵

for the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Roe, A. and H. Schneider (1992). *Adjustment and Equity in Ghana*. Paris, OECD.

⁸² Problems associated with the existence of these two data sets have been discussed by Jones, C. and X. Ye (1995). *Accounting for the Reduction in Rural Poverty in Ghana 1998-1992*. PSP Discussion Paper Series. Washington, The World Bank

⁸³ Ghana Statistical Service (1995). *The Pattern of Poverty in Ghana: A study based on the Ghana Living Standards Survey*. Accra.

⁸⁴ Coulombe, H. and A. McKay (1995). "An Assessment of Trends of Poverty In Ghana 1988-92." *PSP Discussion Paper Series* November 1995.

⁸⁵ Jones, C. and X. Ye (1995). *Accounting for the Reduction in Rural Poverty in Ghana 1998-1992*. PSP Discussion Paper Series. Washington, The World Bank. P.23

Detailed plot history surveys carried out on behalf of the Overseas Development Institute in Dagomba also acknowledge the large growth of cassava output in the North, which those researchers attribute to its tolerance to low nutrient soil.⁸⁶ Data from the Ghana Statistical Service and MOFA also show a very substantial growth in yam output, particularly from the rich yam growing belt of Nanumba. In fact, yam output in Northern Ghana tripled in volume terms between 1986 and 1992. More than one quarter of this output came from Bimbilla, where the Guinea Fowl War was initiated.⁸⁷

B. Macroeconomic Constraint

Although subsidies and their elimination may be better suited to a discussion of changes in overall strategy, they can also be included within the topic of macroeconomic constraint. One of the factors thought to have been most damaging to farmers in Northern Ghana has been the elimination of input subsidies under structural adjustment. Not only is this thought to be reflected in declining soil fertility, but also in crop switching away from nutrient intensive crops such as maize.⁸⁸

The Oxfam analysis, however, provides no data to demonstrate declining maize yields, and likewise provides no evidence to support a related claim that there has been considerable crop switching away from maize in favour of root crops. A detailed and rigorous plot survey from the conflict affected districts of Gushiegu, Karaga, Savelugu, Nantong, and Salaga indicates that the proportion of surveyed farmers' plots planted with maize had increased steadily since 1984.⁸⁹ Regional statistics from PPMED of the Ministry of Agriculture also do not support Oxfam's claims (see Appendix tables)

A substantial increase in yam production is also difficult to reconcile with claims of huge declines in soil fertility. Yams are extremely nutrient intensive and are not grown on land immediately prior to being fallowed.⁹⁰ There is considerable variation in land fertility declines across regions, and in areas where the conflict was initiated and where extremely vicious fighting ensued - Bimbilla, and the Salaga area of Gonja - there was a huge output and yield increase for yams.

Although it may seem difficult to reconcile the withdrawal of fertiliser subsidies with large food crop output increases in the North, the regional output data is consistent with national figures which show large post-1990 yield per hectare of food crops. Agricultural experts note that part of these statistics reflect revised methods of output estimation and should be treated cautiously. They also claim, however, that increases reflect favourable weather, intensified extension

⁸⁶ See for example Al-Hassan, R. A., J. Kidd, et al. (1996). The dynamics of smallholder agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone of West Africa, with particular reference to the Northern Region Ghana Briefing Paper 4. Ashford Kent. On the increasing importance of cassava see also Shepherd, A. and G. Onumah (1997). Liberalised Agricultural Markets in Ghana. Birmingham, University of Birmingham.

⁸⁷ See Appendix tables.

⁸⁸ van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor (1999). Building Sustainable Peace: Conflict, Conciliation, and Civil Society in Northern Ghana. Oxford, Oxfam GB. P. 14.

⁸⁹ Hassan, R. A., J. Kidd, et al. (1996). The dynamics of smallholder agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone of West Africa, with particular reference to the Northern Region Ghana Briefing Paper 4. Ashford Kent. P.17

⁹⁰ *ibid.* Also Langintuyo, A. (1989). Yam Production in Northern Ghana: A Case Study In Farming System Research. Tamale, Nyankpala Agricultura; Research Station.

education, the use of new varieties, and the introduction of new cassava seeds developed by the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture.⁹¹

In sum it is difficult to argue that economic reform increased poverty in the Northern Region as a whole in the period leading up to the Guinea Fowl War, and this is especially true of the conflict hot spots. Although the North remains extremely poor, northern smallholders have almost certainly been hurt less than southern smallholders since northerners were almost certainly less reliant on purchased inputs. The data indicates rather that substantial agricultural growth lowered the incidence of poverty in the era immediately preceding the Guinea Fowl War.

C. Changes in Overall Strategy

I have indicated above that, in the absence of export crops, there are sound theoretical reasons to predict that the North would have suffered from a dearth of both private and public investment as a result of economic reform. What does the evidence suggest about the period before the conflict?

