



## GENDER AND PEACE-BUILDING: NAWURI WOMEN AND PEACE-BUILDING INITIATIVES IN THE KPANDAI DISTRICT IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA

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### **Abstract**

*Scholarship on Nawuri history, sociocultural, economic and political institutions and organizations has provided little space for gender issues. Similarly, the narratives on the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, particularly its resolution and search for peace, have failed to situate peace-building encounters and initiatives within gender perspectives. This study examines the roles of Nawuri women in peace-building in Kpandai and its environs after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict of the 1990s. It examines the sociocultural tools and nomenclatures – the magico-religious rituals, songs, demonstrations and outreach programmes – that Nawuri women utilized to promote peace and advance peace-building initiatives in Kpandai and its environs after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict. By blending together data from monographs, field research and archival materials, this study constructs a coherent narrative on the contributions of Nawuri women to peace-building in Kpandai and its environments over the past three decades. It argues that Nawuri women appropriated issues and events in their sociocultural settings to advance the course of peace and peace-building in their environment after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict of the 1990s.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Peace-building, *alijii*, *ejii*, *chankpana*, Nawuri, Gonja, sociocultural, *Baya*, women.

### **Studies on Gender and Peace-Building**

Generally, studies on conflicts have largely reduced women to victims of violence. In recent times, however, there is a burgeoning literature on the role of women in conflict resolution and peace-building. With the burgeoning literature on gender in peace-building, attention has been drawn to the significance of women in peace-building. It is argued that “the inclusion of women is an essential element to understanding the roots of a conflict and also to developing innovative, viable solutions that can help establish sustainable peace. The importance of bringing gender into peace-building is not confined to redressing the violations of the human rights of women or addressing women’s

economic, social or justice needs. Instead, for many, a gendered perspective represents peace-building as a process of inclusion” (Academy for International Conflict Management and Peace-building, n.d.: 1). In addition, due to the historicity of gender roles in peace-building and reconciliation, it is important for it to receive attention in scholarship. Historically, “there are countless examples and studies of women’s organizations engaging in the process of peace and reconciliation, whether at the national or international level, going as far back as World War I” (Backgrounder, 2017: 2). Specifically, focus on gender roles in peace-building provides a holistic construction of the

nuances of peace-building and reconciliation in the context of local exigencies or variables. This is because:

women peace builders bring different perspectives and priorities than men, so when women are included, the nature of the dialogue changes. Women tend to contribute to a more holistic understanding of peace that addresses short-term security issues as well as long-term needs such as education, health-care, jobs and land. Women also tend to share a vision for peace based on respect for the dignity of the individual, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or economic background (even while their governments maintained isolationist or pro-war positions). Most importantly, they share the understanding that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men (Backgrounder, 2017: 3)

Since the roles of women in peace-building are significant, scholarship on peace-building and conflict resolution can no longer ignore the gender perspective. As Kofi Annan aptly puts it:

we can no longer afford to minimize or ignore the contributions of women and girls to all stages of conflict resolution, peacemaking, peace-building, peacekeeping and resolution processes. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men (UN, 2002: 12)

Examining the extent to which gender and peace-building interface both conceptually and practically, Munro (2000) hinted about the significance of gender to peace-building. He argued that “linking gender and peace building together can positively influence peace building, both in theory and in practice” (Munro, 2000: 1). In the view of O’Reilly et al. (2015), the participation of women in peace-building is significant, stressing the quality of

women’s participation to peace-building. Goetz and Jenkins (2016) argue that women’s participation in peace-building is not tantamount to gender-equality, and that the degree of impact of women in peace-building is a function of the form of women’s engagement.

Some scholars have constructed peace-building from a feminist perspective. Smyth et al. (2020) provided a historical examination of women’s struggles for participation in peace-building in Africa, Middle East and the Pacific Island. Examining their study from a feminist perspective, they argued that “mainstream conceptions of war and peace [impede] both women’s meaningful participation and sustainable peace” (Smyth et al., 2020: 6).

