Gendered Language as an Obscured Causal Factor of the Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict in Northern Ghana

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Abstract

The Dagbon chieftaincy conflict is a dispute over chieftaincy title by two royal families: the Abudu family and Andani family in the northern region of Ghana. The conflict defied all resolution mechanisms from the colonial period to the independence of 1957. Although both successive governments and civil society organizations have devoted resources over the years to facilitate the resolution of the conflict, the conflict continues to persist. A number of factors have been adduced to substantiate the protracted nature of the conflict: the contention over the chieftaincy position by factions which is the primary cause, the ineffective intervention mechanisms to facilitate the peace processes of the conflict, and the invisible hand of modern party-politics in the affairs of the chieftaincy conflict. More important is one other causal factor which is gradually, but seriously, affecting the peace strategies of the conflict - the women use of intemperate and violent language to inflame passions in the context of the crisis. Using qualitative method of research, this paper explores how language is gendered in respect of the conflict and its resolution processes. The paper unravels, among other findings, the effects of the choice of language of women in the context of the conflict and its resolution processes. Consequently, the paper recommends appropriate use of language in conflict times and in conflict resolution processes, as well as encourages further studies on the impact of language in peace and conflict disciplines in our universities.

Keywords: Dagbon, Dagomba, Abudu, Andani, chieftaincy, conflict resolution, gendered language

Introduction

The historic chieftaincy dispute of Dagbon in the northern region of Ghana is one major violent conflict in modern Ghana (Tonah, 2012). The conflict is "characterized by wanton destruction of life and property, development reversals, [*and*] serious abuse of human rights" (Ahorsu and Gebe, 2011, p. 7-8). The major cause of the dispute, since the 19th century, has been a rivalry over legitimate chieftaincy title between two royal families: the Abudu and Andani families respectively (Albert, 2008; Ahorsu and Gebe, 2011). The contention boils down to who has the legitimate right to the chieftaincy position (Tonah, 2012). Though the dispute started since the 19th century, it only received scholarly attention in the 1940s when rotational method of succession was established between the two royal clans by the government. But sadly, this system failed based on the reason that parties attempted to usurp or bypass each other in ascending the throne (Brukum, 1979). Since the independence of 1957 up till date, a lot of intervention strategies have been put in place to find a lasting solution to the problem, but to no avail. Notably, the Nkrumah government of 1957–66 as well as the Mate Kole Committee of the National Liberation Council government of 1966–69 saw the need to implement and restore the rotational succession systems in Dagbon (Ahorsu and Gebe, 2011; Ladouceur, 1972; Tonah, 2012). Similarly, the Acheampong's government of 1972–78 formed the Ollenu Committee of Enquiry which aimed at ensuring the restoration of the rotational system in the chieftaincy affairs. But this attempt, like the previous ones, also failed because of the inability of the factions to agree on the terms and conditions of the method (Tonah, 2012).

The eruption of the dispute in March 2002 witnessed yet another phase of mediation and arbitration attempts by the government, the Wuaku Commission of Enquiry, as well as the Committee of Eminent Chiefs and other interest groups who championed the cause of peaceful resolution to the crisis, but all to no avail (Tonah, 2012).

A number of factors accounted for the protracted nature of the dispute. First, the politicization of the dispute and its peaceful resolution mechanisms; Second, the weak and inefficient intervention strategies; Third, the women choice of language and utterances to inflame passions in the context of the crisis. This last factor has been overlooked in previous research on this conflict. In this paper, the geo-political and socio-cultural background of the conflict is seriously examined. This examination is meant to provide the reader the context in order to appreciate the dynamics therein. The linguistic situation in Ghana will give an overview of the languages in the country. The position of the women in Dagbon culture forms an integral bloc of the paper. The aim is to put in perspective the experiences of women in relation to the conflict and its intervention strategies. Gendered language in the paper examines the cultural connotation of language use by both sexes which has the possibility of sparking violence in Dagbon culture. Finally, the major causes of the conflict and how the choice of language by women induces the conflict will also be given attention in this paper. The main thrust of the discussion would, however, be centred on how the utterances of women contribute to the far-reaching consequences of the Dagbon conflict and its resolution mechanisms.

Brief Review of Literature

The Geo-Political Context and Background of the Chieftaincy Conflict

The protracted chieftaincy conflict of Dagbon in the northern region of Ghana is a contention

over chieftaincy position between two factions - the Abudu and Andani royal families (Tonah, 2012). Even though the dispute predates the colonial period, the arrival of the British in Ghana introduced several failed uncodified successive conventional attempts by the colonial administration to resolve the dispute in the 1930s (Albert, 2008).