In 1986, as part of its SAP, Ghana undertook to prepare a three year rolling *Public Investment Program* (PIP). The purpose was to provide 'a rationalised basis for the planning, analysis, selection, implementation, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of development projects.'⁹² Critics note with respect to the PIP, that a specific poverty focus was applied only to social sector projects. Otherwise the criterion for project selection was an effective rate of return of at least 15% for projects costing more than \$5 million dollars. On this formal criterion the North may have stood to lose out, but market principles alone have not shaped the PIP. In the preparation of the PIP 'adequate consideration was to be given to the regional distribution of projects to ensure equitable and balanced development of all regions.'⁹³

In the early 1990's, the Government of Ghana began the analysis of the distribution of current and capital expenditure by region and by program. This responsibility was delegated to the Policy Analysis Division (PAD) of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, which turned this work over to the Social Dimensions of Adjustment desk. In reality, there is no way to tell to what extent the PIP principles were followed in advance of the conflict. The Ghanaian budget process suffered from opacity, data lapses, and weak coordination. The 1992-1994 *Ghana Public Expenditure Review* written by the World Bank indicated that PAD studies were extremely hampered by a lack of available data. Bank staff noted that 'centralised programs are booked under the ministries concerned... [and] that actual payments cannot be spatially disaggregated from the national accounts, neither on a district level nor on a regional level [sic].'⁹⁴

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

91 Nyanteng, V. K. and A. Wayo Seini (2000). 'Agricultural Policy and the Impact on Growth and Productivity 1970-95.' *Economic Reforms in Ghana: The Miracle and the Mirage*. E. Aryeetey, J. Harrigan and M. Nissanke. Trenton New Jersey, Africa World Press.

92 Republic of Ghana (1994). *Public Investment Programme 1994-96: Volume I main Report*. Accra, Ministry of Finance.

93 Republic of Ghana and Ministry of Finance (1995). *Public Expenditure Review 1994: Effective Planning and Execution of the Development Budget*. Accra, Ministry of Finance. P. 14

94 Republic of Ghana. (1992). *Public Expenditure Review 1992-1994*. Accra/Washington D.C, West Africa Department World Bank. P. 16

in the health development budget. The under-endowed regions do not receive a larger share of the investments than those which are better off.⁹⁵ In the Education sector, actual expenditure on projects was more adequate. This data also indicated that Northern Ghana continued to lag behind the rest of the country. According to PAD, 'the Upper West, Upper East, and Northern Regions continued to do badly. Between them they have 19% of the total population but only 11.6% of actual PIP expenditure'.⁹⁶ The Agricultural study was hampered by greater data problems than education, but based on estimates of the 1990-1992 PIP, it concluded that for the three Northern regions, 'the percentage share in terms of public expenditure (from both local and foreign funding) is small'.⁹⁷

It would appear, therefore, that in terms of public investment and social spending, the North had continued to lag behind other regions on the eve of the conflict. These figures, however, are relative and must be seen in the context of large increases in overall public investment. In absolute terms, the North also received significant infrastructural upgrading in the period immediately prior to the conflict. The Tamale-Kintampo Road was surfaced between 1986 and 1991; major power plants were upgraded in Wa, Yendi and Bawku; the Tamale (regional capital of the North) water supply was rehabilitated; and major district roads in the Northern region were improved and said to have improved the marketing network.⁹⁸ Hospitals were completed at Tamale (Dagomba), Yendi (Dagomba), and Bole (Gonja) prior to the conflict as well. However, as these major infrastructure upgrades were focused on larger towns it meant that Konkomba, who sought access to benefits were also required to relocate and move to more densely settled areas.

Unfortunately, there is no discussion of regional spending in the 1993 Public Expenditure Review (PER) which would have given a better idea of developments immediately preceding the War. However, the budget estimates for 1994 indicate that in terms of development expenditure the Northern region received the highest in percentage and per capita allocations, both of which were twice the national average.⁹⁹ Although almost all of this development was spent on the road from Tamale to Kintampo, it is worth noting that the conflict emerged at a period when more, rather than less, development expenditure was headed to the Northern region from the central government.

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

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p.16

⁹⁶ *ibid.* p. 17

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Massing, A. (1994). "Local Government" p. 84

⁹⁹ Republic of Ghana and Ministry of Finance (1995). *Public Expenditure Review 1994: Effective Planning and Execution of the Development Budget*. Accra, Ministry of Finance. P. 45

Section 6: “Getting Our Eyes Open”

The claims of ‘majority’ tribes upon the state have always ensured continued political subordination for acephalous groups. In general, dominant national parties have selected candidates from ‘majority tribes’ even when they were minorities in their constituency.¹⁰⁰ In Bimbilla, a Konkomba was able to win the parliamentary election in 1996 only because he ran for a minor party, while the majority parties divided the Nanumba vote.