Olofsson (2018) made a comparative study of women’s role in peace-building in Africa and Asia. According to her, “women engage in all types of peace building work and even though women suffer and are victims of war they are also agents of change and when they are limited by the gender roles that exist, they use what agency they have within the frame of their roles as women to implement change” (Olofsson, 2018: 2). Ochieng (2019) examined the place of women in the Catholic Church in conflict resolution and peace-building in African context. She argued that “in many areas of conflict women play a major role in keeping the communities from disintegrating even in the breakdown of the social fabric ... [and] that the Catholic Church as a leading advocate for empowerment of women, has a major role to ensure that they are allowed to play a more significant role in conflict resolution and peace building” (Ochieng, 2019: i).

In another dimension, Goyol (2019) discussed the role of women in post-conflict peace-building initiatives in the context of the civil war in Liberia. She argues that “though women were disproportionately affected during the civil wars that ravaged the country, they have been particularly instrumental in the peace process” (Goyol, 2019: 123). Similarly, O’Driscoll (2017)

discussed the role of women in peace-building in Iraq, and underlined the fact that women are conspicuously under-represented in “peace processes as core actors and when they do participate, their role is limited and the quality of their participation is extremely important (O’Driscoll, 2017: 2).” He further argued that “whilst women’s participation in peace building in Iraq is limited, at a local level there are a number of important initiatives led by civil society that are gradually increasing women’s role in peace building at a micro level” (O’Driscoll, 2017: 2).

In his study of the participation of women in peace-building and reconciliation in the Rift Valley in Kenya following the 2007 post-election violence, Mbakaya (n.d.) argued that women played critical roles in facilitating and fast-tracking the peace process. He concluded that “there is proactive participation of women in peace building and reconciliation processes in Rift Valley following the post- election (*sic*) violence of 2007” (Mbakaya, n.d.: 6-7). Furthermore, women participated in the peace process in the 2007 post-election violence in the Rift Valley in Kenya at various levels – “at household level, village level, sub county level, county level, community level and regional levels both in formal and non-formal (*sic*) structures” (Mbakaya, n.d.: 7). Lorentzen, Toure and Gaye (2019) also provided another African perspective of the participation of women in peace-building and conflict resolution. Focusing their study of women participation in peace-building in Mali on perspectives from Segou, Mopti, and Tombouctou, Lorentzen, Toure and Gaye (2019: 26) underlined the fact that women’s involvement in peace-building in those areas was a function of “the flexibility of existing practices of conflict resolution.” They established that, though some cultural, traditional and religious practices impeded the participation of women in peace-building processes, they highlighted “the importance of gender roles for conflict and peace” (Lorentzen, Toure and Gaye, 2019: 26). Therefore, they argued that “as women have the potential to be both conflict actors and promoters of peace in their

communities; their inclusion is essential to the sustainability and durability of peace and reconciliation processes” (Lorentzen, Toure and Gaye, 2019: 26).

This study builds on the existing discourse on gender and peace-building in Africa. It contextualizes the socio-cultural activities of Nawuri women after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict in the 1990s, and provides a narrative of how Nawuri women utilized cultural tools and nomenclatures to promote and/or provide foundations for peace-building.

### **Background to the Nawuri-Gonja Conflict and Peace initiatives**

In 1991, an inter-ethnic conflict broke out between the Nawuri and the Gonja over allodial rights to lands in Kpandai and its environs. The pendulum of the conflict oscillated over a period, eventually leading to the defeat and evacuation of the Gonja from Kpandai to Salaga, Kpembu and other settlements in Gonjaland. As part of measures to combat the conflict and to ensure peace and security in Kpandai and its environs, the Northern Regional Security Committee (REGSEC) met the warring factions in Tamale on May 7, 1991, whereupon REGSEC referred the conflict to the Bimbilla-Na for resolution (Ampiah, 1991: 35). A peace treaty could not be brokered by the Bimbilla-Na due to the entrenched positions of both parties. Government’s attempt to resolve the conflict through the Ampiah Committee, which was set up to investigate the causes of the conflict and make appropriate recommendations for implementation, did not succeed either. This was largely due to government’s lack of political will to implement the recommendations of the committee (Mbowura, 2014; Mbowura, 2016). Similarly, attempts to build peace through a resettlement scheme by which the Government engineered the resettlement of the displaced Gonja back to Kpandai to create a “natural healing process” for peace formation were equally unsuccessful for a number of reasons including logistical reasons and the psychological

impact of the scheme on the Gonja evacuees (Mbowura, 2016).

