

POWER AND SOCIAL IDENTITY  
THE CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY OF  
TRADITIONAL RULE IN NORTHERN GHANA  
AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS

by

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Traditional Rule in Northern Ghana and Ethnic Conflicts

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## **DEDICATION**

This is dedicated to  
Most Reverend Philip Naameh Archbishop of Tamale  
for his foresight and vision in establishing the Damongo Peace and Unity Center.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **POWER AND SOCIAL IDENTITY – THE CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY OF TRADITIONAL RULE IN NORTHERN GHANA, AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS**

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The Northern Region of Ghana is particularly noted for identity-driven protracted social conflicts centered on ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land. Disputes over chieftaincy succession, ownership and control of land, and a sense of belonging have resulted in the loss of life and property and the displacement of people. As grievances accumulate and are defined at the group rather than individual level, the motivation for reprisals is never ending. Building on existing research on the conflicts in the Northern Region, this study uses theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy, to explain the nature and dynamics of the conflicts in the Region. The study explains the relationship between ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land in the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana by exploring the dynamics of social identity formation and its influence on indigenous perceptions of power and legitimacy. The study shifts the emphasis from ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land as sources of conflict in the Region to the quest to define the legitimate sovereign author-

ity in a modern State where the existence of “traditional authority” is constitutionally recognized. In other words, ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land conflicts are symptoms of crisis of legitimacy of the “traditional authority” system. The position of the chief as “the traditional authority” is being contested, and the question of who is the right public authority to regulate social living, to define, and to enforce land rights today has to be confronted and explored. The argument of tradition and culture as the basis of the power of the chief in a multi-cultural environment must be re-evaluated if the chieftaincy institution is to play a role in conflict resolution, local governance, and development in the Region.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The general perception is that Africa is trapped in a never-ending cycle of “ethnic conflicts.”<sup>1</sup> The seeming implication is that Africa’s culturally distinct identity groups leave the continent perpetually vulnerable to devastating internecine conflicts that cripple prospects for sustainable economic progress and democratization. Ethnicity is certainly the predominant category around which social identity is organized in Africa; however, most ethnic groups in Africa coexist peacefully with high degrees of mixing through interethnic marriage, economic partnerships, and shared values. Indeed, if they did not, nearly every village and province in Africa would be a cauldron of conflict. The simplistic classification of conflicts in Africa as “ethnic conflicts” ignores the political and legal nature of the contentious issues that lead to the conflict in the first place. Azar and Haddad (1986) have noted that in state systems in multi-ethnic societies, in which government is dominated by a particular group or community within it, communities feel threatened with marginalization, and it seems that no recourse for redressing grievances exists, thus so called “ethnic conflicts” emerge. Social identities such as ethnicity become

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<sup>1</sup> These conflicts are characterized as “ethnic conflicts” because ethnic groups are involved, not because the conflict is about ethnicity.

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salient and act as a motor, not because of ethnic differences, but because of the presence or perceived threat of discrimination and marginalization (see Azar and Haddad 1986, p. 1339 ff). Stuart Kaufman (2001) rejects the notion that ethnic conflicts in Africa are the result of ancient hatreds, and insists we pay attention to the politics of myths, symbols, and stories, which ethnic groups tell about who they are, as the source of ethnic conflicts.

The West African nation of Ghana is internationally recognized as a peaceful, stable, and democratic state; yet, there are over 2000 internal conflicts around ethnic identities, traditional authority (chieftaincy), and land. Literally every community in Ghana has experienced conflicts around chieftaincy and land. The magnitude of the violence varies from community to community. The most violent disputes get the attention and coverage of the national media. But most of the conflicts are contained and remain dormant, unless triggered by the death of a chief, a political appointment, a boundary dispute, the allocation of a district capital, or land for development, etc. The Northern Region of Ghana is particularly noted for identity-driven, protracted social conflicts centered on power, identity, and resources.

The focus of this study is the role of power and social identity in the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. It focuses on how the processes of social identity formation influence perceptions of power and legitimacy. Building on existing research on the conflicts in the Northern Region, this study uses theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy, to explain the nature and dynamics of the land and chieftaincy conflicts in the region. The study contributes to existing studies by offering some insights into and methods for conflict analysis and resolution in the Region. As a basis for understanding

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the conflicts, the study explores the indigenous understanding of power by analyzing the differences in perceptions of power between the chiefly and non-chiefly ethnic groups in the Northern Region of Ghana.

This study argues that the identity-based protracted social conflicts in the Northern Region are in part, the result of a crisis of legitimacy of the chieftaincy institution as “the traditional authority” within the modern democratic state system. The main issue of contention is: Which group of people or traditional institution in the Northern Region has the right to the title “public authority” and what does that right entail? In other words what is the role and function of the chieftaincy institution in a modern democratic state and how is that role and function determined and established. Legitimacy is the belief that authorities, institutions, and social arrangements are appropriate, proper, and just and the feeling of obligation to adhere to their demands and requests. According to Kelman (2001), the right to make claims and the correlative obligation to acquiesce is the moral basis of social interaction and determines social behavior and structure. Legitimacy is constantly contested and negotiated in social interactions and cannot be imposed by force or tradition. Stories of origins of social groups are constantly revived, re-constructed, and adapted to justify claims to power and legitimacy. The main purpose of these stories is to prove indigenesness, as a means to power and to resources, with the argument that this is “our” land and that “we” deserve to be in control of its government and territory.

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### **1.2 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The three northern regions<sup>2</sup> of Ghana have experienced a series of inter-communal conflicts since 1981. Between 1980 and 2002, the three northern regions, Upper West, Upper East and Northern Region, recorded 26 violent conflicts between ethnic groups. 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, p. 1). In 1994, Ghana experienced its most violent and destructive social conflict between the “chiefly tribes,” Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja, and the “non-chiefly” tribes, Konkomba, Nchumuru and Nawuri. The entire Northern Region was swept by a violence that drastically changed power relations in Northern Ghana. For more details from different perspectives see Assefa (2001), Katanga (1994b), and van der Linde and Naylor (1994). Disputes over chieftaincy succession, ownership of and control of land, and a sense of belonging have resulted in the loss of life and property and the displacement of people. The sense of loss, grief, hatred and mistrust has polarized communities and created a culture of violence and revenge. As grievances accumulate and are defined at the group rather than individual level, the motivation for reprisals is never ending. The dynamics of competitive multiparty politics tend to politicize the conflicts, further deepening the divide in the communities. The conflicts are described as “ethnic conflicts” because particular “ethnic” groups are involved; however, the issues of contention are struggle for recognition, power, and resources.

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<sup>2</sup> There are three regions in northern Ghana: the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions. Before Ghana gained independence from the British, the three northern regions together formed the British Protectorate of the Northern Territories. The terms “north” and “northern Ghana,” refer to the three regions, whereas “the Northern Region” refers to one of the three.

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The impact of the conflicts on national and sub-regional security and stability are a concern to government and civil society. In the area of economic growth and development, the conflicts have had devastating effects because the Northern Region remains the most deprived and food insecure area of the country. The figures on the United Nations index for human development in the region fall below the national average. The fragile peace in the region is constantly threatened by disputes over land and chieftaincy. There is the need to develop strategies for conflict analysis and resolution for sustainable peace and development.

### **1.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this study is explain the relationship between ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land in the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana by exploring the dynamics of social identity formation and its influence on indigenous perceptions of power and legitimacy. The study shifts the emphasis from ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land as sources of conflict in the Region to the quest to define the legitimate sovereign authority in a modern State where the existence of “traditional authority” is constitutionally recognized. In other words, ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land conflicts are symptoms of crisis of legitimacy of the “traditional authority” system. The position of the chief as “the traditional authority” is being contested, and the question of who is the right public authority to regulate social living, to define, and to enforce land rights today has to be confronted and explored. The arguments of tradition and culture as the basis of the power of the chief in a multi-cultural environment must be re-evaluated if the chieftaincy institution is to play a role in conflict



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resolution, local governance, and development in the Region.

By exploring processes and motives of group-based identity formation, the indigenous perceptions of power and legitimacy, in a multi-ethnic environment, this study contributes to the literature on conflict analysis and resolution in the Northern Region in particular and the field of conflict analysis and resolution in general.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the processes and motives for group-based identity formation?
2. What is the indigenous understanding of power in northern Ghana and how has it influenced the perception of chieftaincy as a core element in ethnic identity?
3. What processes do chiefs use to legitimize their power through identity and how do these processes impact conflict dynamics and contribute to violence between tribes?

### **1.5 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

The literature on conflicts all point to power, legitimacy, and ethnic identity as factors influencing, if not the source, of most of the communal violence. Pul investigated why some locales in northern Ghana, especially the Northern Region, are more susceptible to the eruption of communal violence than other parts of the north, even though the mix of historical experiences is fairly the same across board (Pul 2003). Talton (2003), in his study of the Konkomba ethnic group in the Northern Region, explored the various ways individuals, groups, and the state served as agents of social and political change. Both Pul

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(2003) and Talton (2003) argue that contestation of exclusionary traditional structures and/or political and economic marginalization resulted in the conflicts. Stacey explores how in the interaction between chiefs and the state, chiefs used their access to the modern state to reproduce a separate, protected traditional sphere, on which the modern state is dependent. He describes the interaction between chiefs and the State as “a gelling together of essentially diametrically opposed forces” (Stacey 2009, p. 111).

Reflecting on cultural themes and ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region, Kirby (2003) argues that the oppositional culture of interaction between chiefly and non-chiefly groups can be avoided if emphasis is placed on the two groups as interrelated pathways rather than separate polarities. According to Kirby (2003), “cultural pathways” are the systems that continue to produce war and to prevent peace. The points of contact that produce war and peace are the shared “cultural themes.” Discovering the cultural themes that the two groups have in common and stressing these amidst their many differences is one way of building peace in the Northern Region (Kirby 2003, p. 4).

Most of the existing research has focused on the State and the chieftaincy institution as if they were the only public authority and/or normative systems<sup>3</sup>. The utopian idealization of chieftaincy as “the traditional authority,” with the chief as the custodian of tradition and custom, as “protector of all in the community,” as one who holds the community’s property (land) in trust for the people, speaks to the ideal situation and not to the reality on the ground. The very concept of customary law as a normative

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<sup>3</sup> The basic distinction of state and traditional normative systems can be misleading. In addition to general distinction between chiefly and non-chiefly normative communities, each of the 17 ethnic groups in the region has its normative system of customary law. Scholars studying interactions among these multiple communities have often used the term legal pluralism to describe the inevitable intermingling of these normative systems (Berman 2009, p. 226).

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system in a legally pluralistic context such as pertains in the Northern Region calls for a re-investigation into the indigenous<sup>4</sup> understanding of social identity and how that understanding influences perceptions of power and legitimacy in the community. The tendency to reproduce stories of origins of the chieftaincy institution (stories of conquest) and of the office of the *Tindana* (stories of settlement), in relation to land and property rights, rather than to re-investigate them is problematic. First, the stories of origin feed into the chiefly/non-chiefly distinctions and into the false perception that they are two incompatible social systems. Skalnik contends the chiefly/non-chiefly distinction is “one system with two or more poles” (Skalnik 1987, p. 320). The chiefly and non-chiefly groups have more in common than what divides them, and the differences between them, compared to the European state system, are of little importance. Skalnik further argues that none of the chiefly groups qualifies as a State if we consider their machinery for exercising power over people and territory, nor are the non-chiefly groups headless with no leadership and no possibility that leadership would emerge within their traditional society (Skalnik 1987, p. 321). The chiefly/non-chiefly distinction is a colonial creation and not an indigenous way of self-identification.

Second, presenting chieftaincy as the system of “traditional leadership” in the Northern Region ignores the fact that there are other normative systems clamoring for recognition and acceptance as “traditional public authorities”<sup>5</sup> capable of generating

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4 How a particular group of people experience, comprehends, interpret and deploy power in its many forms in their interactions with others as individuals and as a group. Important here is how the power of the chief is experienced and deployed in conflicts.

5 Public authority is legitimated administrative operations, a specific form of power exercised publicly and legitimated with reference to the state (Lund 2008, p. 7).

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customary laws and enforcing compliance. Chieftaincy is one among many forms of traditional leadership in the region. As Lund (2008, p. 7) has observed:

In Africa there is no shortage of institutions that attempt to exercise public authority. Not only are multiple layers and branches of government institutions (the judiciary, the administration, the customs service, and police, the various extension agencies, etc.) present and active to varying degrees, but customary institutions bolstered by government recognition also vie for public authority ...

In addition associations and organizations that do not appear at first sight as political may also exercise political power and wield public authority. ...

Public authority is legitimated administrative operations, a specific form of power exercised publicly and legitimated with reference to the state.

In the multi-ethnic environment of the Northern Region of Ghana, institutional and normative plurality prevails and competition over access to land is as much about the scope and constitution of authority as about access to resources. As Lund (2008) puts it “recognition of property rights by an institution simultaneously constitutes a process of recognition of the legitimacy of this institution ... Hence public authority is continually constructed in the everyday practices of ordinary people and by the recognition by other institutions of their jurisdiction” (p. 10).

By privileging the chieftaincy institution as the “traditional public authority” over other public authorities, the colonial administration curtailed the political processes of recognizing an institution as a public authority through competition and negotiation, and imposed chieftaincy as “the traditional system of leadership.” Stories of origins,

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conquest, and ancestral settlements are legitimizing narratives constructed to justify the status quo. They are not historical facts explaining the actual origins of groups and institutions. The post-colonial government enshrines the dual power and legal structures in the Constitution of Ghana, limiting the normative systems to two: the state power and its legal system, and the traditional authority power<sup>6</sup> and its customary law. This constitutional stipulation overlooks the fact that each ethnic group is a normative community with its own customary laws and practices. Perceptions of power and legitimacy are generated in these normative groups and a sense of belonging to the group imposes certain rights and obligations. As Berman (2009) has noted, “people belong to (or are affiliated with) multiple groups and understand themselves to be bound by the norms of these multiple groups. Such groups can ... exert tremendous power over our actions even though they are not part of an official state system” (Berman 2009, p. 227). Competition for legitimacy is not only between the state and the chief but also among the ethnic groups as each group seeks its own network of social values on which power is founded and which, therefore, provides the basis for its acceptance. By recognizing chiefs as “the traditional authority,” the Constitution of Ghana lays the foundation for inter-ethnic conflicts. These conflicts are not about ancient ethnic hatred; they are conflicts about who has the authority to regulate social activities and to define property rights in the community? They are conflicts about the primary locus of regulation of land and

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6 As set out in the CONSTITUTION OF GHANA, 270:1 –

The institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage, is hereby guaranteed. Parliament shall have no power to enact any law which-

- (a) Confers on any person or authority the right to accord or withdraw recognition to or from a chief for any purpose whatsoever; or
- (b) In any way detracts or derogates from the honor and dignity of the institution of chieftaincy.

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property rights. In the 1979 and the 1992 Constitutions, all northern lands were returned to their “previous owners” (understood as the chiefs) and in 1980 the first inter-ethnic violence (Gonja and Vagla) erupted in the Northern Region of Ghana. In this Constitutional stipulation, the chieftaincy institution became the primary locus of regulation of land and property rights in the Northern Region. Some non-chiefly groups contested the new authority of chiefs as the primary locus of regulation and those protests were considered by the chiefly groups as acts of insubordination.

John Griffiths makes a distinction between the myth and the ideology of legal centralism, in which there is one source of law and one legal order, and the fact of legal pluralism, in which there is more than one source of law and many legal orders. Griffiths contends that the national (public, official) legal system is often a secondary rather than a primary locus of regulation (Griffiths 1986, p. 4). The chieftaincy institution is not the only source of customary law and legal order in the Northern Region of Ghana.

This Constitutional arrangement creates two parallel structures (traditional and modern) of power, legitimacy, and social identity in a single State “without at the same time providing for mechanisms to deal functionally with the contradictions inherent in the system” (Hinz and Gatter 2006, p. 8). This creates a second source of conflicts located in the relationship between the State and the chieftaincy institution in governance. The struggle for power and legitimacy is more frequent at the local government level where policy decisions are implemented on the day-to-day basis. The nature, function, and limits of the powers of the traditional chief and of the district chief executive are not clearly defined and enforced. The functions of the chief as the “traditional” political

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leader are to protect the people and the land from external aggression, to maintain social harmony and peace in the community, and to promote development. Various arms of the local state government system have taken over these responsibilities. The lack of clarity in the authority lines between the chief and the district chief executive, the nature and limits of the power of the chief have influenced rural land struggles, and outbreaks of communal and ethnic conflicts.

The stories of origins are constructed narratives to legitimize, to public authority, claims of groups and institutions.

This study builds on the existing research on the conflicts in northern Ghana in which ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land have being identified as impacting the conflicts in the Northern Region. By focusing on the processes of social identity formation and its impact on perceptions of power and legitimacy, this study re-investigates the historical and ethnographical data on ethnic identities, the chieftaincy institution and land rights, informed by theories of social identity, power and legitimacy. The study offers insights into processes for analyzing the conflicts based on theories rather than folktales. Stories of origin of the chiefly and non-chiefly tribes, and the use of those stories to justify claims to land and power, are understood and analyzed as constructed legitimizing ideologies rather than actual historical events. The study throws light on the nature of power as a relational phenomenon that is constantly contested, and negotiated, and that using force, tradition, culture, and the legal system to maintain power is not sustainable in the long term. The study shifts the discussion, from the chieftaincy institution as “the traditional public authority” that has power to make and enforce rules with a minimum of

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voluntary compliance, to the chieftaincy institution as one of the many institutions vying for the position of “public authority”. This approach changes the discussion about the future of chieftaincy institution in the Region from the defense and preservation of an age-old tradition to a dialogue and negotiation of the role of traditional leadership in our Ghanaian society today. The focus on ethnicity and land as the source of conflict loses sight of the role of leadership, both traditional and modern, in conflict generation and conflicts resolution. Leadership politics at the state and traditional level play in the activation of ethnicity as a rallying point for power. The political choices made by states lay the foundation for ethnic mobilization. It is the politicization of ethnicity, and not ethnicity *per se*, that stokes the attitudes of perceived injustice, lack of recognition, and exclusion, which are then exploited to create the conditions for conflict.

### **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study was conducted in Damongo, Tamale, and Yendi in the Northern Region. The number of conflicts, and their intensity and duration, has informed the choice of the Northern Region of Ghana for this study. The Region has one of the longest inter-ethnic chieftaincy disputes (50 plus years) that led to the death of the king in 2003. No permanent solution has yet been found to this conflict. Each of the four chiefly groups: Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprussi and Nanumba, have been involved in succession disputes, land litigations, and inter-ethnic conflicts with their neighboring tribes whom they consider their subjects. The division of the society into chiefly ethnic groups and non-chiefly ethnic groups is peculiar to the Northern Region. This division is the result of the process



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of amalgamation in which the colonial administration put together several ethnic groups under one tribal chief for colonial administrative purposes. The result is that today there are ethnic groups in the Northern Region whose traditional leaders are not officially recognized by them as chiefs because they come from tribes which never had the tradition of chieftaincy in the first place. The process was vehemently resisted by the other chiefs in what is today the Upper East, and Upper West Regions. In these regions, every ethnic group has its own chief and the chiefly/non-chiefly divide does not exist. Most of the inter-ethnic conflicts over chieftaincy and land are in the Northern Region.

The choice of the Northern Region is also informed by the researcher's personal experience of living in the region for over thirty years, and managing a project on conflict analysis and resolution in the region for six years. The researcher will return to the Region to teach, research and implement some of the findings in this study.

The study focuses on the perceptions, and understanding of identity and power as experienced by ordinary people in their daily lives. These perceptions were captured in recorded interviews, transcribed and analyzed under chiefly and non-chiefly categories instead of under the various ethnic groups.

Chapter two establishes the theoretical framework by exploring the theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy. The theories of social identity underline the fact that people not only choose social categories that are valued, important, and meaningful to them to define who they are as a people, but that they internalize their group membership as part of their self-concept, and that their perceptions and behavior are influenced by those social categories. Someone from a chiefly tribe thinks and behaves like a chief

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even if he or she is not part of the royal family. The theories of power and legitimacy indicate that power is generated and deployed in social interactions. Legitimate power is negotiated and not imposed by tradition or culture.

Chapter three describes in detail the case study, exploring the historical and ethnographical data on chieftaincy, land, and tribal settlements. This chapter also describes the evolution of two traditional power structures before the arrival of the colonial administration. The chapter underlines the important role played by the colonial administration in setting the stage for the conflicts in the region today.

Chapter four describes and explains the methods used for the collection and the analysis of the data. In chapter five the data are analyzed; the findings are discussed in chapter six. Chapter seven is the conclusion and offer suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THEORIES OF IDENTITY, POWER, AND LEGITIMACY**

#### **2.1 THE ISSUES**

The question of group-based identities and group behavior in relationship to power is of interest to philosophers, social anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, and social psychologists. The fundamental interest in all these disciplines is why people join groups, what keeps them there, and how they behave as a group.

In this chapter, I lay a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between social identity, power, and legitimacy and their impact on communal conflicts. I use this framework to analyze the role of social identity, power, and legitimacy in the conflicts in northern Ghana. In the first place, I explore theories of social identity to help explain the ethnic dimension of the conflicts in northern Ghana. Secondly, I explore an overview of theories of power to inform my analysis of indigenous understanding of power, the diverse forms of power, and how power is legitimized, expressed and deployed in inter-communal relations. Thirdly, I explore theories on legitimacy, and on the processes and the consequences of legitimization and de-legitimization.

## **2.2 THEORIES OF SOCIAL IDENTITY**

An overview of theories of social identity will form the theoretical basis for analysis of conflicts in the northern region of Ghana. I organize the exploration of theories around: the sources and motives for social identity formation, depersonalization, and loyalty to the in-group, and relations between groups. I explore the limitations of social identity theories and conclude by stressing the important ideas in these theories for my research.

### **2.2.1 Definition of social identity**

Social identity is an individual's self concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group. It is "the feeling of belonging to a social group, a strong connection with social category, and an important part of the mind that affects our social perception and behavior" (Korostelina 2007, p. 15). Tajfel (1981) defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 255). In the northern region of Ghana, ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land are social categories around which people tend to define themselves. These social categories are perceived as primordially intrinsic and inherent, when in actual fact they are social constructs influenced by social processes and existing social structures. People make comments such as: "God created us to be chiefs and gave us land," and "My ethnicity is part of who I am and I cannot change it. It is the way God made it to be." Social identities are perceived as fixed and immutable, when in actual fact they are

socially determined and constantly evolving.<sup>7</sup>

Social identity theory explains the processes by which people develop a sense of membership and belonging in a particular group, the motives for belonging to a particular group, and the processes of discrimination between groups. Social identity theory suggests that psychological factors, perhaps even more than material factors, may be at the root of equity, justice, and peace.

### **2.2.2 Processes of social identity formation**

A survey of social identity theories reveals many processes of social identity formation. For the purposes of this study, however, I will concentrate on three:

- (1) Relations between groups and distinctions by categories (Tajfel and Turner, 1971, Tajfel 1981, 1986, Turner et al. 1987);
- (2) Creating boundaries and mythic stories (Barth, 1969, Tilly 2005, Cohen 1986 and Eriksen 2001); and
- (3) Chosen glories and chosen traumas (Volkan 1997, 2004).

#### ***2.2.2.1 relation between groups and distinctions by categories***

Any meaningful social interaction calls for a meaningful relationship between groups and with the environment. Groups have to first define themselves if they are to interact in any meaningful way. The group defines itself in opposition to another group creating an “us”/

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<sup>7</sup> In the 1950s, the “Northern Students Union” was the banner under which all students from the three northern regions socialized. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, ethnic-based youth associations started emerging. The 1979 Constitutional stipulation on land ownership in Northern Ghana sharpened ethnic-based social identity group strengthening.

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“them” divide. The group, once formed, gives a sense of belonging and security. The following are processes of and motivations for social identity formation.

The human need to harmonize and make sense of the social world leads to rationalization and differentiation through the cognitive processes of categorization, assimilation, and search for coherence. Through these processes, groups make sense of their environment and of their position in the environment in relation to others. This process also determines how groups perceive and relate to each other. Writing on human groups and social categories, Tajfel (1981) argues that statements about motivations or instinctive behavior cannot fully explain the dynamics of relations between groups. Relations between groups can only be explained from an analysis of the cognitive processes involved. Tajfel (1981, p. 131) writes:

We live in an environment which is in constant flux, much of what happens to us is related to the activities of groups to which we belong or do not belong; and the changing relations between these groups require a constant adjustment of our understanding of what happens and constant causal attribution about the “why” and “how” of the changing conditions of our life. These attributions are based on three cognitive processes – categorization, assimilation and search for coherence, (Tajfel 1981, p. 131).