At this epoch in the history of Dagbon, there was no scholarly attention given to this development until the events in the 1940s, including the death of Ya Na (The Paramount Chief) Mahama II from the Andani royal family. Per the customs of the land, his son was supposed to have been enskinned as the new Ya Na, but instead Mahama III (a contender from the Abudu family) was installed as the Paramount Chief of Dagbon (Tonah, 2012). This brought a deadly clash between the two factions. In an attempt to restore sanity and peace in the area, the British administration instituted a rotational system of leadership which allowed the contending chieftaincy title to rotate between the two families on the death of the incumbent Ya Na. But years down the lane, the Andani family felt neglected and side-lined in the provisional rotational system. This resulted in the exacerbation of the impasse which defied several resolution attempts since pre-colonial times through colonial to post-independence. For instance, successive governments, including the Nkrumah government of 1957–66, the Mate Kole Committee of the National Liberation Council of 1966-69, the Ollenu Committee of Acheampong's government of 1972–78, all attempted to restore the rotational method of succession (Ahorsu and Gebe, 2011; Ladouceur, 1972; Tonah, 2012). But all failed as a result of the inability of the contending parties to compromise (Tonah, 2012).

For years, Dagbon witnessed a relative peace until March 25 to 27, 2002, when the matter reared its ugly head again leading to the death of Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and many others. There was a swift response by the then Kufour government which instituted the Wuaku Commission of Inquiry led by Justice I.N.K. Wuaku, a retired Justice of the Republic of Ghana, to investigate the matter and make the necessary recommendation. The Commission identified several possible causes: unresolved misunderstanding of the chieftaincy dispute, the denial of the Abudu royal family to perform the funeral rites of Ya Na Abdulai IV who died since 1974 by the Andani royal family, and the refusal of Mahammadu Abdulai-Bolin La Na (heir apparent) from Abudu family to be installed as overlord of Dagbon by the rivalry Andani family (Tonah, 2012).

Furthermore, there was also an establishment of Committee of Four Eminent Chiefs by the government in 2003 to assist in the peace negotiation processes of the crisis. The Committee, after their findings in 2006, recommended a "Roadmap to Peace" (Tonah, 2012). According to the study of Tonah (2012), the Committee recommended "the burial of the late Ya Na Andani II (who died in the last encounter of the families); the installation of the regent of the late king; the performance of the funeral rites of both Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai IV and Ya Na Yakubu Andani II respectively; and finally, the selection and enskinment of a new Ya Na for Dagbon" (p. 10). After signing a peace accord to abide by the tenets of the roadmap, the factions disappointed the Committee by their inability to abide by the terms and conditions of the peace pact (Tonah, 2012).

There were also efforts made by religious groups as well as civil society organizations to complement the government's effort in the peace processes. The National Commission of Civic Education (NCCE) in Yendi, the Regional Peace Council, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Ghana), the Catholic Diocese of Yendi Women Peace group, and the Women in Peace Movement-Tamale devoted resources in contributing to the peace campaign of the crisis.

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In spite of these efforts, the conflict remains protracted. Several possible reasons explain the resounding failures. One, the ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms accounted for the protracted nature of the conflict. Second, it is blameable on the political class of Ghana. Invariably, Albert (2008) lamented that the protracted nature of the crisis is to be blamed on the elites who sacrificed the crisis on the altar of political expediency. This revelation came to light in Tonah's (2012) empirical study: *The Politicisation of a Chieftaincy Conflict: The Case of Dagbon, Northern Ghana,* which chronicles the events in the 1940s when the selection process of the paramount chief was left in the hands of the elites from both factions. According to Albert (2008) the period "coincided with the pre-independence political activities in Ghana and thus became exploited by politicians" (p. 8). The aim of rival politicians from each side was to win the favour of candidates to the chieftaincy position. Therefore, the chieftaincy position regrettably, either directly or otherwise, was influenced by successive administration since independence, "with the elite within the two factions aligning themselves with the …political parties in the country" (Tonah, 2012, p. 7).

One other setback in the search for lasting solution to the crisis is the use of violent and intemperate language by parties in the dispute, especially by the women. The use of language by women during the crisis has alluded scholarly attention. This revelation came to light during my empirical studies on the women activities and experience in the peace negotiation processes of the crisis. In light of this, this paper seeks to examine the use of language by women which gradually, but adversely, impacted the peace negotiation strategies of the crisis.

The Linguistic Situation of Ghana

The concept of language is as old as mankind. It is central to the identity of individuals in a particular society. It is a social product which serves as a medium through which the culture of a people is expressed. Therefore, the customs and traditions, as well as the norms and values, of a society is expressed through their language. According to David Crystal (2003), language "is the repository of the history of a people; it is their identity- oral testimony, in the form of sagas, folktales, songs, rituals, proverbs, and many other practices *[that]* provides us with a unique view of our world" (p. 20).