In 1994 when inter-ethnic conflicts engulfed many parts of the Northern Region, the Government and NGOs made attempts to resolve all the conflicts in the region holistically to ensure lasting peace. Consequently, a mediation body, known as the “Permanent Peace Negotiation Team” (PPNT), was established to conclude peace treaties with the various warring factions in the Region (Mbowura, 2014). While the PPNT made remarkable achievements by brokering peace treaties with the various warring factions, it could not conclude a peace agreement between the Nawuri and the Gonja because of their entrenched positions (Mbowura, 2014). It is against this background of failed attempts by traditional authorities, the Government and NGOs to conclude peace agreement between the Nawuri and the Gonja that the peace-building mechanisms adopted by Nawuri women in the post-Nawuri-Gonja conflict era are significant. The peace-building initiatives of the Nawuri women appropriated available sociocultural tools and nomenclatures to prosecute a peace-building agenda in Kpandai and its environs since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Contextualizing the Issue**

There is paucity of information on gender in the discourses on Nawuri history and social settings. With the exception of the work of Mbowura (2021) that examined the roles of Nawuri women in the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, literature on the Nawuri made peripheral references to gender issues in Nawuri socio-cultural settings. In his discussion of how Nawuri encounters with the German colonial authorities shaped Nawuri history, Ntewusu (2016) provided repertoires of social and economic implications of German policies in Nawuriland. Peripherally, Ntewusu (2016) made references to Nawuri women in the construction of the socio-economic history of the Nawuri. According to him, Nawuri women played a key role in the attempted German cotton plantation in Nawuriland as Nawuri women “extracted oil from the seeds of cotton by roasting it first and crushing the seeds into a paste,

the paste was dried in the sun and afterwards kneaded to extract the oil. The oil was used to prepare local soap called *Gbanekwaya* (Gonja soap)” (Ntewusu, 2016: 9). Mbowura (2021) discussed how Nawuri women used the *ejii* songs to stoke the fires of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict. He argued:

Nawuri women utilized their culture to keep alive the flames of Nawuri resistance to Gonja rule. Through the performance of the *ejii*, a Nawuri funeral dance performed by women, Nawuri women raised nostalgia of Nawuri sovereignty and whipped up anti-Gonja sentiments. During the performance, series of songs were sung which lampooned Gonja rule and called for uninterrupted and collective resistance. The songs contributed in renewing the vigour and determination of their male counterparts to resist Gonja rule irrespective of the consequences until victory was achieved (Mbowura, 2021: 38)

This paper seeks to build on the discourse on gender in Nawuri social history in general. It constructs a narrative of the social roles of Nawuri women within the context of peace-building. The study examines the appropriation of religious rituals by Nawuri women to promote peace and peace-building. It also examines other cultural performances and the activities of Nawuri women in the post-Nawuri-Gonja conflict within the context of peace-building in Nawuriland.

### **Gender and Magico-Ritual Performances for Peace**

Until the advent of Christianity in Nawuriland in the 1960s, Nawuri religious life and cosmology revolved around beliefs in spirits. Veneration of ancestors and twins was deeply rooted in Nawuri religious settings. In the main, “the socio-political and economic lives of the traditional Nawuri were deeply rooted in their belief in their deities – *Idakpa*.

Each Nawuri community had its *idakpa*; so did individuals and families. Among the most powerful *idakpa* in Alfai [Nawuriland] were *Nnanjulo, Nana Esuwele, Chulin, Joogon and Kankpe*” (Mbowura, 2012: 160). The Nawuri worldview and importance attached to rituals are part of the general African traditional beliefs and practices. As Lugira (2009: 64) argued:

to Africans belief without ritual action would take away much of religion’s natural power. Rites and ritual punctuate all aspects of African religious life. Religion is so deeply ingrained in the daily life of traditional Africa that it is all but impossible to separate it from other aspects of the culture.