Categories are classifications, labels, attributes, qualities, or characteristics that can be said, predicated, or declared and asserted about something. They are classifications of every object of human apprehension. Social categories are labels used to classify or describe groups of people based on similar properties. Social categories are “cognitive

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tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and provide a system of orientation for self-reference by creating and defining the individual's place in society" (Tajfel and Turner 1979, p. 40). They are processes of cognitive representation of features that describe and prescribe attributes of a group. Tajfel (1981) acknowledges that the content of the categories is generated over a long period of time within a culture. He leaves the exploration of their origin and development to the social historian and focuses on discovering how these images are transmitted to individual members of a society.

Individuals affiliate themselves to different groups based on shared common characteristics, beliefs and practices, and interact with each other as members of their groups standing in certain defined relationships to members of other groups (Tajfel and Turner 1971, 1979).

The process of categorization introduces simplicity and order in the face of complexity, but it can also oversimplify dichotomies. Such simplification and dichotomies can sometimes blur the facts on the ground. In the northern region of Ghana, ethnic groups are categorized into "chiefly ethnic tribes," and "non-chiefly ethnic tribes." The chiefly tribes are perceived to have a well-structured, hierarchical, and centralized system of power, all the historical data to the contrary notwithstanding. The non-chiefly groups are perceived to be without any structured form of leadership, when in fact they have a leadership structure. The concept of "indigenous" and "non-indigenous," "land owners" and "settlers," are a few examples of simple dichotomies that have no factual basis but are maintained as categories. Such categorizations are for the purposes of coping with the fuzzy differences between groups.

**2.2.2.2 *depersonalization and loyalty to in-group***

Social identity can deprive individuals of their freedom of choice and individuality, determining their behavior, as people tend to behave on the basis of group norms, goals and beliefs. The desire for positive distinctiveness makes people define themselves in terms of the in-group rather than the individual. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), three classes of variables contribute to differentiation in concrete social situations. First, individuals internalize their group membership as an aspect of their self-concept. Second, through intergroup comparison, the relevant relational attribute is selected and evaluated. Third, the out-group is perceived as a relevant comparison group. The need for positive self-evaluation, self-esteem, and desire to improve self-representation can lead individuals to abandon their individual identity and to take on the identity of the group. The dominance of social categories reinforces identification choices and produces normative behavior, stereotyping, positive in-group attitudes and cohesion (Hogg and Terry, 2000, p. 123, Korostelina 2007, p. 23). The salience of social identity leads to a belief in the supremacy of in-group goals and values over personal goals and values, a readiness to forget all internal in-group conflicts in situations of threat to in-group and a readiness to unite against out-groups (Korostelina 2007, p. 73).

**2.2.2.3 *creating boundaries (Barth)***

A second way of social identity formation is the process of creating boundaries and mythic stories about the boundaries. Writing on ethnic groups and boundaries, Barth (1969) contends that ethnic diversity is socially articulated and maintained through



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boundaries. These social boundaries keep social groups stable in the midst of high social mobility. They construct an assumed shared homogeneity within the group and cultural differences between groups, with great potential consequences for the social life of large communities and regions. The concept of boundaries, Barth (2009) writes, embraces three levels of abstraction: (1) boundaries divide territories on the ground; (2) boundaries set limits that mark social groups off from each other; and (3) boundaries provide a template for that which separates distinct categories of the mind (p. 19). Boundaries are cognitive constructs that surround a social group and divide it from other groups and from its environment. Social boundaries, when created, limit the kinds of social relations allowed to be formed between members of the in-group and the out-group.

Barth's theory on ethnic groups and boundaries is critical for understanding the rise of ethnic distinctions in the northern region of Ghana because he focuses on the constitution of ethnic groups and the nature of the boundaries between them. In the northern region, ethnic groups present themselves as if they were unified primordial groups with a unique culture and history. Ethnic groups are "categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people" (Barth 1969, p. 10). Any study of ethnic-based social identities has to focus on the processes which generate and maintain ethnic groups. One such process, in Barth's view, is the creation and maintenance of boundaries. "Categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the

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course of individual life histories” (Barth 1969, p. 9-10). Social interaction leads to boundary creation separating “us” from “them.” The sense people have of themselves and their lived experience is based on boundaries, that is, “authentic markers of their differences from other people,” (Barth 2009, p. 19). Self-concept is possible within a social relationship in which there are boundary distinctions that mark social groups from each other. Understanding how these boundaries are created and the mythic stories accompanying and/or justifying them helps us understand the processes of social identity formation in societies.

**2.2.2.4 *creating boundaries and mythic stories (Tilly)***

Charles Tilly (2005) sees repeated interaction between two or more people as the elemental unit of human group formation. (Social identity resides in relations with others in which relevant boundaries are defined.) “Interpersonal interactions compound into identities, create and transform social boundaries and accumulate into durable social ties. Individual and collective dispositions result from interpersonal transactions” (Tilly 2005, p. 7). Tilly does not explain the exact nature of these transactions. Rather he explains that collective identities emerge from boundary creation, cross-boundary and within boundary relations, and from the stories created about the boundaries and about the boundary relations as people interact as individuals and as groups (ibid, p. 8). As these relations shift, identities also shift.

A second component of Tilly’s theory is the view that creating boundaries leads to claims of inequality, to feelings of superiority and subordination, and to unjust ad-

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vantage. Groups not only distinguish themselves from others through the boundaries they create, they also use those boundaries to their advantage. Embedded in these processes of boundary creation, Tilly contends, are contestations over what political identities have public standing, who has the right or obligations to assert those identities, and what rights or obligations attach to any particular identity (Tilly 2005, p. 9).

Boundary creation results in “organized differences in advantages by gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, community, etc.” Tilly calls this process ‘categorical inequalities.’ Categorical inequalities occur when “transactions across a categorical boundary (e.g. male/female) regularly yield net advantage to people on one side of the boundary and also reproduce the boundary” (Tilly 2005, p. 200). Tilly (2007) argues that categorical inequality in boundary creation protects advantage, establishes systems of extraction and of allocation of resources, and redistributes resources among different segments of subject populations.

A third component of Tilly’s theory on social identity formation is the notion of mythic stories. Social identities in Tilly’s view are social arrangements in which “people construct shared stories about who they are, how they are connected, and what has happened to them. These stories range from excuses, explanations, apologies when something goes wrong to large scale production of peace settlements and national histories” (Tilly 2007, p. 209). As to how these stories are generated and put to effective use, Tilly posits generation and constraint. These stories are generated through political entrepreneurs who “draw together credible stories from available cultural materials, create ‘we’/‘they’ boundaries, and activate both stories and boundaries as a function of current

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political circumstances, and maneuver to surpass competing models. Secondly, people after an interaction create stories about the interaction drawing from existing cultural repertoires” (Tilly 2007, p. 211).

Basically Charles Tilly argues that boundaries are created through social interactions and the boundaries create inequalities between groups, which boundaries are then exploited by political entrepreneurs for the benefit of their in-group.

#### **2.2.2.5 *socio-cultural discourse***

Kelman and Eriksen (2001) argue that social identities emerge within specific socio-cultural discourses, national myths, and intergroup relations. Existing power structures, nationalistic leaders, and modernization influence them. Social identity, in this view, “resides at least partly in one’s national or cultural community, rather than exclusively within the individual” ( p. 6). According to Hogg & Terry (2000), social “organizations are internally structured groups that are located in networks of intergroup relationships characterized by power, status, and prestige differentials. To varying degrees, people derive part of their identity and sense of self from their social organization” (p. 121).

#### **2.2.2.6 *chosen glories and chosen traumas***

Following the view of Barth (1969) that ethnicity is based on ascription and identification (p. 10), 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

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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). Groups tend to mark their social identity with selected historical events, usually victories at war. The “mental representation of a historical event that induces feelings of success and triumph” (Volkan 1997, p. 81), Volkan describes as “chosen glories.” People develop “shared reservoirs” of objects and symbols in which they externalize the good and the bad, placing 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 (p. 89-90). Minor group differences are exaggerated and lead to negative attitudes towards the other group.

Groups can also choose traumas as a marker of their 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, perceptions, fantasies, and interpretations of the event – begins to take shape. These traumatized 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).

### **2.2.3 Motivations for social identity formation**

People choose to identify with a particular category and incorporate it into their self-definition because it is available and addresses their basic needs or interests. The most obvious motivation to identify with a particular category is the availability of the category. The current social situation can also make an available category salient and therefore more attractive than other available categories. Besides availability and salience, self-esteem and uncertainty reduction are two important motivations for choosing to identify with a particular social category and incorporating it into one’s self-definition.

#### **2.2.3.1 *self-esteem***

The need for positive self-esteem makes people distinguish themselves from the other

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and/or associate with groups that enhance their self-esteem. Tajfel and Turner have variously argued that:

The need for positive social identity motivates a search for, and the creation and enhancement of, positive distinctiveness for one's own group in comparison with other groups ... Where the in-group lacks positive distinctiveness, members will be motivated either to leave that group physically or dissociate themselves from it psychologically and aspire to membership of a higher status group or to adopt creative and/or competitive strategies to restore its positive distinctiveness (Turner 1982, p. 34).

Self-esteem refers to a judgment on the worth or value of the self. The group to which one belongs serves as the primary determinant of his self-esteem, and individuals derive benefit from their group's successes and achievements even when they have not contributed to them. Social identity theory holds that an individual's sense of self-worth is enhanced by the positive distinctiveness of their in-group (Brewer 2003, p. 37). Brewer also suggests that people have both the need for distinction from group (inter-category contrast) and need for inclusion in a group (intra-category assimilation) (Brewer 2003, p. 39). According to Hogg & Terry (2000), the purpose of self-categorization and social identification is uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement.

#### **2.2.3.2 security**

Social identity reduces uncertainty by providing access to social consensus, giving people the opportunity to use this consensus as a basis for self-verification (Hogg and Hains

1996, Hogg and Abrams 1993). Social identity provides people with a sense of social protection from the risk of interpersonal opposition and saves them from isolation by establishing boundaries and common space for a group (Korostelina 2007, p. 15). Social identity provides people with a sense of self-worth and security.

## **2.2.4 Consequences of social identity formation**

### **2.2.4.1 *prejudice***

The need for self-esteem leads to prejudice, “an unsubstantiated prejudgment of an individual or group favorable or unfavorable in character, tending to action in consonant direction” (Klineber 1968 in Tajfel 1981, p. 131). Prejudice is a prejudgment, a preconception reached with inadequate or imaginary evidence. Prejudice involves an attitude for or against, ascription of positive or negative values, and an affective or feeling component. There is a readiness to express in action the judgment and feelings we experience, to accept or reject the other.

### **2.2.4.2 *stereotyping***

The formation of social identity groups through the cognitive process of social categorization leads to stereotyping and prejudice in relations between groups. The choice of categories depends on their accessibility and on how categories fit the experience of groups in relation (Korostelina 2007, p. 72). Two dominant social categories with which people in the northern region of Ghana tend to identify with today are *naam* (chieftaincy) and *Tindana*, the office of the priest of the earth shrine. Consequently, there are two types



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of ethnic groups in the region, the chiefly ethnic group, whose social identity is defined by their association with the *naam*, and the non-chiefly ethnic group, whose social identity is linked to the cult of the earth shrine. The choice of these categories is very much influenced by the colonial administration distinction of chiefly and non-chiefly tribes.

The above theoretical exploration of the sources and motives for social identity formation reveals three theoretical positions: the social psychological approach, the psychodynamic approach and a sociological approach. In the social psychological approach, social identity formation is the result of cognitive processes of categorization, assimilation, and search for coherence that creates groups based on perceived shared common characteristics, beliefs and practices. Individuals within these social identity groups interact with each other based on the stereotypes and prejudices developed as a result of the cognitive processes of categorization, assimilation, and search for coherence. As people interact, they create boundaries and form social identity groups which give them a sense of who they are and their lived experience.

The psychodynamic approach explains human behavior in terms of the forces driving the behavior, e.g., behavior influenced by the three parts of the mind – id, ego, and superego; behavior influenced by different levels of consciousness, or behavior influenced by early childhood development.

The sociological approach locates social identity formation in social organizations, the cultural community, socio-cultural discourses, national myths, and intergroup relations. In this view, social identity formation is not a deliberate individual action, it is

the result of “incremental effects, indirect effects, environmental effects, feedback, mistakes, repairs and unanticipated consequences” (Tilly 2002, p. 7). The three approaches complement each other in presenting social identity as “a complex systemic phenomenon that is characterized by different forms, types, and relationships ... an open, evolving process of socialization involving boundary creation” (Korostelina 2007, p. 2). Social identity provides people with a sense of self-worth and security.

### **2.2.5 Limitations of the social identity theory**

Social identity theory focuses only on the social and psychological dimension of the human being to the neglect of the moral and religious dimension as a basis for social identity formation. Hence its inability to explore the human capacity for cooperation in which difference is celebrated as diversity that enriches, rather than threatens, human existence. Korostelina (2011) observes “the idea of morality as a basis or motive for identity that defines its structure and dynamics has yet to take hold in this field” (p. 131). The processes of value transformation from individual to group values in identity group formation and the impact of the group values on the group’s behavior has not been explored. There is a normative dimension of identity and difference that needs further investigation. Korostelina explores the implications of collective axiology and axiological difference on social identity formation and conflict (Rothbart and Korostelina 2011, pp. 140-164). The term axiology connotes an inquiry into the nature, criteria, and conception of value.

A collective axiology is a system of value commitments that define which

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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 member ... defines boundaries and relation among and establishes criteria for in-group/out-group membership ... extends retrospectively from the salient episodes of the past to a prospective vision, presumably into the otherwise uncertain future (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006, p. 4).

According to Rothbart and Korostelina (2006), all groups blend politics with value commitments that confer a collective axiology of identity and difference, which then defines social divisions in normative terms. The axiological difference often leads to the conversion of private hatreds to public devaluations of the other through stigmatization or threat narratives, to create a sense of security in the in-group. According to Kelman (2001), the moral basis of social interaction and a determinant factor in social behavior and social structure is the feeling of an obligation to accept claims coming from rightful authorities. "People often act with disregard to their personal preferences or even against their own interests ... when their obligations are activated" (Kelman 2001, p. 56).

The second limitation observed by Korestelina (2011) in the social identity theory is the role of the third group in the structure and dynamic of social identity formation. In a multi-ethnic environment such as pertains to northern Ghana, the role of the third group in the in-group/out-group dynamic needs further exploration.

Reicher (2004) cautions that a social psychological perspective of social identity runs the risk of reducing human social action to psychological processes without examin-

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ing how the play of processes depends on the cultural and structural settings in which they occur. According to Reicher:

The very notion of social identity is designed to explain how individuals can come to define themselves in terms of a construct that is irreducibly cultural, and to explain that this cultural content gives shape to all the processes that flow from our sense of who we are: how we relate to others, how we define and pursue our goals, what we see as possible, and what we want as desirable (Reicher 2004, p. 928).

Reicher concludes that all human social action needs to be understood in its social context (2004, p. 921). We need to pay attention to which categories people choose to belong to, those they choose to compare themselves with, and the dynamics in which these comparisons occur. When and how does a social/cultural category become a group's identity?

Ashmore (2001) raises a fundamental question about the *locus* of social identity.

Do social group-based identities occur primarily in the minds of individual people? Or are they embedded in the culture, language, norms and social practices of a group of people? Or do social identities emerge from some combination of individual psychology and socio-cultural discourses, beliefs and practices?" (Ashmore 2001, p. 4).

Ashmore (2001) is of the view that the social psychological approach to social identity as expounded by Tajfel and Turner is individualistic and focuses on how individuals think and feel about group membership.

### **2.2.6 Social identity and conflict between groups**

The basic interest in this section is the relationship between social identity and group-based conflicts. Do ethnic and national identities cause political conflict, or do they arise out of political conflict? As Korostelina (2007) has noted, this fundamental question has been explored in the numerous studies on the dynamics and sources of identity-based conflicts. She argues that while the primordialists stress that a salient social identity provokes conflict intentions and leads to violence, and the instrumentalists suggest the importance of economic and political factors in identity salience and in conflict, in her view social identities are a form of consciousness that entirely changes the dynamic and structure of conflict (Korostelina 2007, p. 147). Using the “Four C” model, representing the four stages of conflict: comparison, competition, confrontation, and counteraction, she illustrates the dynamics of identity conflict (Korostelina 2007, pp. 147 – 154).

Social identity theory underlines the fact that in-group/out-group categorization allows individuals to compare and classify other people according to their similarity or dissimilarity to the self. The theory also holds that the need for self-esteem leads to negative or unfavorable judgment on the values, capabilities, and intentions of the out-group. Out-group members are negatively stereotyped in the process of inter-group comparisons. In situations where there is power, status, economic and political inequality, conflicts of interest emerge and competition easily turns into confrontation as groups are more and more polarized. As Korostelina (2007) has noted, “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 defense of their secur-

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ity, beliefs, values and worldview that serve as the basis for in-group identity” (p. 152).

Comparison and competition for power and resources lead to confrontation between groups. Leaders of the various identity groups mobilize group members for the struggle, using social identity as a tool to increase group loyalty and readiness to fight for these group interests (Korostelina 2007, p. 150). Comparison, competition, and confrontation lead to counteractions in which a collective axiology is developed, i.e., “ a set of constructions that is used to validate, vindicate, rationalize, or legitimize actions, decisions, and policies ... to make sense of episodes of conflict and serve to solidify a group” (Rothbart and Korostelina 2006, in Korostelina 2007, p. 152). These can be in the form of mythic narratives, sacred icons, and teleomorphic models. As Korostelina (2007, p. 152) explains:

Mythic narratives stress the perception of a threatening “they” through shocking images, stunning anecdotes, and accounts of violence that can generate fear, terror, and panic. Through narratives and icons that present a concentrated threat and negative images of others, ideas about remote acts of violence are shaped. A teleomorphic model is constructed in binary form, leading to the perception of a fair “us” and the inhuman “them,” sacredness, good and virtue are characteristics of the in-group and profanity, evil, and vice are those of out-groups.

Kriesburg (2012) also argues that a clear and strong boundary between adversaries makes it easy to mobilize for conflict. The emergence of social conflict, its progression and resolution are very much dependent on the degree to which boundaries are clearly defined and recognized, and the degree to which they are permeable. Insofar

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as distinctions are generally clear and recognizable, members of a distinguished category are available to be mobilized (p. 12).

In Kriesburg's view, the degree of internal differentiation in a group impacts the course of conflict. In a highly differentiated group where roles are clearly defined, and there is a sub-group responsible for combat, the chances of such a group involving itself in conflict is high. The relationship between the adversaries, their shared past history, and the level of integration and the degree of asymmetry between adversaries affect conflict. "A conflict emerges when members of one or more potential antagonistic parties develop a shared identity, generate a sense of grievance, form a goal to change another party so as to reduce the grievance, and finally believe that they can bring about that change" (Kriesburg 2012, p. 83). In many ethnic and other inter-communal conflicts, "persons seeking political or other forms of resource control try to mobilize support by claiming to be fighting to overcome past humiliations, to defend against enemy threats, and to reclaim past glories" (Kriesburg 2012, p. 32).

Azar (1991) explains that in economically underdeveloped and mal-developed societies, the machinery of the state is often controlled by one communal group (religious sect, race, ethnic group, linguistic group, etc.) and used to discriminate against competing or otherwise threatened groups. In these states, the social structure encourages discrimination and disintegration; the State is unable to provide for symbolic and material needs of individuals and groups or act as an honest broker. National integration and institution building have failed to occur. The communal group in power attempts to establish and represent its own values as national values. Under these conditions the communal group

tends to be more responsive to the needs of the security, recognition, and acceptance of its members than for fair access to political institutions and economic participation. “When they are denied physical and economic security, political participation and recognition from other groups, their distinctive identity is lost and they will do whatever is in their power to regain it” (Azar 1991, p. 95).

Turner (1979) has argued that as long as the social disparities are institutionalized, legitimized, and justified through a consensually accepted status system, or a firm and pervasive status system that prevents the creation of cognitive alternatives to it, ethnocentrism and intergroup antagonism is minimal. Antagonism emerges when one group rejects the status quo and starts working towards change (Turner 1979, p. 37-38). In a world of competing ideologies and structural inequalities, when these structural inequalities are perceived as unjust and/or illegitimate, the social categorization process may lead to social conflicts.

Reicher (2004) identifies six contextual factors that influence whether and how a subordinate group will seek positive differentiation in relation to dominant groups: power, permeability of group boundaries, legitimacy of inequalities, existence of cognitive alternatives to the status quo, practical constraints on claiming valued resources, and the actions of dominant group members (p. 932).

### **2.2.7 Summary**

Group-based identities and their impact on intergroup relationships are based on a combination of individual psychology and socio-cultural discourses, values, beliefs, and



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practices. Through a process of self-categorization, people choose social categories that are valued, important, and meaningful to them in order to define who they are as a people. This group membership is then internalized as an aspect of self concept and people tend to relate to each other not on the basis of their individual characteristics or interpersonal relationships, but as members of their groups standing in a certain defined relationship to members of other groups. Social identities are social arrangements in which people construct shared stories about who they are, how they are connected and what has happened to them. The sense of belonging to a group provides the individual with security, self-esteem, and a degree of certainty. The level of investment in the group will depend on whether the group (collectivistic) or the individual (individualistic) is at center of the society. The by-products of self-esteem and positive distinctiveness, i.e., prejudice and stereotyping, can foster conflictual intergroup relations.

Social identity theory helps us understand the psychological importance people attach to their various groups and how that attachment influences their behavior and attitude towards other groups. “The cognitive process helps us explain why groups are perceived as more different from each other than they really are, and why they may be seen in crude and over-simplified terms” (Brown 2000, p. 310).

Social identity theory and self-categorization theory are useful for exploring the conflicts in the northern region of Ghana because they help us understand the dynamics of ethnic identity formation. The theories demonstrate both the positive and the negative implications of the social identity formation process and help us shift our emphasis, from blaming ethnicity for the conflicts in the region, to exploring the positive contributions of

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a multi-ethnic environment for peaceful coexistence and development.

Secondly, the theories help us explore historical, political, and economic factors rather than ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land, as sources of the conflicts in the region.

Both the social identity theory and the self-categorization theory have limitations which need further study if we are to fully benefit from these theories. There is the need to explore under what conditions preference for one's in-group translates into negative feelings towards the out-group. It is not very clear if strong feelings of dislike for an out-group necessarily produce aggression against it. Simple cognitive categorization does not seem to be enough to produce dislike and negative out-group discrimination. Tajfel and Turner (1979) have noted that the "in-group does not compare itself with every available out-group: the out-group must be perceived as a relevant comparison group" (p. 41). Exploring further the conditions under which an out-group is chosen for comparison will help us understand why particular groups are constantly in conflict in the region. A process of social identity does not always have to include resistance to the difference of the other. Difference can be welcomed as an expression of the human genius that one group cannot encapsulate in its totality.

### **2.3 THEORIES OF POWER**

Power plays an important role in conflict resolution practice. Theoreticians and practitioners in the field struggle with how to conceptualize and deploy power, especially how to engage power asymmetries in conflict situations (Avruch 2012). Insights from the theories of power in the social sciences can inform the development of a theory of power

in the field of conflict resolution that assists practitioners to deal more effectively with power asymmetries in conflict environments. This section explores the various concepts of power and its nature, source, and purpose in social interactions as a basis for analyzing social identity formation, indigenous power dynamics, and legitimacy.

### **2.3.1 Challenges of conceptualizing power**

Although power is a universal phenomenon experienced in every human social relationship, it is a relational concept difficult to conceptualize, define, and measure. Power is dynamic and context specific. In the view of Arens and Karp, seeking a “standard” definition of power is neither useful nor necessary; rather one should seek to understand how, in a particular context, power is generated and put into use.

Parsons (1968) observed a notable lack of agreement both about power’s specific definition and the conceptual context in which it should be placed (p. 232). Bierstedt (1950) contends that “though power is often identified with prestige, influence, eminence, competence, ability, knowledge, domination, right, force and authority, it is important to distinguish power from each of these” for the simple reason that such a broad application of a concept makes it less precise ( p. 730). Lukes (2005) attributes the difficulty to the fact that power is a value-dependent and contested concept. Also, Haugaard (2002, p. 2) supports the view that “the search for a single concept of power is intrinsically illusory.”

Avruch (2012) explores how power, taken abstractly, has been theorized in the social sciences and concludes:

Although any particular theorist or researcher approaches the notion of power

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with an attitude of epistemological self-assurance, when reviewed across a number of different theoretical approaches, definitions proliferate. One theorist's self-assurance becomes another's wrongheadedness; one researcher's operational definition, another's methodological artlessness – and the whole idea of power is soon rendered an essentially contested concept (p. 171).