Local level political dominance of the ‘majority’ tribes is demonstrated by the government’s decentralisation program which was commenced in 1987. The government vested political and administrative authority at the local level to District Assemblies that were charged with performing 86 specific functions for their communities. These assemblies were to be elected on a non-partisan basis with 1/3 of the members appointed by the government. Many of the appointees were local level “cadres” of the revolution, and one fifth of them were chiefs!

While of dubious benefit from an administrative point of view, the assemblies became important bases of clientelism. The 1992 Constitution authorised the president to appoint the district chief executives (DCEs) which play a prominent role in the Assemblies, both by virtue of their seat on the executive committees and their chairmanship of their district tender board. This central influence is significant in that the 1992 Constitution allocates not less than five per cent of national revenues to the District Assemblies to carry out their functions. This has implied a bonanza for assembly members and local contractors who have links with, or demonstrate support for, the government.

Unfortunately, during my time in Bimbilla it was impossible to examine the operation of the District Assembly, as the DCE had been removed and the governing party was seeking a replacement. However, even this hiatus was telling. One morning, I awoke to find four officials of the regional National Democratic Congress (the governing national party) asleep on the ground beside me in the Bimbilla District Assembly Guest House. Among them was the sister of Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the region’s M.P., and present ECOWAS Secretary General. She was there being mooted as a possible replacement DCE. The Chambas family has historically had close ties to the Bimbilla Na.¹⁰¹

According to Massing, whose fieldwork preceded my own, “in the Nanumba District Assembly, there are but a few Konkomba representatives who are considered irrelevant.”¹⁰² The absence of representation on District Assemblies was an important grievance of the Konkombas that I interviewed in Nanumba and Accra, and according to van der Linde and Naylor, it was important to the Nawuri in the Salaga District (Gonja) who claimed that educational and health services supplied by the assembly were being denied to them.¹⁰³

Two facts about this discussion about local government are relevant. Firstly, local government reforms have generated conflict as they have brought **more** resources to district capitals from the centre. Secondly, and more significantly, the competitive strength of the ‘majority’ tribes in

100 On this point Saaka, Y. (1998). The 1996 General Elections in Ghana: Analysis of Electoral Surveys of the Bole/Damboi and Damongo/Daboya Constituencies of Northern Ghana. The 1996 General Elections and Democratic consolidation in Ghana. J. Ayee. Legon, Dept. of Political Science, University of Ghana.

101 This is mentioned by Ladouceur, Chiefs and Politicians, p. 134.

102 Massing, A. “Local Government Reform” p. 104

103 van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor Building Sustainable Peace, P.23

the contest over authority and resources is tied in to their access to the state. It is here that the issue of liberal growth models becomes relevant.

6.1 Economic Change and the Benefits of Adaptive Failure

Unlike the better known ranked ethnic system of Rwanda, there is no Gini coefficient available that would tell us the relative income shares of 'majority' and 'minority' tribes. However there are very sound grounds to believe that historically the Konkomba have been poorer than their neighbours. Head taxes imposed by the colonial state via native authorities upon the Konkomba were levied at half the rate of those of the Dagomba.¹⁰⁴ Based on field research in the 1950's, Tait argued that "it is probable that Konkomba are always on the verge of hunger...",¹⁰⁵ although it seems unlikely that Dagomba were much more food secure. As their settlement patterns are more widely dispersed than 'majority' tribes, they have had less opportunity in general to benefit from government provided amenities, limited as these are in the Northern region. It is at least in part on this basis that many Christian NGOs have directed their attention to Konkomba dominated areas.¹⁰⁶

The principal arena of economic activity where Konkomba have excelled is as yam farmers, although this crop is also grown extensively by Dagomba, Nanumba, and Gonja. I have already noted that at least some Konkomba and other acephalous minorities were forced to grow foodstuffs for the Gonja and Dagomba royals, and there may be some path determination that explains their current pursuits. Esther Goody noted in the seventies, that ruling Gonja royal elements had negative views of farming and that this also affected Gonja commoners. She stated that "...this attitude seems responsible for the failure of Gonja farmers to take up this opportunity offered by the growing market for foodstuffs in the South. Instead it is the largely immigrant Lo Dagaa and Konkomba population who supply the lorry loads of yams which head for Kumasi and the coast."¹⁰⁷

Katanga claims that this same attitude obtained for Dagomba and Nanumba. This has resulted in the increasing wealth of the Konkomba relative to the 'majority' tribes; and along with the effects of a small educated elite, this has brought enormous 'dissonance' to the ranked system in which Dagomba view Konkomba as 'wild animals', and who in one respondent's words 'breed kids like rats.'¹⁰⁸

These events in Northern Ghana cannot, in one important sense, be considered unique. This apparent failure of majority groups to take advantage of these markets is simply one example of the liabilities of success, and the advantages of adaptive failure. In an important but now neglected article on ethnic politics in Africa, Skinner observed as follows:¹⁰⁹

Groups with more effective strategies and tactics normally gain advantages over the other groups within their societies. Yet their success is not without liabilities; for the very factors that give groups differential advantages often inhibit their adaptation to changing conditions. The result is that the most successful economic groups are ill

¹⁰⁴ Staniland, *Lions* p.96

¹⁰⁵ Tait, D. *The Konkomba*, p. 15

¹⁰⁶ van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor *Building Sustainable Peace* p. 21

¹⁰⁷ Goody, E. (1973) *Contexts of Kinship*, p. 23. cited in Katanga, J. *An Historical and Ethnographic Commentary*, p.21

¹⁰⁸ This chilling statement, redolent of many instances of ethnic cleansing was made by one of the most distinguished residents of Ghana's North. This elder also had extremely close ties to the central government.