Fundamentally, language is the means through which thoughts and feelings are conveyed among individuals in a particular cultural setting. It could be verbal or non-verbal means such as spoken words or gestures and signs. By studying the importance of language, one is able to make sense of the attitudes and values about people - their shared values and norms, their predominant idiosyncrasies, ideologies and belief systems, including their prejudices and biases which are linked to identity and race, gender and class, and many other categorizations that set them apart from others (Alhassan, 2014; Gal, 2001).

Language is also understood in terms of gender, and Dagbani language has a clear-cut distinction of words and expressions of masculinity and femininity. It has well-defined distinctions in terms of language and vocabulary that show the existence of linguistic gender categorization which makes other gender representations more visible and natural in Dagbon culture (Alhassan, 2014).

The differences of language use between men and women have been an issue of concern in the discourse of anthropology since the 17th century (Coates, 2016). Mostly, the differences are basically phonological (that is, sounds and pronunciations), morphological or lexical (that is, the choice of words and expressions in everyday life) (Flannery, 1946; Coates, 2016). Gender activists and feminists alike in the 1970s and 1980s have brought to light the prejudices and biases that the practice of language has

produced and perpetuated overtime. They believed that languages across various cultures are sexist – referring to the use of language or language type "that shows bias in favor of one sex or discriminates, demeans or stereotypes members of either sex" (Alhassan, 2014, p. 394). Sexist language emphasizes differential or asymmetrical forms of representation or categorization of people base on their gender (Pauwels, 2003; Alhassan, 2014). It could be in the form of exclusion of women from societal matters, including those language type that discriminate, devalue, demean and see women as insignificant sub-cultural group (Alhassan, 2014; Henley, 1987, Gomard, 1995; Romaine 1999; Ravitch, 2003).

There exist an avalanche of ethnographic research on many African languages which reveals significant differences between men and women, producing and sustaining gender prejudices and bias in everyday conversation. The differences produced are mostly perpetuated by language taboos and prohibitions (Mbaya, 2002). Yankah (1988) and Dakubu (1997) observe, for instance, unequal spatial differences and application of rules and prohibitions in communicating family or societal matters among men and women in daily language use (Mbaya 2002; Romaine 1999; Moshi 1985). Among the Oromo society of Ethiopia, men can address women by their first names. However, it is prohibited for women to address their spouses and other members of the husband's family by their first name (Mbaya, 2002). This case is no different in Ghana, especially in many patriarchal societies as Dagbon.

Ghana is a multilingual nation with an estimated number of 80 indigenous languages spoken daily. The most wildly spoken and the government approved ones in the educational curriculum are the Akan, Dangbe, Ewe, Gonja, Dagbani, Kasem, Nzema, Ga, and Dagaare-Wali (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009; Hall, 1983). The Ghanaian culture, like other cultures, is expressed in the various Ghanaian languages. The Ghanaian political systems, economic activities, socio-cultural practices as well as the history of the people are expressed in the various Ghanaian languages (Alhassan, 2014; Sapir, 1921). This buttresses why a high level of premium is placed on the individual's linguistic abilities - the correctness or otherwise of the language use of a person. The appropriateness or otherwise of language use by people resonates with appropriate and befitting language for men and women, and thus put in place some specific mode of utterances for each gender. This moral underpinning regarding language use by both gender justifies why a person's character is judged through conversation (Saah, 1986).

Dagbon culture is essentially patriarchal in nature, and so men are seen as the most assertive and domineering group which further reveals in the language variation of men and women in every discourse. Whereas the language use by men is seen as assertive, firm and resolute, women use of language in Dagbon is usually considered weak, trivial and powerless (O'Barr and Atkins, 1980; Adetunji, 2010; Coates, 2016). This chauvinistic tendency further informs the basic fundamental feature of the Dagbani language which indicates male overriding dominance and female submissiveness in language use.

In reaction to this gender imbalance in language use, feminine theorists in linguistics argue that this differentiation in language use of both men and women find interpretations in the theory of dominance and difference in gender linguistic studies (Adetunji, 2010). The former establishes that women are subjugated, disadvantaged and marginalized in the use of language, and the latter sees the differences in language use as purely cultural where both sexes are socialized to kowtow to different conversational pattern and style that are deemed fitting for each of them (Zimmerman and West, 1975; Maltz and Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1990; Tannen, 1991; Adetunji, 2010).