In the field of conflict resolution, the challenge is not only in conceptualizing power, but also in dealing with power asymmetry in practice. Avruch (2012) captures the dilemma of conceptualizing power and applying it in the practice of conflict resolution:

In doing practice, an acknowledgment of larger structures in which individuals are embedded (or of grand narratives into which they are implicated) necessarily leads one to some sort of Archimedean site, an external standpoint from which, structure now recognized, power is interpellated and praxis can be launched .... The burden of conflict resolution is that in recognizing power, it must simultaneously acknowledge its commitment to some moral calculus, that is, a calculus beyond the behaviorist's counting decisions made in city council meetings or the merely Machiavellian cunning to rig meeting agendas. (p. 173)

The moral calculus that conflict resolution is committed to ought to be based on human authenticity, on right relationships. Human beings generate and deploy power in their relationships and interactions; consequently, power asymmetries must be addressed from the point of view of how much the actions, structures and discourse that generate and use power are in accordance with, or against, “authentic” human ways of relating.

### **2.3.2 An overview of theories of power**

In modern times, early thinking on power emerged within the historical context of the politico-religious conflicts of sixteenth-century France torn apart by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants (see Figgis 1922). Power is conceived as originating from the divine and executed by the king. God bestowed earthly powers on the king to make, interpret, and enforce laws in the social order (the divine right of the king theory). People of royal birth have a “divine right” to rule without consent of their people. As the concept of a state as a political community developed, the power of the king was transferred to the state. Jean Bodin (1576) argued that only a strong central government could prevent anarchy, and that sovereignty, the ultimate supreme power in any state, was absolute and indivisible. In any system of government the power to make, interpret, and enforce laws had to be held by one person or institution.<sup>8</sup> Power is conceptualized as domination in response to the practical need to prevent anarchy in the social order.

Within the context of the “state,” power is theorized in relation to the state’s capacity to make, interpret, and enforce laws for social order. Power is perceived as a capacity nested in an individual or an institution. It is external to human relations, given by God to maintain intergroup relationships and social order.

Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* conceptualizes power as stemming from sovereignty, which he describes as “a total political community, the embodiment of which is the state, or the community, or the society, a single unit, ordered according to a uniform principle, possessing a continuity of time and place” (Clegg 1989, p. 21). Only a

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<sup>8</sup> <http://wiki.answers.com/divineright>.

sovereign ruler with absolute power can dominate a society in the undesirable “state of nature”. Hobbes conceptualized power as “a causal relationship, a mechanistic causal agent that produces harmony and order.” Power is concrete, visible, and measurable (Clegg 1989, pp. 21-38). In modern political science, Morgenthau best expresses the Hobbesian concept of power. “Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the power of man over man ... from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another” (Morgenthau 1956, p. 186). For Morgenthau, the world is characterized by competing power bases. Interests are to be maintained through the exercise of dominating power.

### **2.3.3 Conceptions of power in the social sciences**

Two very broad conceptions of power exist in the social sciences. The first views power as a tangible, objective, and measurable phenomenon nested in people, in systems and in structures. Power in this context is a capacity, ability, or potential to dominate or resist (Sharp et al., 2000). Power is conceptualized in relation to control, to domination or to influence. Power is something human beings get, hold, increase, and control. The second broad conception of power views power as a social construct nested in social interactions and relationships. Power belongs to a set of relations that generate capacities in human interactions and institutions. It is the relationships in social interactions that give power its meaning and purpose.

**2.3.3.1 power as making decisions**

C. Wright Mills (1956) locates power in the elite's ability to make decisions. Reacting to Wright Mills' elite power theory, Robert Dahl (1961) locates his discussion on power in the community and in the processes of decision-making and conceives elite power not only in the ability to make decisions but also to prevent decisions from being made, decisions that affect people in one way or the other. Power in Dahl's view is the ability to get people to accept and obey one's preferences in decision-making. He who gets to make decisions has the power. According to Lukes (1974), this "one-dimensional" approach perceives power as the capacity to make decisions exercised in formal institutions. Such power is measured by the outcomes of decisions.

Bachrach and Baratz (1962) react to Dahl's view of power by arguing that power goes beyond the capacity to make decisions to include the capacity to prevent decision-making. Power in this context is the ability to determine the "agenda," which issues are important and which are not. Lukes (1974) calls this a "two dimension" approach that perceives power as the ability to make decisions and/or to prevent decisions from being made, by setting the agenda on issues to be discussed and decided on. Such power is exercised both in formal institutions and informal influences by inducements, direct force, persuasion, coercion, etc. Lukes (1974) critiques these two dimensions through which power has been theorized in the past as limited to visible forms of power and proposes a third dimension, the "critical" dimension. Power is perceived as the "ability to implant in people's minds interests that are contrary to their own good," as the ability to shape preference through values, norms, and ideologies. Power in this dimension is not easily

observable and measurable.

### **2.3.3.2 power as domination**

Gene Sharp (1973) describes social power as “the capacity to control the behavior of others, directly or indirectly, through action by groups of people, which action impinges on other groups of people” (p. 7). The use of social power for political purposes, Gene Sharp (1973) contends, is political power, which he defines as “the total authority, influence, pressure and coercion which may be applied to achieve or prevent the implementation of the wishes of the power-holder” (p. 8). Power is conceived as a coherent oppressive force used to control and coerce others, to impose one’s will upon others or manipulate the consent of others at the material, symbolic, or psychological level. Such power is located in the state, in the economy and in civil society and is articulated within the social, economic, political and cultural relations and institutions. Power as domination strives to discipline, to silence, to prohibit or to repress difference or dissent. Dominating power engenders inequality and asserts the interests of a particular group at the expense of others (Sharp et al. 2000, p. 2). Dominating power generates a new form of power, resisting power, “power which attempts to set up situations, groupings and actions which resist the impositions of dominating power” (ibid., p. 3).

Max Weber, however, makes a distinction between power and domination. “Power (*Macht*) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. Domination (*Herrschaft*) is the probability that a command with a given



specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Roth and Wittich 1978, p. 53). Weber argues that in a given historical situation, the ruler has the right to exercise commands and to expect compliance from others. This combination of “ruler” and “command” in his view forms a legitimate system of authority. Weber develops a theory of legitimate domination in which he conceptualizes domination as a “system of total apparatus of authority reflecting a relationship between ruler, administrative officials and groups or persons existing within the established order” (Morrison 2004, p. 283). In this theory of domination, Weber explores how through emerging social and historical developments, political power manifests itself in three types of legitimate domination. By legitimate domination, Weber means who has the right to issue commands and rule over individuals in an established order (Morrison 2004, p. 284). The three types of legitimate domination are: charismatic domination, traditional domination, and rational-legal domination. Each of the domains has a corresponding form of legitimacy, type of obedience, administrative apparatus and mode of exercising power.

Weber’s theory of legitimate domination is important in this study because it helps us understand the crisis of legitimacy in a traditional authority system based on domination by tradition in the northern region of Ghana, a crisis that, I believe, has contributed in very significant ways to the conflicts in the northern region. Below I explore the basic concepts informing Weber’s theory of legitimate domination.

#### **2.3.4 Social action, social relations and legitimate order**

Weber’s view on power emerged from his thoughts on modern societies and the role of

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the human agent. Weber contends that human beings are value-conferring by nature and act in relation to valued social ends. In his classic work, *Economy and Society*, Max Weber writes: “a human behavior is an action when an acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior” (Roth and Wittich 1978, p. 4). An action is social when “its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of the other and is thereby oriented in its course” (ibid., p. 4). In other words, social action is when the actor’s behavior is meaningfully oriented to that of the other. Social action includes both failure to act and passive acquiescence and may be oriented to the past, present and expected future behavior of others (ibid., p. 22).

Weber identifies four sources of influence of human values and meanings by which social acts are performed: Instrumentally rational – social action is determined by expected outcomes; Value rational – determined by conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior independent of its prospects of success; Traditional – determined by ingrained habits; and Affectual – determined by the actor’s specific affects and feeling states. Weber contends that the traditional and affectual are borderline meaningful social actions.

In Weber’s opinion, social relations exist in meaningful social action. In this view, it is meaningful (i.e., meaningfully oriented to that of others) social action that makes social relationships possible. Any social action, which involves a social relationship, must be guided by a legitimate order. Weber writes:

Action, especially social action which involves a social relationship, may be guided by the belief in the existence of a legitimate order. The probability that

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action will actually be so guided will be called the validity of the order in question (Roth and Wittich 2004, p. 31).

The validity of an order is determined by the subjective belief of the actor that the action is obligatory or exemplary. The existence of a uniformity of social action determined by custom or self-interest does not constitute a social order. Human beings, according to this view, always act in relation to ends which they value. Values are central because they concern themselves with human individuals whose actions reflect the judgments and evaluations of a surrounding social world.

Weber's belief, that human social action reflects an orientation to values, places power in the domain of human social interaction. Power is the product of human action oriented towards certain values and meaning. An exploration of a people's understanding of power must begin with the values and meanings that influence human behavior. Weber views power as legitimate domination.

***2.3.4.1 power as domination through charisma***

Charisma is a form of authority legitimized by a belief in the leader's oracular or divine powers. The leader is able to galvanize followers because of his capacity to see into the future. The charismatic leader is a "savior" figure who promises to emancipate his people or lead them to the realization of a "true" social destiny or rightful national place. Charismatic domination is legitimate only insofar as the powers possessed by the leader are inaccessible to the ordinary person and are perceived as extraordinary. Such a power, Weber believes, is inherently unstable, not amenable to the development of an admini-

strative apparatus, and has the potential to lose legitimacy when discredited by the failure to realize goals or promises (Morrison 2004, p 338).

#### ***2.3.4.2 power as domination by tradition***

Legitimate domination by tradition is based on the sanctity of age-old rules and customs. Leaders obtain their positions and justify their power in the light of custom and customary rights. Power resides in the ability of the ruler to issue commands by virtue of the authority inherent in the person. Sovereigns, monarchs and lords of feudal estates are examples of traditional systems of domination. Persons obey traditional authority out of the recognition of the ruler's inherited claim to the position and the respect engendered by it. Obligations to the leader are owed to the person rather than to objective legal rules, and the execution of authority relies on a rudimentary administrative staff. Traditional authority issues commands on the basis of what Weber calls the edict. These are personal decrees issued by heads of state reflecting the arbitrary nature of traditional powers. There is no separation between the power of the leader and the political office because the power of the leader is based on custom rather than an explicit system of legal norms. The elements of traditional authority thus reflect cultural values and patterns of social action that have been stable for long periods of time.

#### ***2.3.4.3 power as domination through rational legal structures***

Weber's third form of legitimate domination is based on rational legal structures. Rules are enacted by due process and founded upon basic legal precepts. This form of authority

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is based on a system of rational law. Power through legal structures presupposes a belief in the legitimacy of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to office to issue commands. In this system, the leaders and their officials are subject to the rule of law and must orient their actions to the law in their disposition of power. Allegiance in this context is to an impersonal legal order and not to an individual. Rational-legal authority arises in societies with a developed system of industry, markets and a bureaucratic means of administration. Based on the statute as opposed to the edict, laws are developed through legislative acts rather than the personal say-so of the ruler (Morrison 2004, p. 339).

In his analysis of social action, social relations, and legitimate order, Weber clearly underlines the importance of subjective value orientation as the basis for evaluating the validity of a social order. His analysis places power in the domain of social relations and underscores the crucial role that values and meanings play in power dynamics.

#### **2.3.5 Power as the product of social relations**

From Weber's views, it is clear that human beings generate and deploy power in their relationships and social interactions in a given context. Power belongs to the set of relations that generate capacities in human interactions and institutions. Power therefore derives its meaning, purpose, and specific identity from relationships in social interactions driven by value orientations. Power is always generated and deployed in a particular context.

Foucault, however, challenges the notion that power is something that is wielded

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and argues that it is embedded in social relations. His concern is how power operates in society. Power has a strictly relational character and cannot be considered a possession or capacity of groups or individuals (Foucault 1980, p. 61). Individuals are not agents of power, they neither possess power nor have their potential crushed or alienated by it; to the contrary, “one of the prime effects of power (is) that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires come to be identified and constituted as individuals” (Smart 1985, p. 79). Foucault emphasizes the interdependence of power and knowledge. “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault 1979, p. 27). Knowledge is power over others, the power to define others; hence power “produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (ibid, p. 194). Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics of truth, that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true. The mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the technique and procedure accorded value in acquisition of truth” (Foucault 1986, p. 73). Foucault sees power as knowledge to define others and to produce the discourses and truth.

According to Foucault, the state does not cover the whole field of actual power relations that are dispersed through the social body. “The state is superstructure in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth” (Foucault 1984, p. 64). Power according to Foucault “is diffused rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than

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possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them” (Gaventa 2003, p. 3). Power does not reside in individuals or institutions: it is the result of social relations and is productive. Power is “the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1992, p. 93). According to Foucault,

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it excludes, it represses, it censors, it abstracts, it masks, it conceals. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault 1975, p. 93)

Power and knowledge are inter-connected because both need a system of communication and records and both are exercised through extraction, appropriation, distribution, or retention. Discourse is the vehicle through which knowledge and subjects are constituted. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and enables it to be thwarted (Foucault 1992, p. 100).

Gene Sharp (1973) argues that any system of power needs people to operate it and the power holder must depend on them. Power is not intrinsic to the power holder, it depends on the acceptance and cooperation of the subjects. Secondly, it is obedience of the subjects that contributes to the establishment of the system (Sharp 1973, p. 10). There are two views of power. One sees people as dependent upon the good will, the decisions and the support of their government or of any other hierarchical system to which they belong. In the other view of power, government is dependent on the good will of the

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people, their decisions and their support. In social power, the behavior of others is directly or indirectly controlled through action by groups of people. In political power, the power holder applies total authority, influence, pressure, and coercion to achieve or to prevent the implementation of a program.

Weber's theory of power as legitimate domination helps us understand the dynamics of social identity formation and power in a multi-ethnic environment. His analysis of power places power dynamics in social action and social relationships with a focus on values orientation. Values and meaning emerge from the group to which one feels a sense of belonging, hence the importance of a social identity model of power.

#### **2.3.5.1 *the social identity model of power***

Turner (2005) contends in the field of social psychology the standard definition of power is "the capacity to influence people's attitudes, beliefs and behavior and that influence is based on the control of resources valued or desired by others" (Turner 2005, p. 2). The people influenced depend upon the influencing agent for satisfaction of their needs. According to Turner, this definition of power assumes "an implicit causal sequence that runs from resources to power to influence to psychological group. Shared social norms and values develop among people who depend on each other" (Turner 2005, p. 4). Turner (2005) challenges this assumption and argues the psychological group is the precondition of influence, not simply an outcome, because people tend to accept information and seek approval from in-group members who share one's beliefs, values, and objectives. People are more influenced by their sense of belonging to an in-group than by resources.



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Power emerges from human social relationships, from the capacity of people to organize themselves into groups, institutions and societies. People acting in concert, cooperating, coordinating and unifying their actions, developing emergent capacities as members of social systems, are able to have an impact on both the physical and social worlds through their interrelatedness that would be impossible if they were purely individual beings (Turner 2005, p. 6).

Turner argues that social power is the capacity to influence and to control people to effect one's will, to act on one's behalf, as an extension of oneself. Emphasis is on getting people to act in line with one's desires, beliefs, orders, instructions, commands, suggestions, etc., in order to have an impact on the world through them. The capacity to influence and persuade, to change people's private attitudes, values, and beliefs, so that they act on their own volition, as free, intrinsically motivated and willing agents is one basis of "power through." Power as control – capacity to get people to do what one wants where they are not persuaded of, or are uninterested in, the validity of the specific belief or act, is "power over."

Power is generated through persuasion and not coercion. The validity of a judgment is dependent on the "the degree to which it embodies an in-group consensus or norm (Turner 1987 in Turner 2005, p. 10). Group members influence each other because they are perceived as prototypical of the emerging consensus. Both the persuasive power of the group and the individual within it are a function of group identity and consensus. Power gets its meaning, purpose, and specific identity from social interactions. How power is defined and deployed is very much in large part due to the nature of the social

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relations. As humans interact within a social system, they develop a sense of belonging or alienation as their “inter-personal transactions compound into identities, create and transform social boundaries” (Tilly 2005, p. 7). Tilly (2003) contends that these identities then serve as springboards for claim making. They also determine what is legitimate and what is not, and what deserves recognition and representation (p. 32).

#### **2.3.6 Summary**

The various approaches to power presented above speak to the complex nature of power and to the fact that no one particular approach covers the wide spectrum of possible conceptions and application of power. It also draws attention to the fact that in any one particular social order a number of approaches may be present.

In an exploration of social identity formation, a people’s understanding of power must move beyond propaganda to basic social elements, such as social relationships and the values and the meaning people attach to social action and to their perceptions of what is a legitimate order. Weber’s theory of power as legitimate domination helps us understand the dynamics of social identity formation and power in a multi-ethnic environment. His focus on values orientation is useful for understanding the potential for conflict in an environment with multiple values systems. In the case of the northern region of Ghana, the environment is not only multi-ethnic but also combines two social orders: the traditional order based on customs and culture, and the rational legal system. The contradictions inherent in the two systems coexisting in a single political order without the necessary procedures for dealing with emergent contradictions provide an

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environment for conflict. Weber's analysis of power places power dynamics in social action and social relationships and points to a way forward in finding some solutions to the perennial conflicts in the region.

My choice of social identity theories to explore power and the conflicts in the northern region of Ghana is based on the fact that already there exist ethnic identity groups whose very existence and mobilization in times of conflict tend to be perceived as the reason for the conflict. There is the need for a more theoretical explanation of social identity formation in the region. The social identity theories on power better explain the power dynamics and conflicts in the region. Power is not intrinsic to the power holder but depends on the acceptance and cooperation of the subjects (Sharp 1973, p. 10; Foucault 1980, p. 61). Turner's (2005) view that power is people acting in concert, cooperating, coordinating, and unifying their actions in relation to a valued social end draws our attention to the important role of daily social interactions in power dynamics. It shifts the focus of power away from structures and locates it in the daily interactions of people.

Sharp's (1973) view that any system of power needs people to operate it and that the power holder must depend on the good will of the people, and Turner's concept of power as persuasion calling forth cognition change and conversion (rather than domination), will inform my exploration of a new understanding of power that promotes sustainable peace in the region. The power to get people to act in line with one's desires by persuading them that the desired judgments, decisions, beliefs, or action are correct, right, moral, and appropriate (Turner 2005, p. 6) is the power that will promote peaceful coexistence in a multi-ethnic environment. As Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) have

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argued, if they are to succeed leaders need to create, champion, and embed a sense of group identity of which they themselves are representatives. Leaders must take the ideas, values, and priorities of the group and embed them in reality. The leader must create a world in which the values of the group are lived out and in which its potential is fulfilled (p. 75). Leaders who are seen to advance the interest of the group will receive the voluntary obedience of their followers. In mobilizing social identities, leaders generate and legitimize power as they present themselves as the prototypes of the in-group. Chieftaincy as a leadership institution will survive if the concept of “group” is broadened to include all the people in the chief’s jurisdiction and not just his ethnic group. It is my conviction that understanding the concept of legitimation in relation to power contributes to the understanding of social identity and the role it plays in social conflict.

## **2.4 THEORIES OF LEGITIMACY**

### **2.4.1 Legitimacy in social relations**

Legitimacy, like power, is a phenomenon of relations in society. It involves, on the one hand, a claim and a claimant and, on the other hand, a recipient who accepts or rejects the claim based on it being just or rightful (Kelman 2001, p. 55). Legitimacy is “the belief that authorities, institutions and social arrangements are appropriate, proper and just” (Tyler 2006, p. 376) and the feeling of obligation to adhere to their demands and requests (Kelman 2001, 55). Kelman (2001) makes a distinction between influence in authority relations and ordinary influence. In ordinary influence, people accept or reject a claim depending on their preferences and interests. In the case of influence in authority rela-

tions, people feel an obligation to accept a claim if it comes from the rightful authority. In Kelman's view, this sense of the right to make claims and the obligation to acquiesce is the moral basis of social interaction and determines social behavior and social structure more than interests and preferences. The sense of obligation is so strong that "people often act with disregard to their personal preferences or even against their own interests – at least in the short term – when their obligations are activated" (Kelman 2001, p. 56).

#### **2.4.2 Legitimacy in social organizations**

In theorizing about legitimacy in the context of organizations, Suchman (1995) contends that legitimacy is about the justification of the right to exist. According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy is linked to cultural conformity that is "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (p. 574). Where there is a cultural conformity, a power system or institution is considered legitimate.

Suchman (1995) makes a distinction between "strategic legitimacy" – justification by an agent or an institution manipulating symbols to gain social support – and "institutional legitimacy" – justification culturally embedded through the generation of cultural pressures that transcend any purposive control. An array of cultural accounts is used to provide explanation for the existence of an institution (Suchman 1995, p. 573). Legitimacy for Suchman is "a set of constitutive beliefs" that empowers an organization or institution by making it seem natural and meaningful and therefore it gains acceptance from society at large. Legitimacy transcends specific adverse acts or occurrences, but is

dependent on a history of events. Consequently legitimacy is continuously evolving and (re)-constituted through social events. Legitimacy is a discursive product achieved and maintained through social dialogue (pp. 574-6). Legitimacy is the condition or status that exists when the values system of an institution is congruent with the values system of the larger social system of which the entity is a part. When a disparity, actual or potential, exists between the two values systems there is a threat to the institution's legitimacy.

### **2.4.3 Legitimization and delegitimization**

Kelman (2001) argues that through legitimization and de-legitimization, existing social norms in a society may be changed, reversed, or violated through the processes of re-categorization into or out of the domain of moral obligation or moral acceptability (p. 59).

Kelman defines legitimization and delegitimization thus:

Legitimization refers to the process of recategorizing an action, policy. Or claim – or a system, group, or person – such that what was previously illegitimate now becomes legitimate, or what was previously optional now becomes obligatory. In other words, legitimation entails acceptance of a claim or a claimant into the domain of moral acceptability or moral obligation. Delegitimization, on the other hand, refers to the reverse process of recategorization, whereby what was previously legitimate now becomes illegitimate, or what was previously obligatory now becomes optional. In other words, delegitimization entails removal of a claim or a claimant from the domain of moral acceptability or moral obligation. The kinds of claims that I particularly refer to may be claims of certain rights,

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including claims of protection and respect, or claims of certain powers, including claims of authority (Kelman 2001, p. 57-58).

In Kelman's view, legitimization is the acknowledgement of rights or powers not previously recognized, or the extension of certain rights and powers to claimants to whom they were not previously granted. Delegitimization refers to the denial of rights or powers that previously were recognized or the withdrawal of rights or powers from claimants to whom they were previously granted (Kelman 2001, p. 58). Where the processes of legitimization/delegitimization include excluded groups in a system, prevent oppressive and discriminatory practices, and promote governments and institutions that are representative and responsive to the needs of the population, they serve the cause of justice and positive social change. Where they serve to provide moral justification to oppressive and discriminatory practices, to violence and to gross violations of human rights, and to unjust systems of social stratification, they lead to social conflict (Kelman 2001, p. 71).

Kelman's (2001) and Suchman's (1995) understanding of legitimacy finds its basis in the Aristotelian concept of legitimacy as "moral rightness of power." According to Aristotle, the purpose of the state, and I would add any power, is for the "sake of the good life" which he defines as "a community of families that are tied together by the bonds of friendship, who strive for nobility in their actions" (*Politics* III.9). Emphasis is on the "justness" of the structure/system as the basis for stability. According to this concept of legitimacy, people will voluntarily accept a power structure/system if it is perceived to be just.

#### **2.4.4 Weber on legitimacy**

Weber conceives of legitimacy in his theory of power as domination. Legitimacy is the extent to which officials, groups, and individuals actively acknowledge the validity of a ruler in an established order and the right of a ruler to issue commands. Legitimacy is the perception that authority is legitimate for those who are subject to it.

Tyler (2006) combines Aristotle and Weber in defining legitimacy as the belief that authorities, institutions, and social arrangements are appropriate, proper, and just. In very broad strokes, Zelditch (2001) concludes “legitimacy is always a matter of voluntary acceptance that something is right and its consequence is always the stability of whatever structure emerges from the process” (p. 40).

#### **2.5 SOCIAL IDENTITY, POWER AND LEGITIMACY**

Social influence is the basis for power and legitimacy. As Turner (2005) has argued, the social identity group is the precondition of influence because people tend to accept information and seek approval from in-group members who share one’s beliefs, values, and objectives. People are more influenced by their sense of belonging to an in-group than by resources. Power emerges from human social relations from the capacity of people to organize themselves into groups. According to Tilly (2003), social identity is context in which claims to power and legitimacy are made. Through social identity, groups determine what deserves recognition and representation. Group identities become the basis for claims to the right to rule and the recognition of that right to rule. French and Raven (1959) define legitimate power as “the power which stems from internalized



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values ... which dictate that [an authority] has a legitimate right to influence [a person] and that [the person] has an obligation to accept this influence” (p. 159). These internalized values come from social identity formation processes.