Apart from the *Idakpa*, female ritual practices or devotion to the *Chankpana* cult, a secret society, is rife. The *Chankpana* is a secret cultic practice by which women were initiated and venerated the *Chankpana* spirit or deity, a trans-national spirit/deity with its roots in the Republic of Nigeria and with devotees in Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana. In Ghana, the *Chankpana* devotees are usually found among the Achode and the Nawuri in Oti and Northern Regions of Ghana. Its devotees in Nawuriland are referred to as *alijii*, but also variously referred to as *Okuoku* or *Okule*. As a secret society, the activities and behaviours of the *alijii*, especially in the early months after their initiation, were patterned or dictated by the rules of engagement of the society. The *alijii* had their own sacred ideology and ritual practices around their unique secret symbols. The modus operandi of the *alijii* was symptomatic of the ritual practices of all cultic groups – as the initiation rites and operational modalities of cultic groups are shrouded in secrecy and are dictated by their revered sacred ideology. It should be pointed out that female secret societies similar to the *Chankpana* cultic practice existed in the past, and continue to exist in Africa in contemporary times. Indeed, “women’s secret societies in Africa have formed part of their collective activism...” (Tanga, 2006: 1)

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Ntewusu et al. (2016: 153) discussed female Okule cult system within the context of environmental conservation and argued that “through the use of a cult language called *Kiliji (kílídzi)*, female members of the Okule cult controlled the use of natural resources including water, trees and wild animals.” In another perspective, Ntewusu et al (2020) examined Okule education and painted its relevance to the educational needs of societies in Nawuriland. They argued that “there was a direct relationship between Okule cult activities and the needs of society. These societal needs, such as morality, healing, protection, issues of the divine, festivals, the environment, warfare, and rites of passage, often brought communities closer to cult members” (Ntewusu et al., 2020: 131).

This subsection does not seek to pattern the socio-cultural activities of Nawuri *Okule* women within the perspectives of traditional education, agronomy and horticulture as projected by Ntewusu and his contemporaries. The section constructs the socio-cultural activities of the Nawuri women in general within the perspective of peace-building by examining the ritual practices of the *alijii* in the context of peace-building.

In the past, ritual performances surrounding the *Chankpana* cult were done after the return of new devotees who had gone through months of confinement, seclusion, training and initiation. The mysticism surrounding the *Chankpana* cult is difficult to be subjected to scientific explanation. What is known is that, soon after the first initiation rituals were performed by the ritual leader (*Olamie*), the new recruit was possessed by the *Chankpana* spirit, went into ecstasy and would begin to speak *Okuoku* (also known as *Gitaaba*) language without being taught, a foreign language believed to be spoken in modern Nigeria. After months of seclusion and confinement to teach the recruits the *alijii* mythology, ideology, etiology, ritual performances, songs and dances, the recruits passed out and returned to their various homes. Ritual performances in various Nawuri settlements were organized to celebrate the graduation of the new devotees. However, rituals connected to the

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graduation of new devotees are no longer performed in contemporary Nawuriland due to the difficulty of getting recruits or new inductees. Apart from the ritual performances organized to celebrate the graduation of the new devotees, the rituals are performed annually for a week in successive turns in each Nawuri settlement. The week-long festivity (the *Chankpana* week) is not fixed in the traditional calendar of the Nawuri; it is dependent on the spiritual visitation of *Chankpana* in a Nawuri community.

The magico-cultural performances of Nawuri women for peace-building in Nawuriland in the post-Nawuri-Gonja conflict era is not so much in the peace-oriented *ejii* songs; but in the occasional ritual performances in connection with the *Chankpana*. It has already been said that each Nawuri community performed rituals to commemorate the annual week-long visitation of the *Chankpana* spirit to their respective communities. Central to the belief system of the visitations of the *Chankpana* spirit is the belief that “*Chankpana* served as a spiritual rake or broom that sweeps away all lingering negative spirits or bad omens from each Nawuri community it visited. On each visit, *Chankpana* banishes all spirits that would cause disequilibrium and violence in each Nawuri community” (Interaction with Nana Gesuoorkong Seinka, Olamie [ritual leader] of Bladjai, December 20, 2020). Furthermore, it is