Gender Differences in the Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict

Even though women are considered as the weaker vessels and suffer the most during violent conflicts, some of them serve as instigators - those who induce people (especially the men) into fighting. It is very instructive to state that women, on several occasions in history, triggered conflicts and wars between nations and kingdoms. In the history of Dagbon for instance, women have sparked intermittent skirmishes among people and towns and 'officially' act as warmongers by inducing men into war through their actions and inactions. The work of the celebrated anthropologist, Professor Wyatt MacGaffey, is very instructive here. MacGaffey (2013) writes on the tragic landmark encounter between two revered kings: Naa Luro and Kalugisi Dajia in Dagbon kingdom and Gonja kingdom respectively, which was behaviourally masterstroke by an action of a woman:

> The epic conflict between Na Luro [Dagbon chief] and Kalugisi Dajia [Gonja kingdom chief] in northern Ghana took place in the 15th century. According to oral tradition, it happened that Na Darizegu who ruled Dagbon before Na Luro was killed and burnt by the Gonja chief. So, Dagbon had no Paramount chief for many years and eventually Na Luro was enskinned as chief of the kingdom. His maternal uncles came to congratulate him. As customs demanded, he tasked Koyibga (one of the wives) to cook for the visitors. The wife failed to do so and that prompted him to beat her up. Consequently, the wife remarked that food should not be his concern; he [the chief] should rather be concerned about avenging the death of Ya Na Darizegu [his predecessor] whose death gave him [Na Luro] the opportunity to become chief. Angered by this remark, the chief against all odds went to battle against Kalugisi Dajia and defeated him; but died also on his way home because of the deeply sustained wound by the spear of his contender. (pp. 43-44)

The authenticity or otherwise of the above scenario is verifiable. On the one hand, the fact that Dagbon eulogies/praise singers in appellations make reference to this historic event makes it relevant, and thus historically founded in Dagbon. On the other, the fact that this epoch has direct bearing on the current study call for more research on people and the language use in crisis times. In this current study, therefore, a link is drawn to establish the choice of words by women from both sides of the Yendi chieftaincy feud of Dagbon, and how these utterances are implicated in the protracted state of the conflict, thus adversely affecting the peace negotiation strategies of the crisis.

The Dagbon and Dagomba People

The Dagomba people are the microcosm of the Mole-Dagbani ethnic group which comprises the people of the Voltaic states: the Nanumba, Mamprusi, and Mosse people in Burkina Faso (MacGaffey, 2013; Kwame, 2016). The Dagomba people are one of the most dominant ethnic groups in Ghana and for that matter northern Ghana. Even though they are predominantly located in the northern region of Ghana, they are equally dotted all over the country due to migration, inter-cultural marriages, formal job transfer, and the desire to seek greener pasture elsewhere in the country. In terms of demography, the 2010 Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) survey concludes that there are over two million Dagombas nationwide (GSS, 2010).

The Dagbon state is the traditional home of the Dagomba people. As part of the colonial legacies, the Dagbon kingdom is divided into western Dagbon, with Tamale as cosmopolitan city and the administrative region of the entire northern region and eastern Dagbon, with Yendi (which is about 97kms east of Tamale) as the traditional capital as well as the seat of the *Ya-Na* (the Chief with Absolute Authority), who doubles also as the Paramount Chief of the Dagbon kingdom (Awedoba, 2009; Kwame, 2016). According to the GSS 2010 population census, Yendi has a total population of 199,592 (GSS, 2010) and covers a land mass of about 4,087.2km.

In territory wise, Dagbon state is next to Gonja traditional area in northern Ghana (Knusen, 1994). Martinson (2002, as cited in Awedoba, 2009) reveals that a total of 8,082 square miles of the land mass represent Dagbon territorial sovereignty.

The socio-political system of Dagomba is hinged on kinship system where patrilineal descent system is practiced, making it an absolute right for sons to inherit their fathers' positions (Knusen, 1994). They practiced the acephalous system of leadership where there is an absolute power vested in one central figure who sees to the affairs of the kinship group. Predominantly, marriage system is traditionally polygamous.

Historically, the Dagomba practice the indigenous African traditional religion even though the Islamic faith has now taken over virtually every aspect of people's life. About 60 percent of the population practice the Islamic religion (GSS, 2010). Writing on the impact of foreign religions on the indigenes, Abdul-Hamid's (2010) studies on the influence of Islam in Dagbon reveals that "less than 10 percent of the Dagomba population still refers to themselves as traditional believers" (p. 3). He asserts further that some of the African traditional religion practitioners combine Islamic doctrines and rituals into their spiritual lives and that alone indicates the level of influence Islam has on the entire culture of the Dagomba people. Yet still, an insignificant percentage of the people profess the Christian faith.

In terms of occupation, more than half of Dagomba's population live in the rural settings and depend largely on the environment especially agriculture and other natural resources as their major source of livelihood. They cultivate crops such as maize, millet, guinea corn, yam, and so on, and rear animals such as goats, sheep, cattle and poultry birds. Dagbon is in the heart of the savannah vegetation region with scattered short tress and tall grasses. The land contains trees of economic benefits, including dawadwa, baobab, shea nut, teak and others.