Power depends upon legitimacy and social influence; consequently, leaders and authorities are effective to the extent that they are perceived as having legitimate power and acting in accordance with prevailing norms of appropriate conduct. “Attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes serve to legitimize power and social arrangements and to provide ideological support for social and political systems” (Jost and Major 2001, p. 4). Social identity then becomes a means to mobilize support in pursuit of power and resources.

Legitimacy contributes to self-esteem through social identity. A legitimate power structure that is fair and respects the rights and dignity of individuals and groups promotes a sense of belonging and increases the self-esteem and sense of self-worth of individuals and groups. Tyler (1997) writes that people internalize social values and take on the obligation to obey social rules without rewards or the threat of punishment by authorities. One such internalized value is “the judgment by group members that they ought to voluntarily obey social rules and authorities, irrespective of the likelihood of reward or punishment” (Tyler 1997, p. 323).

Legitimacy can also be used negatively to justify discriminatory and prejudicial treatment of out-groups, as well as play an ideological role in legitimizing beliefs in the maintenance of authority and the perpetuation of inequality and injustice. Tyler (1997) contends that rulers and authority are a core feature of groups and organizations, and that, in times of difficulties, groups often create or empower authorities in an effort to resolve

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problems and maintain the group. “People draw information about their identities from their group memberships consequently, the neutrality of authorities, trustworthiness of their motives and status recognition – that is interpersonal respect and the dignity of interpersonal treatment are concerns of the people” (Tyler 1997, p. 325).

In the psychology of legitimacy, emphasis is on ways in which people construct ideological justifications or rationalizations for their own actions and for the actions of others taken on behalf of valued groups and systems (Jost & Major, 2001). Power is about “how some individuals or cliques have disproportionate power and influence to set agenda, define identity, and mobilize people to achieve collective goals” (p. 188). Power influences identity formation as people depersonalize and assimilate the behavior and identity of the “prototype.” People with power are perceived to embody the norms of the group. Hogg argues further that external threat from an out-group “enhance identification and depersonalization increases solidarity and social attraction” (Hogg 1993, p. 201). Prototypical leaders are perceived to embody the norms of the group and do not need to exercise their power to have influence.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have explored the theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy. I have also explored how social identity influences the perceptions of power and legitimacy in social interactions. In social identity people choose social categories that are valued, important, and meaningful to them to define who they are as a people. They internalize their group membership as an aspect of their self-concept, which in turn

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influences their perceptions and behavior. People relate to each other not as individuals but on the basis of their perception as a group in relations to other groups. Social identities are social arrangements in which people construct shared stories about who they are, how they are connected and what has happened to them. The sense of belonging to a group provides the individual with a sense of distinctiveness, security, self-esteem and a degree of certainty but it can also lead to prejudice and stereotyping.

Social identity theory helps us understand people's attachment to groups and how that attachment influences their behavior and attitude towards other groups. Social identity theories helps us explain why groups are perceived as more different from each other than they really are.

Power is a complex phenomenon of social interactions with a wide spectrum of possible conceptions and application. Human beings generate and deploy power in their relationships and social interactions in a given context. Power is influenced by social identity and derives its meaning, purpose and specific identity from relationships and value orientations. Legitimacy is the belief that authorities, institutions, and social arrangements are appropriate, proper, and just and the feeling of obligation to adhere to their demands and requests. Kelman (2001) explains that the right to make claims and the obligation to acquiesce is the moral basis of social interaction and determines social behavior and social structure. In Kelman's view, the sense of obligation is so strong that when activated, people will act against own interest (Kelman 2001, p. 56). The caveat is that the claim must come from the "rightful authority." The perception of power and the "rightful authority" to exercise power is defined, contested, and negotiated in the social

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group and in inter-group interactions. The institutions and groups that exercise power of governance in the social group take on the mantle of “public authority” i.e. legitimated administrative operations whose jurisdiction is recognized by other institutions and groups (Lund 2008). Social identity formation, power and legitimacy are social constructs that are continuously, contested and negotiated in the everyday practices of ordinary people.

In the case of the Northern Region of Ghana, external factors such as colonization, post-colonial development of the new independent State of Ghana, and events on the international scene, have influenced social identities and local power dynamics in very significant ways. An understanding of indigenous power dynamics in the Region and the impact of the colonial administration on social identities and power structures are important for understanding the protracted social identity based conflicts. The next chapter will explore the historical and ethnographical factors leading to the present situation of conflict in the Northern Region of Ghana.

## **Chapter 3**

### **IDENTITY AND CONFLICTS IN NORTHERN GHANA**

#### **A CASE STUDY**

##### **3.1 THE COUNTRY OF GHANA**

The Republic of Ghana is situated in West Africa, just above the Equator. The Greenwich Meridian passes through its main industrial city, Tema. Ghana shares common boundaries with Togo to the east, Burkina Faso to the north, and Cote d'Ivoire to the west and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. On March 6, 1957, Ghana, at the time a British colony, became the first country south of the Sahara to become independent with a parliamentary system of government led by a prime minister. Ghana became a republic on July 1, 1960, and is a member of the Commonwealth. Ghana has a population of about 24 million as of 2010, and a landmass of 238,537 square kilometers divided into 10 administrative regions (Greater Accra, Eastern, Western, Central, Volta, Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti, Northern, Upper East, and Upper West) and 170 district assemblies, with Accra as the capital.

The political system of Ghana is a constitutional parliamentary democracy with a president as head of state and government, a cabinet of ministers and a unicameral legislature elected by direct popular vote. The judiciary consists of the Supreme Court,

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High Court, and Court of Appeal. The legal system is a combination of British Common Law and Ghanaian Customary law. The first president of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, promoted social integration through a national identity and discouraged ethnic, regional and religious political groups. The common slogan was “One Nation, One People, One Destiny.” Parallel to this “modern” system of governance is a traditional system of political governance, the chieftaincy institution. The traditional system of governance in each local area consists of a paramount chief, divisional and village chiefs, a legal system of customary law and a social identity centered on ethnic (cultural) groupings. The traditional system of governance is organized at the regional and national level through the “House of Chiefs” and at the district level through “Traditional Councils.”

### **3.2 NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA**

The Northern Region of Ghana is one of the three administrative regions in the north of Ghana. The other two are the Upper East Region and the Upper West Region. Together these three regions are termed Northern Ghana. The Northern Region shares boundaries with the Upper East Region and Upper West Region in the north and Brong-Ahafo Region and the Volta Region to the south. The Black Volta and the White Volta rivers together with their tributaries drain the area.

In the colonial times, the Northern Region together with the Upper East Region and Upper West Region constituted the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Colony and was administered by a Chief Commissioner who was responsible to the Governor of the Gold Coast Colony for its administration. Before 1898, colonial rule in Ghana was

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limited to the coastal area known as the Gold Coast Colony (or the Colony) and Ashanti. Ashanti domination of trade in the northern region prevented direct access to the area. The conquest of Ashanti at the dawn of the twentieth century opened the way to the North. Earlier in the nineteenth century, George Ekem Ferguson made treaties with chiefs in the Northern Region for trade purposes (see Roger Thomas 1972). The Northern Territories was administered as part of the Gold Coast Colony, and in 1901 became a separate administrative unit from the Colony and Ashanti. The limits of the Northern Territories were defined in Her Majesty's Order in Council of 1901, and it became a British protectorate. In 1957, the Gold Coast gained independence from British rule and the Northern Territories became the Northern Region of Ghana with its capital at Tamale. In 1960, a separate Upper Region was carved from the Northern Region with Bolgatanga as its capital, and in 1983 the Upper Region was further divided into the Upper East and the Upper West regions with their capitals at Bolgatanga and Wa, respectively. This case study is located in the Northern Region of Ghana (see map).

#### **3.2.1 Population and ethnic composition of the Northern Region**

The Northern Region of Ghana covers an area of 70,383 square kilometers with a population of about 1.82 million, scattered over 3,000 villages and towns. The population of the region represents 9.6% of the country's population. The region has the largest land area in the country and is sparsely populated. Migrations, slave raiding, and erratic rainfall patterns have contributed to the variations in population levels over time.

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There are seventeen major cultural (ethnic/tribal) groups in the Northern Region,<sup>9</sup> divided between chiefly and non-chiefly tribes.<sup>10</sup> Four of the chiefly tribes, Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprusi, and Nanumba claim descent from warrior immigrant groups that invaded the area and imposed their rule over the indigenous peoples. The general myth is that a band of invaders imposed their rule and political institutions on the indigenous populations and in some cases killed the local Earth shrine priest, the *Tindana*, or allowed him to carry on with his sacred duties while the invader chiefs became the secular rulers. These invaders were of two different origins. From the northeast came the Mossi, Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba, who claim a common recent ancestor in Naa Gbewa and a more remote ancestor in the mythical Tohajeye (Red Hunter)<sup>11</sup>. The second group came from the northwest in the seventeenth century, conquered the indigenous people, intermarried, and settled among them. Their founding father Ndewura Jakpa<sup>12</sup> expanded his kingdom by conquering neighboring villages and appointed his sons and relatives as divisional chiefs (Cardinal 1920, Rattray 1932, Levtzion 1968, Ladouceur 1979). As Rattray has noted, these invading groups were travelling as wandering soldiers of fortune and not as the migration of a tribe. Today these chiefly ethnic groups claim ownership of all the land in the region based on conquest. There is no historical evidence of specific wars in which the chiefly tribes were victorious over the non-chiefly tribes and thereby

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9 These groups lay claim to having origins in this Region. There are many other residents from groups outside the Region.

10 The chiefly/non-chiefly distinction is a colonial invention in which cultural communities were defined in relation to the perceived system of leadership. Groups with a centralized system of leadership were described as chiefly groups and those with a diffused system of leadership described as non-chiefly.

11 Naa Gbewa and Tohajeye are mythical figures representing the ancestors of these chiefly tribes.

12 Nde Wura Jakpa is the legendary warrior king who represents the founding father of the Gonja cultural group (tribe).



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taking over the land by conquest. Interestingly, the British in 1887 claimed ownership of wastelands in the Gold Coast colony based on conquest. The chiefs challenged the British government to show proof of the war in which they conquered the land (see Metcalfe 1964).

The non-chiefly ethnic groups claim to be the indigenous people of the land based on the myth of “first settlers on the land.” These groups locate their origins in the myth of the first family that settled on the land and established a relationship with the gods of the land. According to Carol Lentz (2006):

The first-comers are believed to have established a special relationship with the spirits of the land, often symbolized by shrines at which regular sacrifices are offered in order to ensure the fertility of the land and the well being of the community. First-comers and their descendants distributed land to later immigrants, they grant the right to build houses and bury the dead, and often still mediate in conflicts over land boundaries and land use (Lentz 2006, p. 8).

The myth of the first-comers and the office of the *Tindana* are the basis of the claims of non-chiefly ethnic groups to ownership of land. The chiefly ethnic groups legitimize their claims to traditional authority, power and control of land with the myth of conquest and domination of the indigenous tribes.

Besides the chiefly and non-chiefly ethnic groups, the Northern Region is also home to people from the different ethnic groups in the country. These people are either civil servants, farmers, or business people.

The chiefly/non-chiefly distinctions notwithstanding, the ethnic groupings in the

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Northern Region are fairly homogenous linguistically. They have a uniform traditional religion, and a social organization based on age and patriarchy (Cardinal 1920, Rattray 1932, Fortes 1940), and similar means of production (Goody 1967). This raises the question whether some of these tribal distinctions are boundaries deliberately created and legitimized through the myths of origins?

#### **3.2.2 Political structures in the Northern Region**

The Northern Region has three systems of political administration: the modern state system, the chieftaincy institution (traditional authority), and Earth shrine priest (*Tindana*) system. The modern system comprises the regional administration, with the regional minister as head of central government business appointed by the president of Ghana. Also part of the modern system of governance are twenty municipal and district assemblies with district chief executives (MCEs and DCEs) as heads of government nominated by the president and approved by the district assembly members.

The traditional authority system comprises five paramountcies, also known as traditional areas. The paramount chief is the head of the traditional area and the traditional council. Under the paramount chiefs are divisional chiefs and village chiefs. The paramountcies correspond to the five chiefly tribes: Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprussi, Nanumba, and, recently, the Moo.

A third, often not acknowledged, traditional authority system is the office of the *Tindana*. This office is often depicted as a religious office, however, before the arrival of

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chiefs, local governance centered on family heads, clan heads and the *Tindana*.<sup>13</sup> The *Tindana* played a significant economic, social, and political role in the community in addition to his ritual role. Cardinall (1920) attests to the multiple roles the *Tindana* assumed in the community. The *Tindana*, Cardinall (1920, p. 25-26) writes:

Has many other duties besides allocating land. He selects and marks out sites of new compounds; arranges for the annual sacrifices; introduces the new chiefs to the Earth-god; is the chief peacemaker when war breaks out; orders the sacrifices when blood is on the ground or vile offences such as incest (i.e., adultery with a female of too close a consanguinity or marriage connection) pollute the soil; appoints the day when the new crop may be eaten generally by the community at large ... in short, regulate all matters touching on his deity.

The office of the *Tindana* did not change with the arrival of the chiefs. The *Tindana* and his community welcomed and accepted the chiefly people. Skalnik (1987) contends that the emergence of the common ethnic group Nanumba is based on a politico-ritual pact between the *Tindana* and the chief, the former accepting the chiefly people with their institution of chieftaincy on condition that the *Tindana* sanctioned the election of a new chief. The chief of Mampurugu is selected and enskinned<sup>14</sup> by three senior *Tindanas*, *Gambarana*, *Sagadugunaba* and the *Bokunaba* (Davis 1987, p. 633). The Dagombas killed off most of the *Tindanas* (Lance 1995) and the Gonjas have a

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13 The *Tindana* comes from the first family to settle on the land. He is usually the oldest male in the family or clan.

14 The sits on a pack of animal hides (skins) as the symbol of his throne and the authority of the ancestor chiefs who have gone before him. To be enskinned means to be enthroned. In the south of Ghana the “stool” is the symbol of authority.

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respectful relationship with their *Tindanas*. James Merriman Lance is of the opinion that:

The autochthonous peoples already possessed the prerequisites for state formation; a capacity to produce food surplus and a ruling stratum of the *Tindanas* who could expropriate these surpluses ... besides, the warrior groups were not strong enough to conquer the people. Princes who could not get chieftaincy would go around fighting the local people with the hope of getting enough supporters to acquire chieftaincy in a village (Lance 1995, p. 46).

The office of the *Tindana* was suppressed during the colonial rule as the colonial administration had already developed a system of “native governance” through the chiefs in the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti. The State divestiture of land in 1979 encouraged competition between customary authorities that resulted in the revival of the office of the *Tindana* (Lund 2008).

These three political structures are competing for power and legitimacy in the Northern Region, especially in the area of land and property rights. Most of the traditional areas span several local government jurisdictions (District Assemblies). The territorial jurisdiction of the Gonja paramount chief covers five District Assemblies. Administration of justice, allocation of national resources and political offices tend to generate conflict, because the guidelines regarding the areas of operation and limits of the power of each political structure are not effectively enforced. The siting of physical structures always generates conflicts around where the structure should be located and over who has the authority to grant rights to the land and enjoy the benefits accruing from the land. Payment of royalties for the use of the land generates conflicts between the

chief, the *Tindana*, and the families claiming ownership of the land. There is a national land policy in Ghana and the Ministry of Lands and Forestry is the government institution responsible for enforcing land rights. However, this institution is not very effective and often is a source of conflict because the multiple authorities<sup>15</sup> involved in land administration have different legal regimes (customary laws) regarding land and property rights.

### **3.2.3 Socio-economic (under) development in the Northern Region**

Ghana's economy has grown significantly in the past decade. The country is well endowed with natural resources,<sup>16</sup> and agriculture accounts for a quarter of gross domestic product. Ghana's Northern Region has largely been excluded from the broader trend of economic progress and falls short of almost all the indicators for economic and human development. The geographical location of the region (far from the sea ports) and climatic conditions such as arid land and erratic rainfall patterns has contributed to the poverty of the Northern Region. The disparity in social and economic development between the north and the south, Naameh (1993) maintains, may be attributed to policies of the colonial administration designed to prevent development in the north in order to conserve it as a source of cheap labor for the exploitation of the more naturally endowed south.

The first commissioner and commandant of the Northern Territories (N.T.s),

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15 The Ministry of Lands and Forestry, the chieftaincy institution, the *Tindanas*, families and individuals who own land are authorities involved in the land administration. Each of these institutions has a role in land and property rights. In some traditional areas the land may be sold but the commercial trees or water bodies on the land belongs to the chief, *Tindana* or the family that sold the land.

16 Ghana has minerals such as gold, diamond, bauxite. The country is also rich in cocoa, timber and oil.

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Lieutenant Colonel H.P. Northcott, planned to administer the area with its own currency and stamps and a program of development that would require direct cooperation and funding from the imperial government. Lord Salisbury had warned that, “If the N.T.s are simply tacked on to the Gold Coast, goodbye to all chances of development. No Governor will ever go near them (and) not a sixpence will be devoted to their development except by the direct orders of the secretary of state,” (Bening 1975, p. 66). Northcott died in 1899 and the colonial office decided to administer the N.T.s as a division of the Gold Coast Protectorate under a resident commissioner.

The death of Northcott reversed the fortunes of the territories in terms of development. By the turn of the century, a consensus had emerged among policy makers that the N.T.s were lacking in natural resources and that it was a waste of money to invest in them (Metcalf 1964, p. 546). Expenditure in the Protectorate was to be confined to the smallest amount consistent with the maintenance of British rights until the value of the territories was more fully ascertained. Speaking to the legislative council in 1913, Sir Hugh Clifford more or less defined the colonial policy regarding the development of the N.T.s when he argued that due to the lack of the population and natural resources:

In this matter (development), the N.T.s must be content to await its turn. At the present time, many of the richest and most developed districts of the colony and of Ashanti are still without any efficient means of transporting their produce to the coast; and it is not until these districts have been opened up by railway extension, that the provision of similar facilities for the N.T.s can be regarded as a question of practical politics ... The government of the colony must contend

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for years ... to recognize the N.T.s as a direct and unremunerated source of expenditure (Metcalf 1964, p. 546).

In the view of Sir Hugh Clifford, British occupation of the north was a great humanitarian service to the area since it rescued “a population of over 360,000 people ... from the tyranny of slave raiders, from the horrors of frequent inter-tribal conflicts, and from the miseries and privations which these things were wont to bring in their train” (Metcalf 1964, p. 546). Effectively, the colonial policy in the north prevented direct foreign capital investment in the development of the north, terminated and redirected trade relations between the north and its western Sudanese partners to the south, and forcibly integrated the north into the emerging capitalist economy of the south as the supplier of migrant labor (Plange 1979). The desire to isolate the north led also to a delay in the opening of secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. Whereas the Wesleyans had established in the south a secondary school for boys in 1876 (Mfantsipim school) and one for girls (Wesley Girls) in 1884, the first secondary school in the north was not opened until 1951. At independence in 1957, the entire north of Ghana had only one university graduate, while the south could boast of graduates of several professions; lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc. Government education was aimed at training the children of chiefs to prepare them for future leadership roles. The impact of this skewed development affected the distribution of national resources in general and politics in particular as the few emerging political elites manipulated tradition, culture and custom for political gains.

In preparation for independence, the question arose of the representation of the

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north in the newly formed National Assembly and some of the northern chiefs lobbied for chiefs to represent the people of the north in the National Assembly. J. A. Braimah, a Gonja chief, argued:

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

Was J.A. Braimah referring to all the tribal groups in Gonjaland when he said “representatives of our people” or that was just political talk?

Similarly, the Dagomba politician, J. H. Allassani arguing in favor of the Ewart Committee’s<sup>17</sup> recommendations said that:

The relationship between chief and people has been one of father and children. Nothing has so far happened yet to mar this relationship 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.

Yakubu Tali, another Dagomba politician noted:

No chief in the Northern Territory 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

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17 A Select Committee of the Legislative Council, under the chairmanship of Kenneth Ewart with the responsibility to delineate constituencies and establish voting procedures in preparation for independence.



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surrendering of part of their power to the common man only for it to be snatched away from him by an outside agent.

The few educated elite from the chiefly groups took advantage of the emerging political dispensation to strengthen their position and power as they claimed to represent the people of the Northern Region.

At independence, the lack of education and of political awareness and astuteness among northern politicians limited their capacity to leverage their power in the national distribution of resources. A budget allocation of 10 million pounds for the construction of the Northern Territories railways was cancelled and replaced with the hard surfacing of the Kumasi-Bolgatanga road at the cost of 2.5 million pounds. Likewise most of the budget allocations for development in the north were reduced and the left over funds transferred to the south.

Naameh (1993) attributes the relative neglect of the north during the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) regime to northern political weakness. He argues that northern politicians did not receive an education that equipped them to deal with southern politicians such as J.B. Danquah, K. A. Busia and Kwame Nkrumah on the national stage. Northern politicians could therefore not exert any influence on central government nor make substantial political use of issues like the drift of northern labor to the benefit of the south. In general, “northerners played a minor and marginal role and had little influence in central government policies” (Ladouceur 1973, pp. 167-68). No northerner was in fact a part of the inner circle of the government. This political weakness was further compounded by the fragmentation of the northern solidarity built up before the

1950s. The lack of a comprehensive socio-economic development of the Northern Region impacts conflicts today in many ways.

### **3.2.4 Religion in the Northern Region**

The Northern Region of Ghana is often mischaracterized as a Muslim dominated area. Muslims are 56.2%, Earth shrine worship (African traditional religion) 21.3% and Christians 19.3%. People of the chiefly tribes tend to be Muslims, and those from the non-chiefly tribes mainly adhere to African traditional religion and Christianity. Other than intra-religious skirmishes, over all there is a peaceful relationship between the various religious groups. Christianity has often been blamed for bringing development to people and “opening their eyes” to demand their rights. This is because the Christian churches invested in education, health and the general social development of the communities where they ministered. Most of the converts to the Christian faith came from the non-chiefly ethnic groups.

### **3.3 SOCIAL IDENTITY BASED PROTRACTED SOCIAL CONFLICTS IN THE REGION**

Between 1980 and 2002, the northern region of Ghana recorded seventeen violent inter-communal conflicts, relating to ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land (Pul 2003, p. 1). Between 2002 and 2009, an additional nine conflicts brought the total number to thirty six. In 1994, Ghana experienced the most destructive inter-group violence in its history. The entire northern region was swept by the violence, which left over 2,000 people dead; 200,000 internally displaced; and 442 villages and settlements destroyed. Public property,

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such as schools, clinics and government buildings, was destroyed. People were physically and emotionally wounded. The violence, destruction, and human suffering of that conflict has drastically changed the power relations in the region. These conflicts are within the context of the campaign in the 1970s by some northern elites, enlightened chiefs, and intellectuals for the divestiture of northern lands from the state to the traditional owners. A committee to investigate the possibilities of divesting the land was set up headed by Roland Issifu Alhassan (the Alhassan Committee) in 1978. The recommendations of the committee were incorporated in the 1979 Constitution and the lands of the Northern and Upper Regions were divested from the state and vested “in any such person or in the appropriate skin without further assurance than this clause” (Constitution of Ghana 1979, Article 18 Clause 3: see Lund 2008, pp. 47-67). A second event that gives context to the conflicts in the northern region was the military coup d’état of Flight Lieutenant John Jerry Rawlings and his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) that promoted a “peoples revolution movement.” The main thrust of their message was that people dealing with the public in whatever capacity, are subject to popular supervision, must abide by fundamental notions of probity and have an obligation to put the good of the community above personal objective. The chieftaincy institution came under public scrutiny and chiefly claims to power and land were openly contested.

#### **3.3.1 Causes of the conflicts**

Several scholars have researched the causes of the conflicts in the Northern Region, especially after the 1994 conflict. This scholarly research all points to three areas as the

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sources of conflict: power and authority, land and property rights, and the politics of belonging. On power and authority, most of the research has focused on State and traditional (chieftaincy) power and authority, rather than on examining the processes of public authority formation. For instance, how does an institution or a group of people come to exercise power and authority, and how is their authority received, negotiated and implemented? How is a process of governance eventually institutionalized and formalized as an institution of power and authority?

