

Threat Narratives, Group Identity and Violence: A Study of the Dagomba, Nanumba and Konkomba of Northern Ghana.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Science at George Mason University

By

Clement M. Aapengnuo
Master of Science
Pontifical Salesian University, 1996

Director: Karina Korostelina, Professor
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Summer Semester 2008
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Copyright 2008 Clement M. Aapengnuo
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my Bishop Most Reverend Dr. Philip Naameh who introduced me to Conflict Analysis and Resolution and whose brotherly love has brought me this far. It is also dedicated to my parents who taught me at a very early age to respect those who are different from me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many friends, relatives, and supporters who have made this happen. My Bishop Philip Naameh for introducing me to the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Fr. John Gatzak, Scott Parmelee, the Staff of the office of Radio and Television, Archdiocese of Hartford for being a family to me, and Counterpoint Communications Inc., for the financial support. My heartfelt thanks to Bishop Paul Loverde for accepting me into the Arlington Diocese and Frs. Gerry Creedon, Jack O'Hara and Richard Mullins, and the Parish Staff and Parishioners of St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Arlington. My thanks to Dr. Karina Korostilina and the other members of my committee were of invaluable help.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	3
Research Questions.....	4
Hypothesis	4
1. Sources of Ethnic Conflict	6
The Primordialist Approach to Social Identity and Group Violence.....	6
The Instrumentalist Approach to Social Identity and Group Violence.....	7
The Constructionist Approach to Social Identity and Group Violence.....	8
Positioning Theory	9
Volkan’s Ideas on Ethnic Identity.....	11
Threat and Threat Narratives.....	12
The Link Between Social Identity, Group Formation and Violence.....	15
Conclusion.....	16
2. Contextualizing the Conflicts in Northern Ghana.....	20
Chieftaincy in Northern Ghana.....	22
Chiefs and Politics in Northern Ghana.....	26
Social Implications of Chiefs in Politics.....	29
3. Methodology	34
4. Results of Findings.....	36
Threat Narratives and the Social Construction of Dagomba, Nanumba and Konkomba Identity.....	36
Identity.....	36
Chieftaincy as a Social Category for Identity Formation	37
Culture and Tradition as a Category for Social Identity Formation	43

Land Ownership as a Category for Social Identity Formation	44
Interest.....	44
Land.....	44
Politics.....	47
Perception and Threat Narratives	48
5. Conclusion.....	55
Appendices.....	62
Group Characterization of Self and Other.....	62
Interview Questions.....	64
Human Subject Review Board Approval.....	65
Informed Consent.....	66
Confidentiality Agreement/Permission to Record.....	68
Map of Northern Ghana.....	69
Map of Ghana.....	70
References.....	71

ABSTRACT

THREAT NARRATIVES, GROUP IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF THE DAGOMBA, NANUMBA AND KONKOMBA OF NORTHERN GHANA

Clement M. Aapengnuo, M.S.

George Mason University, 2008

Thesis Director: Dr. Karina Korostelina

Ghana has a reputation as a peaceful, stable and democratic state in the West African sub-region. However, beneath this peaceful image, there are more than 200 internal conflicts around traditional authority (Chieftaincy), land and politics. In the northern part of the country, these conflicts take on ethnic dimensions. Between 1980 and 2002, the three northern regions recorded 26 violent ethnic conflicts. The impact of these conflicts on national and sub-regional security in general and economic growth and development in the three northern regions in particular is very high. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are frustrated because their efforts at improving the lives of the people are repeatedly disrupted if not destroyed by the cycles of inter ethnic violence. This thesis explores the relationship between value systems and ethnic identity formation and how the difference in value systems influences the salience of identity and conflict. Through narratives from in-depth interviews, the thesis analyzes group identity formation and their impact on conflict. Understanding the role of competing value systems in the

formation of salient identity and relations between identity salience and violence will help explain why some ethnic groups are prone to violence in northern Ghana. The research shifts the focus from the use of ethnicity, chieftaincy and land as causal factors of the conflicts to their interpretation, perception and employment in the process of social identity formation, interests and perceptions of the 'other'. By analysing the role of salient identity in the denigration of others, the thesis explains how through narratives an enemy is created out of the "other" and violence towards them justified.

Introduction

Ghana has a reputation as a peaceful, stable and democratic state in the West African sub-region. However, beneath this international recognition, there are more than 200 internal conflicts around traditional authority (Chieftaincy), land and politics. In the northern part of the country, these conflicts take on ethnic dimensions. Between 1980 and 2002, the three northern regions recorded 26 violent ethnic conflicts. Seventeen (17) of the conflicts occurred in the northern region alone. Of the 26 conflicts 18 were inter-ethnic, involving the same ethnic groups (Pul 2003:1). These conflicts have left communities polarized by grief, hatred, and mutual mistrust leading to a cycle of violence and revenge. Ghana's competitive multiparty political environment has also created a fertile ground for the politicization of these conflicts, further deepening the divide in communities.

There are growing concerns about the impact of these conflicts on national and sub-regional security and stability. Their impact is most felt in the area of economic growth and development. The three northern regions remain the most deprived and food insecure areas of the country. About 70% of the population live below the national poverty line, as compared to the national average of 27%.¹ According to the World Bank Country Director, 90% of the people are within the poverty net.² This situation of poverty is

¹ Gariba, Sulley cited in presentation available at [http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cpb/jciicd01.nsf/vLUIImages/Sylvie2/\\$file/SLIDESGariba.PDF](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cpb/jciicd01.nsf/vLUIImages/Sylvie2/$file/SLIDESGariba.PDF).

² Peter Harold World Bank Country Director for Ghana available at www.ghanaweb.com: General News of Tuesday, 16, April, 2003, p.2.

further aggravated by the loss of human lives and property. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are frustrated because they see their efforts at improving the lives of people repeatedly disrupted if not destroyed by the cycles of inter ethnic violence. There is the need to find a sustainable way of engaging the communities in conflict and building their capacity for conflict analysis and resolution. This calls for research into the nature and driving forces behind the conflicts.

Most of the research available assumes a theory of causation in conflict dynamics without indicating the kind of causation. Often it is not clear if the causal factors presented e.g. ancient hatred, ethnicity, chieftaincy, land, political elite activities etc., are *sine qua non* causation, an active causation or an immediate causation. In other words are they factors without which the conflict would not occur, but of themselves do not cause conflict? Are they causal factors that ought to happen before the conflict breaks out, i.e. factors that come later in time that push the conflict or violence or are these causal factors triggers? Often the question, what causes the “conflict loaded” situation in the first place? is not addressed.

Pul (2003) carried out a very extensive research into the conflicts in the north of Ghana in which he investigated the conflict proneness of certain locales in the northern region and concluded that “ violent conflicts are prevalent in areas where ethnic elite groups compromise the neutrality of the state in favour of their ethnic group and when traditional authority structures and procedures exclude others from traditional power and public decision making processes” (p.7). The question that still remains to be answered is why these exclusionary tactics in the first place?

There are psychological factors that make people have conflicts and socio-structural components which condition people for action. A causation theory that combines the psychological and socio-structural causes of conflict, such that neither one is primary but rather two sides of the coin, will help us better understand and explain the nature, and dynamics of the conflicts in northern Ghana. This research thesis combines the psychological and socio-structural factors of the conflicts by investigating the processes of group identity formation of the Dagomba, Nanumba and Konkomba of northern Ghana and how they altered the saliency of identity to engage in conflict and acts of violence based on their world view and moral order.

Purpose of Study.

In the daily social interactions of ethnic groups, events and actions are given meaning and judged by the value systems as virtuous or vicious deeds leading to a collective axiology. A collective axiology (CA) “is a system of values that defines which actions are important for group members, which actions are prohibited, and which actions are necessary for specific situations” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006, p.5). As groups tend to define themselves more in terms of their differences, than their commonalities, the difference in axiologies becomes the source of conflict. Examining and comparing the Dagomba, Konkomba, and Nanumba collective axiologies will reveal how each group views and defines itself and the “other” and the moral guidelines by which each group operates. By examining how groups in conflict form and change their collective axiologies, I am able to analyze how group identity is altered in a manner that causes, exacerbates, or directly contributes to ethnic violence. Understanding the role of

competing axiological difference in the formation of salient identity and relations between identity salience and violence will explain why some ethnic groups are prone to violence in northern Ghana. The research shifts the focus from the use of ethnicity, chieftaincy and land as causal factors of the conflicts to their interpretation, perception and employment in the process of social identity formation, interests and perceptions of the 'other'. By analysing the role of salient identity in the denigration of others, I will explain how through narratives an enemy is created out of the "other" and violence towards them justified.

This information will also help conflict resolution practitioners develop new tools for intervening in the conflicts. The research will also contribute to the body of knowledge on the northern Ghana conflicts.

Research Questions

1. What values, myths and normative orders constitute the identity of the Dagomba, Konkomba, and Nanumba?
2. How does group identity of the Dagomba, Konkomba, and Nanumba influence a readiness for violence?
3. What characteristics emerge from the narratives of the community/political leaders that sustain contemporary identity?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study is that issues of land and chieftaincy constitute the basis of ethnic identity in northern Ghana and are perceived in terms of morality and normative

order. Leaders use these issues to emphasize a threat to ethnic identity and thus, increase conflict readiness.

Chapter1. Sources of Ethnic Conflict.

The attempts of scholars to explain the sources of ethnic conflict fall within the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist theories of conflict.

The Primordialist Approach to Social identity and Group Violence.

The primordial approach stresses the role of the salient social identity in provoking intractable, irrational, and affective conflicts and violence. This approach puts emphasis on inherent or essential characteristics rather than learned or created characteristics of ethnic groups. It posits that each ethnic group could be defined in terms of its distinctive artefacts and customs with the elements of irrationality. Shared genes (Van den Berghe, 1987), genetic similarity (Rushton, 1995), and predisposition to ethnic nepotism (Vanhanen, 1999) provide strong biological basis for ethnocentrism that, complicated by 'ancient hatreds', leads to violent ethnic conflicts. In the context of conflicts in northern Ghana, one finds this primordialist approach in some of the literature. Ancient hatred, (Martinson 1999) innate barbarism, rebellious migrant populations (Boaten 1999), resource competition, significant ethnic symbols and institutions are given as some of reasons for the communal violence. It is clear that this approach underestimates the political and economic motivations, the role of the political elite and manipulations of public opinion, including perceived threats and redefinition of history.

The Instrumentalist Approach to Social Identity and Group Violence.

The instrumentalist approach points to the use of violence, the manipulation of violence for particular ends. Emphasis is placed on the leading impact of economic and political interests over social identities. In this approach, the elite in the society either for political or economic reasons take advantage of existing political or economic inequalities to organise their ethnic group for violence. Violence is used or manipulated by these elites for their own particular ends. In contrast to the primordialist approach, instrumental violence has agency and intention. Among the factors that lead to ethnic violence, scholars point out 'weak states' (state-making as territorial consolidation and institution-building) (Ayoob, 1997; Jackson, 2004; Tilly, 1975; Zartman, 1995); political, economic, social, or territorial dispute between two or more ethnic communities (Brown, 1993); a struggle over rights (Stavenhagen, 1991); role of political and ethnic entrepreneurs in maintenance of 'war economies' and construction of a discourse of violence that portrait evil enemies and dehumanizes them (Jackson, 2004). In the case of northern Ghana, some scholars have argued that political and economic exclusion, state complicity, and the agential role of civil society organizations; especially Ethnic Youth Associations have led to the generation and sustenance of the conditions that make some locales/ethnic groups in the north prone to violence more than others (Pul, 2003, Talton 2003).