¹⁰⁹ Skinner, E. P. (1975). 'Competition Within Ethnic Systems in Africa.' *Ethnicity and Resource competition in Plural Society*. Leo Despres ed.

prepared for change and often surpassed by the formerly less successful groups within the ethnic system.

This assessment accurately describes events in Ghana's North. However, this story does not end in the 1970s, and these reversals have been accelerated under reform.

6.2 State versus Market Oriented Production in Northern Ghana.

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

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

Principal beneficiaries of this strategy were chiefs. These included Alhaji Sule (Gushie na) and Dr. Arda (Navoropio or chief of Navorongo).¹¹⁰ As demand for commercially valuable land grew, so did the acquisitive opportunities for chiefs. Shepherd documented a growing, monopolistic, and largely covert market in which chiefs sold land use rights to stranger farmers.¹¹¹

As I indicated in an earlier section, the state's ability to maintain an ISI model faltered. The large scale rice scheme collapsed in the economic malaise of the late 1970's and early 1980's. Massive import compression resulted in an absence of fuel or spare parts for machinery, and hyperinflation eroded farmers' abilities to repay their bank loans causing credit to be withdrawn.¹¹² The policies of economic reform have further vitiated this model.

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

¹¹⁰ Gariba, S. (1989). *The Peasantry and the State*, p. 250 footnote 6

¹¹¹ Shepherd A.. (1981). Agrarian Change In Northern Ghana: Public Investment, Capitalist farming and Famine. *Rural Development in Tropical Africa*. J. Heyer, P. Roberts and G. Williams eds. New York, St. Martin's. p. 177

¹¹² Shepherd, A., E. Gyimah Boadi, et al. (2004). *Bridging the North South Divide in Ghana?* Equity and Development, World Development Report 2006 Background Paper. *Draft* p]. 35-36

I cannot account entirely for the dynamic growth of starchy tubers in the conflict zone during adjustment. Studies on relative price changes under reform indicate that cassava farmers were the exception to the rule that subsistence food farmers were net losers from reform.¹¹³ A growth in cassava in some districts is also consistent with an erosion of soil fertility, since it is extremely low-nutrient tolerant and, as noted above, cassava has received support from the national and regional research system. Starchy tubers are also in extremely high demand in the South, and budget shares for roots and tubers are consistent across all income groups.¹¹⁴ Demand for these goods has increased along with economic recovery.

Increased output can also be accounted for by the restored incentives for commercial output that accompanied the return of necessary consumer goods - such as cloth, matches, and kerosene - to local markets in the wake of liberalisation. Official export statistics on non-traditional exports (NTEs) have not been sufficiently disaggregated in the past for me to know exactly when northern yams emerged as an international export crop. By 1993, yams' share of Ghana's NTEs was increasing, implying that commercial yam farmers had become major beneficiaries of Ghana's expenditure switching policies. Outside of frozen fish and pineapples, yams had become the largest NTE in value terms by the time of the conflict. In fact, by 2002 yam exports from Ghana had a value of over \$8 million.¹¹⁵

For commercial yam farmers, the large output growth is in part accounted for by improvements in the marketing networks and the renewed availability of commercial transport. Key roads in the Northern region - Yendi-Bimbilla-Salaga, Yendi, Nakpanduri, Damongo-Bole, Tamale-Bolga, and Gushiegu-Karaga became subject to regular bi-annual maintenance. This last point is not insignificant. The failure to develop commercial agriculture in the Northern region under colonialism is intimately tied up with the failure to extend the railhead north of Kumasi, and the associated problems with transport. Moreover, the opening up of road traffic in the 1920's led to an explosive growth in yam output from areas with large Konkomba populations, and created profitable niches for transporters and market middlemen (the latter were not Konkomba).¹¹⁶

The gains from road rehabilitation and the restored availability of transportation in the reform era are key elements in the crop's pre-1994 growth profile. These have reduced spatial price differentials, improved farm gate prices, and reduced the share of transport margins to levels where production for the market remains profitable. Although infrastructure remains inadequate, it has certainly improved from the crisis era immediately prior to adjustment.

The new wealth associated with profitable yam farming and marketing contributed to the Guinea Fowl War in four interrelated ways. First, the increasing wealth of Konkomba, and the emergence of increasing numbers of Konkomba "Big Men", intensified the misfit between their economic and political status.