important to note that one of the rituals climaxing the week-long visit of the *Chankpana* spirit is the “spiritual cleansing of the community. Each community member cleaned their rooms and gathered the dust for the *alijii* to bury them in a mound at the outskirts of the community, symbolizing the banishment of cataclysmic issues that would have negative repercussions on peace, prosperity and development in each Nawuri community” (Interaction with Nana Gesuoorkong Seinka, Olamie [ritual leader] of Bladjai, July 20, 2021). More importantly, the *ejii* dance performed on the annual visitation of *Chankpana* was “part of spiritual rituals by which at least one of the *alijii* devotees was possessed spiritually, communicated with the *Chankpana* spirit and prophesized to the community and individuals to provide pathways to deal with the spiritual paradigm to maintain peace and prosperity or advert violence, catastrophes and dangers” (Interaction with Nana Gesuoorkong Seinka, Olamie [ritual leader] of Bladjai, July 20, 2021). Finally, in the *Ogou nii na lɛɛ* (ritual sacrifice of a goat by hitting it on the ground till it dies) as well as the sacrifice of a fowl by the *Olamie* – beheading a fowl by placing its head between the hallux and long toe and chopping off its head – the *alijii* performed sacrifices to *Chankpana* for peace and prosperity of their various communities. This has been a common phenomenon before and after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict.



*Elijii performing the eji dance in commemoration of the visit of the Chankpana spirit in Kpandai on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020 as men watched in awe*



*The Ogou nie naa leɣ ritual sacrifice of a goat in pictures. In all-white is the Chankpana agent- a woman said to have the powers to invoke and invite the Chankpana spirit from its abode in Nigeria to wherever she pleases.*

### Social and Recreational Activities

The socio-cultural milieu of the Nawuri is gender biased. It provides avenues for mobilization of human resources for the execution and performance of social and cultural activities along gender lines. Mobilization of human resources for social and cultural activities is not a peculiar phenomenon among the Nawuri; it is an integral part of the philosophy of African communalism that prioritizes collectivity over individualism in the execution of socio-cultural practices and activities (IKuenobe, 2006). Among the Nawuri, communalism provides an identity to the various Nawuri communities and the Nawuri in general as an ethnic group. An essential element of the aggregation of Nawuri women for sociocultural activities is that, though the pooling of the women together is mainly voluntary, it has the social and moral force to compel individual Nawuri women to participate in them.

The performance of rites of passage provides avenues for Nawuri women to band together. Prominent among such social occasions is funeral celebrations in Nawuri communities. During funerals, Nawuri women banded together to perform the *ejii*. Prior to the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, Nawuri women utilized the *ejii* songs to eulogize Nawuri identity and to encourage Nawuri men to fight against the Gonja for Nawuri political autonomy. Mbowura (2021: 38) painted a picture of this scenario in the following argument:

through the performance of the *ejii* ...  
Nawuri women raised nostalgia of

Nawuri sovereignty and whipped up anti-Gonja sentiments. During the performance, series of songs were sung which lampooned Gonja rule and called for uninterrupted and collective [Nawuri] resistance.

After the Nawuri-Gonja conflict in the 1990s, *ejii* songs were carefully selected to highlight the importance of peace-building. One of such post-Nawuri-Gonja conflict peace-building songs is one that “likens politics of peace to a calabash or a mirror that requires delicate handling to prevent it from falling off and breaking into pieces” (Interactions with Acting Kabonwule Queen Mother, Nana Agomada Yawa Nsiemendi, December 21, 2020). In another development, one of the *alijii* songs “likens peace-building to the tact, bravery and shrewdness required of a man to fight off the attack of a lion – epitomizing that peace-building is arduous and that it requires a lot of sacrifices of all to build peace” (Interactions with Acting Kabonwule Queen Mother, Nana Agomada Yawa Nsiemendi). It is difficult to measure the impact of the peace-oriented *ejii* songs on the Nawuri since the songs are couched in *Okuoku*, which is only understood by the *alijii* and some few adults. Nonetheless, the songs provided a basis to shift the focus of the few privileged speakers of the language to peace-building, which invariably contributed in patterning their social relations. Nana Agomada Yawa Nsiemendi stressed the import and impact of the peace-oriented *ejii* songs