According to Pul (2003), the disposition of a locale or ethnic group to violence is highest when 1) the structures and systems of local chieftaincy institutions exclude some ethnic groups from access to power and economic resources. 2) Ethnic elites engage in reconstructing ethnic histories and leading factions in the struggles for or against

exclusion in traditional authority arrangements and 3) state neutrality in the conflicts is compromised when ethnic elites on one side of the conflict are able to co-opt state processes and resources for their ethnic agendas and/or influence the crafting of state laws, policies, programs, actions and/or inactions to reinforce the exclusion of the other group. Pul further argues that, the presence of all three factors in a locality increases the incidence of violence more than any one of the factors can do alone. (P.12) This approach overestimates the role of the elite manipulation of the masses and undervalues social movements and mobilization. It also assumes the primacy of rational and strategic calculation.

The Constructionist Approach to Social identity and Group Violence.

The constructivists argue that social identities are socially constructed phenomena influenced by the processes of existing social structures (Butler 1990, Novotny 1998, Young 1994, Korostelina 2007). It is generated, confirmed and transformed in the process of interactions between groups and individuals and reflect their perceptions and behaviors (Barth 1961, 1981). Fredrik Barth (1969) argued that both self-ascription and ascription by others are critical factors in the making of ethnic groups and identities. Ethnic groups and identities form in an interaction between assignment, what others say we are and assertion, who or what we claim to be (Ito-Adler 1980). This interaction is ongoing. Social identity is “a dynamic construct that determines interrelations between individual behavior and social reality” (Korostelina 2007:18). This approach places interactions between circumstances and groups at the heart of the process of identity

formation and one would add communal violence (Katanga, 1996, Kirby J. 1998, and Talton 2003). Talton argues that the development of Konkomba identity was as a result of their interaction with their neighbors. (2003:3). Similarly, Kirby has argued that “over 500 years the indigenous peoples of Northern Ghana have been gradually reforming their social identities from structurally simple organizations involving leadership by clan elders... towards the ‘traditional state’. Local ethnic groups have been slowly incorporated into larger more highly stratified social and political organizations, distinguishing the degree of identity or belonging and structuring the processes by which higher statuses were acquired” (p.2). In this context social identities are ever changing, but there are characteristics in social identities that are relatively stable and fixed with norms, customs and expectations (Kellner 1992).

Positioning Theory.

The social constructionist theory of knowledge holds that knowledge derives from and is maintained by social interactions. Positioning theory is one such social constructionist approach to knowledge that pays attention to discourse as a way of creating social reality. Harre and Langenhove (1999) define “positioning theory” as “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (p. 1). It is the process, in interaction, in discourse, by which persons come to occupy a moral location in that discourse (p.22). Positions are locations in moral frameworks, and are fundamentally reciprocal and oppositional. “Positioning constitutes the initiator and the others in certain ways and at the same time it is a resource

through which all persons involved can negotiate new positions” (p.22). People tend to position themselves in opposition to others e.g. a victim cannot exist without a victimizer. Positions confer rights, duties, and obligations on persons and, in the process, create the moral frameworks (p.43). This process of social interaction through discourse reveals a certain local moral order, a local system of rights, duties and obligations, within which both public and private intentional acts are done (Harre and Langenhove, 1999:1) and judged. Positions confer or deny social legitimacy on persons and, given that access to resources (relational, financial and organizational, etc.) depends on legitimacy, the struggle over position is inevitable precisely because these positions are oppositional and reciprocal (Cobb 2006:162).

According to Cobb (2006) a conflict narrative provides legitimacy for Self, while delegitimizing the Other. It advances a plot line that has a linear causal structure with the initial conditions residing in the bad intentions, bad actions, or bad traits of the Other providing an evaluative schema based on binary and polarized moral values...They are the locus for the struggle over meaning, which is, in turn, the locus for the struggle over legitimacy – who is right, who is wrong, who is good, who is bad and why. The criteria for legitimacy emerge in the social construction of positions in interaction, reflected in the conflict narratives (163). Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) have argued that episodes, events or actions are evaluated within a pattern of virtuous and vice deeds and a negative evaluation inheres in the threat, and is inseparable from its significance for the threatened

group. The threatening actions are viewed as vicious while actions of the threatened are viewed as right and commendable (p.3-4).

Volkan's Ideas on Ethnic identity.

Volkan (1997) argues that ethnicity is a mode of thought and not a category in nature and has no existence outside of inter-ethnic relations. When ethnic groups define and differentiate themselves, they almost invariably develop some prejudice for their own group and against the other (p.23). People are usually not preoccupied with their identity until it is threatened. Depending on the nature of the threat, group members may become acutely aware of their group identity to the detriment of their individual identities.

Volkan explains the importance of the psychology of “we-ness” in understanding the invisible force of large group identities. Individuals perceive the group as seeking to satisfy the same vital needs they themselves want to satisfy. This congruity makes them idealize, identify and love the group. They suspend their critical faculties, falsely inflating the group values (p.27). Through ‘chosen glories’, “the mental representation of a historical event that induces feelings of success and triumph that brings a large group together, usually victories over another group, are often used as a key marker of a group’s identity” (p81). People develop ‘shared reservoirs’ of objects and symbols in which they externalise the good and the bad. The good in the ‘we-group’ and the bad in the ‘other’ group. People become secure by connecting themselves to the large group and sharing the reservoir. Eventually, the shared way of feeling about one’s large group becomes more

important than the concrete symbols themselves (p.89-90). Minor group differences are exaggerated and leads to negative attitude towards the other group.

Groups can also choose traumas 'chosen trauma' as a key marker of a group's identity.

Volkan explains that human beings cannot accept change without mourning what has been lost. Mourning is an involuntary response to the loss of a person or thing we love or hate. It is a painful but effective way of letting go of things we are attached to and to adjust to the absence and get on with life. Large groups also mourn and depending on the tragedy the mourning may be complicated. "In a situation where a shared calamity leaves members of a group dazed, helpless and too afraid, humiliated, and angry to complete or even initiate a mourning process, group members cannot turn their passive submission to the event into responsive , constructive activities" (p.40), a mental representation of the event, a consolidated collection of the shared feelings, perception, fantasies, and interpretations of the event begins to take shape. These traumatised self-images if unresolved are passed down to later generations in the hope that they will resolve them (p.45). This shared mental representation of the original injury is not only stored and reactivated as and when needed but also serves to bond the group. Through these chosen traumas, the group unconsciously defines its identity by the trans-generational transmission of injured selves infused with the memory of the ancestor's trauma (p.48).

Threat and Threat Narratives.

Claudia (2003) writes that "As groups or nations interact with each other, patterns of interaction develop over time. Repeated experience leads to the formation and

solidification of beliefs and perceptions of self and others. While this can be a positively reinforcing process in which the relationship between the two parties is based on trust and cooperation, in situations of conflict such processes are largely negative. If the history shared between two groups is competitive -- either over resources or over power -- then the other party is viewed as a threat". Over an extended period of time, Claudia argues, "individuals and societies mobilize against the negative other, and soon define themselves according to their opposition of that other". In the process of mobilizing against the other,"the threatened group denigrates the 'other' as uncivilized, savage, subhuman, or demonic. Negative images are retrieved from mythic stories of the past which lend validity to notions of ingroup nobility, skill, and virtue" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006, p1). These narratives "frequently exploit intense and powerful imagery, the choice and assignment of such imagery are often deeply embedded in fabrications about race, ethnicity, gender, religion and nationality...threat narratives frame the 'them/us' in normative terms. who 'they' are is revealed through their vices and who 'we' are is revealed through our virtues" (Rothbarth & Korostellina 2006:2). Through these narratives a collective axiology is developed. Rothbart and Korostelina(2006)define collective axiology, "a system of value-commitments that define which actions are prohibited, and which actions are necessary for specific tasks. It provides a sense of life and world, serves to shape perceptions of actions and events, and provides a basis for evaluating group members. A collective axiology defines boundaries and relations among groups and establishes criteria for ingroup/outgroup membership" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006, p.4).

Claudia(2003) further notes that in a social interaction in which there is “a history of domination of one party over the other, there is little basis for trust or cooperation. Each of these past experiences lays the foundation for interactions in the present and the future”. For Claudia, a phenomenon is most readily recognized as a threat if it is intentionally created by someone else, morally offensive to in-group, and presents a clear danger. Writing about threat perception, O’Connor is of the view that, “to claim that something is a clear and present danger is to make a positive truth claim that must be validated by facts verifiable by others in a relatively objective manner. To claim furthermore that these unfortunate facts are also morally offensive is to make a normative claim that they are wrong or inappropriate in light of values validated within a particular culture. When something is widely regarded as painfully true and just plain wrong, it tends to rise rather high on the list of problems to be solved or threats to be addressed. Especially if we can convince ourselves that this threat was the brainchild of human intention, the consequence of somebody else’s insincere, deceptive, and manipulative strategies to gain power or profit at the expense of truth and justice”.

Analyzing Chris Argyris’s action science and Habermas’s early work on universal pragmatics, O’Connor concludes that in the event that the threatening situation is created by the threatened, they tend to act defensively by blaming someone else for a situation they have created themselves, which puts the other in the defensive too leading to a conflict which deviates from the actual problem. O’Connor (2007) writes “when we feel threatened we tend to see, think, judge, act, and learn in defensive ways, in ways that

protect us from the embarrassing acknowledgment of our own roles in creating the problematic situation and the costly challenge of changing our own problematic behavior. We do this by employing partially sub-conscious strategies designed to covertly gain unilateral control over the behavior of others, so as to accomplish our desired goals, avoid discussing threatening issues, and disguise from ourselves and others the ways in which we are doing this”. This is done by prevailing upon the source of the threat or by electing politicians who promise to use their political power to deal with the threat.

Link Between Social Identity Group Formation and Violence.

There are different approaches to the link between social identity group formation and violence. The very concept of ethnicity and its role in violence is challenged. Chandra (2006) argues that although scholars have converged on which identities are classified as ethnic, there is no agreement on the definition that justifies this classifications. Defining ethnicity broadly as “a subset of identity categories in which membership is determined by attributes associated with or believed to be associated with decent based attributes” (p.398), Chandra concludes that ethnicity either does not matter or has not been shown to matter in explaining most outcomes to which it has been causally linked e.g. violence, democratic stability and patronage.

Fearon and Laitin (2000), after an enquiry into the relationship between ethnic identity construction and ethnic violence conclude that “the mere observation that ethnic identities are socially constructed does not by itself explain ethnic violence and may not

even be particularly relevant” (p.874). From their analysis of several narratives linking social identity construction to violence, they conclude that “there are two main ways to develop the insight that ethnic identities are socially constructed in the direction of explanations of ethnic violence: first, individual actions, elites who construct antagonistic ethnic identities in order to maintain or increase their political power or the mass publics whose individual actions produce, reproduce and contest the content and boundaries of ethnic categories. Secondly, a supra-individual discussion of ethnicity containing internal, ideational logics that construct actors and motivate or define their possibilities for action (p.874). The specification of these processes is outlined in collective axiology.

Conclusion.

In this research my point of departure is the social constructionist theory of knowledge that considers how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that all knowledge, including the most basic, taken-for-granted common sense knowledge of everyday reality, is derived from and maintained by social interactions.

When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced and over time are presented as part of an objective reality.

Since these social interactions are always in the context of existing historical legacies, any experiences or perception of domination of one group over the other, lays the

foundation for the creation of threat narratives. Depending on the nature and intensity of the perceived domination, conflict can be intense and protracted.

The Konkombas, Dagomba and Nanumbas have lived in very close proximity, interacting socially on a daily basis for years. The majority of these years were under a colonial administrative system which was perceived by the Konkombas to be unfair and dominating. In the newly created post-colonial state, the dynamics of access to political power and resources changed creating the need for groups to clearly define themselves, give themselves some legitimacy and claim some of the political power and resources available. Identities had to be redefined based on political interests and perceptions of the 'other'. Given the fact that the post colonial state did not change the colonial power structures raised the stakes very high.

Threat narratives and collective axiologies developed as part of the process of social identity formation within the context of the existing social structures and systems in northern Ghana. These threats and axiologies are contained in the stories and narratives passed on from one generation to the next. As Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) have noted, any violation of a norm poses as a threat and narratives are immediately constructed around the threat. These threat narratives frequently exploit intense and powerful imagery. The choice and assignment of such imagery are often deeply embedded in fabrications about race, ethnicity, gender, religion or nationality (p.2).