#### **3.3.1.1 *power and authority***

On power and authority, most of the research focused on the relationship between the colonial regime and the chieftaincy institution as the basis for the claims of the chieftaincy institution as “the traditional authority” and custodian of customary law. The conflicts are perceived as the result of some of the non-chiefly groups contesting these claims to traditional authority by the chiefly groups. The first extensive scholarly research aimed at understanding the conflicts in the region was Justice Katanga’s (1994) “historical and ethnographical study of the factors leading to the conflicts.” Confronted with “the blizzard of inaccurate statements, half-truths and down-right lies generated and circulated in the media concerning the groups involved in the conflicts of 1981 and 1994” (p. 1), Katanga endeavored to set the record straight. Exploring the historical and ethnographical factors leading to the conflicts, Katanga observed that conflicts in the Northern Region were among other things the result of the colonial invention of chieftaincy, especially as vested in a few tribes. This he described as a new and more oppressive form of slavery.

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Bogner (2000) attributes the proximate cause of the conflict of 1994 to the quest of the non-chiefly groups to have their own chiefs. The issue of contention, in Bogner's view, was "whether the most prominent chief among the Konkomba<sup>18</sup> was entitled the status of an independent 'paramount chief' with autonomous land rights, or whether he remains hierarchically subordinate to the Dagomba King, the Ya Na"<sup>19</sup> (Bogner 2000, p. 187). Bogner (2000) blames the conflict on the quasi-feudalistic and, at times, discriminatory relations between the chiefs of the majority tribes<sup>20</sup> and the rural Konkombas and the scarcity of land due to population growth (p. 195).

Pul (2003) is of the opinion that the sources of the conflicts are the denial of political rights of self-rule to recognizable groups under the traditional system of governance, the demands by excluded groups for participation in the traditional institutions of governance and the resistance of the majority<sup>21</sup> groups to those demands.

Pul (2003) writes:

The predisposition 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

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18 In June 1993, the Konkombas petitioned the national house of chiefs for the creation of an autonomous chiefdom for the Konkombas.

19 The Ya Na lays claim to the highest traditional authority and ownership of all land in the "homeland" of the Ghanaian Konkombas.

20 The term "majority tribes" is used for the chiefly tribes and has no relations to population statistics. Some minority (non-chiefly) tribes are numerically more than the so-called majority tribes.

21 The term "majority groups" refers to the chiefly tribes and minority groups to the "non-chiefly groups." Katanga (1994) has demonstrated that some of the so-called minority groups are actually in the majority, population wise.

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the conflicts is compromised when ethnic elites in 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. The presence of all three factors in a locality increases the incidence of violence more than any one of the factors can do alone (Pul 2003, p. viii).

Kantaga (1994), Bogner (2000) and Pul (2003) draw our attention to the centrality of traditional authority and property rights, emphasizing the fact that exclusion from rights and entitlements generates conflict. Exploring the understanding of the people about who they are as a people and their conceptions of power and legitimacy may shed some light on why such exclusionary tactics can have devastating consequences, and what can be done to mitigate them.

Other scholars are of the opinion that the mix of State authority and traditional authority is the source of the conflicts. Talton (2010) sees the conflict as the result of “democracy confronting entrenched political privilege born from custom and tradition” (p. 191). Talton rejects the simplistic explanation that ethnicity is the cause of the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. He examines the influence of tradition, ethnicity, and local power on political consciousness and notions of belonging. Talton (2003) observes that “British colonial rule made chieftaincy essential for a group to assert local and regional power. Chieftaincy became the primary symbol of political currency and a tool of political authority over the non-chiefly groups” (pp. 4-5). The conflict is the result of a new political consciousness that challenges this claim to political authority.

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Jönsson (2007) and Stacey (2009) argue that the overlap in powers between traditional authority and state political authority makes direct competition over access to chieftaincy structures important to the conflicts. Paul Stacey (2009) attributes the recurring conflicts in northern Ghana to the interactions between the traditional and modern political spheres, between chiefs and the state. He contends that in the process, chiefs have used their access to the modern state to reproduce a separate, protected traditional sphere, on which the modern sphere is dependent. He describes the interaction as “a gelling together of essentially diametrically opposed forces” (p. 111).

The two forces need not be diametrically opposed and in conflict. They can complement each other if their roles are clearly defined. Traditional authority has a place in a modern democratic State; however, the chieftaincy institution must be recognized for what it is, a public authority vying with other public authorities for legitimacy, land, and property rights.

According to MacGaffey (2006) the conflicts in the northern region of Ghana are symptomatic of the “inherent political and cultural tensions in plural societies in which two or more social systems, or institutional sets, are incorporated in a political framework dominated by one of them” (p. 80). In such situations, MacGaffey contends, “the norms, practices, and values of one social system are often radically incompatible with those of the other and people tend to manipulate the values and structures of one system in order to gain advantage in the other, while simultaneously deploring this tendency in others” (p. 80).

The privileging of State and traditional authority to the neglect of the other

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institutions of authority and legal regimes in the Northern Region obscures the inherent conflict generating nature of public authority formation in a pluralistic society. The tribal groups in the region have their legal regimes (norms, beliefs, taboos, ideas, and agendas) vying for public recognition. A public authority in this context is in the words of Sally Falk Moore (1978) a semi-autonomous social field with the capacity to generate rules and customs and symbols internally, but also vulnerable to rules and forces emanating from the larger world which surrounds it (Moore 1978, p. 55). The semi-autonomous social field can establish institutions and induce or coerce compliance with them (Lund 2008). A social field is usually created in response to an issue of concern, property, land, or authority, etc. A social field becomes a process of governance that is eventually institutionalized and formalized into a public authority legitimized through voluntary compliance (Moore 1978, pp. 54-81, in Lund 2008, p. 6). In the Northern Region, several of these social institutions exist: family, clan, tribe, community, government officials, chiefs, *Tindanas*, youth associations, warriors, etc. These social institutions all exercise competing public authority creating multiple parallel structures and alternative centers of authority. Such plurality of institutions produces ambiguous practical meaning of customary law and property rights. Public authority then is created through day-to-day social encounters and is vindicated and legitimated or de-legitimated through a broad array of political practices (see Lund 2008, pp. 6-11). The colonial administration interrupted this process of public authority creation and imposed chiefs as “the traditional public authority” with the right to generate rules and to enforce compliance. As Moore (1978) has noted, this public authority is vulnerable to rules and forces from the larger



world which surrounds it. The formation of the post-independence state and the introduction of the local governance structures exposed the vulnerability of the chieftaincy institution as the “traditional authority” in the Northern Region.

Power and authority goes beyond State and traditional authority. Understanding the different “centers” of public authority helps us understand the relationship between authority and property rights, belonging and legitimacy.

### ***3.3.1.2 land and property rights***

Most of the conflicts are over land and property rights. A property right according to Bates (1983) is the power to limit the ability of other persons to enjoy the benefits to be secured from the use and enjoyment of a material good. Struggles over property are as much about the scope and constitution of authority as they are about access to resources. Lund (2008) has argued that institutional and normative plurality means not only that people struggle and compete over access to land, but that the legitimate authority to settle land disputes is also at stake.

Katanga (1994) attributes the conflicts in the Northern Region, among other things, to the bid by the chiefly and non-chiefly tribes for the title of “landowner,” understood in the new sense of owner of private property (p. 26). According to Justice Katanga the chiefly groups make their claims to land ownership based on historical conquest followed by traditional suzerainty even in the post-colonial era, while the non-chiefly groups base their claims on numbers, residence, and use of the land. Katanga’s work provides historical and ethnographical information which is very important for

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understanding how the historical legacies of colonial rule, and the power struggles and legislative changes during and after the colonial period, etc., impacted the local dynamics of politics, property rights, and social identities. This historical background is also important because local actors construct historical interpretations to back certain claims to power, property, and identity (Lund 2008). History gives us the context, but does not explain the processes of forming public authority, which is when an institution or a group of actors try to define and to enforce collectively binding decisions and rules. History does not explain the processes involved in the formation of property rights. Understanding how public authority is created in the day-to-day social encounters, how it is legitimated and vindicated through political practices can explain the political dynamics of public authority and property rights.

Weiss is of the opinion that the contested historical and geographical narratives, succession disputes, contested land ownership, and religious conflicts in northern Ghana are “significant signs of societal changes. They are not mere episodes of the political landscape of the northern region, they are part of an unstable political-economic structure ... the politicization of history (time) and geography (space)” (Weiss 2005, p. 1). Weiss (2005) asserts that poverty in northern Ghana is the result of power relations in which some groups have more influence and access to political power. The conflicts over land ownership are the result of the:

Politicization of geography blended with different narratives of the historical past. One group claims a certain area as their own by referring to a past as conquerors, warriors and rulers over subjects, another disputes such a claim and

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argues that the claimant never controlled or ruled an area or that land has been taken away from them in the first place. History has emerged as a legitimizing narrative and is used as a political ideology (p. 17).

Weiss (2005) draws our attention to the side-by-side existence of several stories or versions of history and notes that some versions were more visible and louder than others, especially the versions of the tribes in power. The versions of history were those of:

1. The colonial, taken over by the post-colonial state.
2. The Muslim scholars.
3. Local storytellers/historians (Lunse and griots).
4. The elders.
5. Those whose voices were not heard in the community.

In a pluralistic society such as pertains in the Northern Region, legal pluralism is a social reality that must be taken into account when explaining the sources of the conflicts.

Chieftaincy, land, and ethnicity capture the dynamics of the politics of public authority, the politics of property rights, and the politics of belonging. These three are intimately linked. As Christian Lund (2008) has rightly noted, “of all the issues in African local politics, land remains the most prominent one. Questions of access to land and control over landed property can quickly mobilize, individuals and groups” (pp. 9-10). Claims to land are fashioned around social identities from the household to the societal level and are linked to authority in particular ways (Lund 2008, Lentz 2007). Institutional and normative plurality means that people are not only struggling and competing over access to land, but that the legitimate authority to settle land disputes is

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equally in question and at stake. Struggles over land are as much about the scope and constitution of authority as they are about access to resources. Christian Lund explains that property is about recognition by others through enforcement of property rights:

Property is property only if socially legitimate institutions sanction it, and the institutions are effectively legitimate only if their interpretations of social norms (in this case property rights) are heeded ... the many rules relating to interest in land and other resources and the plurality of institutions of public authority turn the process of recognition into a political process of competition and negotiation .... The relationship between property and authority is a social, political and legal construction, maintained and challenged through active and contested reproduction of property relations (Lund 2008, p. 11).

The national land policy in Ghana recognizes two types of land ownership: public or state lands and private lands. Public or state lands are lands compulsorily acquired by the government through the invocation of the appropriate legislation, vested in the President and held in trust by the State for the entire people of Ghana. Private lands are in communal ownership, held in trust for the community or group by the traditional authority. There are also private lands owned by families, clans and individuals. In the Northern Region, however, all communal lands are vested in the chief who holds the lands in trust for his people. This legal stipulation ignores the multiple sites of authority over land rights, the family, clan and *Tindana* and denies a majority of the population land rights. Traditional authority, the right to allocate land user rights (land ownership), and belonging become areas of contestation. These conflicts therefore represent the

challenges of finding structural solutions for linkages between and mutual co-existence of multiple legal systems within one geographical area.

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### **3.3.1.3 *politics of belonging***

Ethnic divisions and ethnic hatred are one of the reasons given for the conflicts in the Northern Region. According to Katanga (1994), the conflicts reflected the search for a new identity, a transition from a “slave-master” perception among tribal groups to an acknowledgement of a common Ghanaian identity (p. 27). In Talton’s (2010) view, historically marginalized communities in the Northern Region have defined and redefined themselves to protect their interests and compete with neighboring ethnic groups politically and economically. The conflicts are about local communities redefining power, tradition and belonging. Talton (2010, p. 1) writes:

For Konkomba, the 1981 conflict was the culmination of a dramatic process of social change out of which they emerged with a strong sense of Konkomba as a political community that possessed common social, political, and economic interests. The unity they exhibited reflected the extent to which their political identity had evolved to exhibit the effective glue of a community of belonging

The above research works indicate that the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana are a result of the contestation of public authority, property (land) rights, and social identity. Researchers have, however, focused on the State and the chieftaincy institution as the two public authorities competing for legitimacy, to the neglect of the other existing public authorities. These two public authorities have two different legal systems,

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state law and customary law, and two systems of social identity: national and ethnic. The challenge in this approach is that the different types of traditional authorities, customary laws, and meaning of social identity in a multi-ethnic environment are competing with each other and with the State. The chieftaincy institution is facing a crisis of legitimacy as its claims to power and authority are contested especially in the area of land management.

Manfred Hinz (2006) coined the expression “the dilemma of the new African Constitutionalism” to describe the challenges of commingling the traditional with constitutional order. The challenge in commingling two distinct power structures, with their respective legal and social identity systems, in one national constitution, is how to manage the contradictions such a combination may entail. The post-colonial independent modern state based on a democratic constitution locates its power in civil society. The “people” are citizens with equal rights and rights of freedom guaranteed by the constitution. The citizens decide the kind of leadership they want by exercising their power through their vote. The state has the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its orders. The post-colonial “traditional state,” that is, the “chieftaincy” institution however, is based on perceived primordial indigenous communities with a well-structured system of leadership steeped in tradition and culture. The “people” are subjects, not citizens, and the focus of the power system is the defense of “culture” (Mamdani 1996). Leadership is hereditary, hierarchical, and autocratic.

Besides tribal groups in the Northern Region have their own culture, traditions and customs. Customary law seems to indicate a universal, coherent traditional law, which is in reality non-existent because of the pluralism of legal orders. Every ethnic

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group has its norms, beliefs and values. Legal pluralism, according to John Griffiths (1986), is “that state of affairs for any social field in which behavior pursuant is to more than one legal order.” Griffiths contrasts legal pluralism with legal centralism in which the “law is and should be the law of the state, uniform for all persons, exclusive of all other law, and administered by a single set of state institutions” (Griffiths 1986, p. 3).

The historical legacies of colonial rule, power struggles, and legislative changes after independence impinged on local dynamics of property and politics and privileged the chieftaincy institution over other institutions. These historical legacies are part of the idioms and logics of local contestation and people tend to conjure up historical interpretations to back certain claims to power and property. The challenge of the modern state and traditional authorities is how to manage the contradictions of legal centralism in an environment of legal pluralism. Historical analysis is important for understanding the levels of context of these conflicts.

#### **3.4 HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHICAL FACTORS LEADING TO THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF CHIEFLY AND NON-CHIEFLY BOUNDARIES IN THE NORTHERN REGION**

To shed some light on the complicated historical, cultural and contemporary politico-economic dimensions of the conflicts in the region, this section explores the origins, development and maintenance of the chiefly/non-chiefly boundaries in the Northern Region. Exploring ethnographical data and colonial administration documents on policies of native administration, development, and the land tenure systems in the Northern

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Region of Ghana will provide some information on the chiefly/non-chiefly boundary creation and the maintenance and the significance of this boundary in social identity and power dynamics in the region.

### **3.4.1 Pre-colonial social structures in the Northern Region**

The earliest writings on pre-colonial indigenous social structures in the northern region of Ghana come from colonial anthropologists, diaries of colonial administrative officers, and Muslim scholars. Ethnographers and anthropologists, such as Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1949), Rattray (1969), (1956, 1967), Lentz (2000) and Kirby (1994), all point to two indigenous central building blocks of traditional societies. They are the family, *yir/yili*, which is interpreted as house, local kinship group or patriclan, and the territorial division of land – *tengan*, and earth shrine parish. A third, chieftaincy, or *naam*, emerged later. At the dawn of the colonial administration around early 19<sup>th</sup> century, groups self-identified around family, ritual parish (land and Earth shrine) and chieftaincy.

#### **3.4.1.1 *family/clan head***

The head of the family (*yir*), the oldest male in the family, is known as the “owner of the house” (*yirsob, yililana, yidaana*). The *yidaana* is the leader of the household with the primary function to regulate and control relationships and social behavior within the family. He maintains the unity and identity of the family, represents his family in the community, and is responsible for all the ritual ceremonies in the family. The *yidaana* administers the family with moral and ritual authority. The basic social identity group



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with which people self-identify is the family of about five generations (Goody 1967). Settlements are made up of families, which Jack Goody describes as descent groups (lineage). A family or decent group consists of a “group of agnatic descendants of one man, relatively undifferentiated in corporate action, known as a ‘room’ (*di*),<sup>22</sup> a lineage,” that is, “all the descendants in the male line of the remotest common patrilineal ancestor known to the members of the lineage” (Goody 1967, p. 65). To this agnatic core of the village are added other family members with ties of common ancestry (cognatic) by marriage (affinal). Goody calls this group the patrilineal group (Goody 1967, Rattray 1932). The clan is a dispersed group of people claiming a common descent. Clan members speak of themselves as belonging to the same “house” and may be dispersed over several settlements. (Goody 1967 p. 70). This first form of social identity is the family nucleus and extended family. Family land disputes, droughts, and the quest for fertile lands, compelled some families to migrate. Families migrated together as a group or split up and migrated in separate directions. Where a group of families settled on the same piece of land, they formed a village community with the eldest of the first family to settle on the land as the ritual head, the *Tindana*. Each family head maintained his autonomy and together with the *Tindana* formed a council of elders to manage the affairs of the village. This system of leadership was perceived by early anthropologists and the colonial regime as a lack of a governance system because it was not centralized.

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22 The distinction between “room” (*di*) and “house” (*yir*) is the respective equivalent of nucleus family and an extended family.

**3.4.1.2 Tindana (earth-shrine priest)**

The second level of social identification is by the ritual area associated with a particular Earth shrine. Both the shrine and ritual area are known as *Tengan* and the priest *Tindana*. The first family to settle on a piece of land established a relationship with the gods of the land. The land and the Earth shrine form a “ritual parish,” a temporary dwelling for the sojourners. The Greek term for “parish,” – *paroikia* ‘sojourning,’ from *para* ‘besides’ or ‘subsidiary’ or ‘around’ plus *oikos* ‘dwelling’ – better captures the migratory nature of the people and the temporal nature of the settlements and their relationship with the land. The land belongs to the Earth shrine; no land exists that does not belong to a shrine (Goody 1967, p. 91). People did not self-identify with the land; they used the land for their livelihood and moved on when the land was no longer serving them.

From the records of early anthropologists, there seem to be no indication of categorical distinctions by territory or by tribe. There were cultural and linguistic communities who distinguished themselves first by descent and then by settlement. Distinctions were made by mode of inheritance, taboos, and ways of burying the dead, etc. Complex and subtle distinctions were made between settlements, which were not related in anyway to tribe (Goody 1967). Fortes (1940) in his study of the Tellensi found no tribal unity and no fixed territorial boundaries. The parish (or ritual area) was the main identifiable unit and usually comprised a settlement (named area of habitation). It is the settlements that are constitutive of societies and not language or territorial boundaries. Social hierarchies are based on age and gender. The oldest male in the family is the family head, and he controls the means of production and distribution, and takes care of

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the ritual ceremonies of the family. If his family was the first to settle on the land, he became the *Tindana*. He interceded on behalf of the people for rain, and after a good harvest offered sacrifices of thanksgiving to the land. He was in charge of all uncultivated lands, knew the boundaries of the land, and gave land to people to farm or build. The farmers in turn gave gifts (grain, meat and beer) to the *Tindana*. The land is never sold; it is leased out to the farmer for use. The day the farmer no longer needs the land it reverts to the *Tindana*. “Prior to each season of cultivation, the Earth priest must propitiate the land and sacrifice to the gods, and it is also he who must appease the gods in the event of sacrileges committed against the Earth” (Kasanga 1996, p. 8 ). Spilling human blood on the land is considered a sacrilege. The annual tithe paid to the *Tindana* (a basket of millet) is exchanged for a sheep or cow to sacrifice to the Earth-god with all the people attending.

The *Tindana* therefore gradually becomes what is to all intents and purposes a high-priest. He is between the people and their local deity; he is on behalf of the latter the caretaker of the land, for he alone can propitiate the earth when blood is wantonly shed or vile crime pollutes the purity of the life-giving soil (Cardinal 1920, p. 60).

As the closely-knit family societies expanded in the settlements and other communities joined the original settlers, group-based hierarchies began to emerge. The first settlers became the dominant group and the new immigrants the subordinate group. The office of the *Tindana* slowly emerged from a ritual function of the oldest male in the family to a position of centralized economic, social, political and religious leadership of the

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community. This new position of the *Tindana* is what the historians and anthropologists have documented. Cardinall writes, the *Tindana*:

has many other duties besides allocating land. He selects and marks out the sites of new compounds; arranges for the annual sacrifices; introduces the new Chiefs to the Earth-god; is the chief peacemaker when war breaks out; orders the sacrifices when blood is on the ground or vile offences such as incest (i.e., adultery with a female of too close a consanguinity or marriage connection) pollute the soil; appoints the day when the new crop may be eaten generally by the community at large, ... in short, regulate all matters touching his deity (Cardinall 1920, pp. 25-26).

The office of the *Tindana* also becomes the legitimizing ideology for the dominant group in the settlement and a basis for their claim to economic and socio-political power. The ritual power gives the *Tindana* control over the means of production in a community dependent on subsistence farming for their sustenance. There is however, no direct control over the means of destruction because everyone uses the bow and arrow for self-defense and for hunting. The alternative to securing this centralized power over the means of destruction is to control the social and cultural discourse.

The *Tindana* has power because of the land. He can use the land to curse people by evoking sickness, a calamity befalling the family, death or madness. In his book *The Ashanti Hinterlands*, Rattray (1969) reports his interviews on the *Tindana*:

The *Tindana* “owns” the land. “When anything happened, we all met and gave him (the *Tindana*) things to sacrifice and thus gained life and grain. The *Tindana*

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had power; when anyone refused to obey him he would strike the land and that person would die ... the land will break his compound; his fowls, goats, sheep, children, wives will die ... In the event that a *Tindana* was made a chief, he delegated the religious aspect of his duties to another. (Rattray 1969, p. 376).

Rattray notes that in Ashanti, the religious and secular functions are combined in the chief. In the Northern Region of Ghana, the *Tindana* and the chief are two distinct institutions.

The earliest information on pre-colonial social organization and power structures acknowledge the existence of a dual system of centralized leadership, the indigenous Earth shrine priests (*Tindana*) and the foreign chiefs. According to Rattray, the foreign chiefs were invading bands travelling as wandering soldiers of fortune and not as the migration of a tribe. They settled among the natives and intermarried. Rattray (1932) writes:

There was the secular ruler descended from the leader of the early warrior bands. He was recognized by every one as a kind of leader of titular head, he had a red fez and wore clothes, but really interfered hardly at all with the life or private affairs of the masses. All religious or magico-religious concerns continued to be managed and conducted by the former priestly rulers, who now, however, functioned nominally under the territorial chief. The former continued to assert his original title to be custodian and trustee of the land of his people, a claim which few, even of the most arrogant secular Chiefs ever dared to dispute (Rattray 1932, p. xv).

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The idea that a chief must have land became a new social and perspective. H.A. Blair, the most knowledgeable of British District Commissioners in the Dagomba area, had this to say about chiefs and land:

Right of control is vested in the Ya-Na (Yendi chief), for the decision of boundary dispute between Chiefs, but not for the apportionment of land outside Yendi sub-division. Similarly, sub-divisional Chiefs have no right to apportion land to persons except within their own towns ... The chief does not grant farming land to individuals. He is considered not to have any right over farms ... Tindamba or Otindaan (in Konkomba) still have power over Chiefs and are feared (Manboah-Rockson 2007, p. 12).

As Lentz (2000) has observed, boundaries were drawn within the framework of these two forms of belonging, *yir* and *tengan*. They integrated people of different dialects and languages with a minimum core of cultural commonness such as recognition of the Earth deity, the rights of the first settlers, etc. Language and culture play no central role here (Lentz 2000, p. 138).

The office of the *Tindana* gradually declined in effectiveness as colonial legislation took away from the *Tindanas* the economic and political control of the land. The Native Rights Ordinance (cap. 143) had declared that all lands in the Northern Territories, whether occupied or unoccupied, to be native lands and placed them under the control of the Governor. In the 1979 Constitution, the State divested its trusteeship over most of the lands in the Northern Region. The question of to whom these lands were to be given became acute. Christian Lund writes, “the new legal situation provided an

opportunity for reassessing the past, resettling old accounts, renegotiating ownership to land. Chiefs and earth priests (tindambas) intensified their competition over the control of the land” (Lund 2006, p. 77).

### **3.4.1.3 chiefs**

The earliest writings on chiefs from the dairies of explorers,<sup>23</sup> merchants, colonial officers, Muslim scholars (in the case of northern Ghana), and anthropologists are more descriptive of encounters with native rulers, especially Ashanti kings and kingdoms, than they are an exploration of the nature and function of chieftaincy in the Ghanaian society. The second source of literature on the chieftaincy institution comes from nationalist scholars whose writings had a political agenda. Scholars such as John Mensah Sarbah, J. E. Casely Hayford, James Africanus, Beale Houton, and Carl Reindorf wanted to demonstrate that Ghanaian kings were comparable to the kings of great societies in the past. These nationalist scholars wanted to demonstrate that Africa had great kings who could manage the affairs of their people (see Rathbone 2006). The attempts of the colonial regime at curtailing the powers of the chiefs prompted some of the educated elite to defend the original status of the chief (see the Fanti National Constitution of 1906). However, these efforts were more a push back against what was perceived as an encroachment on the powers of the chiefs by the colonial administration than a reflection of the actual power of the chiefs.