on peace-building in Nawuriland in the post Nawuri-Gonja conflict period when she said:

given the aura attached to the *Chankpana* spirit and given the belief that the *alijii* were driven by the *Chankpana* spirit to raise such tunes, the peace-building songs placed a moral responsibility on the speakers of the language to act as agents of peace. If *Chankpana* desires peace and communicates it to us in songs, it is imperative on us to carry through his desire. Remember, *Chankpana* does not tolerate excuses for failure to carry through his instructions. His wrath is catastrophic (Acting Kabonwule Queen Mother, Nana Agomada Yawa Nsiemendi, personal communication, December 21, 2021).

The ambience of the *ejii* songs changed in the post-Nawuri-Gonja conflict era. From stoking the fires for war in the pre-conflict era, the ambience of the *ejii* songs shifted to peace-building, especially a decade after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict. As the *Olamie* (leader of the *ejii* fraternity) in Kabonwule argued:

The war [Nawuri-Gonja conflict] is over. Ten years after the war in 1991, we realized that there was the need to shift attention from “beating war drums” to the mobilization of sociocultural resources for the peace building process. It is a complex and complicated situation to shift from stoking the fires of the war and actively participating in it to canvassing for peace. In the architecture of peace in Nawuriland after the war, it was necessary for us in the *ejii* fraternity to carefully select songs that preached peace as fundamental tools in the peace-building process (*Olamie* of Kabonwule, personal communication, December 25, 2021).

The shift in the genre of traditional music in Nawuri social setting after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict in the 1990s is not limited to the *ejii*; it is the pattern in all Nawuri traditional dances. In the *Baya* dance (a female-dominated dance performed largely for recreational purposes), the songs performed shifted from stoking the fires of war to peace-building. To study the extent to which *Baya* songs served as cultural tools for peace-building in Nawuriland after the inter-ethnic conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja in the 1990s, a research was conducted on *Baya* songs from December, 2019 to July, 2021. During this period, a total of 375 *Baya* songs were recorded in all the Nawuri communities on different occasions. A study of the songs shows the centrality of peace-building through the utilization of cultural tools among Nawuri women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Of the 375 *Baya* songs, 195 of them (representing 52%) focused on peace-building as a basis of development or unity and development as precursors for peace formation in Nawuriland and between the Nawuri and their neighbours. In addition, 101 of the *Baya* songs (representing 26.93%) provided messages encapsulating joy, love and relationship in a social setting of peace and tranquility. Only 46 of the songs (representing 12.27%) focused on bereavement, sorrow and the pain of losing a beloved one while just a handful (33 songs, representing 8.8%) focused on the valour of the Nawuri in war, Nawuri identity and miscellaneous issues. Of the 375 *Baya* songs, 189 were recorded in two homecoming festivities (annual festivities of the Nawuri) in December 2019 and December 2020. Interestingly, 157 of the *Baya* songs performed in the above homecoming festivities, representing 83.07%, focused on peace-building, peace as a precursor for development, unity as a precursor for peace and development, peace and unity as fundamental features of Nawuri identity and orientation. From the data, it is obvious that *Baya* songs serve as cultural tools that Nawuri women utilized in the post-Nawuri-Gonja conflict era to promote peace-building in Nawuriland. It is difficult to measure and analyse the impact of the peace-oriented *Baya* songs on peace-building in Nawuriland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, one thing

is clear: the peace-oriented *Baya* songs stimulated a change in orientation from war to peace; hence, the

songs provide the building blocks for peace-building activities in Nawuriland.



*Baya dance by Nawuri women on the occasion of the homecoming in December 2021. Each song has a peculiar drum music that accompanies it, which ultimately determines the dance rhythms of dancers.*

### **Nawuri Women and the March for Peace**

Nawuri women had been instrumental in the events that led to the outbreak of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict in 1991. According to Mbowura (2021: 39), the incessant altercations between the Nawuri and the Gonja in early 1991 made “the outbreak of a war” between them “only a matter of time. It only needed a trigger, and women provided it.” From the outbreak of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict to its conduct, Nawuri women were visible and played active roles as financiers, logistics suppliers, first-aid providers, eavesdroppers, food suppliers, among others (Mbowura, 2021). Similarly, after the end of the conflict, Nawuri women played and continue to play active roles in the attempts at maintaining peace in Kpandai and its surrounding Nawuri communities.