Secondly, as a result of the growing opportunities associated with Ghana's economic recovery, Konkomba increasingly invested in productive assets, although this trend has been going on since the 1950s. To some extent, this plays out as a modern equivalent of defying sumptuary

¹¹³ Pearce, R. Ghana. Structural Adjustment p.21

¹¹⁴ Maxwell, D., C. Levin, et al. (2000). *Urban Livelihoods and Food and Nutrition Security in Greater Accra, Ghana. IFPRI Research Report 112*. Washington D.C., International Food Policy Research Institute.

¹¹⁵ Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (2001). *The State of the Ghanaian Economy in 2000*. Accra, University of Ghana-Legon. P. 109.

¹¹⁶ On the large growth of Yam exports to the south in this period see Talton, B. (2003). *Ethnic Insurgency*, P. 149/150. Also Brukum.

laws. This new propensity for accumulation was tied to the development of their own yam marketing chain. This has been a key component of their liberation from Nanumba and Dagomba, and has generated sharp resistance.

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

Finally, the growth of commerce and government provided amenities in urban settings also increased the incentive for greater concentration in the towns. Fees for acquiring urban land became punitive for 'minorities'. These economic factors dramatically intensified the stakes in the attempt by the Konkomba leadership to install a paramount chief.

6.3 The Growth of the Commercial and Marketing Networks of the Konkomba

One of the foundations for the 'majority tribes' supposition of superiority was the Konkomba tendency to not invest the wealth they obtained from sales of their marketed surplus.¹¹⁷ A division of labour between food growing and marketing is a classic feature of ranked ethnic systems. According to one influential Konkomba respondent in Accra, Konkomba who attempted to market their own goods suffered expropriation and were told that marketing their own products was a violation of customary law.¹¹⁸

Prior to the 1981 Nanumba-Konkomba conflict, KOYA organised farmers to boycott 'majority' middlemen in the yam trade. As one of my respondents noted:

Originally Dagombas were coming to buy and often deceiving you over the price. We started trading in the 80s. We realised that they cheated and started to put ideas. Opportunities were coming and our eyes were getting open.

This transformation was also clearly a source of grievance prior to the Guinea Fowl War. Van der Linde and Naylor heard from one Nanumba workshop participant:¹¹⁹

...whoever is strong to farm should be allowed to farm...But the problem, one of the things that triggers problems is the marketing of this produce. Konkombas are the dominant producers of yams. They go to the market and arrange yam in heaps for a particular price. Somebody else goes in to turn them away and says, "No you can't do that, you people are not from this place. This is our land. You can't come and produce here and sell it at that price.' And it created a lot of friction a number of times and people fought over that.

With respect to the national marketing chain that developed after the boycott, Nanumba and Dagomba dominance was undercut on two fronts. One front involved the growth of marketing networks and transport arrangements among the Konkomba themselves. This included the development of the large Agbobloshie market in Accra, and a second market in Kumasi. With respect to transport, I am not certain of the volume moved by Konkomba. However, transport owners and drivers appear to make up a significant portion of KOYA members. In 1997 in the town of Chamba, I interviewed a gathering of Konkomba men organised by the Konkomba 'chief', Bijiba Iyaar. When I asked these farmers if they were better off than they had been in the pre-

¹¹⁷ Skalnik, 'Nanumba Chieftaincy' p. 94

¹¹⁸ Interview, Agbobloshie Accra, August 2007, with Edwin Balidin Ndjonah, Accra

¹¹⁹ van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor (1999). *Building Sustainable Peace* p.22

crisis era, they claimed they were not sure, but now were much more interested in trading and investing. I was informed that “the number of grinding mills is uncountable”, and that there were more than 20 Konkomba owned lorries in the area.¹²⁰ I cannot confirm this figure but even half of this number would mark a large shift in Konkomba ownership of capital goods.

A second front on which ‘majority’ marketers have been undercut has been the growing attraction of Konkomba yams to larger middlemen from the South, whom Katanga states, “broke the hold chiefs had over their former slaves.” Because Konkomba marketing activities galvanised in 1981, it is impossible to state that they are a direct result of reform. However, the explosive growth of this liberating development, in recent years has been made possible by the growing integration of national markets.¹²¹ These developments would have remained meaningless if the inter-regional transport of food had not recovered from the crisis period. Nor would they have been possible if the state had dominated food crop marketing.

The fact remains that rising Konkomba income, accumulation, and investment strike at the economic underpinnings of the ranked system of the North. As disadvantages for the previously marginal Konkomba were removed and poverty was reduced, greater fissures emerged in the ranked system of Northern Ghana, generating precisely the dynamic predicted by Horowitz.

6.4 The Commodification of Land

As the yam market grew, conflict escalated over who the beneficiaries would be. Following the war, a Nanumba spokesman claimed that the Konkombas simply “don’t want us to farm yams.” The President of KOYA has countered that “before the Nanumbas didn’t want to farm because they had us do everything. Now it’s profitable and they want to take it all.”¹²² At issue here was not simply two parties fighting over land ownership, but rather the meaning of the term ‘ownership’ itself.