Using the theories of social identification, I explore the process of formation of Konkomba, Dagomba, and Nanumba ethnic identities “as a form of consciousness that entirely changes the dynamic and structure of conflict” (Korostelina 2007:147) and not as its source or consequence. Social identity, according to Korostelina (2007) has to do with a feeling of belonging to a social group, a strong connection with a social category and affects one’s social perception and behavior. Social identity provides individuals with a sense of protection from the risk of interpersonal opposition and saves them from solitude by establishing boundaries and a sense of a common space within a group (p.15).

Through the categories of land and chieftaincy, the Dagombas and Nanumbas defined themselves as a social group, creating borders and boundaries between “them” and the “others”. In their interaction with the Konkombas they came up with chosen glories through the stories the drum beaters tell about the greatness of the various chiefs, their conquests and victories in War³, and chosen traumas in stories about how the Konkombas unjustifiably attacked and killed innocent Dagombas and Nanumbas⁴.

The Konkombas, defined more by their individualism and internal squabbles, than their collectivism (Talton 2003), developed a very salient Konkomba identity over the years in the face discrimination, denigration, and exploitation. Strengthened by the new identity, the dynamics of interaction with the Dagombas and Nanumbas changed as Konkombas started questioning certain practices e.g. the servant-master relationship, taxation, systems of dispute settlement and the right to self-determination and rule. The new

³ The battle of Adibo where a Dagomba chief is alleged to have defeated the British

⁴ The Cow Affair where the Chief of Jagbel was killed

Konkomba consciousness changed the conflict dynamics in the region. As Korostelina (2007) has argued, “once a social identity gets involved in interest-based or instrumental conflict, it changes the nature of political or economic conflict in particular ways, making it protracted and deep-rooted.” (p. 147).

Through a process of comparison, competition, confrontation, and counter action, Dagombas, Nanunbas and Konkombas have developed a consciousness of who they are and what their entitlements are. They have defined themselves in ways that protect their interest and exclude any form of competition. Land and chieftaincy become constructs around which social identities are formed, dividing the society into antagonistic groups. According to Korostelina (2007), “once a society has become divided into antagonistic groups, social identities become a cause of confrontation among groups competing not just for material advantage, but also for the defence of their security, beliefs, values and worldview that serve as the basis for ingroup identity... through narratives and icons that present a concentrated threat and negative images of others, ideas about remote acts of violence are shaped (p.152).

Chapter2. Contextualizing the Conflicts in Northern Ghana.

In order to understand the dynamics of ethnic identity formation, the accompanying narratives and the propensity for violence, one has to understand the pre and post independence political, social and economic dynamics which informed the formation of identity groups along ethnic lines.

‘The North’, as the northern part of Ghana is often referred to, is distinct from the south in many ways. As Kelly and Bening (2007) have pointed out, its colonial history, economic underdevelopment and ethnic diversity make the north distinct from the south (p.182). Before 1960, the area was one administrative region. The upper region was created and later divided into the upper east and upper west regions. “Both of these divisions reflected internal ethnic rivalries in which local groups used the resources of competing national political parties to attain their particular interests” (Kelly & Bening, 2007:182).

Regarding the ethnic diversity, one can identify three main divisions. The first is “the Mole-Dagbane group, which includes among others the languages spoken by the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Kusasi, Dagaaba and Builsa, who can be found in almost all areas in the north. The origin myths of many of these societies indicate historical links, at least between ruling clans. The second most significant group are Grusi speakers, such as the

Kassena and Sissala, who are also found throughout the area, and their common role as tindanas or 'land priests' would indicate their role as the earliest known inhabitants of many areas. The other language groups are the Gurma, Guang, Senoufo, Mande and Akan groups, whose speakers are most commonly found in areas close to international borders or those with the 'southern' regions of Brong-Ahafo or Volta" (p.184).

The northern region alone has seventeen (17) indigenous ethnic groups (tribes) divided into chiefly or majority tribes (Dagomba, Mamprusi, Nanumba, Gonja and recently Mo) and the non-chiefly or minority tribes⁵ (Konkomba, Bimoba, Anufo, Bassare, Nchumburu, Vagla, Safalba, Birifo, Hanga, Nawuri and Tampulma). The chiefly tribes own all the lands in the northern region and the rest are considered settlers. This dualistic picture of the north was the result of surveys conducted by the European colonial powers.

According to Weiss, "George Ekem Furgeson's investigations into the Asante hinterland revealed centralised kingdoms which existed side by side with so-called stateless or acephalous groups. From a colonial perspective, only the centralized kingdoms were of importance since they had identifiable rulers with whom one could negotiate and sign treaties". (Weiss 2005:6).

While some scholars argue that 'tribes' "in the sense of united political entities with hierarchies of chiefs are a colonial creation with the British attempting to group people of the same or similar linguistic and cultural practice into manageable administrative units", (Kelly & Bening 2007:188), others argue that in pre-colonial societies, there existed a form of traditional authority in the person of the chief in societies which had them and

⁵ The term minority does not refer to the population as the Konkombas argue that they are the second largest ethnic group in the north, yet they are classified as minority.

'earth priests' in societies which did not have chiefs. The concept and practice of chieftaincy as a form of traditional authority/leadership was present in all societies in a very rudimentary form of 'centralised' or 'collegial' authority. As Lentz (2000) has argued, "many of the identities of present day Ghana were not simply an invention of the colonial period, but drew on older 'we' group processes of inclusion and exclusion (p.2). Historical sources which predate the colonial enterprise mention the Dagomba Kingdom, the Basaris and the Konkombas, hence the Dagomba kingdom is not a political invention neither is the relationship between rule and territory, a colonial invention. What is lacking and very much constructed is "information relating to the concept of political power and the reception of such authority by the ruled" (Schlotter in Lentz 2000, p.49). For others still, 'tribe' is the result of "a gradual formation of social identities from structurally simple organizations involving leadership by clan elders backed by religious beliefs in the primal authority of the ancestors, toward the 'traditional state' – a more highly structured form of social organization with rulers and elaborate institutions including religious beliefs in the accessibility of a trans-territorial God" (E. Goody 1973, Kirby 1986 p.2). In the process of this gradual formation of social identities, small tribal groups were slowly incorporated into larger more highly stratified social and political organizations.

Chieftaincy in Northern Ghana.

The concept of chieftaincy as a well organised centralised authority, an authority accepted by all the ruled, and the accompanying narratives and myths of origin and power are socially constructed for leveraging political power and resources in the

context of a nation state. The conscious and unconscious use of chieftaincy and land ownership as a social category for group formation to leverage political power is the source of the salience ethnic identity consciousness. According to Kirby, “the ‘traditional state’ was introduced through small bands of slave raiders who often travelled with itinerant Muslim clerics” (p.2.). These groups took advantage of the Pax Britanica to establish a stable political and social environment. “Under the policy of ‘indirect Rule’ they expanded the power and prestige of the chiefs and altered the concept and structures of the ‘traditional states’ to meet their own administrative needs. The peaceful environment engendered population growth, fostered trade and increased agricultural production, while the structures of the new bureaucracy brought about changes in political identity and ethnicity” (p.2).

The chieftaincy institution is perceived as the repository of traditional authority and derives its legitimacy from a myth of origin that confers temporal power on it. Myth and ritual orderings give a spiritual content to the exercise of the authority of the chief. The mythic construction of power has the further advantage that rulers could dispense with any socio-political negotiation of meaning. What in other circumstances would appear as ordinary discourse, open to negotiation, is simply abstracted from the arena of daily interaction and endowed with a transcendence that emanates from the primordial past. Endowed with such mythic qualities, the authority of the chief is not contested. (Lucy 2008:1)

From its inception, the Dagomba 'kingdom' was beset with wars, internal and external. In most of these wars, they were not always as victorious as the drum history presents them. "According to oral tradition, the related kingdoms of Dagomba and Mamprusi should have come into being in the 15th century. It is commonly accepted that their founder was a certain Na Gbewa (spelled also Na Bawa) and his two sons. After they had quarrelled, they separated and gave rise to two kingdoms which were independent from each other. In the end of the 16th c. those political units were conquered by Gbanya warriors of Mande origin who earlier had founded the Gonja kingdom. Until the 18th c. the Gbanya exercised control over the Dagomba people. They imposed a sort of levy upon them, and had also a considerable influence on the internal matters of the Dagomba kingdom" (Pilaszewicz 2001:1)

Pilaszewicz further notes that Ndewura Jakpa, the founding ancestor of the Gonja dynasty, came into conflict with the paramount King of Dagomba (Ya-Na) when he seized control of Daboya, north-west of Tamale, and made himself the overlord of Tampolensi. Daboya had been a useful asset to Dagomba as a salt-producing and cloth-dying centre, and the King of Yendi claimed suzerainty over the Tampolensi. Having appointed his son as Chief of Daboya, Jakpa is said to move south to attack the Dagomba. Ya-Na Dariziegu was defeated in battle of Yapei and eventually he was killed. Subsequently, the Gonja conqueror caused the trade in kola nuts to be directed through the town of Salaga which in the course of time became an important caravan centre.

The independence of the Dagomba was rather short-lived. Soon after the Gonja had been expelled from Dagomba, the Dagomba kingdom became subject to the raids of Ashanti which may have spread over as many as 50 years. There was a period of some 130 years (1744-1874) during which the Ashanti exercised a strong influence in Dagomba. Every year the Dagomba had to pay a heavy slave tribute. The slaves were supplied by the Dagomba raid caravans which used to be harassed by Basari, a warlike people living to the east of Yendi. When Ya-Na Abdullahi (enslaved probably in 1862) was not able to fulfil his duty, the Ashanti representatives in Yendi began to threaten him with the destruction of his capital. This was the main reason for the Dagomba-Basari war.

As the Basari dwelled in a mountainous country, they used to descend into the valley in order to fight against the Dagomba invaders. The Dagomba horsemen were not able to mount the inaccessible slopes of the mountains where the Basari entrenched themselves. After the three years of siege the army of Abdullahi, endangered by famine, was forced to retreat. Still Ya-Na was successful in a sense, because he brought with him a few hundred Basari captives. Despite this setback in the Basari campaign: “Abdullahi, the King of Yendi, exercised [his] office very well”. The Dagomba people even said that they never had such a King of Yendi like him.

The Dagomba kingdom also suffered from internal conflicts. There are several accounts on the internal quarrels, rebellions, insurgencies and anxieties against the Ya-Na Yakubu. Most of the skins were contested. The dispute over the chieftaincy of Karaga is a case in

point in which an appointment of the Ya Na was disputed leading to a revolt of Abdullahi against Yakubu, his own father.

Another threat to the internal stability of the Dagomba kingdom were its princes who had no chiefdoms. They lived on robbery and were called nabiyonga "vagabond princes". Yakubu, a free-lanced prince, made dangerous the Kumbungu-Kasoriyiri road. On a certain weekly market day of Kasoriyiri, he hid himself in the bush and having seen women from the Kumbungu village who were going to attend the market, he attacked them. Then he caught a wife of an important follower of the Chief of Kasoriyiri. It resulted in a general turmoil and necessitated military intervention of Ya-Na Andani II (1876-1899). We see a chieftaincy institution evolving but confronted with a lot of external and internal conflicts.

Chiefs and Politics in Northern Ghana.

The colonial outline of two different sets of societies in the north, the kingdoms and the stateless societies suited colonial purposes. With the introduction of the indirect rule, in 1932, the Northern Territories were finally divided into societies with rulers and ethnic groups without representation. Among the latter was a wide range of different ethnic groups, especially in the Northern Region, most notably the Konkomba. (Weiss 2005:11). For effective administration, the British created Native Authorities (NA) and Native Traditional Councils (NTC) in consonance with the logic that "any devolution of power to the natives should be to the 'natural rulers' of the people, the chiefs. Through the NTC, the chiefs were to be trained first to advance beyond local affairs to consider matters that

affected the welfare of all, then to play a role in the colony wide affairs” (Ladouceur 1979:72). Sound as this logic may be, it was a mistake to limit ‘natural rulers’ to the chiefs with the assumption that the interests of the ordinary people would be adequately represented by the chiefs. The situation was further complicated by the British not having or ignoring information because of administrative interests.