Over the years, the nationalists’ glorification of the chieftaincy institution soon

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23 Bowdich undertook a mission to Ashanti in 1817 (See Busia 1951).

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turned into feelings of contempt and opposition to the chiefs as prospects for independence came onto the horizon. The thought of chiefs taking over the administration of the country from the colonial administrators did not sit well with most of the nationalists who had political ambitions. The chiefs on their part complained about the ambitions of some of the educated elite. A petition of the Akim Abuakwa chiefs to the Governor urged that “every educated African, whether he be a lawyer, doctor, surveyor, engineer, or any other professional man, should be made to realize that he was still bound by traditional loyalties ... there is loose talk at some quarters that the educated African becomes the natural leader of the country irrespective of any other consideration” (Kimble 1963, p. 472). Government was accused of interfering with the chieftaincy institution and chiefs were accused of claiming power they did not traditionally have.

The first systematic exploration of the chieftaincy institution is Dr. K. A. Busia’s (1951) work on the position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti. This study was motivated by political problems centered on the position of the chief in the modern political system of Ashanti (Busia 1951, p. ix). Threats to the chieftaincy institution from the modern democratic state initiated among supporters of this institution a determination to legitimize the authority of chiefs by means of culture, custom, and tradition. Chieftaincy is portrayed as the traditional form of leadership, an emblem of African tradition and culture, and a true representation of an African form of democracy (Kloeck and Jenson 1999). Boafo-Arthur (2001) describes chieftaincy as an indigenous socio-political structure of governance that is later adapted in the colonial period to function at the service of indirect rule. “Pre-colonial chieftaincy,” he writes, “constituted



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the axis for the exercise of executive, legislative and judicial powers.” It has been the “embodiment of political power in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial times” (p. 1). Boafo-Arthur’s description of chiefs may apply to some extent in the southern regions of Ghana and especially Ashanti. Be that as it may, I do not believe that the traditional concept of power and the nature of the relationship between the people and their chief can be captured in these modern democratic terms. The social environment was different. Writing on conflicts in northern Ghana, Mahama (2004) reveals a political agenda when he writes, “in the past the sovereignty of Dagbon was vested in the Ya-Na. He was the Commander-In-Chief of the Dagbon Military Establishment. He was not only the head of state but also the Chief Justice. In addition he was the head of the legislative body” (p. iii).

The claims that the chieftaincy institution in Northern Ghana before the advent of colonial administration was a well-organized “traditional administrative system” hierarchically structured and functioning well, is not supported by available data. On the “Dagbon traditional state,” Staniland (1975) writes, “the capacity of the central government to control outlying centers of power was limited; the king did not have an effective monopoly of force; and the institutions of government were replicated at lower levels. The structure was ‘pyramidal’ rather than hierarchical” (p. 37). Staniland, quoting other scholars Rattray, Eyre-Smith and Manoukian, reiterates the fact that “Dagbon state” was a loose federation of semi-independent provinces. Each province had its own *Na* and the Yendi division was regarded as a kind of *primus inter pares* with its *Na* nominally *Na* over all the others (p. 37). From its inception, the Dagbon kingdom was beset with wars, external and internal. Externally, Dagbon had to contend with the Gonja and Ashanti

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threats over the Trans-Sahara trade routes. Internally, the kingdom had to contend with internal quarrels, rebellions and insurgencies, as most of the skins<sup>24</sup> were contested. Princes with no chiefdoms were a threat to internal stability. Some of the princes lived on robbery and were called *nabiyongsi*, meaning “vagabond princes.”

Writing on the Mamprussi kingdom, Schlottner describes a similar situation of a loose federation of chiefs and a kingdom beset with conflicts. Reflecting on the oral history of these kingdoms, Schlottner (2000) writes:

In short, the past as revealed in the official oral traditions of the lumsi reconstructs the history of the rulers rather than that of the segments that constituted the bulk of the population. The sovereign is the center of attention in oral data as in written sources. Furthermore, the recitation of the drummers works towards the continuity of *nam* (sic), since all events are associated with the relative chronology of the chiefs, whatever is said in such context is intended to strengthen the position and authority of the ruling dynasty (p. 54).

The chieftaincy institution in the face of threats from modernization recasts itself as the repository of culture, custom and tradition. The traditional authority of the chief is redefined as cultural, and derives its legitimacy from a myth of origin that confers temporal power on it. The myth and ritual orderings give a spiritual content to the exercise of the authority of the chief. Endowed with mythic qualities and transcendence from the primordial past, the authority of the chief is reinvented to counteract the contestation of modernization. Custom and tradition are used to legitimize this claim to authority.

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<sup>24</sup> Skin is the equivalent of a king's throne. The chief sits on a pile of animal hides (skins). The skin represents the authority of the chief.

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In their critical historical approach to tradition, Eric Hobsbawn and Terrence Ranger (1992) have argued that tradition can be historicized and shown to be ideological and constructed. They challenge the idea that our traditions and cultural identity are derived from a continuous and insular past. The many so-called ancient practices are creations of the modern era. Most traditions are produced by elites and some are consciously fashioned as instruments of control (see also Vlastos 1998 on the invented traditions of modern Japan). There is, however, a logic to the evolution of the chieftaincy institution in the Northern Region which is applicable whether in Europe, Latin America, Polynesian Islands or elsewhere in Africa. There is no need to invoke or invent traditions to justify the claims of the chieftaincy institution to traditional power.

#### **3.4.1.4    *the evolution of the chieftaincy in the Northern Region***

Chieftaincy is, for all intents and purposes, a political institution. It is a system of centralized leadership that evolved as a social response to particular ecological and socio-economic challenges in the northern region. Chiefs hold and institutionalize power through social relationships, control of the means of production, control of the means of force, and control of social discourse (Earle 1991, 1997). According to Earle (1991), “a society’s economy and ideology stand in different ways as the infrastructure and justification for developing political domination” (Earle 1991, p. 1). In his book, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa*, Jack Goody has followed this model and demonstrated how superior military technology changed the power dynamics and led to the creation of centralized system of leadership at the dawn of the colonial regime. It is

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interesting to note that the first thing the colonial regime did was to break the military power of the chiefs and replace it with a legal power. This section explores the pre-colonial economic, social and political conditions that made the evolution of chieftaincy as a centralized system of leadership in the Northern Region possible.

#### **3.4.1.5 *Trans-Sahara trade and evolution of centralized leadership***

Agriculture among the first settler communities was at subsistence level. Family heads controlled the production and distribution of food. Trade was very minimal and consisted of exchange of goods and services. The means of destruction was limited to the bow and arrow, which was used more for hunting than for warfare. Leadership was more egalitarian and democratic as family heads and *Tindana* formed a “governing” council of elders with moral and religious authority. The use of force for compliance was not very effective. Each family had the responsibility of defending itself physically and the *Tindana* was responsible for the general ‘spiritual’ wellbeing of the community.

The Trans-Sahara trade, especially the trade in slaves, changed the social organization of the power dynamic in the Northern Region. Traders from the Niger River bend brought salt, cloth, and beads to the forest regions of West Africa and in return bought gold, ivory, and slaves (Levtzion 1968). Market centers developed along the trade routes, e.g., Buipe, Mpaha, Kafaba, and Salaga. A new social group distinguished by Islam and trade emerged and settled outside these trade centers. The new economy also introduced new power dynamics. A group of men specialized in cavalry and the use of the spear in warfare arrived on the scene. They used their superior military technology to

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their advantage by providing protection for the trade caravans. They also participated in the trade by raiding surrounding villages for human booty to be sold as slaves. According to Jack Goody (1979), “small-scale temporary polities of a centralized kind arose around (or in opposition to) the raiders for slaves and booty during the period immediately prior to the coming of the Europeans” (p. 18).

Goody is of the opinion that the transition from small-scale acephalous polities to large-scale centralized states must have taken place over a period of time. He cautions that any ideas of the diffusion of kingship or chiefship from a single source should be treated with great caution. Any monarchy system in Africa must be linked to a religious system, whether it rose in response to local conditions or was created by some process of diffusion. Generally what we can say is that slave raiding gave rise to a number of temporary small-scale centralized polities that later collapsed (Goody 1979, p. 19).

The social organization and power dynamics changed with the introduction of the slave trade. Settlements needed to consolidate for protection from the slave raiders leaders with an increased capacity to protect the community from physical attacks. The slave trade also introduced a system of domination. Slaves were used domestic work in the homes or in the fields. Social hierarchies and ties of subordination arose between slave owners and slaves, and the master/slave categorization emerged which to this day is still used. Tribute and protection payments, taxes on trade and markets and booty from raids in which captives were sold as slaves, became part of the productive system of the ruling class (Goody, 1971, p. 36).

The new chiefdoms provided centralized leadership through the control of trade

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and the means of destruction. Resources from the surplus wealth were used to recruit and maintain warriors. The new chiefdoms were faced with a greater power, that of the Ashanti kingdom with its experience of trading with the Europeans at the Coast. The Ashanti army was more organized and better armed to control these trade routes. The new chiefdoms in the north armed with horses and spears could not challenge the Ashanti musketeers with their guns and gunpowder purchased from the colonial traders. As Nehemia Levtzion has aptly put it;

The possession of firearms gave the Ashanti a decisive superiority over its northern neighbors, and the musketeers of the forest defeated the horsemen of the savannah. In the second quarter of the eighteenth century Gonja and Dagomba became tributaries to Ashanti. Ashanti domination lasted until 1874, when the British defeated Ashanti (Levtzion 1968, p. xv).

Ashanti reorganized the Dagomba fighting forces, the *kambonse*, and permitted the controlled importation of arms to both Gonja and Dagomba. Before then, Ashanti had maintained its superiority in weaponry over its northern neighbors by effectively preventing the movement of arms from the coast northwards. With these Ashanti trained forces both Gonja and Dagomba frequently raided societies like the Grunshi, Frafra, and Konkonba for slaves to pay the tribute to Asante (Ladoucer 1979, p. 33).

The superior military technology became the productive system of the ruling class, since it led to the acquisition of slaves, other booty, and taxes on trade. The horse was the possession of a politically dominant estate that was usually of migrant origin and had established its domination over a land of peasant farmers. The very nature of cavalry

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warfare imposed certain patterns upon social organization. Cavalry provides a sense of nobility and a knightly ethic. Horsemen, once trained and feeling important, demanded their share of power, either as kingmakers or divisional chiefs, and were paid off with booty (see Goody 1973). The importation of guns and the external demand for slaves encouraged the war-like proclivities of the centralized governments and consequently the nature of their interaction with other people (Goody 1979, p. 39). Centralized and non-centralized states existed side by side, but trade was centered in the states where there was peace that allowed trade to continue. The chiefs got a bulk of their revenue from these traders. There were no profits to be gained by owning land. Land was plentiful and of little commercial value.

There are two versions of the origins of chieftaincy in the Northern Region. The first and popular version is that a small band of raiders conquered and settled among the indigenes, intermarried, and ruled them. The generic story of the four “chiefly tribes” in the Northern Region is that a mythical great grandfather warrior instituted chieftaincy through conquest of the indigenous people and made his sons chiefs. The dates and places of such conquests of indigenous people are not specified. Today the paramount chiefs of these “chiefly tribes” claim a common ancestry with these legendary figures.

Other scholars are of the opinion that a form of the chieftaincy institution evolved from structurally simple organizations involving leadership by clan elders, backed by religious beliefs in the primal authority of the ancestors, towards the traditional state. The evolution of chieftaincy was facilitated by the arrival of “small bands of slave raiders who travelled with itinerant Muslim clerics” (Kirby 1986, p. 2) who settled in the

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communities, intermarried, and slowly established a political and social environment. The four chiefly tribes in the Northern Region of Ghana claim their origins from this group. Kirby (1986) writes:

The traditional state was introduced through small bands of slave raiders who often travelled with itinerant Muslim clerics. These groups took advantage of the Pax Britannica to establish a stable political and social environment. Under the policy of ‘indirect rule’ the British expanded the power and prestige of the chiefs and altered the concept and structures of the ‘traditional state’ to meet their own administrative needs. The peaceful environment engendered population growth, fostered trade and increased agriculture production, while the structures of the new bureaucracy brought about changes in political identity and ethnicity (p. 2).

Whatever the origins of chieftaincy in northern Ghana, the colonial administration empowered chiefs in ways that have led to the social construction of chieftaincy as a well-organized centralized authority, an authority accepted by all the ruled.

#### ***3.4.2 Colonial regime and the restructuring of chieftaincy***

The Gold Coast colony was established in 1874 with the mandate to preserve peace, to administer civil and criminal justice, to establish and regulate courts of justice (including native courts), to enact laws “framed with due regard to native law and customs” where they are not repugnant to justice, equity and good conscience, to hear appeals from native tribunals, to apprehend and try criminals, to abolish human sacrifice, slave trading and domestic slavery, to protect and encourage trade by means of roads, bridges, telegraphs



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and other public works, to settle chiefs' disputes, to promote public health and education, to establish municipalities and to raise revenue (see Kimble 1963 p. 303, Metcalfe 1964, p. 370).

The Chief Magistrate, D. Chalmers, outlined a comprehensive scheme for “utilizing, regulating and controlling” the power of the chiefs. Magistrate Chalmers admitted that a King possessed little real power over his subordinate chiefs, and had doubts about the ability of the chiefs to cope with modern conditions, but upheld the authority of chiefs as much as possible, both to reduce the cost of government and to avoid influential discontent (Kimble 1963, p. 460). By 1878 (1883),<sup>25</sup> the first piece of legislation was enacted by the colonial government, Gold Coast Native Juridical Ordinance (GCNJO) to “strengthen the power of the kings and chiefs, or to speak more correctly, to restore to them a portion of the authority over their own people which various causes have gradually tended to diminish” (Metcalfe 1964, p. 387). This ordinance was aimed at:

- clearly defining the authority of each chief in the colony,
  - supporting the chiefs to uphold this authority as long as it was not abused,
  - giving chiefs a stipend according to their status, power and function.

The ordinance defined a Head Chief as “a chief who is not subordinate in his ordinary jurisdiction to any other Chief, and includes the Chiefs known as Ohen, Ohene, Manche and Amagah” (ibid., p. 390).<sup>26</sup>

The ordinance stipulated the setting up of native tribunals to try breaches of the

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<sup>25</sup> The 1878 Ordinance was never put into effect, but was repealed and subsequently re-enacted by Ordinance No. 5 of 1883.

<sup>26</sup> *Naam, Wura, Kuori, Pio* are terms used for “chief” in the northern part of Ghana, but they are not included in this ordinance because colonial rule had not yet reached the north of Ghana.

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local laws and of those laws customary before the ordinance. The courts were to exercise civil and criminal jurisdiction only over the natives.<sup>27</sup> Non-natives needed to consent in writing before they could be tried in the Native courts. The 1878 Native Jurisdiction Ordinance was repealed and replaced with the 1883 Ordinance, which remained in force till 1927. The NJO sparked debate among the educated community in Cape Coast on the nature of the chief's jurisdiction. In 1888 the Native Prison Ordinance gave power to the governor to close native prisons and reduce prison terms to just one month. The compulsory labor ordinance forced chiefs to provide labor to government. The 1904 Chiefs Ordinance gave power to the governor to have the final say on the election or deposition of a chief. His decision was final and could not be challenged in the courts (see Kimble 1963).

Early colonial administrators were divided over the role of chiefs in government. Some believed chiefs were useless, tyrannical, and not to be trusted to administer justice and preferred a direct British rule. Others felt the proper way to administer the Gold Coast Colony was by acting through the chiefs. As one governor stated, chiefs are “the most respectable persons in the community and the expression of the native mind in favor of social order and the rights of property” (Kimble 1963, p. 472).

Through various pieces of legislation, the colonial administration supported and strengthened the power of the chiefs and used them for their administrative needs. This bolstering of the powers of the chiefs generated debate among the educated elite. Those who felt the colonial administration was infringing on the powers of the chiefs started defending the original status of the chiefs (e.g., the Fanti National Constitution of 1906).

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<sup>27</sup> In the colonial administration, “natives” represented the indigenous people and non-natives, the European traders and colonial administrators.

Others felt the chiefs were claiming power they did not traditionally have.

### ***3.4.3 Colonial administration and chieftaincy in the Northern Territories***

In 1901 when the colonial regime administered the Northern Territories, they were confronted with two challenges not experienced in Ashanti and the Colony: ignorance of local traditions and customs, and the dual system of power – the *Tindana* and the chief. This ignorance of local traditions and customs is demonstrated in the vagueness of the Administrative Ordinance of 1902 that empowered the native tribunals. The native authorities were to “exercise the jurisdiction heretofore exercised by them in the same measure as such jurisdiction has been heretofore exercised” (Rattray in Kimble 1963, p. 487). They avoided defining clearly who had the power and the extent of the jurisdiction of that power. To help the governor define the authority of the chiefs and empower them to exercise that authority, the governor needed to know the customs, laws, and history of the people. The Commissioners were tasked to help the chiefs document their history and draw up constitutions. In his address to the chiefs at the first Dagomba Conference of Chiefs in Yendi, November 21, 1930, the acting chief commissioner, E.A.T. Taylor noted that the purpose of the gathering of chiefs was to record the history, customs, and traditions of the Dagomba people. This information, Taylor observed, had “hitherto been locked up in the minds of men,” in a form to which reference could not be conveniently made. There was the need for an authoritative and accurate record of the history, customs and traditions of the Dagomba people. The commissioner explained to the chiefs that “since the whole of Dagomba state came under the English Government, the laws which

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govern it are made by the Governor in Accra.” An authoritative constitution of all the chiefly tribes in the region would avoid the “cumbersome process of assembling meetings of historians and drummers whenever the governor wanted information concerning custom, law and history of the people.” Commissioner Taylor exalted the chiefs saying:

The Governor has decided that it is well to give a more particular acknowledgement than has been accorded heretofore, to the standing and authority of Chiefs over their people; and to clothe them with powers, enforceable by law, which they have not previously exercised. In order that the law, which gives effect to this decision, may be wisely and suitably framed, it is vitally necessary that the information, which you record, should be given with the utmost exactitude and precision. In your deliberations, therefore, let no one, through desire for self-glorification or for the confusion of his enemies allow himself to supply anything other than a simple and truthful record of facts as they are known.

The speech of the Commissioner is very instructive on the role of the colonial administration in strengthening the chieftaincy institution and creating an authoritative narrative of the history, custom and traditions of the chiefly tribes. The speech was also very prophetic in a sense. Seventy years after this speech, the dangers the acting Commissioner was admonishing to chiefs to avoid, came to haunt them. After outlining the purpose of the gathering and the need for a Dagomba Constitution, the acting Commissioner then advised the chiefs:

No administration can be a successful one unless the funds, which have been contributed by the people, are being properly administered. ... If they (the

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people) feel it is being wasted or spent for the private good of the rulers themselves instead of the public interests of the people, they will become dissatisfied and disaster will follow the state. We have learned that no rule is successful or safe unless it is founded on the “consent of the governed.” That is the principle upon which the Government will found any law, which may be made to regulate the powers of Chiefs. The preservation of that condition will be insisted on before any authority is given to you, and Government will not support you in any courses which are not directed towards the prosperity and well-being of the people, and entered upon with their consent.

The commissioner’s speech set the tone for the relationship between the colonial administrators and the chiefs in the Northern Territory for the implementation of the Gold Coast Native Jurisdiction Ordinance of 1888. The Dagomba Constitution was imposed on the Walas (Wilks 2002), and similar constitutions were documented for the Nanumba, Gonja and Mamprussi. The constitutions of these chiefdoms were written at the instruction and supervision of the colonial governor. These constitutions defined the definitive history of the chiefly tribes, their customs, and their traditions. The history, customs, and traditions of the other tribes were neglected.

At the dawn of the colonial administration in northern Ghana, three forms of social identification and power existed. People socially identified with the family, the earth shrine and the chief – in that order. The chief was the last category around which people mobilized and identified, with the chief having minimal power in the community and over his people. The colonial administration did not create the chieftaincy in the

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chiefly tribes in the Northern Region of Ghana. However, it supported the chiefs with the power of the law and created a new political structure, the traditional authority system. This was necessary because at the dawn of the colonial regime the chieftaincy institution in the Northern Region was at its lowest. Gonja and Dagomba were tribute-paying vassals to Ashanti. Ashanti controlled the trade routes and stationed their agents in key market centers. The colonial regime came as relief for some of these chiefs but at a price. The colonial regime took control of the means of force and weakened the power base of the chiefs. The pieces of legislation were created in and for the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti and later applied to the Northern Territories. Chiefs became responsible for providing labor, collecting taxes, and settling disputes. The advent of the colonial administration elevated chieftaincy to a “traditional political authority” with a legal backing through the various Native Ordinances and the codification of customary law.

#### ***3.4.4 Chiefs and the modern state***

At independence, the new government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) had the task of establishing control over the country and building a new democratic and decentralized government. The new government was confronted with a chiefly power that controlled local government business. The chief's palace was the center of political activities in the south of Ghana and administrative control of the Northern Territories was in the hands of the chiefs. The processes of democratization and decentralization implied a transfer of power from the government official and the chief to the common man. The modern government wanted to shift power from the traditional

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councils by creating local and district councils. These councils were to be efficient, modern and democratic bodies with an origin and existence wholly distinct from the traditional councils. The traditional councils were now to perform only functions related to custom and ritual. The Coussey Committee had advocated a reduction in the local power of chiefs. It had envisaged giving chiefs a voice in national government through their membership in an Upper House or in regional councils. The ideas of a national upper house or regional councils were replaced with local and district councils.

The chiefs felt marginalized politically and resisted government attempts to democratize local government. The chiefs found support from the opposition parties: the Ashanti dominated National Liberation Movement (NLM) and the chiefs dominated Northern Peoples Party (NPP). Chiefs were perceived by progressive nationalist elements in the government to be antique, feudalistic, and unprogressive elements of the past. During the debate on the Local Government Ordinance, J. Hagan summed up the general feeling about chiefs in the government: “For the past 107 years our chiefs have been exercising their rights ... but that privilege has been abused ... our confidence is now gone ... their future is doomed ... we want them to abstain themselves from politics and wash their hands of financial matters” (Rathbone 2000, p. 32).

The political discourse leading to independence was one of a struggle both for the liberation from all forms of domination and the opportunity for self-rule. The formation of political parties and the election of leaders challenged the chieftaincy institution in many ways. First, the chieftaincy institution resisted the struggle for independence and was considered a part of the colonial rule. Second, ethnic groups which were forcibly put

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under different chiefdoms perceived in the independence of Ghana the opportunity for having their own chiefs and taking control of their own traditional affairs.

The power of chiefs in the psyche of Ghanaians was deeper than the progressive nationalist elements in government realized. The threats to the chieftaincy institution from the modern democratic state initiated among supporters of the chieftaincy institution a determination to legitimize the power of chiefs with custom and tradition. In the face of modernization, tradition is not about going back to the past, it is a reaction – better, an action – completely embedded in modern times. Chieftaincy traditions enable supporters of the institution to make a claim in the present, a claim which they did not have to make in the past. Post-colonial democratization and decentralization of local governance challenged the claims to power of the chieftaincy institution. Traditions are created to legitimize contested claims to a position or power. The chieftaincy discourse today must be understood in the context of democracy challenging the legitimacy of chiefly claims to power.

### **3.5 PROPERTY RIGHTS: LAND OWNERSHIP AND TENURE SYSTEMS**

Property rights in Africa in general are mixed, fluid, and insecure. Ownership of land ranges from communal, to state, to private property. The Ghana national land policy identifies five types of ownership: allodial title, customary law freeholder, estate of freehold, leasehold interest, and interest in land by virtue of a contractual arrangement. There are over 132 laws and subsidiary laws on land and natural resources listed in the national land policy. The numerous land litigation cases in court attest to the ad hoc basis



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on which land has been managed and administered in Ghana. With the national land policy in place since 1999, enforcement of land rights and the general management of land is still a huge challenge. As Lentz (2006) had noted, land ownership is a complex bundle of rights that are socially and politically embedded. The tendency to link rights to land to membership in specific communities further complicates land ownership and management. The colonial regime and the rise in value of the land have contributed to the complex property rights system in Ghana.