The Dagomba speak Dagbani or Dagbanli, which is a fraction of the Oti-Volta sub-cultural entity of umbrella Gur languages of the Niger-Congo language family of sub-Saharan Africa with over two million native speakers nationwide (Olawsky, 1996; Hudu, 2010; Alhassan, 2014). The Dagomba language, just like any other language worldwide, is the foundation on which culture is transmitted down to the next generation. It is a practical tool that brings people together. Predominantly, language functions as a two-edged sword. In other words, language in whichever shape or form can either build and mend or break relationships, and the Dagomba language is no exception. In Dagbon, the use of intemperate language to induce or instigate violent conflict by women is historically founded and significant for our appreciations of the Dagbon crisis (MacGaffey, 2013). It is important to state that, among the major causal factors of the crisis, other factors contribute significantly to the protracted nature of the crisis of which the use of intemperate and violent language by people especially women have alluded scholarly and peace practitioners' attention. Consequently, this paper is purported to theorize and conceptualize the language use by women in the Yendi chieftaincy crisis of Dagbon.

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Gender Differences in Dagbon

The leadership and political structures of the Dagbon kingdom, like others in the other parts of Ghana, have women assuming complementary responsibilities to men. The women involvement in the body politics, the economy, the family, and the entire society has been part of the Dagbon culture since time immemorial. Even though modernity has greatly impacted on some of these practices, the women's role within the domestic settings in recent times stands non-contestable (Oppong, 1973).

At the family level, women assist in the maintenance of the family. Unlike the matrilineal Akan groups where "women hold leadership positions and exercise authority equivalent to that of men" (Sudarkasa, 1986 p. 95), the women in Dagbon tradition rarely hold formal leadership positions. According to Christine Oppong's (1973) view on the place of women within the social structures of Dagbon, the mother or first wife (*Mmapaani* and *Walgira*) within the chief palace and ordinary homes respectively assumes leadership position within the womenfolk.

In the case of women in chieftaincy institution, there is little or no studies on women leadership in contemporary chieftaincy and political systems in Dagbon. Nonetheless, some existing research reveals interesting findings. The Dagbon culture acknowledges female leadership within the chieftaincy institution and Queen Mothers and Princesses exercise authority within their areas of jurisdiction (Stoeltje, 1997). The communities such as Gundogu, Kpatuya, Kulogu and others have female chiefs who exercise authority over their people just like their male counterparts (Boafo-Arthur, 2003; Odotei, 2006). Apart from ceremonial roles, they exercise judiciary duties: settlement of cases relative to land litigation and land use, livestock and domestic violence and divorce, and capable of punishing perpetrators accordingly (Stoeltje, 1997; Stoeltje, 1998).

Economically, more than half of the women in Dagbon depend largely on the informal sector for their livelihood and other needs. Haug (2014) reveals about 90.9% labor force as women in the informal sector. Like other societies in sub-Saharan Africa, gender division of labor in Dagbon subsistence agricultural communities is very prominent. The men are the primary producers of grains, legumes, cereals and tuber crops, while women on the other hand complement that with vegetables. Primarily, the indigenous women's vocation includes trade such as shea-butter production and petty trading, as well as food vending.

Gendered Language in Dagbon

The Dagbani language contains a lot of semantic asymmetries and expressions that designate and represent daily conversation into male and female, or masculinity and femininity. Some words and expressions in Dagbani do not only depict the biological sex of the referent, but it does connote and reveal gender asymmetries and semantically assigned derogatory representation which devalue the worth and quality of the referent (Alhassan, 2014).

In a typical Dagbon society, the word man (*doo*) and female (*paya*) do not depict or denote only the biological makeup of the individual talked about, but it conveys and carries with it gender biases and stereotypes to mean a different thing all together. So it is for several words and expressions in every day communication. For example, when a Dagomba man describes someone as being a man, it does not necessarily implies the state or the biological makeup of the person. But it does expresses the idea that the person "has shown certain qualities like courage, brawn, resoluteness, decisiveness or any of those qualities that the Dagomba believe are found only in males" (Alhasssan, 2014, p. 399). Similarly,

a person who is described as a woman, *paɣa*, does not in any way imply the genetic composition of the referent as a female; but it does connote the character and qualities of timidity, cowardice, submissiveness, irresoluteness, and so on, which is believed to be the basic qualities of a complete woman in Dagbon culture. Here, the referent could either be a man or woman, but more demeaning is the case of a man who is described as a woman in a particular situation (Alhassan, 2014).

Again, the word *doo* (man) in Dagbani can also convey acts of bravery- a praise for an accomplishment of a task that is worth bravery or legendary. Conversely, to describe someone, especially a man as "female" implies a derogatory remark and a mockery to men who have failed to live up to the expectations and standards for men in Dagbon culture (Alhassan, 2014).