Historically, northern Ghana has been a labour, rather than land, scarce economy. As in the South this relative factor endowment created the basis for slavery as a mode of production and political stratification, rather than feudalism. Chiefly jurisdiction was political and over persons, and did not imply ‘ownership’ of land in the modern sense. Traditionally all villages had a *Tindana* that played the principal role in land allocation. While payments in the form of a basket of millet or corn to the *Tindana* were required at harvest time, this was understood to be a gift rather than rent.¹²³ As noted above, in the conquests of the acephalous groups, many *Tindana* were killed. Over time, and largely through their role as intermediaries between state and society under colonialism, political chiefs usurped the privileges of the *Tindana* in land allocation.¹²⁴ However, within this system land still largely remained a free good.

In Nanumba, the allodium is vested in the paramount chief, the Bimbilla na, and is administered through four-sub chiefs. These chiefs, however, are fundamentally trustees of land and are not ‘owners’ in the strict sense. Citizens of Nanun have automatic rights to convert any virgin land into a farm. Non-citizens (Konkomba) lack these rights. Instead they must seek the permission

¹²⁰ Group interview organised by Bijiba Iyaar, J.K. Munkaila, Bijiba Barnabas. June 5, 1997 Chamba.

¹²¹ More data on national market integration in this period. However, Alderman, and Alderman and Shiveley’s work indicate that price movements in North produced grains are consistent with improvements in transport from the Northern regions to southern markets. See Alderman, H. (1996). “Economic Reform and Food Prices: Evidence from Markets in Ghana.” *World Development* 24(3).

¹²² Liz Sly (1995) “Dispute reflects Clash between old and New Ghana” *Chicago Tribune* August 20 1995.

¹²³ Adeetuk, T. U. (1991). *Land Tenure and Food Production* p. 62

¹²⁴ Goody, J. (1980). “Rice-Burning and the Green Revolution in Northern Ghana.” *Journal of development Studies* (2)

of the Bimbilla na to establish farms. They must also pay a fee, and may be subject to dispossession. A 'stranger' is also required to provide larger annual quantities of grain and yams to the chief. By all accounts, these exactions, along with the Konkombas' recent unwillingness to pay them, have been a historically important source of friction and conflict.¹²⁵

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

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

Royal assumption of private 'ownership' over land held in trust in the context of increasing prosperity and land value is a familiar story in Ghana. During the cocoa boom in Ashanti and the Gold Coast Colony this activity was widespread. Here too the process could be violent, and led to the exploitation and redefinition of strangers and citizens.¹²⁶ But unlike the context of the Guinea Fowl War, these transformations did not occur in a stratified ethnic system. Moreover, these transformations did not occur in a political environment of populist mobilisation in which the normative framework centred on democracy. In the South, commercial transformation and rising wealth were not as incendiary as in Dagomba, Nanumba, and Gonja.

I do not wish to assert that the tie between land and chieftaincy was the only reason that the Konkomba leadership petitioned to obtain a Paramount Chief. This act was also clearly bound up with the need for recognition. And land issues were not the only reason that 'majority tribes' reacted to this request with hostility. After all, the vast majority of Nanumba, Dagomba, and Gonja have **not** benefited from chiefs' land privatisation.¹²⁷

As Horowitz points out, "lack of group autonomy in leadership selection is a sure sign of ethnic subordination." Konkomba requests to have their own Paramount Chief installed who could then enskin subordinates on his own, thus implied a massive redefinition of the Konkomba position within the Ghanaian hierarchy, and violated 'majority' conceptions of the 'natural' social order in which Konkomba are deemed to be profoundly inferior. The Konkomba request for autonomy also implied an assault on the territorial and proprietary sovereignty of Dagomba and Nanumba. Having said this, for many Konkomba, particularly at the elite level, the issue has been one of land rights.¹²⁸ As I have argued, this desire to secure land ownership resulted from improving welfare rather than immiseration.

¹²⁵ Adeetuk, T. U. (1991). *Land Tenure*, p. 76

¹²⁶ Rathbone, R. (1996). "Defining Akyemfo: The Construction of Citizenship in Akyem Abuakwa, Ghana 1700-1939." *Africa* 66(4).

¹²⁷ On this point see especially Sule Nabia "Why do Chiefs Sell our Land?" *Accra Mail* Jan 17, 2006

This relative improvement in the lives of those who have not been as successful in historically cultivating ties to the state is not random. Economic reform, and the liberal market growth it encouraged, has emphasised reversing urban bias and has sought to eliminate the role of the state in the administrative allocation of resources. It is directed at improving the lives of those who have been politically weak and whose primary avenues of survival have been rural. National market integration also enables subordinate groups to network outside of their closed and ranked communities. A similar experience occurred with Asante rubber traders a century earlier.¹²⁹ In ranked systems the outcomes of such benefits generate dissonance and war.