According to Weiss (2005), “British investigations had pointed out that a common feature in the north was the nonexistence of the concept of individual landownership, the control of land was transferred to the Native Authorities. Furthermore, although the British authorities were aware of the religious and symbolic position of the earth priests, the *tindaanas*, as the ritual owners of the land, their position was overlooked when the new Native Authorities were established or when the political structures of the old kingdoms were codified. Last, but not the least, by defining the stateless groups as ‘minority people’, the colonial – and also post colonial - vocabulary created an image that the centralized states were the majority of the population in the north “ (p.11). The ownership of land was transferred to the Native Authorities.

Through the Native Authority and Native Traditional Councils, local political power was a prerogative of the chiefs and their sons. As long as the Northern Territories remained under the British rule, the structure and systems worked well as any form of dissent was not tolerated. However, as nationalist politicians in the South agitated for independence as a united country, the issue of political parties, people’s representation and voting rights challenged the political system in the north with far reaching consequences for the political authority of the chiefs and for peaceful ethnic co-existence in the north.

As independence was inevitable, two forms of political authority developed in the north. The Native Authority made up mainly of chiefs and their relatives and allies and the new class of educated few who were mainly teachers and local authority clerks. These formed a loose group of opinion leaders, some with chiefly connections and others not. These educated few were vocal about certain colonial policies and will become a recruiting ground for the emerging political party system (Ladouceur 1979:79).

With the advent of political parties, the Native Authority was eventually transformed into the Northern People's Party (NPP) "originally to act as a pressure group to defend northern interests. Its expressed aims were to safeguard the culture of the north and bridge the economic gap between north and south before any form of self-government took place" (Kelly and Bening 2007:186). In preparation for the first Legislative Assembly elections, NPP found itself in fierce competition with the Convention People's Party (CPP), a competition which will eventually divide the northern political front, and leave a political tradition in the post independent Ghana. While CPP developed a kind of "socialism which appealed to economically underprivileged and marginal elites in society, the liberal reformism of Busia and Danquah⁶ appealed to the educated, professional elites, and traditional chiefs" (p.195).

The third political setting was the June 4, 1979 revolution of Flight Lieutenant John Jerry Rawlings with its Marxist tendencies which emphasised power to the people in its attempts to rid the country of all forms of corruption and oppression. Ordinary people

⁶ The Busia/Danquah an amalgam of the Northern People's Party and the Ghana Congress Party. When the Nkrumah CPP government proscribed regional parties, the United Party (UP) was formed popularly known as the Busia/Danquah tradition.

were encouraged to take their own destiny into their hands and challenge the powers that be and any unjust systems and structures.

From the above we see that chieftaincy in the north moved from a form of traditional governance to the only form of political power, economic resources and development.

Chieftaincy shifted from a sacred institution to an institutional resource for political power, development, and economic resources. Becoming a chief, and or having a chieftaincy institution in your identity group became a power issue. Having that power determined the individual or group's social status, political and economic power.

Social Implications of Chiefs in Politics.

The colonial political arrangements had social implications in the daily interactions of the chiefly and non chiefly people. As Dagombas, Nanumbas and Konkombas lived in close proximity and interacted on a daily basis, their actions and reactions were guided, perceived, analysed and interpreted by certain normative order, moral principles and values.

The prominent role given to chiefs in the politics of the north created political inequalities between the centralised and non-centralised societies. Power was associated with chieftaincy and located in the centralised societies and powerlessness with non centralised societies. Talton (2003) has argued that, through the 1932 ordinances, Dagomba control over the Konkomba clans became enforceable by colonial law, making it illegal for Konkombas to refuse to respond to a *na*'s summons or demands for tribute. In return, the Dagombas were to represent Konkomba interests to the colonial administration, despite the lack of incentive the government provided for them to do so.

Meanwhile, by granting Dagombas the power to collect taxes, tribute, and control of the distribution of government resources in Konkomba areas, the British provided the *nas* with greater means through which to benefit from their positions of authority. In the first period of British rule in the Northern Territories the *nas* exercised little actual power over Konkombas and even feared, in some instances, entering Konkomba areas (p.85). Talton points out that with indirect rule, however, the power that the *nas* exercised grew excessive and frequently exploitive. Under the guise of enforcing tax laws, Dagomba *nas* and their subchiefs often exploited the surrounding Konkomba clans. If Konkombas refused to comply, they faced the threat of paying heavy fines or being imprisoned by the district commissioner. Beginning in the 1930s, therefore, Konkombas began to regard Dagomba authority as linked to British power. To challenge Dagomba authority they could no longer simply disregard the *nas*' demands. Konkombas began to regard violent resistance as their only viable option for protecting their interests.

Elites with political ambitions took advantage of the post colonial state's failure to rectify the political inequalities to look for political leverage in their ethnic groups. The centralised societies formed political identities around the chieftaincy authority, and the historically non centralised societies which had very little value for chieftaincy, started agitating for chieftaincy as a political currency.

Through the land and Native Rights Ordinance No.1 of 1927, the British had rendered all land in the Northern Territories "public land" held in trust by the governor of the Gold Coast Colony. In the Colony and Ashanti, on the other hand, authority over the land was vested in the chiefs. However, upon representations by the "Chiefs and Peoples" of the

Northern regions to the Supreme Military Council (SMC), the Alhassan Committee was set up to look into the matter. The Committee favored the restoration of land to its allodial owners. Consequently, the framers of the 1979 constitution gave due cognizance to this. The 1979 Constitution, therefore, restored stool lands in the Northern regions to its “original owners”. The relevant article emphatically stated:

For the avoidance of doubt it is hereby declared that all lands in the Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana which immediately before the coming into force of this Constitution were vested in the Government of Ghana are not public lands. All lands shall vest in any such person who was the owner of any such land before any such vesting or in the appropriate skin (See Article 188 (3&4).

As a result of the Alhassan Committee recommendation and this constitutional stipulation, the Ya Naa (King of Dagbon) assumed legal control over all land in the Oti plain. In addition, the Bimbilla Naa (King of Nanun) formally became the paramount for the Konkomba who had migrated to areas around Bimbilla. Furthermore, by 1980 the Konkombas, represented as much as two-thirds of Bimbilla’s population of 125,000 (Skalnik 1983:19). The authority of the chiefs was further expanded and his economic power in terms of revenue from sale of lands increased.

The 1979 constitution further safeguarded the chieftaincy institution, guaranteed its existence, and also restored its economic basis (land). Article 177 (1) emphatically stated that “the institution of chieftaincy together with its traditional councils as established by

customary law and usage is hereby guaranteed”. In pursuant of this, subsection 2 stated that, “Parliament shall have no power to enact any legislation:

a) which confers on any person or authority the right to accord or withdraw recognition to or from a chief; or

b) which in any way detracts or derogates from the honour and dignity of the institution of chieftancy.”

In addition, chiefs were represented on the district councils and the Lands Commission (See Articles 183 and 189). In a nutshell, unlike the First Republic during which every conceivable effort was expended by the government to cut the chiefs to size, the swing of the political pendulum later favoured the chieftaincy institution. Some of the succeeding governments recognized the status, role, and economic base of the institution. This not only created problems for the non-chiefly groups in terms of political representation, but also compromised the traditional role of a chief. As leaders, chiefs should be the rallying point and the spiritual head and should be able to unite their people. They may not be able to perform this function to any appreciable satisfaction if they engage in partisan politics. As the father of the community, a chief should be neutral so as to be able to arbitrate in an impartial manner.

While the land tenure act was a political boon for the Northern chiefs, it was a setback for the historically non-centralised societies of the region that had benefited during the post colonial years from the dwindling authority of the chiefs. Through the Land Tenure Act, the chiefs’ traditional jurisdictions were upheld as the government relied on the boundaries the British established between each centralized polity. Therefore the land

historically occupied by groups lacking an officially recognised chief legally became part of the domain of a neighboring chief.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Two main sources of data were used in this study – in-depth field interviews of a targeted sample of Chiefs, political leaders and Youth Association members of the Dagomba, Nanumbas and Konkomba ethnic groups. Ten people from each ethnic group were interviewed. The second sources of data included press releases, communiqués, memoranda issued by the leadership of the various ethnic groups in the conflict, news paper reports, review of available academic works and other forms of documentation on the conflicts. Although these documents may not reveal the value systems of the various ethnic groups, they may help me understand the circumstances leading to the formation of the various value systems. A total of thirty interviews, ten from each group, were conducted in Accra, Tamale, Yendi, Saboba and Bimbilla using open-ended questions in face-to-face interviews. These interviews were conducted and audio tape recorded with the prior consent of interviewees. All interviewees received a confidentiality agreement and a consent form prior to each interview which was approved by George Mason’s Human Subject Review Board, (appendix). The audio recordings were transcribed for analysis. The open-ended, in-depth interviews were used to elicit themes of morality, normative order and threat to identity from the narratives interviewees told about their ethnic identity, values and causes of the conflict. Morality in the context of this paper is a group’s system of determining good and bad, right and wrong, virtues and vices, a

recognized code of conduct. Normative order is a system of rights, duties and obligations a group develops. This normative order is often defined through dualities of sacred/profane, good/evil, or virtuous/vicious as a group tries to define “who they are” by defining “who they are not” on the basis of their value judgments about how the world should be organized. (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006: 41). A threat is any actual, or perceived indication, circumstance or event with the potential to cause the loss of, or damage to, an asset or people. Emphasis is on the perceived intention and capability of an adversary to undertake actions that would be detrimental to an asset or people.

Following the data collection, the information was used to populate the CA table which will be elaborately explained in the data analysis section of this thesis. The table was used to analyze the specific topics among threat narratives and determine where on the CA axis each group is located.

Chapter4. Results of Findings.

Threat Narratives and the Social Construction of Dagomba, Nanumba and Konkomba Identity.

An analysis of the interviews conducted reveal three key areas that have influenced the dynamics of the conflicts in northern Ghana: Identity, Interest and Perception. Each of these will be explained showing their linkage to the conflicts.

Identity:

In responding to questionnaire on their ethnic group identity and values, participants revealed in their narratives, three social categories around which social identities are formed;

1. Chieftaincy,
2. Culture and tradition
3. Land.

Of the three, chieftaincy stood out as the main category around which a salient identity is built. Interviewees were often not clear about their use of the words culture and tradition. In most of the cases, the impression was given that culture and tradition is equated with customs or certain traditional practices.

Chieftaincy as a Social Category for Identity Formation

The narratives revealed the general discourse on chieftaincy as a defining category for identity formation. The following excerpts from the interviews of Dagomba and Nanumba participants describe how they see themselves:

“Chieftaincy is a tradition and culture among us. Chieftaincy is part of our identity and we are proud of it. So anyone attempting to overthrow a paramount or minor chief will be a problem because we know that it is our identity. Our traditions come from there” (N.I. 1:1).

“Chieftaincy plays a very important role in our life and culture. The chieftaincy institution was the main pillar of governance before Ghana was colonized. The traditional authority was and still is the symbol of authority around which the Nanumbas and other settlers are governed. The chieftaincy institution is the most highly respected and the people are always prepared to pay any price to protect and sustain the integrity and tradition of the institution” (N.I. 4). “We believe that the most important issues and values are respect and dignity for our chieftaincy institution” (N.I. 5).