Beginning with periodic meetings of Nawuri women in various communities for social activities and the promotion of peace, some Nawuri women in Kpandai engaged their counterparts of other ethnic groups to establish pathways for peaceful co-existence and interactions of women in economic activities in the informal sector. Of all the contributions of Nawuri women to peace-building after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, it was the march of Nawuri women for peace in 2010 that was prominent. Just like the march of French women to Versailles in demonstration against Louis XVI and his government on 5 October 1789, Nawuri women held a mammoth demonstration in 2010 against perpetrators of events that could potentially renew

the conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja. After over eight years since the end of hostilities between the Nawuri and the Gonja, Nawuri women seemed unwilling to go through a cycle of armed conflict with its attendant consequences. As one of the respondents puts it:

the conflict (Nawuri-Gonja conflict) was devastating. No one predicted its outbreak; neither did anyone anticipated its unbearable consequences. Most dwellers thought it was one of the usual inter-ethnic brawls between the Nawuri and the Gonja, brawls that were symptomatic of and defined their relations since the colonial era. Therefore, no adequate preparations were made to prevent loss of lives and properties. Indeed, in the midst of the events that culminated in the outbreak of the conflict, many Nawuri and Gonja women were busy buying and stocking cereals, leguminous crops and many other farm crops as the events unfolded in the harvest season when farm crops were plentiful and relatively less expensive. It was the normal trend of business for women as they bought the produce in the harvest season, stocked them and resold them in the lean season to make

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profits. Hence, when the war broke out, both Nawuri and Gonja traders lost their investments as their stocks were either looted or burnt (Madam Wumbei Takpa, personal communication, December 27, 2020).

After eight years of the conflict, Nawuri women have succeeded in a recapitalization process, succeeded in restructuring their debt and equity mixture and succeeded in building their capital structure to engage in profitable economic activities as they did before the outbreak of the conflict. Given this scenario, Nawuri women were unprepared to suffer losses of their business and capital in another communal violence. Consequently, they stood to oppose any actions that were likely to renew hostilities between the Nawuri and the Gonja. It was for this reason that some Nawuri women demonstrated in Kpandai for peace in 2010. Referred to as “League of Nawuri Women for Peace,” the Nawuri women organized a peaceful demonstration in the principal streets of Kpandai against the claims of one Madam Fulera Adam (a Gonja) that were deemed as a potential factor that could rekindle the conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja (Kpandai District Assembly’s Report on Nawuri Protest, 2010; League of Nawuri Women’s Protest, 2010). From official reports, Madam Fulera Adam, who withdrew from Kpandai to Salaga as a result of the conflict lost her house to the Nawuri as a war booty. Later, she returned to Kpandai to reclaim it from a Nawuri occupant, and when that failed, she initiated a law suit in the Salaga District Magistrate court to reclaim ownership of the house (Kpandai District Assembly’s Report on Nawuri Protest, 2010). Fearing that Madam Fulera Adam’s action could trigger similar actions by other Gonja kinsmen that lost their houses in Kpandai as war booties to the Nawuri, and fearing such actions could generate cacophonies that could eventually lead to a renewal of armed conflict between the two ethnic groups, Nawuri women were quick to rise up to demonstrate for peace on February 1, 2010 (Kpandai District Assembly’s Report on Nawuri

Protest, 2010). The objectives of the demonstration were two-fold – to forestall a possible outbreak of conflict and to express their view that Madam Fulera Adam had forfeited her legal entitlement to the house in dispute on the account that war booties are irreclaimable. Explaining the argument of the Nawuri women demonstrators that formed the basis for the famous “march for peace”, Mbowura (2014a: 114) indicated:

the demonstrators expressed their abhorrence to violent conflict in general and viewed Fulera’s action as one that has the potential of rekindling the Nawuri-Gonja conflict (League of Nawuri Women’s Protest 2010). The League argued that Fulera’s house was a war booty which could not be reclaimed by any means whatsoever, and therefore threatened to marshal its resources to resist the attempt by Fulera and her Gonja cronies to reclaim the house.