Conclusion

I have argued that the desired results of economic reform have contributed to violence in Northern Ghana. The question before us now concerns the broader implications for research and policy analysis. My general analysis has been principally directed at the conflict literature, but there are broader implications for scholars concerned with gross regional political and income inequality.

This paper makes a strong case for the consideration of local context and multiplicity of institutions when trying to understand the social impact of economic growth, contraction and poverty. Historical institutional analysis of tribal conflict forces us to confront the fact that ethno-political actors are not merely “generic individuals pursuing generic preferences but have distinct preferences, orientations, and values that are shaped by unique historical and institutional backgrounds”.¹³⁰ For the purpose of this conference this implies that even within marginal areas distinct groups will be better placed than others to benefit from market based growth, and this can contribute to war.

Consideration of this case should also serve to remind us of the distinction between economic science and political economy. Assumptions about the broader benefits of efficiency and rationality are not components of economic ‘science’ but are political assumptions. These assumptions are naturalised in constructs such as pareto optimality. However, growing equality and wealth are not universally desirable by all actors in real world contexts.

I stated at the outset that one would wish to have a great deal more data before making a firm conclusion about the social impact of reform in Northern Ghana. I do believe, however, that the increasing commercial value of land and rising incomes played a role as a conflict driver. This does not mean that poverty reduction and growth should be removed from the IFIs’ agenda. Nor does it imply that goals of better market access for regions that have not benefited proportionately from market based growth is undesirable. It does raise flags, however, about the complexity of the institutional reforms that will be required for some regions with a high incidence of chronic poverty to benefit from growth. Commercial transformation and an increase in amenities generate conflicts over access to those values.

A final thought, perhaps also contrary to the general assumptions at least of this conference concerns the danger of focusing on the political and economic strength of poor regions, as opposed to the weakness of ‘core’ areas of a given state and the central state itself. The

129 Arhin, K. (1972). "The Ashanti Rubber Trade With the Gold Coast in the Eighteen Nineties." *Africa* XLII(1). This of course involved a stratified society, but conflicts were intra-ethnic.

130 Grindle, M. (2001). In *Quest of the Political: The Political Economy of Development Policymaking*. *Frontiers of Development Economics*. G. Meier and J. Stiglitz. Oxford and Washington, Oxford University Press and the World Bank.

prominence of political elites, and particularly chiefs do reflect the limited commercial transformation that is a correlate of regional chronic poverty. Reliance on regional patrons is also clearly the result of a lack of local amenities and low stocks of human capital within the North. But the position of these local notables in the context of Ghana's political pluralism also reflects the fundamental weakness of the central state vis a vis society and the inability of the nominally dominant central political system to actually dominate. Weber's magisterial presentation of the social foundation of patrimonialism is helpful here. Weber emphasised the extent to which construction of binding authority of the centre was tenuous in politically plural contexts "particularly where the patrimonial ruler confronts not a mere mass of subjects, but where he stands as one landlord (grundherr) above others who as honoraires wield an autonomous authority of their own. The patrimonial power disapproves of independent authority but cannot dare to destroy autonomous local powers, unless he has an organisation of his own which can replace them with approximately the same authority over local populations. Typically the financial requirements of this were, impossible to satisfy."¹³¹

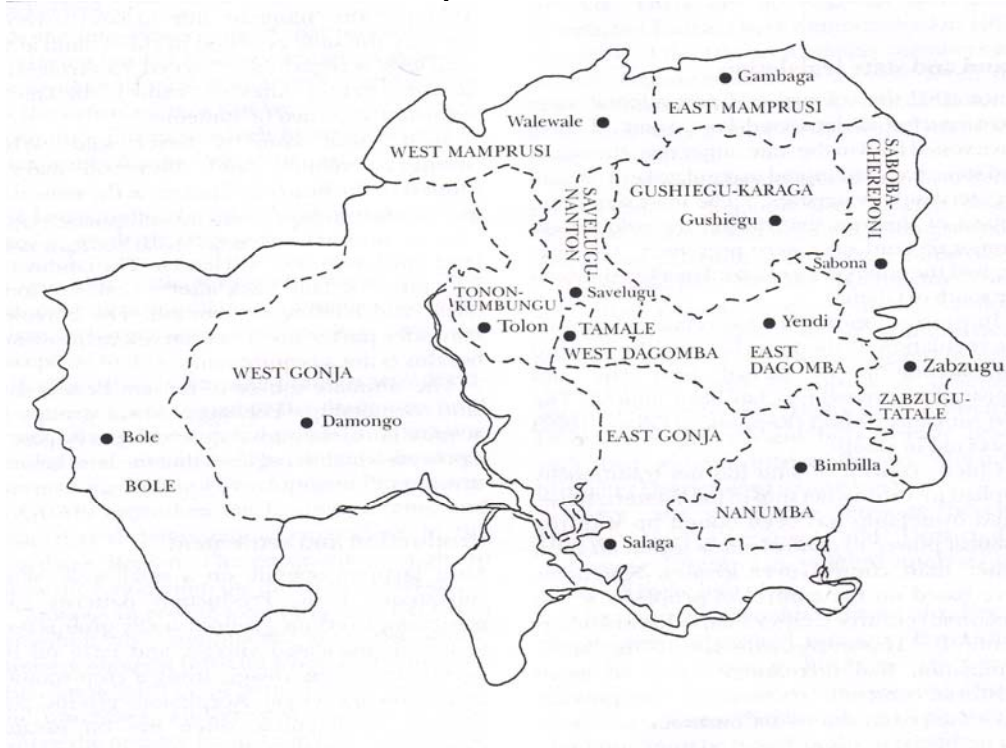
While meaningful decentralisation, as suggested by one member of this panel, may no doubt make self serving regional elites more responsive to constituents, more effective national development agencies, revenue agencies, and national institutions may enable the state to gain greater autonomy from regional elites. A more effective and well equipped national military would also be more capable of responding to conflict effectively when it emerged. This is not to state that problematising marginal regions of chronic poverty on their own terms is wrong. It is simply to note that eradicating some dimensions of spatial poverty will also involve empowering wealthy regions.