“Dagombas value leadership. We are taught to be leaders. A Dagomba cannot be there without a leader. You must be led till you lead, and you must aspire to lead. Even if you do not go high, you should take up a leadership position in the community. No Dagomba dies with his ordinary name. If you are there and you are getting old, they will create a title for you” (D.I. 1). “Chieftaincy is a core value in Dagbon...In Dagbon when someone attacks your father, or any chief (as a prince any chief is your father) you will have to take up arms to defend him. It is a taboo for a prince to talk carelessly to a chief” (D.I. 3). “A key value is to defend the chief and to defend one’s land” (N.I. 4)

The excerpts above, present a discourse in which Dagombas and Nanumbas define themselves around chieftaincy and the chieftaincy institution. They are a “people with

chieftaincy”.⁷ Integrity, dignity and respect for chieftaincy become moral values binding on all members of the group and all who live with them. Members of the group are expected to defend the institution at any cost. Leadership, a normal social function in any society is given new meaning, the essence of who “we” are rather than a function. A conflict already developed over the question of representation of the north at the national assembly that was being formed in preparation for independence. The following arguments in favour of chiefs representing the people are very informative.

We the chiefs are here as representatives of our people and trustees of their rights. We want to preserve that right until the lower estate or the common man in the street, as our political parties call them, are prepared to take over. There is no doubt that at the present, the chiefs are the political leaders of the Northern Territories. (J. A. Braimah, Kabachewura).

The relationship between chief and people has been one of a father and children. Nothing has so far happened yet to mar this relationship, and give cause for the loss of confidence in the fatherhood and leadership of the chief by the common people....This recommendation{of the Ewart Committee} definitely ensures that this tradition, undisturbed, happy, peaceful relationship between chiefs and people shall continue to remain secure and undisturbed, and I most strongly support it. (J.H. Allassani)

No chief in the Northern Territories objects to surrendering of part of his power to the common man; what I feel all chiefs in the Northern Territories object to is the surrendering of part of their power to the common man only for it to be snatched away from him by an outside agent.. (Yakubu Tali, Tali Na).

These arguments according to Ladouceur, were in reaction to the fear that southerners would be elected in the north (Ladouceur 1979:76). Whatever the reason, these

⁷ I prefer to use the term people with chieftaincy instead of chiefly people to denote centralized systems of leadership because not all Dagombas and Nanumbas belong to a royal family.

statements demonstrates how the people with chieftaincy viewed their leadership role in the northern region in relation to the other ethnic groups.

Confronted with Konkomba demands for a redefinition of the social relationships, Dagombas and Nanumbas had to defend their interests in land and political power by redefining who they are and why the social relations should be maintained as they are. Chieftaincy, an existing form of traditional leadership was the obvious social category to use, because of the political power and status the colonial administration gave chieftaincy. Chieftaincy and the chieftaincy institution becomes the essence of who Dagombas and Nanubas are and not just a leadership tool. By defining themselves as a people with chieftaincy, they created “a local system of rights, duties and obligations within which both public and private internal acts are done and judged” (Harre and Langenhove, 1999:1). Respect and allegiance to the chief became a norm, the violation of which was perceived to threatened the very existence of the identity group.

A Nanumba Interviewee added,

“We have very cordial relationships with other groups except Konkombas who are settlers but now claim ownership of the land on which they farm. They (Konkombas) also say they want to have their own chiefs and therefore they do not respect or pay allegiance to existing Nanung chiefs who gave them the land to settle. We see this as lack of recognition of our very ethnic existence and belonging and the things which we have authority over. This show of disrespect for authority and to the owners of certain properties in the area resulted in the 1981 and the 1994 conflicts between Nanumbas and Konkombas” (N.I. 4:2). Another Nanumba interviewee said “the Nanung traditional area geographically belongs to Nanumbas. Therefore Nanumbas see any other group as settlers. This

means that settlers cannot own land. Settlers may have their own chief enskinned by the Nanumba paramountcy. What this means is that he and his subjects thus owe allegiance to the Nanumba chief, and cannot on their own perform certain core traditional functions or take decisions on those core issues. The main functions of settler chiefs may be regarding funeral arrangements and performance, marriage arrangements, etc” (N.I. 5:2).

By defining themselves as ‘people with chieftaincy’, Nanumbas and Dagombas set up norms and also conferred on themselves a social legitimacy with access to resources.

Being a ‘people with chieftaincy’ entitles any member of the group to social, economic and political rights. This very process denied Konkombas any legitimacy and imposed on them certain duties and obligations.

“We were working on their chief’s farms and responsible for our own accommodation and feeding and sometimes we contributed yam seeds for the farm. During the harvesting season we had to contribute fresh yams and add a cock or a guinea fowl and send to the chief before we eat the farm produce. They would send empty sacks for us to fill them with grains and during our funerals we had to take a big pot of pito and whole hind leg of a cow to the chief” (K.I.3:2).

The Konkombas on the other hand see the chieftaincy discourse differently:

“To the average Konkomba, chieftaincy is good, but we do not cherish it the way the Dagombas and Nanumbas do. To us a chief is somebody who can manage his household, can manage to feed his people, his wives and children, and entertain his guest as much as you can. To a Konkomba if you are a chief, you have to still go to farm and work, which is the opposite of our brothers the Dagombas and Nanumbas. If you are a chief, you have to sit down for others to come and work for you”. The Konkomba chief is usually the head of the clan we have imbibed this chieftaincy thing from Dagombas (K.I. 3:2-3). “We the Konkombas are also looking for chieftaincy because we feel marginalized, we need to assert ourselves,

we have an identity, we want to be identified as a group” (K.I.2). “We think also that chieftaincy is important in our society but we also think that nobody should impose himself as a chief” (K.I. 4:1). “If a group insist on getting recognition, paramountcy, status, that is not posing any threat to anybody, because when you are a chief, you are a chief of your ethnic group, you don’t relate to the other ethnic groups in any way” (K.I. 4:4). “Konkomba has no central authority, we have clans. We learned chieftaincy from the Dagombas, this is the source of Dagomba claim that they own Konkombas and their land” (K.I. 5:2)

In reaction to the process of de-legitimization, Konkombas demanded chieftaincy as a means of legitimizing their social status. Konkombas felt they were de-legitimized because they had no centralised system of leadership. As one Konkomba interviewee explained,

“We the Konkombas are also looking for chieftaincy because we feel marginalized, we need to assert ourselves, we have an identity. Historically, Dagombas came and met us on the land, took over land and subjected us to their rule. We also need an identity; we want to be identified as a separate group” (K.I. 1:2). The interviewee continued, “Government has marginalised us. In the whole north, population wise, we are only second to the Dagombas, and we are classified as a minority group by government. Why are we classified as minority when we are more than most of the groups in the north. This is because they have land and chieftaincy, they classified them as a majority group and we are completely sidelined” (K.I. 1:2).

In analysing chieftaincy as a social category around which social identities are formed, my purpose is not to determine who is right and who is wrong, but to understand the psychological and socio-structural dynamics as groups living together create social reality

in their search for meaning and how they legitimize or de-legitimize each other in the process as they seek to define themselves and protect their interests.

According to a Dagomba interviewee,

“Dagombas use chieftaincy, religion (Islam) and their language *Dagbanli* to assimilate others” (D.I. 1:4). Any resistance to this integration is considered a threat. “When you resist the integration, you are isolated and allowed to do your own thing, but they will never give you an eldership or chieftaincy. Once you stay away, you will not get it” (D.I. 1:2). The Konkombas have always resisted Dagomba assimilation. “We have never been under Dagombas, we were both under the colonial rule and because of that could not fight. If we were allowed to fight, things would have been different today” (K.I. 4:1).

Key questions need to be answered here. How is this value system created? Who determines who is an indigene and who is not? How are the rights, duties and obligations determined? Positioning theory, a social constructionist approach to knowledge that pays attention to discourse as a way of creating social reality may be of some help in answering some of these questions. Harre and Langenhove (1999) define positioning theory as “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (p. 1), a process, in interaction, in discourse, by which persons come to occupy a moral location in that discourse (p.22). In their daily social interactions and discourse, Dagombas/Nanumbas ‘positioned’ themselves as ‘people with chieftaincy’ and the Konkombas as people without chieftaincy. This positioning has some moral and resource implications. People with chieftaincy, by virtue of the chieftaincy, have moral and legal rights over those without. By defining themselves as ‘people with chieftaincy’, Dagombas and Nanumbas give

themselves the right to own land, denying Konkombas the same right and imposing on them certain duties and obligations. As Skalnik (1983) noted, as long as they remained politically marginal and unassertive, they were welcome in Nanung (p.19). Under normal circumstance, such a process of social legitimacy is on-going, ever-shifting and constantly contested. The colonial intervention stopped the process by imposing the Dagomba/Nanumba position. As long as that external force was present, Konkombas could not contest the position in which they were socially placed. “The post colonial state’s failure to eliminate British imposed political inequality, increased the politicization of ethnicity and the spread of chieftaincy as the primary symbol of political currency among historically non-centralized groups” (Talton 2003:85).

Talton concludes that while Dagomba political identity evolved to reflect their control over Konkombas, the legalization of Dagomba authority influenced Konkomba identity to evolve around challenging their subordinate status. The historically disunited Konkomba clans began to identify the Dagombas as their common subjugator and Dagomba exploitation as their common plight. Their growing sense of powerlessness combined with widespread desire to assert their autonomy, led Konkombas to begin to directly challenge Dagomba authority.

Culture and Tradition as a category for Social Identity Formation.

The term culture and tradition are used interchangeably but their meaning is not very clear. Interviewees talked about having a rich culture and tradition but never elaborated on what exactly they mean by that. The silence on the meaning of these terms is indicative of the lack of clarity over the use of the term. They talk of respect for customs

and culture of the ethnic group without explaining what this culture is. I tend to see culture and tradition more in terms of code of conduct or ways of behaving.

Land Ownership as a category for social identity formation.

Land ownership as a social category for identity formation is not very much emphasised in the interviews. Land ownership is often associated with chieftaincy. Consequently, I will look at the land issue under interests.

Interests.

Land.

Through the land and Native Rights Ordinance No.1 of 1927, the British had rendered all land in the Northern Territories “public land” held in trust by the governor of the Gold Coast Colony. In the Colony and Ashanti, on the other hand, authority over the land was vested in the chiefs. In 1979, Land Tenure Act, all northern lands were placed under the authority of the chiefs. While the land tenure act was a political boon for the Northern chiefs, it was a setback for the historically non-centralised societies of the region that had benefited during the post colonial years from the dwindling authority of the chiefs.

Through the Land Tenure Act, the chiefs’ traditional jurisdictions were upheld as the government relied on the boundaries the British established between each centralized polity. Therefore the land historically occupied by groups lacking an officially recognised chief legally became part of the domain of a neighboring chief. Consequently, the Ya Naa assumed legal control over all land in the Oti plain. In addition, the Bimbilla Naa formally became the paramount for the Konkomba who had migrated to areas around Bimbilla. Furthermore, by 1980 the Konkombas, represented as much as two-thirds of

Bimbilla's population of 125,000 (Skalnik 1983, p.19). The four chiefly tribes in northern Ghana, by this land tenure act owned all the northern lands. It is interesting to note that majority of the violent conflicts in northern Ghana took place after 1979. This shows that the conflicts were not only identity conflicts but also interest based conflicts. The identities were constructed precisely to protect these interests.

“Predominantly, our main source of livelihood is agriculture so we cherish our land so much and very sensitive to issues bordering on our land and geographical boundaries...Land is one of the most important and closely guarded resources of the Nanumbas. Since our main stay is agriculture, our survival depends on the preservation of this important resource” (N.I. 7:1). “The king of Nanung and his sub-chiefs are the custodians of the Nanumba land, culture and traditions held in trust for the present and future generation of its people. Land is closely linked with chieftaincy , the role of the Nanumba chief when “enskined”⁸ by the king is to see to it that the well being of his subjects and the land is secured” (N.I. 7:1). “The land belongs to us and we cannot allow anyone else to come and take it away from us” (N.I.2:1). “Land is a big asset. Nanumbas are farmers and land is important for us. We practice rotational farming and so need ample land to farm. Because our land is rich, we like to farm on virgin land and land is free” (N.I. 1:1).