Firmin-Sellers (1996) has argued that the transformation of property rights is the product of the interaction between state and society. State rulers create or manipulate political institutions to pursue their own goals. Individuals in society compete within the shadow of those institutions to secure a privileged share of society's resources. Any transformation of property rights redistributes wealth and power; consequently individuals and groups in society will mobilize to articulate a new, distributionally favorable definition of property rights to claim a privileged place in society or to defend against a change in the already favorable status quo. Individuals may lobby state actors directly to capture the state's coercive power and force their preferred property rights system or they may seek to create an alternative source of authority, enforcing property rights privately or at the local level. The rest of the chapter explores the transformation of property rights.

#### **3.5.1 Pre-colonial land ownership and tenure systems**

There is the romantic view of pre-colonial land rights that seems to suggest a coherent, homogenous, and stable system of communal land ownership and management. In this

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view, land is vested in a mythical ancestor and held in trust by an individual for the group. The individual could be the family head, the *Tindana*, or the chief. Contrary to this view, Lentz (2006) argues that land rights have always been dynamic, ambiguous, negotiable, politically embedded, and prone to conflict. Most of the conflicts are over belonging, authority, and land rights. These conflicts range from the family, clan, ethnic group, to the village level. The composition of the group members claiming ownership, the boundaries of the land, multiple layers of rights, the right to allocate use rights, who has the ultimate control over the territory, are all negotiable and contested (p. 54). The very fact that the early settlers on the land were highly mobile is an indication that land rights were very fluid and insecure.

#### **3.5.2 The colonial administration and land rights**

The first task of the governors who represented the Queen of England in the Colony was to ensure peace, to open trade routes, and to keep order. They were to keep the administrative costs as low as possible. Ruling through the chiefs was the best option for the colonial administration. Revenue generation was very important for the colonial administration and one way to increase revenue was through property taxes. Besides, the influx of mining companies in the Colony prompted the British Prime Minister Carnarvon to ask if some encouragement might not be given to mining enterprise. Governor Freeling called for caution since land was a very contentious issue in the colony. Freeling writes:

Land cannot be entirely alienated. It is held with tenacity and there is no subject which gives rise to disputes of so much acrimony and pertinacity as dis-

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agreements relating thereto. At present there is a disagreement of the kind which has for many years past been a source of trouble and anxiety to the Government, and at times has led to inter-tribal war between the Aquapims and Croboes. (Metcalf 1964, p. 388)

Eventually the idea evolved to define and to enforce a property rights that would enable the colonial governors to secure titles for mining rights and to guard against the reckless alienation of tribal lands and the wanton dissipation of the forest and their natural products. A Lands Bill was introduced in 1897 in which all “waste lands, forest lands, and mineral lands” were vested in the Queen of England (Kimble 1963, p. 334). The Bill provoked violent protest from the educated elite, who allied with the traditional rulers of the colony to form the Aboriginal Rights Protection Society (ARPS) and dispatched a delegation to Britain to protest (ibid. 349). The ARPS argued that “there were no waste lands in the Gold Coast; all land was already allocated according to the principles of customary law. Occupied lands were owned by an extended family or by a chief; unoccupied lands were managed by the stool on behalf of the citizens of the state” (Firmin-Sellers 1996, p. 31). Although the bill was later withdrawn, the consequences of the debate over the bill had lasting effects. As Firmin-Sellers (1996) noted, property rights were defined in terms of customary law and the battle to secure property rights was transferred to the arena of the traditional state and the chiefs (p. 32). Secondly, “indigenous actors battled one another to ‘reinvent’ the institutions of the traditional state. The composition of the traditional state council, the identity of traditional rulers, and the order of traditional inheritance were all embroiled in the ongoing contest to enforce a new

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version of customary land law” (p. 32). Thirdly, traditional rulers could define and enforce property rights only if the coercive authority of the colonial state backed them. Individuals and groups defined customary property rights systems that gave them privileged access to and control over land and reformed traditional state institutions in an effort to enforce those rights (p. 33).

Firmin-Sellers (1996) writes:

The story of the transformation of customary land tenure in West Africa begins with the imposition of colonial rule. Colonial rule established the framework within which indigenous actors operated. Colonial institutions created the channels through which local actors could gain access to British decision-making; designated which groups of indigenous actors would be eligible to work through those channels; and allocated responsibilities between national and local level institutions. Colonial institutions thus shaped the strategies that indigenous and European actors used to redefine property rights to land and they determined the actors’ capacity to enforce those rights at the state or local level (p. 21).

Several correspondences between the Governors and the Home Office indicate a land tenure system that is family based. The “title to property,” one governor wrote, “is most unsafe. ‘Native Law’ apparently favors joint ownership by numerous members of a family, their interest being proportionate to the degrees of consanguinity” (Metcalf 1964, p. 477). The Governor concluded that any purchase of a piece of land “is not unlikely to be followed by litigation, in which members of the vendor’s family of varying degrees of remoteness, will seek to establish a claim to a share in the property, or its

equivalent in money” (ibid).

An ordinance regulating the acquisition and vesting of lands for the public service was promulgated in 1876. Lands required for public service may be purchased or taken. Such land shall be vested in the Colonial Secretary in trust for Her Majesty. This enabled the colonial government to acquire as much land as it needed for public service. This process of acquiring land for state purposes helped craft property rights. First, parties to a piece of land to be purchased by the Colonial Secretary had to provide the office with “a valid written title to such land to the satisfaction of the Colonial Secretary” (Griffith 1898, p. 200). If the party could not produce a written title, payment for the land was deferred for a year to see if anyone else will laid claim to the land. The Bill also stated that parties in possession of the land at the time of purchase shall be deemed to have been lawfully entitled to such lands, unless the contrary be shown to the satisfaction of the court.

The interaction between the colonial administration and the society transformed property rights. By creating or manipulating the chieftaincy institution into a Native authority with juridical powers to create customary laws, the colonial administration empowered chiefs to develop customary land tenure systems. Chiefs were given the exclusive rights through a legal backing to create and enforce property rights. The result is a varied and highly deficient land tenure system (Kasanga 1988).

### **3.5.3 Colonial administration land policy in the Northern Territories**

When the Northern Territories became a British Protectorate, there was no educated

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northern elite. The governor observed in 1901 that: “Large tracts of the Northern Territories appear to be uninhabited or sparsely populated by rude savages without recognized head-chiefs and central forms of government ... It seems right that the main part of the rent for unoccupied land should go to the Paramount power” (Bening 1975, p. 69). In Bening’s view, the colonial administration saw the northern lands as a means of raising revenue and passed the Mineral Rights Ordinance in 1904, which vested “the right to grant concessions for mineral prospecting in the Governor and prescribed minimal rents for land owners” (p. 70). In 1923, Governor Guggisberg empowered the government to acquire any land it needed for public service without any compensation to the owners. By 1927, all lands in the north were declared public lands to be controlled by the Governor and “administered for the use and benefit, direct and indirect of the natives” (p. 70). Der (1975) is of the opinion that the real motive for acquiring the land was to prevent development and education so that the north could continue to be a pool of cheap labor for agriculture and the minerals industry in the south. The imposition of exorbitant rents discouraged mining companies that showed interest in exploiting the mineral resources of the north and prevented the construction of a railway in the region. Christian missionaries could not afford to acquire lands for schools. The policy not only dispossessed people of fertile lands for agriculture and prevented private enterprise but also affected fundamentally the people’s perception of development as the provision of services by the state (Ladoucer 1975, p. 90).

The various Ordinances of the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti were applied to the Northern Territories. Chiefs had juridical powers to make customary laws and

determine customary land tenure systems. *Tindanas* were totally sidelined in the process.

#### **3.5.4 Post-colonial land policy**

After independence, the post-colonial government did very little to change the land policies. Between 1957 and 1970, the lands in the south belonged to the “stools” - that is, the chiefdoms - while the lands in the north belonged to the government. By 1970, chiefly domination had increasingly come to mean territorial control in some areas. This position was strengthened by the 1979 Constitution, when, for the first time in the modern history of Ghana, land tenure was vested in ethnic groups and their authorities (Skalnik 1985, p. 23). With the value of land on the rise, land became a scarce resource.

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter has explored the historical and ethnographical data on the evolution of traditional power and authority, land and property rights, and the politics of belonging in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history of the Northern Region as a background to the case study. The rationale for this brief exploration is to situate the conflict in the Northern Region in its historical context, and to identify what has been investigated and what needs further investigation in our attempts to understand the protracted social conflicts in the Northern Region and to explore possible strategies for analysis and resolution.

There is very little historical documentation on the pre-colonial social and political structures in the Northern Region. Most of the data comes from Arabic scholars,

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anthropologists, and ethnographers, who relied on local storytellers to reconstruct the indigenous social and political structures before the colonial period. Concepts of power and authority, land and property rights, and the politics of belonging come from these writings. They reveal a dual power structure: the *Tindana* and the chief, a system of land management and the perceptions of belonging. The data is limited and skewed, but that is the best material available. The value of these narratives is that they are not influenced by the post-colonial struggles for power, recognition, and resources.

Much documentation is, however, available for the colonial and post-colonial periods. Colonial historians and ethnographers have written extensively on the social and political structures of the tribes in the north of Ghana. Colonial administration documents provide a wealth of information open to a variety of interpretations. These documents reveal an interesting negotiation between the colonial administration and the indigenous power brokers to define power and authority, land and property rights, and the dynamics of belonging. In this period the chieftaincy institution, among the many institutions vying for recognition as a legitimate public authority, is established as “the traditional authority” with legal backing from the colonial administration to define, establish, and enforce customary law, land, and property rights, and social identity based on tribal affiliations.

The post-colonial period creates a new political, social, and economic environment. The post-colonial modern State rule raises the issue of sovereign authority in the new political dispensation, especially in the area of local governance. The challenge of managing the dynamic of the modern State authority and traditional authority especially



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in the area of local governance raised the question of the role of traditional leadership in local governance. Who has the sovereign authority? In the Northern Region with its dual traditional power structure and multiple ethnic groups, the question of the legitimate authority in traditional matters became a hotly contested issue. Which customary law prevails? Who has the authority to regulate on land and property rights? As claims to traditional power and authority are contested, stakeholders turn to the past to reconstruct history, tradition, culture, and custom to legitimize their respective claims. The narratives of power and authority, of land and identity at the center of the conflicts in the region are ideological re-constructions to legitimize the status quo or to challenge it. These narratives need to be re-investigated in the context of contemporary perceptions of social identity, power, and legitimacy, and analyzed in the light of contemporary theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy.

## **Chapter 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter reviews the process of inquiry used in this research. The chapter explains and justifies the theoretical underpinnings that inform the choice of a qualitative method of inquiry. The chapter explains the strategy and research design, the choice of face-to-face in-depth interviews in collecting the data and the process used in selecting participants. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the research limitations.

The purpose of the research is to explain social identity formation processes and how the processes inform perceptions of power and legitimacy. The research also explains how the relationship between social identity, power, and legitimacy impacts social conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. The research involved an exploration of the experiences and perceptions of participants. The main strategy of inquiry adopted was a case study of the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana using in-depth interviews of selected participants.

#### **4.1 EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The general approach to knowledge is that of social constructivism, the “view that humans generate and construct their own knowledge and understanding from their

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interaction with the world around them” (Matthew, 1993, p. 359). Social constructivists hold the view that people construct their beliefs and meaning from their experiences in a social context. The individual’s experience and perspective on issues is an important source of knowledge. The choice of social constructivism is appropriate for this research design because the purpose of the research is to use the experiences and perceptions of participants to explore how people construct their meanings of social identity, power, and legitimacy. Meaning making is a constitutive element of social identity formation and the basis for the exercise of power in social interactions. As Klotz and Lynch (2007) have noted, particular meanings are reinforced over time and become dominant. They may even be expressed as historical “facts” or unavoidable “reality” (pp. 6-10). Klotz and Lynch (2007) contend that “practices” or “custom” are basically habitual actions emanating from these interpretations of how the world works. Discourse, culture, tradition are the language and technique employed to maintain these habitual actions. Social groups create and perpetuate beliefs, norms, values, meanings, language, culture, and ideologies, which hold members together and guide social actions. Group beliefs, norms, and values form a framework for understanding the world, they determine what is legitimate behavior and which interests and goals group member can pursue (Klotz and Lynch 2007). Groups create multiple meanings that coexist, often in tension with one another, as practices tend to reinforce or undermine meanings. Groups exercise power if they have the ability to reconstruct discourses and shape practices. Meaning, therefore, produces social reality and conditions identities and interests (Klotz and Lynch 2007, pp. 20-25).

“Social constructionism draws attention to the fact that human experience,

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including perception, is mediated historically, culturally, and linguistically. What is perceived and experienced is never a direct reflection of environmental conditions but must be understood as a specific reading of these conditions” (Willig 2008, p. 7). The social constructivist’s approach to knowledge pays attention to factors and processes such as the socially constructed nature of reality, the role of language, ideas, norms, knowledge, symbols, history, and culture in initiating and producing social reality. As Gergen (2003, p. 15) has argued:

Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common factors of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they might exist should creative attention be so directed.

Such common forms of understanding of the world, of reality, or of “tradition,” as they exist, are often taken for granted and presented as if they were objective, unbiased observations of the world or of events. Gergen contends that some of the taken-for-granted beliefs, when subjected to objective criteria, are shown to be either highly circumscribed by culture, history, or social context or are altogether nonexistent. Gergen concludes that:

The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people. From the constructionist position the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship (2003, p. 15).

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Social constructionism does not reject the existence of material reality, instead it recognizes that the meaning of material realities and their effects on human behavior and social organization are dependent upon and constructed through the use of language, ideas, symbols, and the like. Language allows individuals to construct and give meaning to material and social reality.

The choice of the social constructionist approach in this study is based on the fact that this research aims at making sense of social conflict by “seeing the world” as the participants in the research experience it.

The study tries to understand what induces animosity and motivates the mobilization for violence. Why and how individuals define themselves in relation to a group, how enemies are made, and why conflicts often turn brutal, especially between people who have lived peacefully together for years (Roy 1994, p. 3). Why categories such as chieftaincy, ethnicity, and land are used for social identity formation and how the process is experienced understood and interpreted by individuals in the groups.

Within this broad context of social constructionism, theories of symbolic interactionism informed the research design because individual actions are influenced by the subjective meaning people attribute to their activities and their environments. The different meanings people invest in objects, events, experiences, etc., determine how they react. Positioning theory has also informed the design of the research because of the emphasis on discourse as a means of creating social reality.

#### **4.1.1 Symbolic interactionism**

The theory of symbolic interactionism is based on the premise that symbols and meaning shape human perceptions of the world and allow interaction, thinking, and planning to take place. The individual's definitions and interpretations of him/herself, others, and his/her social situation influence his/her behavior in society. "By exploring the meaning participants attribute to their surroundings by getting 'inside their head' and seeing the world from their perspective, we can understand why people do what they do" (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds 1975, in Burke and Stets, 2009, p. 33).

The basic assumption of the symbolic interactionism is that:

Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer 1969, p. 2).

Symbols provide names and shared meanings (responses) for a large number of objects and categories that are relevant to social interaction. Symbols are learned in interaction with others and form the basis for evaluating the behavior of others (Burke and Stets 2009, p. 15). Symbolic interactionism values the individual's experience and point of view in understanding the social construction of reality. Flick (2009) argues that the aim of analyzing subjective viewpoints is to understand the "subjective theories" people use to explain the world. The assumption is that individuals like scientists, "develop theories on how the world and their own activities function. They apply and test these theories in

their activities and revise them if necessary” (p. 59). Symbols and shared meanings are communicated through discourse.

#### **4.1.2 Positioning theory**

Positioning theory pays attention to discourse as a way of creating social reality. Through discourse, social reality is created as persons come to occupy a moral location in that discourse. Harre and Langenhove (1999) explain that, people come to occupy certain positions through social interaction and discourse. Positions, in the view of Harre and Langenhove, 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 private and public intentional acts are done (Harre and Langenhove 1999, p. 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, p. 162). Social constructivism with its attention to experience and perception, symbolic interactionism emphasizing symbols and meanings, and positioning theory focusing on discourse,

provide the lens and a set of conceptual tools informing this research strategy and design.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH METHOD**

The method of choice in this research is qualitative because the research involves the experiences and perceptions of participants. The purpose of research is to understand how participants made sense of their social identities, their perception and experience of chieftaincy and land ownership. Understanding the meaning participants have constructed and how they make sense of the world in which they live will help explain the protracted identity-based conflicts. The research aims to explain why people behave the way they do, how their opinions and attitudes are formed, and how people are affected by their ethnicity and the chieftaincy institution. In this regard valuable insights into participants perspectives are gained by focusing on a single case study and talking to participants through in-depth face-to-face interviews. The research had no intention of predicting future conflicts. Its aim is to produce culturally specific and contextually rich data that, when understood and verified, can be used to design conflict resolution and peace-building strategies for the region.

Flick (2009) has argued that the central ideas guiding qualitative research are “the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories; the recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researchers’ reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production; and the variety of approaches and methods” (p. 14). The goal of the qualitative research, Flick concludes, is “to discover and develop the new and to develop empirically grounded theories” (Flick 2009, p. 15). Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.



16) are of the opinion that qualitative research helps the researcher to:

Step beyond the known and enter into the world of the participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge ... any explanation of experience would be incomplete without locating experience within the larger conditional frame or context in which it is embedded; and describing the process or the ongoing and changing forms of action/interaction/emotions that are taken in responses to events and the problems that arise to inhibit action/interaction.

The in-depth interviews with participants opened the doors to their worldview and perspectives. It gave me insights into participants' attitudes, value systems, concerns, motivations and life style.

#### **4.2.1 Case study**

A case study, according to Yin (1984, 2003), allows a researcher to observe a natural phenomenon, which exists in a set of data, by examining a very small geographical area or small number of subjects of interest. Case study as a research method "enables a researcher to examine the data within a specific context ... it helps to explore and investigate contemporary real life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of Case study as a research method helps the researcher to elicit implicit and explicit data from subjects as he/she focuses on data at the micro level (Zanial 2007).

There are three categories of case study: explanatory, descriptive, and exploratory (Yin 2003). Most of the research on the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana has

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been exploratory and descriptive. This research is explanatory. It explains the processes and dynamics of social identity formation and how social identity shapes power and legitimacy in social interactions.

This research used the case study method to collect and analyze the data because of the quest for an in-depth understanding of the underlying factors influencing the conflicts in northern Ghana. It explains the sets of interrelated activities engaged in by actors in a social situation (Feagin, Orum and Sjober, 1991) that impact conflict. The explanatory case study method is used to explain the relationship between social identity, power, and legitimacy and how that relationship impacts social conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. It explains why ethnicity (social identity), chieftaincy (power and legitimacy), and land (power and legitimacy) are so central to the conflicts in the region. If that dynamic is not understood, the processes leading to the outcomes can be mistaken for causal factors. In other words, the processes of social identity formation in the larger political, social, and economic context can shape power dynamics, thus in the process raising legitimacy issues which, if not properly handled, can lead to social conflicts. Focusing on social identity and power as causal factors makes it difficult to develop appropriate conflict resolution processes.

I have chosen the Northern Region of Ghana as a case study because some groups of people vest and mobilize their social (ethnic) identity in and around chieftaincy. They lay claim to chieftaincy as “the traditional” structure for leadership in the private and the public sphere and as a core element of their social identity. These groups are described in the literature as “chiefly tribes,” “chiefly people,” and “chiefly ethnic groups,” people

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with centralized leadership or cephalous tribes. Using conquest as the basis for indigen-ousness, these chiefly groups exercise dominance over the “non-chiefly” ethnic groups by claiming ownership of the land and the right to traditional and political power. Any challenge to their claims of power and legitimacy is perceived as a threat to the existence of the group, increasing the likelihood of conflict. The “non-chiefly” groups contest these claims, and their accompanying myths, symbols and histories that support the claims, and exclude them from power and resources. The “non-chiefly” groups argue they are the first settlers and, therefore, indigenous owners of the land with a decentralized system of leadership structure around the custodian of the “earth-shrine,” clan, and family heads. Their claim to indigen-ousness and ownership of land is based on the “earth-shrine” priest.

Most of the literature on the conflicts in Northern Ghana explores the historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts of the exercise of traditional, i.e., chiefly power and its consequences on social interactions. These studies have focused on the instru-mental dynamics of social identity i.e., the use of ethnic identities by the elite for power rather than the constitutive dynamics, i.e., the processes of ethnic identity formation and how do processes influence the perception of power and legitimacy. The conclusion in most of the literature on the conflicts in the region is that ethnic identities, power, and legitimacy are the causal factors in the conflicts. This conclusion is based on the fact that the dominant discourse, that is, the language and technique employed to maintain the dominant interpretations of social reality expressed as tradition, culture, custom, etc., that is the outcome of the process of socialization, is taken as a given. In my interviews, I noticed that participants perceived social reality, e.g., the construction of their ethnic

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identity, as a natural or primordial reality. Participants never questioned the boundaries and mythic stories about the boundaries they have constructed. These boundaries and mythic stories are taken for granted and presented as if they were inherent and immutable facts. Some participants sincerely believe that God created them to rule over others, that their cultural practices are unique and timeless. These views of the participants are reflective of the views of the general population. There is a need to explain to stakeholders in the conflicts the processes of meaning making, as a constitutive element of social identity formation and as the basis for the exercise of power in social interactions.

### **4.2.2 Participants**

The general target population was the people in the Northern Region in Ghana. Forty (40) participants were selected using the purposive sampling approach. Participants were selected because of their experiences and perceptions. The following criteria guided the choice of participants:

1. Participants must be more than thirty-four (35) years old,
2. Participants must have been resident in the northern region between 1980 and 1994,
3. Participants must be from one of the ethnic groups in the northern region,
4. Participants must be willing to be interviewed on tape.

Participants were selected if they had lived through some of the conflicts in the Northern Region, especially 1994 northern conflict. This conflict is important because it permanently changed the power dynamics in the northern region.

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Participants were first contacted to ascertain if they met the criteria for participating in the interviews and if they were willing to participate voluntarily in the interviews. Participants were selected from the Dagomba and Gonja tribes representing the chiefly groups. Participants from the non-chiefly tribes were selected from Konkomba and Vagla tribes. Participants came from ethnic groups involved in the conflicts relating to chieftaincy, land, and recognition of groups. Participants who are now living outside the Northern Region but are natives of the region and lived in the region between 1980 and 1994 were included. In all, 40 participants were interviewed; 25 men and 15 women were selected, 10 each from the Dagomba, Gonja, and Konkomba, Vagla, representing the chiefly and non-chiefly ethnic groups respectively. Dagomba, and Gonja engaged the Konkombas in conflict in the eastern corridor of the northern region of Ghana in 1994, while the Gonjas engaged the Vaglas in conflict in the western corridor in 1980. Only participants who were willing to be interviewed on tape participated in the research.

Each participant for the interview was contacted personally and the purpose of the research and interview explained to them. They were told it was totally voluntary, they could opt out anytime and, even after the interview, if they had second thoughts their responses would not be part of the research. I explained to the participants what informed consent meant, of their rights to withdraw from the interview and their rights to a debriefing after the interview. I informed them that all discussion during the interview was confidential and would be recorded. Participants were given a written document on what the research was about and what their rights were in participating in the research. Those who accepted the conditions were given a consent form to sign. Those who

voluntarily signed the consent form were interviewed.

### **4.2.3 Data collection**

The primary source of data for the research was the field interviews. The field interviews consisted of an hour-long informal meeting in which I asked participants questions on the perceptions of power and ethnicity. Participants were free to respond to the questions in whichever way they chose to. Their responses were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The process offered the opportunity to meet participants face-to-face and observe their body language as they responded to interview questions.

Data was collected from historical records and published works. The historical records gave me some background on the colonial and post-colonial policies in the Northern Region of Ghana. The published works selected were mainly research conducted on the conflicts in the region. They provided a context for understanding some of the responses of participants.

#### ***4.2.3.1 field interviews***

Forty (40) participants were interviewed and their responses digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. I also enlisted the help of some graduate students from the University of Development Studies to interview some people who were not part of the sampled group. The purpose of using the student interviewers was for cross checking the results of the interviews. I wanted to be sure that I, as researcher, was not influencing participant responses. For six (6) years I worked in the northern region as director of the

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Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution. Some of the participants knew me and had participated in my conflict resolution training programs.

A sample of the responses from the interviews conducted by the student interviewers did not show any significant difference in the responses I was getting. I did not notice any signs of inhibition or hesitation on the part of participants since they all expressed their perceptions and shared their experiences without fear. What did strike me was that on questions of people with power in the community, participants would seek clarification on what type of power I had in mind. My response to them whenever the question came up “you choose the power you want to talk about.” This experience of participants questioning me to know the type of power I was investigating was an indication to me that they perceived different types of power. Every time the question came up, I took note of the type of power participants chose to talk about. I did observe that such questioning from the participants did not affect the responses. All participants had perceptions on the power of the chief and the *Tindana*.