From the concept of *doo* (man) and *paɣa* (female), Alhassan (2014) examines the interpretations of *dotali to* include masculinity, maleness, manliness and manhood. Invariably, these terms denote the state of being a man - the ascribed qualities of the male which include boldness, courageousness, bravery, forthrightness, and legendary among other qualities, and the euphemistic reference to the male genitalia. Similarly, *paɣtali* also refers to femininity, womanhood, and femaleness which denote the condition of being female. On that score, the expatiation of the lexical and morphological sense of the male (*dotali)* and female *(paɣtali)* uncover the Dagomba conceptions and worldview of being a male or female in Dagbon culture. It must be stressed also that their philosophical conception of male and female or masculinity and femininity provide the understanding of the connotative gendered language and expressions of the words *doo* and *paɣa* and other terminologies and expressions that come to denote masculinity and femininity in Dagbon culture.

It is therefore instructive that *dotali* and *paɣtali* are used sometimes to either commend or condemn the behaviour of people (especially men) in Dagbon culture. For instance, the man's conduct or behavior may command praise or commendation if it shows or proves an act of "*dotali*"- including agility, bravery, forthrightness, aggressiveness, and virile among other expected qualities of a man. On the other hand, the male conduct or behavior attracts communal disapproval and condemnation if it is deemed "*paɣtali*" (feminine) – that is, cowardice, soft-spoken, submissiveness, tenderness, and compassionate among other qualities that are deemed feminine.

Alhassan (2014) concludes that the words *dotali* and *paɣtali* exemplify two separate but related concepts and expressions which produce and sustain a semantically assigned derogatory gender roles differences/specializations, and seek to devalue the worth and quality of the referent in Dagbani. Also, the idea of *dotali* and *paɣtali* indicates the subjective and stereotypical qualities and abilities assigned to the various sexes in Dagbon culture.

(i) Reference to the roles assigned to the two sexes

On one aspect, the interpretation of *dotali* stresses the gender roles assigned to individuals based on their sex. *Dotali* in this sense implies a responsible man - the man who can guarantee the safety or protection of his family by providing food, shelter, clothes, health care and other necessities of life. On the other hand, the conceptualization of *paɣtali* in terms of gender roles acquisition and specialization reveals assigned qualities of responsible woman who cares for the home by cooking and fetching water, sweeping, and nurturing the young ones. This role division inform the ubiquitous expression of division of labor in Dagbon society (Alhassan, 2014)

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(ii) The qualities or behavior they believe to be ingrained in males or females

On another angle, *dotali* and *paɣtali* emphasize the expected character disposition of both male and female where *dotali* implies courageousness, fortitude, virile, confidence, combative, and so on, and *paɣtali* indicates squeamishness, qualmishness, timidity, weakness, emotional, and so on. From this discussion, we can derive the "sense that the words *doo* and *paɣa* assume the additional meanings of 'a brave or strong person' and 'a weak or cowardly person" (Alhassan, 2014, pp. 399-400).

From the above review, it is seen that in Dagbon tradition, women do not play any roles in societal matters in the open, including conflict management. They are seen as weaker vessels of the society, and are therefore debarred from being heard because their contribution is considered insignificant. However, women use their marginalized position to their advantage, especially in the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict and its resolution processes. They are quick to manipulate and instigate men into engaging in violent activities.

The use of violent and intemperate language by both men and women have different impact and effect in traditional Dagbon society. The intemperate language used by men would result in less violence than that of women. The reason being that men (in Dagbon culture) are by nature seen as combative, fearless and courageous, and so attitudes of violence are considered normal in the character disposition of men. Accordingly, a man would go any length in defense of his masculinity if tagged in any behavior that is deemed feminine – including cowardice, timidity, submissiveness, and so on. The belief is that such a man is reduced in value and made less important in matters of society.

Also, women sing with indirect speeches, use proverbs and provocative languages, and spread rumors easily during chores at home, at the market square, and with the use of body language (eye contacts, walking style), and so on. The use of provocative songs and jargons, and other related utterances have the tendency of instigating violence, especially when these are directed toward men. The men would want to justify and defend their masculinity as people with absolute authority over the household.

Nonetheless, women also know the kind of language to use to speak to men in crisis times. They have the ability to calm down nerves of armed men. They have the natural propensity to convince and speak directly to the heart in order to salvage crisis in the society. Hence, this must be explored to harness women's talents in conflict management and resolution in Ghana, Africa, and all over the world.

Methodology

This paper is borne out of my post-graduate *Thesis* in Development Studies. The research was carried out using qualitative research method. The aim was to emphasize the value of depth over quantity and work at delving into social complexities, in order to truly explore and understand the interactions, lived experiences, and belief systems that are part of individuals and institutions in relation to the chieftaincy crisis of the area (Ridwan, 2016). In this regard, my main aim was to understand the social reality and worldview of the women in the conflict situation.

Thus, in generating data and creating knowledge with participants, about 15 separate interviews were conducted, including the women Chiefs of the area. Also, a number of institutions that mattered in the conflict resolution processes were contacted. These were the Nation Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the Regional Peace Council, and the Catholic Diocese of Yendi Women in Peacebuilding Group and Women in Peacebuilding Movement-Tamale. The interviews were recorded and transcription was done manually.