“We believe that land is there for us to till and to farm to make a living and we also believe that since time immemorial, which we cannot place a definite date on, the area around Yendi, known as the eastern dagomba belong to the Konkonbas. Dagombas came and met us and a number of writers have attested to that. To us as long as we are allowed to work on the land without any hinderance,

⁸ In the northern part of Ghana, chiefs sit on animal skins. The process of induction into office is known as enskinment. In the south of Ghana the chief is enstooled because he sits on a stool.

it does not really matter who says he owns it. Like what a former head of state said, “we are not born with the land and you do not carry it anywhere” (K.I.3:3).

“A konkonba man is a farmer and so fertile land is important to him. They migrate to other places in search of land. Wherever they go they have problems. They are accused of not being indigenous and so are often levied heavily. We do not have chieftaincy so when we settle, dagombas enskin chiefs for us and want us to pay allegiance to the chief and this brings problems. Their argument is that it is not our home so we cannot have chiefs. I think this is because we do not have much knowledge about chieftaincy and so are often taken advantage of” (K.I.2:1).

“We value land and we think that nobody has paid for land. We want land purely for farming activities and we do not intend to buy or sell land to anybody and we believe that , if somebody wants land for farming, no matter the sizes, he should be given free of charge, don’t take anything” (K.I. 4:1).

From the above statements we see that land is a very precious resource for Dagombas, Nanumbas and Konkombas. Their livelihood depends on it, but ownership was never a real issue because until 1979, when all northern lands were vested in the government in trust for the people. The Land Tenure Act of 1979 in which all northern lands were placed under the ‘traditional owners’ triggered the need for ethnic identity formation around chieftaincy. The very source of people’s livelihood was at stake. Land was such a basic need that to be without land was suicidal. Groups with land had to justify or legitimize their ownership of the land as the law had stipulated and groups without land had to ‘fight’ for land. The issue of land became a matter of life and death, a basic need. What we see happening is a legal stipulation generating the formation and or strengthening of ethnically based identity groups to legitimize their ownership of land or

claim ownership of land. Dagomba/Nanumba social identity was constructed to legitimize existing legal stipulations on land ownership. Konkomba demand for chieftaincy was implicitly an attempt to protect their interests, land. In this case, it was not about scarcity of a resource but ownership. The terms 'land owners' and 'settlers' took on new meaning. "In the process of the identity formation, history became a warehouse where anyone who enters takes out what is needed to construct that narrative, blueprint or Truth one needs to propagate for a certain cause...history is used in shaping, writing and even creating new narratives" (Weiss, 2005:2)

Politics

Chieftaincy and land entitled a group access to political power. In a context where access to education, basic social services and development are dependent on the government, access to political power becomes a matter of survival, a basic need. The struggle for chieftaincy and land becomes a struggle for access to a share of the "national cake".

"Until very recently, there was no konkonba appointed a minister. The NPP government is the first to appoint a Konkonba as a deputy northern regional minister. This is the first in the history of Ghana where a konkonba has been appointed a cabinet minister. Otherwise, in all the previous governments, Konkonbas did not matter. During the 1994 conflict, a Konkonba made a comment in parliament and was suspended but they forgot that it was the Nanumba and Dagomba Members of Parliament who made comments and the Konkonba MP responded but they were not suspended. We were consigned to being hewers of wood and carriers of water for others" K.I.3:3).

Perceptions and Threat Narratives.

A key component of this identity formation is the perception of the self and the other. Through social interaction over the years, Dagombas/ Nanumbas formed and solidified beliefs and perceptions of self and others. In the case of Dagomba/Nanumba, it was a positive and reinforcing process based on trust and cooperation, but in relation to the Konkombas, a largely negative process. The other was viewed as a threat as they competed for resources and power. Each group mobilized against the other and soon defined themselves according to their opposition of that other. In the interviews, Konkombas saw themselves as people created by God, who are honest, hard working people who value justice, respect for the dignity of the human person, family relations and friendship. They see Dagombas and Nanumbas as proud lazy people “who sit under trees, gossip about others and don’t work yet they want food to eat. They are cheats and very dishonest people. Their chiefs are lazy, they sit down for others to come and work for them” (K.I. 3:3). Konkombas believe that because they have no central authority, they are denigrated, marginalized, cheated, called and treated like animals. “Nanumbas call us animals (Bonkobri)” (K.I. 2:1).

Nanumbas and Dagombas see Konkombas as

“settlers who now claim ownership of the land on which they farm. They want their own chiefs even though they have no tradition of chieftaincy. They do not respect or pay allegiance to existing Nanung chiefs who gave them land to settle. They do not recognise our very ethnic existence and belonging and things which we have authority over. They disrespect authority, are intruders, power drunk and having ill motives. They pose a threat to Nanung identity, they claim to be

aborigines” (N.I. 3:2). “Dagombas scorn Konkombas, do not respect them and look on them because Konkombas do not give the necessary reverence to a senior. A Dagomba man cannot stand this” (D.I.1:2). “Dagombas disparage the Konkomba norms and values... some of the things we condemned were looked at as inhuman. How can you come and have a relationship with my daughter in my presence? They do not see anything wrong with that and we see everything wrong with that. So there is no way we will marry from that tribe. That behaviour is considered animalistic. How can you tell a Dagomba man to accept such a behaviour?” (D.I.1:5). Konkombas do not value life. “They do not see killing to be anything wrong. Somebody has wronged you, Konkombas revenge killing and killing someone for disrespecting you in public is seen to be heroic... ambushing your enemy is another value” (D.I.1:5).

The Dagombas and Nanumbas interviewed felt their very existence and dignity was threatened by the Konkombas in their blatant disregard for the authority of the chiefs, traditions and customs and claims of land ownership. The Konkombas on the other hand felt that their very existence and dignity was threatened by the Dagomba/Nanumba refusal to acknowledge their independence, dignity and capacity for self determination and governance. These feelings of threat are presented in narrative form, in the stories that are told of the ‘other’.

“Konkombas are settlers who did not exist in Nanum before 1940. They came to Nanum to escape punishment from the British for murder. The chief of Nanum was warned not to receive them, but he did and generously gave them land to farm. Today they have become a threat to Nanumba survival and livelihood. They are using violence to grab fertile Nanum lands and moving whole families into Nanum. They refuse to pay for the land, disrespect the chief and are determined to crowd out Nanumba communities through violent conflict” (NI 3). “Konkombas are settler who now claim ownership of the land on which they

farm. They want their own chiefs even though they have no tradition of chieftaincy. They do not respect or pay allegiance to existing Nanum chiefs who gave them land to settle. They do not recognise our very ethnic existence and belonging and things which we have authority over. They disrespect authority, are intruders, power drunk and having ill motives. They pose a threat to Nanum identity they claim to be aborigines”. (NI. 3)

Through these narratives, the Dagombas and Nanumbas create for themselves a system of value and norms which regulate their lives and relationship with others. This value system provides a sense of life and world, serves to shape perceptions of actions and events, and provides a basis for evaluating group members, defining in the process boundaries and relations among groups and establishing criteria for ingroup/outgroup membership” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006, p.4). Chieftaincy becomes an ultimate value which must be defended at all cost. Disrespect for the chief is a violation and a threat to the very existence of the group. Respect for authority becomes a defining characteristic of the group and any violation is punished. An attack on any authority person, system or symbol becomes an attack on the group to which members are called to fight to defend.

Konkombas developed threat narratives around their perceived mistreatment by Dagombas and Nanumbas. “We were in Nanung in 1907 before the Naumbas came. We moved in search of fertile land and resurfaced in Nanung in the 1940s.” (K.I. 4:1). They claim they are the second largest group in the region yet they are called minority and cannot have their own chiefs. They were never conquered by the Dagombas and were never under them. “We have always asked the Dagombas to tell us which Yaa Naa was

sitting as paramount chief in Dagbon when the Konkombas arrived? Till date they have not been able to tell us” (K.I. 5:1).

A Konkomba interviewee’s version of the sources of the 1981 conflict presents the general view of the plight of the Konkombas.

In the 1981 conflict, apart from the fact that we wanted our freedom because we did not get justice in the courts, the chief’s palace and at the police station. A case in point is, two Konkombas went to court because of a quarrel over a young lady. The magistrate ended up marrying the lady. So the two men lost. But one significant thing is that Nanumbas insisted that Konkombas should give their farm produce and animals to them to go down to Accra and sell for them and then come back and pay them their money. In most cases they came back with very interesting stories, e.g., the market is bad, we did not have good market, some of the animals died on the way, some of the yams got rotten etc. Meanwhile, we were working on their chiefs farms and responsible for our own accommodation and feeding and sometimes we contributed yam seeds for the farm. During the harvesting season we had to contribute fresh yams and add a cock or a guinea fowl and send to the chief before we eat the farm produce. They would send empty sacks for us to fill them with grains and during our funerals we had to take a big pot of pito and whole hind leg of a cow to the chief. So we said at this point that if we do not have justice in the chief’s palace and in the court then what else? Then, come the consequence. So they decided to choose somebody to lead them. This was the beginning of the Ali incident. The konkombas chose Mr. Ali to be their arbitrator to handle their cases. The Nanumbas objected to it, bundled him into a tractor and drove to Machayili and threw him away (KI 3).

The Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) felt that the only way Konkombas could fight for their liberation was to present a united front. So they united Konkombas and gave them a new identity.

“One of the things we made them to understand is that it is in God’s wisdom he made us to be Konkombas. He did not make us Nanumbas or Dagombas or whatever. So if you are called a Konkomba you need to be proud, proud in the positive sense that you are a konkomba, and we have common problems. And if we have common problems it is better we get together and talk about our common problems. We were getting complains from various angles. The youth as sociation came as an umbrella organization, to unite all Konkombas in the country” (KI. 3).

They also felt that Dagombas were not prepared to give them chieftaincy and were not honest about it.

“We sent to the late Yaa Naa and told him we understand government wanted to elevate some chiefs to paramountcies and we wanted to be included. He assured us that we would be included, then we went back home. But we did not sit. We got some insiders to tell us if we were included. An insider informed us when the final list was out and that our name was not there. That made us also to write to the national house of chiefs directly, bypassing the Yaa Naa and only copied him. The conflict erupted before the final list came out”. (KI. 1)

Konkombas believed that Dagombas wanted to wipe them out in war.

“The plan was to eliminate the konkombas, we are told some ministers stood in Yendi and said this is the day, if they let this day pass without them getting what they want, then they are the losers. This goes to battress the point that was made in a meeting held in Tamale attended by the Yaa Naa where they threatened to do away with us completely. I was there because KOYA was represented at that meeting. And after that meeting, after our conflict with the nanunbas, I led a team of five konkombas to go and see lawyer Ibrahim Mahama in Tamale to tell him that the relationship between the Konkombas and the Nanumbas is the one we do not want, but we want to maintain the good and positive relation with Dagombas

so we had come to him as an opinion leader so that we can see what we can do and among other things he said something like this, “yes you yourselves should know that the day you dare to attack us, you will be annihilated”. That was the word he used, annihilated. He said they knew that we konkonbas could not stand Dagombas and the day we attempt Dagombas we will be annihilated. We went with two elderly konkonba muslims who pray with him at the Afajura mosque, thinking that with the presence of his religious brothers he would be sympathetic but this is the answer he gave us. I wish someone would ask him how it went in 1994 and whether we were annihilated” (KI.3).

In time of protracted conflict, the veracity of such narratives are not questioned, “achieving an aura of transcendent truth”. Rothbart & Korostelina describes this as “a threat-logic”. According to them, “a threat-logic recasts Self and Other within a pre-formed dogma, elevating their roles to a timeless universal law. All ‘facts’ are ordered, all experiences are explained, and all personal relationships are subject to controls...the logic is removed from direct contact with the subtleties, complexities, and temporality of daily life” (p.5).

What we see happening is each group defining the other by their deeds. Rothbart and Korostelina (2006) explain this phenomenon thus; “in a conflict situation people tend to be defined by their deeds. Questions about ‘what happened’ in a conflict quickly turn to monolithic explanation of who ‘they’ are, why they are malicious and when they will strike...the threatened group denigrates the other as uncivilized, savage, subhuman or demonic. Negative images are retrieved from mythic stories of the past (p.1).