The march for peace by Nawuri women was significant for a number of reasons. In the first place, it created the awareness for peace in Nawuriland. Secondly, it prompted the Kpandai District Assembly to put in place measures to prevent a renewal of conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja (Kpandai District Assembly’s Report on Nawuri Protest, 2010). Its report on the situation made the Northern Regional Minister and Northern Regional Security Committee (REGSEC) to make interventions, leading to an out-of-court settlement of the ownership of the disputed house in Kpandai.

### **The Women’s Wing of the Nawuri Professionals’ Association (NPA)**

As part of efforts to mobilize human resources and contribute ideas to promote the development of Nawuriland, the youth of the Nawuri formed the Nawuri Professionals Association (NPA) in 2019. Its purpose was “to foster unity, fraternity, education, skills development among Nawuris and to seek welfare of our members.” (NPA Constitution, Article 2(C), 2019). In Article 3(13)

of the NPA Constitution, the NPA seeks “to serve as a mediation body and provide mediation services to resolve misunderstandings and disputes among members and Nawuris in general.” To provide avenues for peace-building mechanisms, the NPA Constitution (2019) made provision for a standing committee to be known as “peace and dispute resolution committee. The provisions of the NPA Constitution (2019) spell out the functions of the Peace and Dispute Resolution Committee as follows:

- 1) Intermediation and dialogue;
- 2) Working hand in hand with opinion leaders, chiefs and all stakeholders to Foster unity between among factions;
- 3) Prevention of dispute;
- 4) Peaceful coexistence of Nawuris;
- 5) Come out with a roadmap of conflict & land resolutions (NPA Constitution, Article 6(D1), 2019).

To operationalize its peace-building agenda, the NPA established local chapters in all the Nawuri settlements, each with standing committees including the peace and dispute resolution committee. Though not so much peace mediation achievements have been made in the past two years of its existence, the activities of the NPA have contributed to re-orienting the mindset of the Nawuri towards peace and peaceful coexistence. Its women at the local level, particularly in Kpandai, have been vociferous as they continue to make overtures on various platforms for peace and peace-building in Nawuriland. Interactions in December, 2020 with residents – both the Nawuri and other ethnic groups – have revealed that NPA women such as Madam Cynthia Okumasi, Madam Dorcas Anawusah and Madam Celestina Serwaa Asunke, Madam Stella Amoani, Madam Francesca Ama Attah, among others, have made several overtures on local radio FM stations in Kpandai concerning peace and peace-building structures and modalities. These women took

their peace-building campaign beyond the corridors of the FM stations to the various Nawuri communities. They were said to have made periodic visits to the Nawuri settlements where they interacted with the youth about peace, unity and development in Nawuriland. Though the work of the NPA women towards peace and peace-building in Nawuriland is too embryonic to warrant a critical assessment, it is important to note that the overtures for peace have become catchy phrases among the Nawuri, a situation that has provided a solid foundation for intra-ethnic peace-building mechanisms among the Nawuri.

### **Conclusion**

This study discussed gender and peace-building from the perspective of the socio-cultural history of the Nawuri after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict in Kpandai and its environments in Northern Ghana in the 1990s. It underlined the fact that Nawuri women contributed significantly to the establishment of peace in Nawuriland after the conflict. The study established that Nawuri women utilized social and cultural tools such as the performances of the *ejii* and *Baya* songs as mediums through which they portrayed and advanced the need for peace and peace-building. Though this mechanism was not utilized as a formal peace-building process, it made Nawuri women agents for peace as well as created awareness for peace in their male counterparts. Furthermore, the study established that the famous march for peace by Nawuri women in 2010 was not only a symbolic gesture for peace, it also pushed the government to establish modalities to pre-empt a renewal of conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja. Finally, the paper discussed the “new initiative” by the Nawuri Professionals’ Association (NPA) to promote development and peace in Nawuriland since 2019. It established that NPA women have been vociferous on the agenda for peace in Nawuriland, a situation that has contributed to strengthening the desire for peace and peace-building in the area.

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