Inductive content analysis was applied in the discussion of findings. For the purpose of this paper, data emerged out of the conversation I had with the women at the research site. Theoretically, the entire study examined the contribution of women in Yendi, and for that matter Dagbon, in the peace processes of the chieftaincy crisis of the area. However, this article hinges on the use of language by women as a causal factor in the crisis and its resolution mechanisms as theoretical perspective.

Discussions and Findings

The Yendi chieftaincy crisis, since colonial times till now defied every resolution attempts by successive governments and other interest groups. The reasons for the protracted nature of the crisis are not far-fetched.

The Major Causes of the Chieftaincy Crisis

Fundamentally, the main cause of the on-going crisis is the contention between the two main families - the Abudu and the Andani respectively over chieftaincy title (Tonah, 2012). It was an attempt by one family to usurp the chieftaincy title to the detriment of the other. Brukum (1979) confirms that the prolonged nature of the conflict results from unacceptable procedure in choosing traditional leaders or an attempt by one faction to take over the position from other contenders. The governments' attempts to resolve this issue, among others, called for the rotational method between the two divide in order to maintain sanity in the sacred chieftaincy institution in Dagbon. It is regrettably, however, that this mechanism could not stand the test of time as parties accused each other of machination and scheming to wrongfully obtain the contending chieftaincy title.

Also, the invisible hand of modern politics is believed to have done more harm than good in the conflict and its resolution processes. The influence of party-politics in the feud is traceable to the system of *indirect rule* by the British through which the colonies were ruled through local chiefs, and this regretfully laid the foundation on which modern party-politics got married to chieftaincy affairs as in the case of the Dagbon crisis (Ladouceur, 1972). Since the independence of 1957 up to date, Albert (2008) observes critically that the Dagbon issue has been a theatre of political gymnastic in the history of Ghana. For instance, apart from the major two political parties (the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress) aligning themselves to the factions in the disputes - Abudu family (pro-New Patriotic Party) and Andani family (pro-National Democratic Congress) -, every national election was an opportunity for the contending candidates to exploit the two clans in the dispute for political gains. In the words of Alex Akurgo (2010), the Dagbon case was an altar on which politicians sacrificed the dispute and its resolution mechanisms for political merits. Accordingly, the creeping of party-politics into chieftaincy institution in defiance of the constitutional provision to remain neutral makes the dispute and its peaceful resolution difficult if not impossible in the area (Deflem, 1994; Crook, 1986; Van Gyampo, 2008).

Again, the ineffectiveness of the resolution strategies is another observed concern. For instance, injustices in court rulings pertaining to the resolution of the crisis is also identified as one plausible cause of the unending feud. Participants reveal impartial justice delivery as something that threatens the peace negotiation processes of the area. When one party feels denied in terms of justice delivery, they would disregard the law with impunity as a way of registering their displeasure. With this attitude in justice

delivery, Agyekum (2002) confirms that 'The Yendi Chieftaincy Trials of 1987' which was aimed at bringing perpetrators to book failed in the implementation of judgement, and that gives reasons for more atrocities to be committed with impunity. Similarly, the Mate Kole Committee of 1966-69, the Ollenu Committee of 1972–78, the Wuaku Commission of Inquiry, and the Committee of the Eminent Chiefs of 2002 and 2003 were all failed attempts by the government to resolve the conflict.

Gender Differences Conflict and Evidence in the Dagbon Chieftaincy Conflict

The contribution of women in the peace negotiation processes of the Dagbon crisis cannot be overemphasized. This to a larger extent, underscores the role of women in conflict management and resolution at both the local and national levels in many parts of Africa and beyond (Gbowee, 2009; Maoz, 2009; Taylor, 2001). The women, like their Liberia counterparts (Gbowee, 2009) embarked on rigorous peace campaign missions amid peace seminars and workshops to tell their own experience in the search for lasting solution to the crisis.

Undoubtedly, many studies have revealed the efforts made by women in peace missions, and how their motherly propensity could privilege them to lobby and appeal to the most aggrieved parties in conflicts into peace talks (El-Bushra, 2007). Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2013) observes the following:

> when the MARWOPNET delegation [Mano River Women's Peace Network, a local peace organization that coordinated peace programs between Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia] went to Guinea to convince President Conte to come and sit at a table next to Charles Taylor, the President answered to their offer: 'What man do you think would say that to me? Only a woman could do such a thing and get by with it'. He finally accepted to participate in the summit admitting: 'Many people have tried to convince me to meet with President Taylor, [but could not succeed]. Your commitment and appeal have convinced me. (p.11)

The above scenario (among others) reveals the power of the woman's tongue in peace talks and conflict resolution. Nonetheless, women could also contribute greatly to resolving the prolonged conflicts in many parts of Africa and beyond, and the Dagbon crisis which is the focus is just one example.