Threat narratives are created according to these perceptions. Cobb (2006) has argued that, a conflict narrative provides legitimacy for Self, while de-legitimizing the Other...

They are the locus for the struggle over meaning, which is, in turn, the locus for the struggle over legitimacy – who is right, who is wrong, who is good, who is bad and why (163). The criteria for legitimacy emerge in the social construction of positions in interaction, reflected in the conflict narratives.

Chapter 5 Conclusion.

I started this research with the hypothesis that land and chieftaincy constitute the basis of ethnic identity formation in northern Ghana and are perceived in terms of morality and normative order. Leaders develop threat narratives around land and chieftaincy thus increasing the potential for conflict. To test this hypothesis, I developed a questionnaire with three key questions;

1. What values, myths and normative order constitute the identity of the Dagomba, Nanumba and Konkomba?
2. How does group identity of the Dagomba, Nanumba and konkomba influence a readiness for violence?
3. What characteristics emerge from the narratives of the community/political leaders that sustain contemporary identity?

From the analysis of the in-depth interviews I conducted, I have demonstrated that ethnicity, chieftaincy and land are social categories that Dagombas, Nanumbas and Konkombas have chosen to construct their social identity around. Of themselves, they do not cause conflict. A salient ethnic identity is developed around chieftaincy that reinforced positive in-group characteristics and attributed negative characteristics to the out group through threat narratives. These narratives are based on the perception of “they

as an enemy” and reflects negative attitudes, feeling and stereotypes towards the perceived enemy. Dagombas and Nanumbas define themselves as “people with chieftaincy” and see in the Konkomba demand for chieftaincy a threat to their identity and existence. A collective axiology is built around land and chieftaincy with respect for the chieftaincy institution a high moral value. Any disrespect for the chieftaincy institution is viewed as a serious threat. Dagombas and Nanumbas see themselves as superior to Konkombas and look down on them. Konkombas on the other hand are demanding recognition as a people with a right to chieftaincy as a means to legitimacy and access to resources.

The social category chieftaincy is specifically chosen and an ethnic identity created around it because of land. In the northern region of Ghana, chieftaincy and land go together. The chief has full authority over land and holds it in trust for his people. To be defined as “a people with chieftaincy” entitles a group to land. To be defined as a people without chieftaincy is to be dispossessed of land. The identity is formed around chieftaincy to protect an interests, land and political power. The negative perceptions of the other which develops in the “we”/”they” categorization leads to the formation of threat narratives and a collective axiology which sets the stage for conflict and needs only a trigger event.

In this research, I have shifted the focus in the analysis of conflicts in northern Ghana from the use of ethnicity, chieftaincy and land as causal factors of the conflict to the internal dynamics of meaning making as groups socialize, define and redefine themselves to protect their interest in an ever changing social environment. This process of meaning

making compels groups to define themselves through group identity formation in ways that gives them legitimacy and access to resources. The group chooses a salient identity from among the available identities, to differentiate themselves from others and binds them together. The reverse effect of this process is the de-legitimization and negative perceptions of the other. In the process of salient identity formation, social categories like ethnicity, chieftaincy, religion, race, land etc, may be used as mobilizing and legitimizing elements, but of themselves do not cause conflict.

A major component of this identity formation process is the formation of a collective axiology, a value system, which gives meaning to life and regulates the daily living and social interaction with others. Where the salient identity reinforces positive in-group characteristics and attributes negative characteristics to the out-group through threat narratives, conflict and violence becomes inevitable.

My data shows that the Dagomba, Nanumba and Konkomba all have salient ethnic identities. Dagomba and Nanumba have a collective axiology that is very similar and very different from that of the Konkombas. It is the high salience of the identity, the huge difference in collective axiology and the threat narratives in circulation that have resulted in the conflict proneness of the three ethnic groups. The interviews also revealed that for a long time the Konkombas did not have a salient identity and so did not pose any threat to the Dagombas and Nanumbas, but as they developed a salient identity, they also developed a collective axiology different from that of the Dagombas and Nanumbas.

A Konkomba interviewee explained that the Konkomba Youth Association felt that the only way Konkombas could fight for their liberation was to present a united front, so they united Konkombas and gave them a new identity.

“One of the things we made them to understand is that it is in God’s wisdom he made us to be Konkombas. He did not make us Nanumbas or Dagombas or whatever. So if you are called a Konkomba you need to be proud, proud in the positive sense that you are a Konkomba, and we have common problems. And if we have common problems it is better we get together and talk about our common problems. We were getting complains from various angles. The youth association came as an umbrella organization, to unite all Konkombas in the country” (K.I.3:3).

These findings are in line with the available literature on the Konkombas. As Talton (2003) writes, “for most of its history, the size of the konkomba population had largely been irrelevant. With few exceptions, Konkombas were a collection of fragmented highly fractious subsistence farming subclans and lineages. Each clan remained a political entity unto itself and feuding between and within them was rampant. Moreover, Konkombas did not engage in economic activities from which their large numbers would create an advantage. During the late colonial period, “a small group of educated Konkombas of various clans came together and defined Konkomba as possession a common history and political interests. This group organized itself as the Konkomba improvement Association with the goal to decreasing Konkomba feuds. In addition, it began to represent the interest of all clans to the district and regional administration. Over a period of 20 years, a certain consciousness developed among Konkombas and added strength to their numeric size as they began to assert themselves more and more as a group”. (p. 188)

Between 1977 and 1981, the numeric strength of Konkombas and an increased level of political organization were the dominant forces behind changes in their relationships with their neighbours the Dagombas and Nanumbas. Konkombas who originally fought against any chieftaincy system are now mobilized and fighting for a chieftain system (Skalnik 1983, p. 19). “An organization originally formed to promote education, unity and development among Konkombas became a liberation movement to establish the political autonomy and power because challenging the centralized polities’ authority over the konkomba had become a central element with Konkomba political consciousness” (Talton 2003:190).

Through the mobilizing activities of the Konkomba Youth Association, a Konkomba ethnic identity was created with demands for recognition as an autonomous ethnic group with chieftaincy and land. This new salient identity challenged their subordinate status, the construction of Konkomba as people without chiefs, and, therefore politically powerless. They sought to construct a political identity among Konkombas that more closely resembled that of the historically centralized groups in the region. Since they perceived that they could not get justice in the law courts or chief’s palace, Konkombas often used violence to challenge their subordinate status and protect their interests. Consequently, there was a constant threat of violence that could only be checked by a strong military force. These conflicts according to Talton (2003) represent a collective Konkomba challenge to their subordinate status. In order for this to happen, there had to be changes in the intra-Konkomba relations and relationships between Konkombas and their neighbors.

In the face of this Konkomba salient identity and challenge, Dagombas and Nanumbas responded with the formation of a salient identity centred on chieftaincy and land. In the process, they moved from a welcoming and assimilating group to an exclusivist group with clear ‘we’/‘they’ distinctions and a collective axiology based on respect for the chieftaincy institution. Being a Dagomba/Nanumbas meant being part of and respecting the chieftaincy institution. Being a member of this group entitled you to land and political power. The chieftaincy institution is reconstructed as a well structured and respected system of administration dating back in history to the fourteenth century with myths of origin and greatness.

“Being a Dagomba is being a descendant of Tohazie. He was a great hunter and a great fighter and so we are proud to belong to his descendants. Dagomba and Nanumba chiefs are put in-charge of the other tribes to supervise them because they were conquered by our grand ancestors and are living on our land” (D.I.2:1).
“Naa Gbewaa conquered Konkombas but never interfered with their customs. He left them in peace as long as they respected the Yaa Naa and came to work on his farm once a year. We have chieftaincy and well structured systems. Everyone knows his place. We will fight and defend that which is ours” (D.I.1:4).

In the collective consciousness of Dagombas and Nanumbas such a great system of chieftaincy was under threat by the Konkombas who are settlers with no tradition of chieftaincy but who have benefited from the generosity of their host to enrich themselves, increase in numbers and are now threatening and using force to take away the ‘birth right’ of Dagombas and Nanumbas. Konkombas on the other hand see themselves as a people democratically organized and determined to develop themselves and contribute their lot to nation building and do not understand why a request for paramountcy should

be a threat to anyone. It is this dynamic that led to the explosion in violence in 1981 and 1994.

APPENDICES

Group Characterisation of Self and Other.

Dagomba/Nanumba		Konomba	
We	They	We	They
<p>Assimulating Superior, Responsible Communal Respectful, value leadership, defenders of state, clear social roles, welcoming, have chieftaincy and land, peaceful, have tradition and culture, honest, proud, value authority, respect for family, code of conduct, stratified society, have great ancestors, progressive, accommodating, a sense of belonging, cultural identity, indigenes</p>	<p>Disrespectful, no reverence for authority, bizarre culture, behaviour & practices, violent, war-like, kill at will, attack when not provoked, will fight anybody, animalistic behaviour, revenge killing, ambushing the enemy, slaves, settlers, aliens, do not own land, strangers, murderers, intruders, power drunk, having ill motives, no respect for authority, a threat, claim to be aborigines, refuse to pay allegiance to</p>	<p>Created by God, Communal, hardworking, have culture and taboos, respectful of neighbour, respect human dignity, Have land, marginalized, oppressed, dehumanized, second largest group, denigrated, humble, slow to anger, unique culture and language, hard working farmers, patient, called settlers, levied heavily, not allowed to have own chiefs, called animals. Cherish friendship, united, honest.</p>	<p>Proud, lazy, exploitative, dishonest, lack understanding, cannot be trusted, unforgiving, violent arrogant, interfere in the affairs of others.</p>

	chiefs, illegitimately seeking power and land, distrustful, friendly, generous, trustworthy.		
--	---	--	--

Questionnaire.

1. What does it mean to you to be a member of your ethnic identity group?

What makes you proud to be a member of your ethnic group?

What are the most important issues and values of your ethnic identity?

What is the value of land and chieftaincy in your identity?

What role has ethnic youth associations played in the formation of your identity?

2. How would you describe your relationship with the other groups?

Does the other group pose a threat to your identity and how?

What were the 1981 and 1994 conflicts about?

Why have your ethnic group been in conflict with the other group?

What role do issues of land and chieftaincy play in these conflicts?

3. Do you think that the importance of ethnic affiliations in northern Ghana increase during last several years?

Do you feel your identity group has been marginalised by the government and traditional leaders? In what ways?

Do you believe that an ethnic group's search for land and paramountcy poses any threats to other ethnic groups? How?

4. Are the inter-ethnic tensions increasing or decreasing? Why?

What do we need for ethnic groups to live in peace?



Office of Research Subject Protections

Research I Building, 4400 University Drive, MS 4C6, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-4121; Fax: 703-993-9590

TO: Karina Korostelina, Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

FROM: Sandra M. Sanford, RN, MSN, CIP *SMS*
Director, Office of Research Subject Protections

PROTOCOL NO.: 5574 Research Category: Masters Thesis

TITLE: Threat Narratives, Group Identity and Violence: A Study of the Konkomba, Nanumba and Dagomba of Ghana

DATE: February 4, 2008

Cc: Clement Aapengnuo

On 2/4/2008, the George Mason University Human Subjects Review Board (GMU HSRB) reviewed and approved the above-cited protocol following expedited review procedures.

Please note the following:

1. A copy of the final approved consent document is attached. You must use this copy with the HSRB stamp of approval for your research. Please keep copies of the signed consent forms used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.
2. **Any modification to your research (including the protocol, consent, advertisements, instruments, etc.) must be submitted to the Office of Research Subject Protections for review and approval prior to implementation.**
3. Any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects including problems involving confidentiality of the data identifying the participants must be reported to Office of Research Subject Protections and reviewed by the HSRB.