The state of insecurity in Northern Ghana created an environment in which "men feel like they should sleep in a hotel". At the same time, we have learned about the potential risks associated with market led economic growth and poverty reduction. One wonders whether researchers should hope that the standard of accommodation in the Northern region improves.

¹³¹ Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Appendix Figure I

District Map of Northern Ghana



Map source: van der Linde, A. and R. Naylor (1999). *Building Sustainable Peace: Conflict, Conciliation, and Civil Society in Northern Ghana*. Oxford, Oxfam GB *note Bimbilla in the Map's south east corner. Note: The author has not yet obtained permission to reproduce this map. Please do not reproduce.

Appendix Table I

The Political and Economic Profile, 1957-2000

Dates	Government	Type	Economic Stance
1957-1966	K. Nkrumah	Civilian	Socialist, inward looking
1966-1967	National Liberation Council	Military	Renounced socialism, initiated liberalisation
1969-1972	K.A. Busia, Progress Party	Civilian	Stronger moves to liberalisation
1972-1977	Gen. I. Acheampong, National Redemption Council	Military	Inward looking, protectionist reversal of Busia devaluation
1975-1978	Gen. I. Acheampong, Supreme Military Council	Military	Inward looking: protectionist
1978-1978	Gen. F.W.K. Akuffo	Military	Inward looking: protectionist
1979-1980	Fl.Lt. J.J. Rawlings, Armed Revolutionary Council	Military	General tightening of forces, economic controls
1980-1981	H. Limann	Civilian	No real change
1981-1992	Fl.Lt. J.J. Rawlings, Provisional National Defense Council	Military	Initial tightening of cont. From April 1983, outward oriented
1992-2000	National Democratic Congress	Civilian	Continuation

Appendix Table II

Ghana: Composition and Growth of GDP by Category 1980-2001

(Annual Percentage Change)	1980-83	1984-91	1992-2001
GDP at market prices	-4.9	5.4	4.4
Agriculture	-4.9	3.9	3.2
Industry	-11.9	8.3	4.3
Services	0.6	7.4	6.2
Exports (GNFS)	-29.1	13.8	9.4
Imports	-19.3	10.9	9.9
Per Capita Growth Rate	-9.7	2.4	1.8

Source Quarterly Digest of Statistics and IMF Staff Estimates

Appendix Table III

Production Estimates for Yam in the Northern Region

District	Year		
	1992	1993	1994
Damango	9000	10500	12600
Yendi	58500	74250	31250
Bimbilla	214500	249600	78000
Gushiegu/Karaga	94800	108420	31500
Gambaga	700	700	750
Savelugu/Nanton	19000	14980	17550
Salaga	243600	252170	61000
Tamale	35000	44000	31200
Bole	45600	34290	37536

(Figures in Metric Tonnes)

Appendix Table IV

Northern Region Production Estimates				Figs in Metric Tonnes					
Crops	Maize	Rice	Cassava	Millet	G/Corn	Yam	G/nuts	Beans	Pepper
1986	102100	36100	122950	106400	115520	453964	86300	12100	72400
1987	90000	31000	140000	35530	59470	300000	85957	5797	4169
1988	134600	46000	108000	90000	89460	624200	99000	6700	1100
1989	87000	19500	122400	112000	121000	447000	91000	13400	1000
1990	106700	44696	56000	38710	68040	352000			
1991	159460	50160	140400	35050	120360	1185900	23000	32775	
1992	130560	43360	155890	43850	112850	905420			
1993	167889	60212	197345	60980	127032	995370	32650	43871	

Source: Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Dept. (Statistics Division) MOA.

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