The use of violent and provocative language by women during the Dagbon crisis is a typical case in point as this adversely affects the peace negotiations of the conflict. In one of the interviews, a participant shares her experience about an inciting comment by a woman that led to the death of the husband during the 2002 deadly encounter between the two factions when the husband escaped home.

> What are you coming back for? When your colleagues are defending the Chief at the palace. What you are interested in is my vagina! Come for it; I'm here! That is what you know! Your colleagues have gone to fight; I didn't know that I have been married to my fellow woman, I wish I was born a man. (Anonymous, 18 July 2016)

This was in reaction to a husband who fled the chief's palace when the situation became unbearable. Sadly, the ego in men could not stand this disparaging remarks. The husband, in an effort to prove his worth as a man, went back and unfortunately was killed. Further discussion with this woman revealed that nobody from the husband's family is ready to assist in the upbringing of the children.

In Dagbon, just like in some other patriarchal societies in Africa, men hate attacks on their personality especially when the attack is motivated by a woman. They will do everything in their capacity to defend the status quo. Consequently, being aware of this weakness, the women exploited this to their advantage in their utterances in both crisis and peace moments. In another interview session, a key informant explains the language invoked by women during crisis period which sometimes cost the lives of their husbands. This is in reaction to a situation where men wouldn't naturally like to participate in disputes:

> Which of the men in this house could lend me [his] penis so I can go out and fight! I didn't know we are all women in this compound; what they [men] are interested in is the vagina! When other men are out there fighting. (Anonymous, 2 August 2016)

When this remark gets to the targeted victims, the reaction has always been to defend their position as men of the house by taking up arms to fight. Regrettably, some of these men are killed in the process of proving their worth. A participant shared another practical experience during the Yendi crisis in 2002:

> When the situation became so critical during the encounter between the two families in 2002, one man had to withdraw and go back home. On his arrival, the wife asked if he was coming home for food when the other fighters were defending the chief at the Palace. He angrily went back and was killed. (Anonymous, 14 August 2016).

This explains MacGaffey (2013) findings on the episode of the historic encounter between Na Luro [Dagbon chief] and Kalugisi Dajia [Gonja kingdom chief] during the tribal wars in the 15th century Ghana. In the same context of food, the former's wife provoked him into waging war against the latter. This further buttresses the fact that the use of violent and intemperate language by women to instigate conflicts in Dagbon is historically and contemporarily significant as this may help us appreciate the causes and solutions to the impasse in Dagbon.

Furthermore, the use of body language and gestures such as eye contact, mode of dressing, use of proverbs and provocative songs and indirect speeches are all employed by women to cause problems, especially during crisis times. Similarly, the idea of backbiting and spreading rumors at the river side and the market square are all factors that sustained the conflict. The excerpt below was the response from an interviewee on a question on how women induce the conflict:

> The songs we sing while performing household chores are all full of messages. A message in a song could be in the form of praise or insults that can cause a fight. The same thing applies to the proverbs and the jargons we use in our everyday life, be it in the market or on the farm, at the river side and even in the compound of the house are all markers that make the search for peace in the area difficult as these make cooperation among parties difficult. (Personal communication with Anonymous, 17 July 2016)

This quotation exhibits a thorough knowledge of the negative impact of verbal communication of any kind in the society. It is understood from the response that the type of language we use in communication can either bring division or unity among people. In view of this, there is need to encourage

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people to use the best form of language that would foster peace and unity in the Yendi community and throughout the Dagbon region.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that one unique thing that characterizes the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict is its ability to defy every resolution attempts by non-state peace agents, governments and the civil society organizations. This, indeed, has been the concern for both the governments and interest groups in Ghana. In this paper, a critical reflection was made on the reasons why the conflict still persists in spite of the attempts made to resolve it.

First, the conflict remains unresolved because of the desire of the contending parties to bypass each other in order to ascend the chieftaincy position. Second, the mechanisms put in place to facilitate the peace processes have not offered the desired results, and also the politicization of the conflict over the years has posed a herculean threat to the peaceful resolution of the dispute as politicians turned to exploit the crisis for their own political advantage. Lastly, the use of provocative language during the conflict period by the different factions, especially the women, has equally contributed greatly to the prolonged nature of the conflict.

The paper examined critically how the use of language by the women in the area adversely affected the resolution processes of the crisis. It further shows that a person's choice of language can either induce conflict or help in peace processes. Consequently, the people of Dagbon, especially women, are therefore advised to use constructive discourses in their daily lives. This is believed to foster peace and unity in Yendi and the entire Dagbon region. The paper recommends further studies on the effect of language on the peaceful settlement of chieftaincy conflicts both in other regions of Ghana and other West African countries.

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