The anniversary date of this study is 2/3/2009. **You may not collect data beyond that date without GMU HSRB approval.** A continuing review form must be completed and submitted to the Office of Research Subject Protections 30 days prior to the anniversary date or upon completion of the project. A copy of the continuing review form is attached. In addition, prior to that date, the Office of Research Subject Protections will send you a reminder regarding continuing review procedures.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 703-993-4015.

64

**Threat Narratives, Group Identity and Violence: A study of the Konkomba,
Nanumba and Dagomba of Northern Ghana**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to analyze how group identity is altered in a manner that causes, exacerbates, or directly contributes to violence in Northern Ghana. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to respond to a series of interview questions on the value system of your ethnic group. The interview will last between 45 minutes to an hour. I will be using a digital recorder during the interview in addition to the notes I will be taking.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in building sustainable peace in northern Ghana.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. The interview will be kept strictly confidential. I will transcribe the recorded interview myself after which the data will be deleted. The transcribed text will be given a code number known only to me. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

65
1 of 2

Approval for the use
of this document
EXPIRES

FEB 03 2009

Protocol # 5574
George Mason University

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Clement M. Aapengnuo at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. He may be reached by email at caapengn@gmu.edu, by mail at 3304 Washington Blvd, Arlington, VA.22201 U.S.A. or by phone at 0717-22032 or 703-527-5500 for questions or to report a research-related problem. His faculty advisor is Dr. Karina Korostelina. She can be contacted through; Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University, 3330 N. Washington Blvd. Truland Building, 5th Floor. Arlington, VA 22201 USA. Phone: US +1 7039931304 Call Fax:(703) 993-1302. E-mail: ckoroste@gmu.edu703-993-1304. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections through Bess Dieffenbach, Office of Research Subject Protection, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, MS 4C6 Fairfax, VA 22030. Phone: US + 1 703-993-4121 fax: +1 703-993-9590, if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

Approval for the use
of this document
EXPIRES

FEB 03 2009

Protocol # 5574
George Mason University

66

Request to Participate in a Research on “Threat Narratives, Group Identity and Violence: A Study of the Konkomba, Nanumba and Dagomba of Ghana”.

I am Clement Aapengnuo, a masters student at George Mason University. I am in my final year of study. I am carrying out a research for my Masters thesis on the Northern Conflicts. I am investigating the role of value systems and normative order of the Konkomba, Nanumba and Dagomba ethnic groups and how these value systems have influenced the conflicts. As a traditional/youth association/opinion leader of your ethnic group, I would like to interview you on the value systems of your ethnic group. The interview will last about 45 minutes to an hour. I will use a digital recorder during the interview in addition to the notes I will be taking. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Details are enclosed in the consent form which I will leave with you to study. If you are interested in participating, kindly give me a call on my cell phone 024-208092 and we will arrange to meet at a place you are comfortable with for the interview. I can also be contacted at the St. Victor’s Major Seminary in Tamale. Thanks.

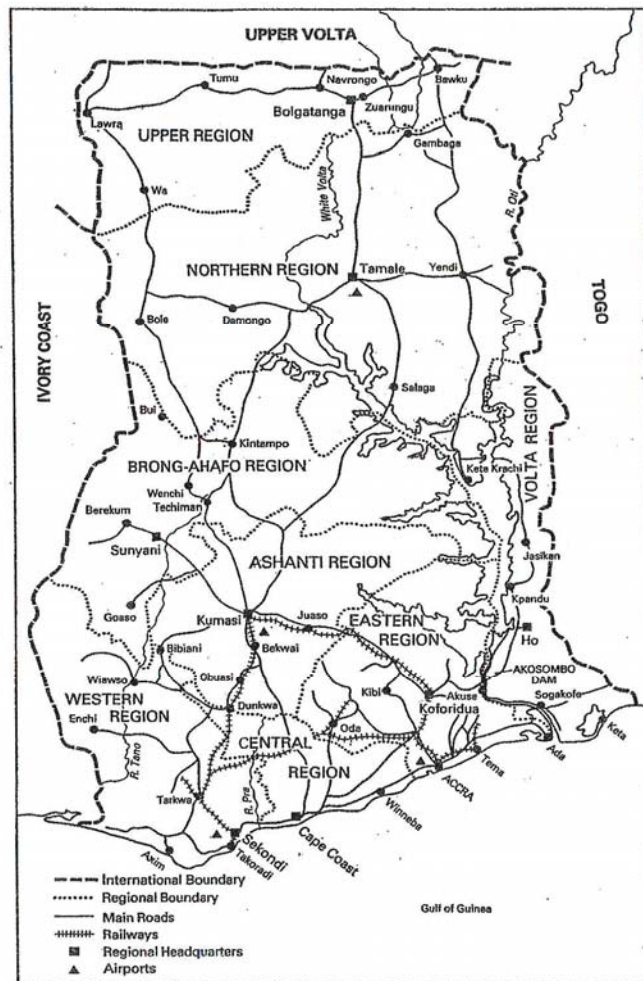
Approval for the use
of this document
EXPIRES

FEB 03 2009

Protocol #: 5574
George Mason University

67

Map of Ghana



REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Akwetey, E. 1996. "Ghana: violent ethno-political conflicts and the democratic challenge", in A.O Olukoshi & L. Laakso, eds., *Challenges to the Nation-State in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic African Institute, 102-35.
- Amo, G. S. 1997. "The challenge of Ethnicity and Conflicts in Africa: The Need for a New Paradigm, Emergency Response Division", United Nations Development Programme at <Http://www.undp.org/erd/archives/cnflct.htm>.
- Ayoob, M. "Defending Security: :A Subal tern Realist Perspective" in Krause, Keith & Milliens, M. 1997. *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and cases*. UCL Press Limited, London.
- Barth, F. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The social organization of cultural differences*. Bergen, Universitets Forlaget.
- _____, 1981. *Process and Form in Social life*. London Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Anchor Books, N.Y.
- Boaten, 1999. "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: Ghana's Example" *Anthropology of Africa and the Challenges of the Third Millennium – Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts*, PAAA/APA.
- Brewer, M.B. & Silver, M. 1978. Ingroup Bias as a Function of Task Characteristics. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 8: 393 – 400.
- Brewer, M.B. 2003. *Intergroup Relations*. Open University Press, Philadelphia.
- Brukum, N.J.K. 2001. *The Guinea Fowl, Mango and Pito Wars: Episodes in the History of Northern Ghana*. Legon, Ghana University Press.
- Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge

Chandra K, "What is Ethnic Identity and Does it Matter?" Annual Review of Political science, 2006 9 pp397 – 424. Downloaded from orjournals.annualreview.org.

Claudia S. "Social Psychological Dimensions of Conflict." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: September 2003
<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/social_psychological/>.

Cobb, S. 2006. A Developmental Approach to Turning Points: "Irony" as an Ethnic for Negotiation Pragmatics. In *Harvard Negotiation Law Review* Vol. 11:147.

Cohen, A.P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London. Tavistock.

_____, Belonging: The Experience of Culture. In *Symbolizing Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in British Cultures*, ed A.P. Cohen, 1-17. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Drucker-Brown, S. 1988. "Local Wars in Northern Ghana". *Cambridge Anthropology*, no.13, 2: 86-106.

Drucker-Brown, S. 1994. "Communal Violence in Northern Ghana: An acceptable warfare" in Hinde & Watson, eds., *Warfare a Cruel Necessity?* London I.B. Tauris.

Fearon J.D. and Laitin D.D. Violence and social construction of ethnic identity. *International organization* N. 54, 4 Autumn 2000 pp.845 -877.

Harre, R. & Langenhove L., 1999. *Positioning Theory*. Blackwell Publishers Massachus.

Horowitz, D. 2000. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkely, CA University of California Press.

Holger, W. 2005, "Contested historical and geographical narratives: Succession disputes, contested land ownership and religious conflicts in northern Ghana". *Working Papers on Ghana: Historical and contemporary studies*. Nr 6 (September 2005).

Ito-Adler 1980. Quoted in "A Constructionist Approach". http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/13426_chapter4.pdf

Jackson, R. 2004. (Ed.) (Re) *Constructing Cultures of Violence and Peace*. Amsterdam/New York.

Kirby Jon, Thoughts about Culture: "The politics of Religion in Northern Ghana", Retrieved September 19, 2006, from <http://www.sedos.org/english/kirby.htm>,

Katanga, J. 1996. *An Historical and Ethnographic Commentary on the Northern Conflict*, unpublished manuscript.

Kellner, D. 1992. *The Persian Gulf T.V. War*: Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Kelly & Bening: ideology, Regionalism, self-interest and Tradition: An investigation into Contemporary Politics in Northern Ghana. *Africa*: 2007; 77, 2; International Module p.180-206

Korostelina, K. 2007. *Social Identity and Conflict: Structures, Dynamics and Implications*. Palgrave. Macmillan.

Martinson, H.B. 1994. *The Hidden History of Konkomba Wars in Northern Ghana*. (n.p.)

Novotny, K.M. 1998. Taylor-Made? Feminist Theory and the Politics of Identity. *Women and Politics* 19:1-18

O'Connor, D. 2007. Catallaxis: The Three Lenses of Threat Perception. http://www.catallaxis.com/2006/07/Threat_Perception.html.

Peacock, J.L. 2007. Cross-cutting identities: Singapore's Crabgrass. *In Identity Matters*, ed. J.L. Peacock, P.M. Thornton & P.B. Inman. Oxford Berghahn

Pilaszewicz, S. 2001. History of the Dagomba Kingdom in Some Hausa Ajani Manuscripts. *Studies of the Department of African Languages and Cultures*, 29:24-48. Downloaded from, <http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/kmi/tutkimus/sal/pilaszewicz.htm>.

Pul Hipolyt A.S. 2003 *Exclusion, Association, And Violence: Trends and Triggers of Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana*. Unpublished Thesis. Duquesne University.

Rothbart & Korostelina (ed), *Identity, Morality and Threat*. Lexington Plymouth, U.K.

Skalnik, P. 2000. "The state and local ethno-political identities: The case of community conflicts in Northern Ghana", *Nouveaux Mondes* 10: 141 – 66.

_____ 1983. "Questioning the Concept of the State in Indigenous Africa", *Social Dynamics* 9, 2 (1983).

Smith, A. 2001 *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, Cambridge:

Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann 1998 *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge,

Stavenhagen, R. 1991. "The Ethnic Question: Some theoretical Issues". Paper presented at UNRISD workshop on ethnic conflict and development. Dubrovnik.

Tajfel H. 1978. *Differentiations between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C. 1986. The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. *In Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. S. Worshel & W.G. Austin, 7-24, Chicago: Nelson Hall.

Talton B.A. (2003), *Ethnic Insurgency and Social Change: A History of the Konkomba of Northern Ghana*. Unpublished Thesis. Chicago.

Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D. and Watherell, M.S. 1987. *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Tilly, C. ed. 1975. *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. N.J. Princeton University.

_____, 2005. *Identity, Boundaries and Social Ties*. Boulder, Co. Paradigm

Van den Berghe, 1987. *The Ethnic Phenomenon*. New York. Praeger.

Vanhanen, T. 1999. "Domestic Ethnic Conflict and Ethnic Nepotism: A comparative analysis". *Journal of Peace Research*. No. 36, 1, 55-73.

Volkan, V.D. 1988. *The Need to have Enemies and Allies: From Clinical Practice to International Relationships*. N.Y. Aronson.

_____, 1999. *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. N.Y. Farrar Straus Giroux.

_____, 2004. *Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror*. Charlottesville, VA Pitchstone.

_____, 2006. *Killing in the Name of Identity: A Study of Bloody Conflicts*. Charlottesville. VA. Pitchstone.

Young, I.M. 1997. *Interesting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*. Princeton. N.J.

Zartman, 1995. *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an end to Civil Wars*. Washington D.C. The Brookings Institution.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Clement M. Aapengnuo graduated from St. Victor's Major Seminary, Tamale, Ghana in 1988. He worked as a Catholic Priest in the Archdiocese of Tamale and received his Master of Science in Social Communications from Pontifical Salesian University in Rome in 1996 and a Master of Science in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University in 2008.