The face-to-face interviews also offered me the opportunity to understand the meanings that everyday activities such as festivals, funerals, weddings etc., hold for participants. Of particular interest to me were the events participants chose to narrate and their conviction that events happened the way they narrated them.

As Kristin Luker observed:

Interviews are accurate accounts of the kinds of mental maps that people carry around inside their heads, ... The point of interviews, however, is not what is going on inside one person’s head, but what is going on inside lots of people’s

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heads. When you hear the same thing from people all over the country who don't know one another, you can be reasonably sure that you are tapping into something that is reliably social and not just individual (Luker 2008, p. 167).

The interviews provided very rich data on participants' perceptions, definitions of situations, views, beliefs, values, attitudes, and the meanings that underpin their lives and behavior. The interviews provide an opportunity to explore how participants constructed their meaning of social identity, of power, and of legitimacy.

Participants were generally willing to be interviewed and answered the questions freely. There were only two instances where participants did not want the interview recorded. In those instances, the interview did not take place.

### ***4.2.3.2 review of historical records***

A second source of data was the writings of colonial officials, historians, and ethnographers. The historians and ethnographers documented the origins of the various ethnic groups, their traditional practices, structures, and systems. These documents are the results of interviews and observations by these colonial historians and ethnographers. The documents have their limitations: inadequate representation of events by interpreters as the result of language barriers, deliberate and/or inadvertent misrepresentation of histories of origin, explanation of events, etc. A misreading on the part of the authors of certain cultural practices, their own perceptions and prejudices of African societies, etc., calls for caution in the use of this type of data in this study. In spite of these limitations, the data offers a historical context for understanding the contested claims and counter



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claims of the chiefly and non-chiefly groups. A second value of the data is in the fact that these narratives were documented before the post-colonial struggle for political power vis-à-vis the role of the chieftaincy institution in the daily lives of the people.

The data from the colonial officials informed the research in the area of the role of the colonial administration in creating, remodeling, or suppressing some of the indigenous systems and structures. They are particularly informative on the evolution of the chieftaincy institution in northern region of Ghana.

### **4.2.3.3 *published works***

A third source of data is the scholarly writings on the conflicts in Northern Ghana. These writings have analyzed and documented the historical, cultural, political, and economic conditions influencing the conflicts. This research builds on their scholarly research by deepening the understanding of inter-communal violence through an explanation of the processes of social identity formation and how those processes shape power and legitimacy. My research contributes to the body of knowledge on the conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana.

### **4.2.4 Data processing**

At the close of each day, I expanded my field notes by listening to portions of the recorded interviews and filling in the gaps in my notes. The following day I transcribed the recorded interviews and typed them using Microsoft Word. The transcribed document was edited to remove repetitions and organize the responses according to the interview

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questions. Transcripts were categorized under the tribe of the participants and given codes e.g., G1 represented Gonja participant one. Participants' responses were fed into a Microsoft Excel document with the following headings:

- (1) Ethnic Group,
- (2) Interview question, and
- (3) Themes.

The interview question on power had the following themes:

- (1) people with power,
- (2) sources of their power, and
- (3) uses of their power.

The data were then ready for analysis.

### **4.3 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS**

The first level of analysis was done using prior codes derived from the interview questions. Under the general theme of power, the first codes were “people with power,” “sources of power” and “uses of power.” These codes helped me pull together all the responses to the question “who are the people in your community with power in your community, where do they get the power from, and how do they use their power?” The same process was used for all the interview questions.

The second level of analysis used inductive codes, i.e., codes emerging directly from the data. Two people emerged as people with power in the communities, the *Tindana* and the chief. Data on the “sources” and “uses” of power of the *Tindana* and the

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chief were pulled together for further analysis. Each interview question was analyzed in the same manner.

### 4.3.1 Theme analysis

The theoretical framework in chapter 1 which explored the various theories on social identity, power, and legitimacy informed the interview questions. The questions were grouped under the themes of power and legitimacy, and social identity. Under the theme of power and legitimacy, I elicited participants' perceptions of power by exploring their views on who is considered powerful in the community, the sources of his/her power and the uses of his/her power. I also added to the theme "power" participants' perceptions of the value of chiefs and land. Table 1 below captures the themes I used for the analysis.

**Table 1. Matrix for responses to questions on power**

Participants	Questions	R1	R2	R 3	R4	R5	R6
Chiefly/ non-chiefly	Power & Legitimacy	People with power	Sources of power	Uses of power	Value of chief	Value of land	Power is?

The same procedure was followed for social identity.

The analysis under the theme "People with power" elicited from the data participants' perception of power. By naming people in their community with power, partici-

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participants expressed their perceptions of power. The *Tindana* and the chief consistently emerged as the people with power in the community. These two represented the two main types of power as perceived by participants. Analysis of the sources and uses of their power provided very useful knowledge on participants' perceptions of power.

**Table 2. Matrix for responses to questions on social identity**

Participants	Questions	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6
Chiefly/ non-chiefly	Social Identity	Proud to be a member	Values norms beliefs	Distinct from others	Value of chiefs	Value of land	Relation to others

### 4.3.2 Sub-theme analysis

The main themes came from the interview questions, and the sub-themes emerged as I examined the data directly. Careful reading and re-reading of the data revealed key words, recurrent phrases and sentences that were used as codes for further analysis. In response to the question “why do you feel proud to be a member of your ethnic group?” the following words kept coming up in every response: uniqueness, belonging, origin, history. These words were examined from the data to see the context in which they were used, the meaning, how the words were used and how many participants used these words. This often meant returning to the original interview script to capture the meaning in context. The emerging sub-themes from these words, phrases, and sentences were

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analyzed in detail using the same format as explained above. The process of analysis consisted of constantly returning to the data to check and recheck to make sure the themes and sub-themes captured exactly what the participants said and meant in some of the words or statements they were making. For example, the statement “the *Tindana* has spiritual powers” had to be deconstructed. What do participants mean by spiritual power? What are the various ways in which the statement is expressed and how many participants used that expression? The term “spiritual power” means the “gods of the land” gives the *Tindana* his power. Different participants expressed the same idea in different ways e.g., “The *Tindana* is the custodian of the earth-cult,” “he is the priest who sacrifices to the land god.” The same analysis was done for each sub-theme for both the *Tindana* and the chief.

Another level of analysis was to compare themes and sub-themes between chiefly and non-chiefly groups for similarities and differences and to try to explain the meaning and implications of the similarities and differences. I compared my findings to the theories discussed in chapter 1 for similarities and differences to see if some of the social behavior in the region can be explained by existing social science theories.

### **4.3.3 Classification of participants**

Participants were first classified under their ethnic groups and then reclassified under chiefly and non-chiefly people. This reclassification was informed by the fact that there was a clear distinction in the responses between the chiefly and non-chiefly groups and very little distinction within the groups. Chiefly group participants from different ethnic

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groups had similar perceptions about the origins of their social identity, about power and legitimacy. Non-chiefly participants held similar perceptions despite the difference in their ethnic grouping.

### **4.3.4 Enumeration**

A challenge in the data analysis was how to quantify the data for communicating the frequency of themes or patterns. I used the number of participants (40) as the basis for my numbering. Using word count was not the best for this data, because redundant repetitions were eliminated when the data was processed for analysis. The analysis of the data also revealed words had different meanings depending on the participant's ethnic affiliation; consequently counting the frequency of a word could be misleading. In this research, accurately portraying the meaning given by the participants to concepts is more important than the amount, frequency, and percentage of words used. Using the number of participants as the basis for enumeration is more appropriate in this research. The number of participants using the same theme or patterns in participants' perceptions of concepts is important for the purpose of this research.

## **4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

From the above section on data analysis, it is clear I am using an interpretive paradigm, an approach "which looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life (Gray 2004, p. 20). The research was conducted in a natural setting in which I was the primary means for gathering and interpreting the data. This raises the

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issue of the credibility of my findings and the criteria of judging my findings. This raises issues of transferability and applicability of my findings to another setting or group of people, or whether the findings can be replicated with the same participants in the same context. In other words, what is the guarantee that findings are not fabrications from the researcher's prejudgments and predilections. Marshall and Rossman (2006) have raised these concerns: they are of the view that sound research must be based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and objectivity (pp. 199-205). Flick (2009) lists attention to scientific quality, welfare of participants, and respect for the dignity and rights of participants as three ethical foundations for research. In this research, I have addressed these ethics issues under Flick's (2009) classification.

### **4.4.1 Scientific quality**

Scientific quality addresses Marshall and Rossman's (2006) criteria for judging the soundness of the research. The processes of data gathering and data analysis address the issue of credibility of findings. The interview questions were informed by previous research on the conflicts in the northern region of Ghana in which social identity, power, and legitimacy were among other factors identified as impacting the conflicts in the region. The issues to be investigated were based on existing research. Secondly, the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter of this research informed the interview questions and determined the choice of participants. The subject matter was appropriately identified and described. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), one criterion for credibility is that "the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the

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subject matter was appropriately identified and described” (p. 201).

A second area of consideration for scientific quality is the transferability and applicability of the findings. The findings of this research are useful for understanding protracted social conflicts in Ghana. Most of the social conflicts involve different ethnic groups, and the issues of contention are usually chieftaincy and land. The findings of this research throw some light on the dynamics of social identity formation and how the process shapes people’s perception of power and legitimacy. These finding help us to understand better the dynamics of social conflicts. The findings also offer some insights for conflict resolution. Understanding that social identities are social constructs and not primordial realities will help reduce ethnic tensions. People looking for ways to resolve their conflicts can, with this new awareness, choose to construct their social reality in ways that are inclusive and not exclusive. The findings also reveal that political action or political inaction do have consequences for social relations and social conflict. Conflicts around ethnic identities and chieftaincy conflicts are rampant throughout Ghana.

### **4.4.2 Objectivity**

Objectivity in the context of this study is about the trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability of the process of data collection and analysis (see Flick 2009, p. 392). I have tried to report my data, results, and procedures, as honestly as possible, avoiding falsification, fabrication, and misrepresentation of data. I have endeavored to keep good records of my encounters with participants and reflections on my encounters through extensive note taking, journaling, and memo writing. In analyzing the data, I let the



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categories emerge from the data rather than imposing meanings upon the data. During the research process, I had several discussions with peers in the field who offered useful perspectives on my initial findings.

### **4.4.3 Reflexivity**

One of the dangers involved in qualitative research is the role of the researcher. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted, care has to be taken by the researcher so that “the findings reflect the participants and the inquiry itself rather than a fabrication from the researcher’s biases or prejudices” (p. 201). Reflexivity calls for an exploration of the ways in which a researcher’s involvement in a study influences, acts upon, and informs the study. As Willig (2008) noted, “reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meaning throughout the research process and acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of one’s subject matter while conducting research” (Willig 2008, p. 10). I am very much aware that my involvement in this research has influenced in many ways the outcome of this research. My values, interests, beliefs, social identity, and work experience has shaped the research. On the other hand the research has changed my thinking on social identity, power, and conflicts.

I lived and worked in the northern region of Ghana for thirty eight years. In the last twelve years I have directly worked with different stakeholders in the conflicts as coordinator of the Northern Ghana Peace Project, a peace building project in northern Ghana. Through the project I have interacted with chiefs, opinion leaders, youth groups, women’s groups, politicians, and scores of grassroots organizations engaged in the con-

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flicts and/or working for peace and reconciliation. In preparation for post-conflict mediations in communities, I had the opportunity to listen to stories, histories and narratives of ethnic origins, chieftaincy, and land ownership, origins of the conflicts, triggers and factors escalating the conflicts. I have facilitated dozens of workshops in conflict analysis and resolution in the three northern regions of Ghana. These years of working directly with the stakeholders in the conflicts in northern Ghana have informed and impacted the research.

My experiences in the field have sharpened my desire to understand how people make sense of the world around them by the meaning they attach to events, and how those meanings influence the perceptions of their in-group and attitudes towards the out-group. I have always been baffled by the degree to which some people so identify with their social identity group (ethnic, cultural, religious, political, etc.) that they lose their individuality. I have been struck by the readiness to harm or kill a neighbor, with whom one has lived and interacted for many years, in defense of one's social identity group. Coming from an ethnic group where chieftaincy is a colonial invention, I have always been amazed at people's readiness to kill or die for their chief, raising in me the question: what makes people so committed to their in-group and so resentful of an out-group?

I have also experienced first-hand the impact of mythical stories of who people are, how they came to be where they are today, and how they see their role as a group in the society. People tend to believe these stories as historical events and facts rather than social constructs created for a purpose. They do not question the origins and purpose of these narratives. These experiences have influenced my epistemological stance. My

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choice of social constructionism is to “draw attention to the fact that human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically” (Willig 2008, p. 7), and that what is often described as custom and tradition are social constructs rather than primordial and immutable cultural artifacts. As Willig (ibid.) has aptly noted, “research from a social constructionist perspective is concerned with identifying the various ways of constructing social reality that are available in a culture, to explore the conditions of their use and to trace their implications for human experience and social practice.”

I am very much aware that this is not the only approach to studying the conflicts in northern Ghana. Several good studies have been done. However, I bring a unique perspective to the scholarship on the conflicts in Northern Ghana because of my field experience. I am also fully aware that this unique perspective can also influence the research negatively and have taken the following steps to prevent any negative subjective influences.

### **4.4.4 Validity**

To ensure that my data collection and analysis addressed the research question, that the research described, measured, and explained what I set out to describe, measure, and explain, I kept detailed notes on participant’s reactions to the interview questions and evaluated every interview by carefully rereading the transcripts to see if the data addressed the research question. In discussion with some of the scholars in the region, I asked for their input on my findings vis-à-vis the research question.

#### **4.5 LIMITATIONS**

In this research I have tried assiduously to document factually and accurately participants' experiences and perceptions as they responded to my interview questions, and to accurately portraying the meaning given by participants to the concepts of power, legitimacy and social identity. I do recognize, however, some inevitable limitations that I tried to address as much as possible. First the research is interpretive and I the researcher was the primary means of gathering and interpreting the data. This raises some concerns about the credibility of my findings. I have tried to address the issue of the credibility of my findings by using existing research as the foundation of my interviews. Using the existing research, the subject matter of my research was appropriately identified. All research on the protracted social conflicts in Northern Region of Ghana has identified social identity, land, power and legitimacy as issues influencing the conflicts. This research builds on existing study and contributes to the body of knowledge by explaining the processes of social identity formation and how those processes influence perceptions of power and legitimacy. I have tried to present as accurately as possible participants' perceptions of the issues of study as captured in the recorded interviews. The apriori codes were informed by the theoretical framework in chapter 1 and can be judged by the degree to which the theoretical explanation of social identity, power, and legitimacy fits the data.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **5.1 DATA ORGANIZATION**

The data are organized around participants' responses to questions on power, on social identity, and on legitimacy. Participants' responses to my interview questions were transcribed and keyed into a matrix using Microsoft Excel. The responses were then categorized under chiefly and non-chiefly groups. The choice of categorizing the data as chiefly and non-chiefly is because the colonial administration divided the ethnic groups into people with a centralized and hierarchical system of governance (chieftaincy) and people with a decentralized system of governance (council of elders).

On power and legitimacy, the following questions were put together to explore participants' understanding of power and legitimacy:

Who are the people in your ethnic group (or in the village) who have power and how do they receive their power? How do people with power use it in your ethnic group or community and why do they use their power in these ways? Describe a personal experience with a person with power. What is the value of land and chieftaincy in your ethnic group? How does having a chief in your ethnic group make a difference in the value of your group and should every

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ethnic group have their own chief and land?

These questions sought to elicit from the participants their perception and understanding of power, its sources, uses and value. The sources and uses of power give us both a perspective on participants' understanding of power and criteria for evaluating the legitimacy of claims to power by individuals or groups. The framing of the question was based on the assumption that by naming persons with power, the sources, uses, and value of that power would give an indication of participants' understanding of power, its manifestation, and its legitimacy. In framing the question I was very much aware of the ontological challenge in defining power. Is power a tangible object, a person possesses or a relational phenomenon generated in a relationship or both? I held on to the challenge to allow the data to indicate the choice. A second challenge was participants' understanding of the question on power. In the field interviews participants often asked me: "what do you mean by power?" or "What kind of power are you talking about?" This was an indication to me that power in their mind was contextual. Whenever I was asked any of these two questions, I always responded by asking the participant to choose the power they wanted to talk about. I wanted to see their immediate perceptions at the mention of powerful people in the community. I analyzed their responses under the themes: people with power, sources of the power and uses of the power.

### **5.2 SUMMARY STATEMENTS ON PEOPLE WITH POWER IN THE ETHNIC GROUP**

The following summary statements by participants on the people with power in the ethnic group are categorized on chiefly and non-chiefly basis.

**Table 3. Responses to people with power – *Tindana* vs. Chief**

<b>REGARDING THE TINDANA</b>	
Non-Chiefly respondents	Chiefly respondents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <i>Tindana</i> is the one with the greatest power in the village before the arrival of the colonialists. Before chiefs, we had <i>Tindana</i>. He owes the land. Nobody disobeys the <i>Tindana</i>. Even the Gonjas<sup>28</sup> respect him. He is recognized by the Gonjas.</li> <li>• The <i>Tindana</i> is more important than the chief but, because of power, the chiefs are now ruling them. When it comes to issues of land, the <i>Tindana</i> has more power, but when it comes to political issues in the sense of traditional governance, it is the chief.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ndewura Jakpa<sup>29</sup> met some of the <i>Tindanas</i> who were sacrificing to the gods. He gave his respect to them, because they accepted him as chief, so he did not take power from them, he gave them their independence.</li> <li>• The chief pays homage to the <i>Tindana</i> who owes the land.<sup>30</sup> There are certain things the chief does not do. Only the <i>Tindana</i> does them. The Yundoni <i>Tindana</i> is the chief of all Dagomba <i>Tindanas</i>. When the Ya Na goes to Yunduni he sits on the floor, a mark of respect for the <i>Tindana</i>. The chief respects the <i>Tindana</i>,</li> </ul>

28 One of the chiefly tribes in the northern region who claim to be the descendants of the invading horse men, the *Gbanya*.

29 Ndewura Jakpa is the legendary founding father of the Gonja kingdom, a political system with semi-autonomous territorial divisions. Ndewura in Gonja means ‘chief of towns’.

30 Land includes water bodies, forest reserves, hills and mountain.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anyone coming to the land calls on the <i>Tindana</i> for a piece of land. He has power over all buildings (he puts the first building stone on the ground before a building is put up. The <i>Tindana</i> has spiritual powers that enable him to find the truth. The <i>Tindana</i> has a lot of power. He can ask you to leave his land.</li> </ul>	<p>the owner of the land. The <i>Tindana</i> is responsible for the land and the chief for the people. The <i>Tindana</i> can curse the chief, the chief with all his powers fears the <i>Tindana</i>.</p>
<p><b>REARGDING THE CHIEF</b></p>	
<p>Non-Chiefly respondents</p>	<p>Chiefly respondents</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community accepts the chief. If the community does not accept him, he has no power.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The chief is the most powerful; he is the chief of power (Yaa Naa).<sup>31</sup> The chief in Gonjaland is the head of power. In Gonja, power is vested in the chief. The chief is the owner of power (wura). The title chief is attached to power.</li> <li>• The chief is a leader of the community, a traditional political leader. The chief leads the society and upholds the culture. He controls the land and has the confidence of</li> </ul>

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<sup>31</sup> *Yaa* (strength) *Naa* (chief) in the Dagomba language (dagbangli) means ‘chief of strength.’ The title of the paramount chief of the Dagomba traditional area is *Ya Na*



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	<p>his people. People in small villages have more confidence in their chief than the political leader.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good character is important for the chief's power. A chief with truth is more respected than a rich chief.</li> <li>• The chief is a respectable person.</li> </ul>
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Two people emerge in the above summary statements on people with power in the community, the *Tindana* and the Chief. In the following table is the percentage distribution of the perceptions of the respondents – 20 Non-Chiefly and 20 Chiefly – regarding which person with power in the community is more powerful.

**Table 4. Attitudes to people with power – percentage responses**

People with Power	Non-Chiefly Group	Chiefly Group	Total (40)
Chief	20	50	35
<i>Tindana</i>	45	5	25
Chief > <i>Tindana</i>	0	25	12.5
<i>Tindana</i> > Chief	35	20	27.5

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The above data show that seventy-five percent (50+ 25=75%) of the chiefly ethnic group said the chief was the most powerful person in the village and twenty-five (25%) said the *Tindana*. Only twenty percent (20%) of the non-chiefly ethnic group said the chief is the most powerful person in the village and 80% said the *Tindana*. Altogether, fifty-two and a half percent (52.5%) of all participants perceive the *Tindana* to be the most powerful and 47.5%, the chief. A few participants mentioned religious leaders, opinion leaders, wealthy people, juju men, and warriors as people with power.<sup>32</sup>

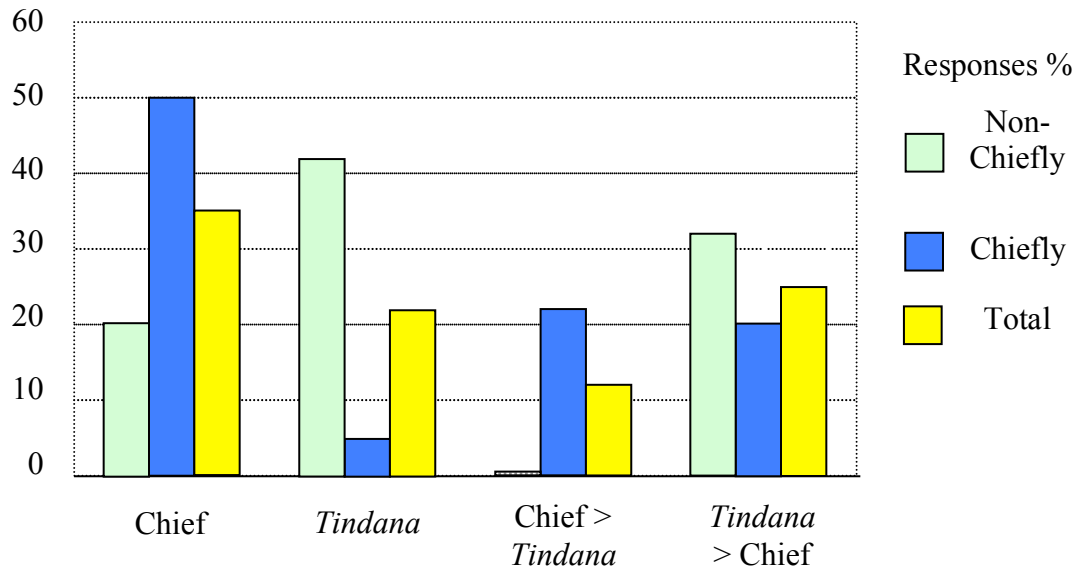


Figure 1. **% Distribution of Power between Chief and *Tindana***  
as discerned by Chiefly and Non-Chiefly groups

<sup>32</sup> The contextual and multi-dimensional nature of power was expressed by participants who always prefaced their responses to questions of power with “which type of power are you talking about?” religious leaders, opinion leaders, wealthy people, politicians, medicine men are all people with power.

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The *Tindana* and the chief represent two basic traditional structures of power. The *Tindana* is associated with the system of leadership based on the family structure. The family head, and the clan<sup>33</sup> head are the leaders in this power structure. The office of the *Tindana* resides in the myth of the first family to settle on the land. The oldest male at the time of settlement on the land holds the leadership role of *Tindana*. Thereafter, the *Tindana*-ship resides in that family. The chief, on the other hand, is associated with the system of leadership based on the myth of a warrior king invading and conquering the people already settled on the land and exercising leadership over them. The chieftaincy system comprises the paramount chief representing the family of the first mythical warrior king to arrive and conquer the people living on the land, divisional chiefs and village chiefs. Among the Vagla ethnic group, some *Tindanas* are also chiefs. Some participants mentioned religious leaders (Muslim and Christian), political leaders, and the rich. The analysis will focus on the *Tindana* and the chief because they represent two systems of power originating from a sense of belonging to a social group.

The data reveal a correlation between participants' perception of who has power in the community and their social identity group. The chiefly groups perceive the chief to be the most powerful in the community. Among the chiefly group participants, 15 out of 20 said the chief had the most power (75%). The chiefly groups as a socially identifiable group trace their ancestry to a mythical great warrior king<sup>34</sup> whose kingship is the basis of their claim to power and control of the land. The chiefly groups make a distinction

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33 The clan represents a group of families claiming a common ancestor.

34 Each of the chiefly tribes attribute their origin to a legendary figure, a great warrior king in the case of the Gonjas or a great chief in the case of the Dagombas.

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between “ownership” and “control” of land. The chiefly groups attribute the power of the chief to the conquest of people and the control of their land. This idea is echoed in the definition of the chief as “owner of power,” the “chief of power.”

Among the non-chiefly groups participants 16 out of 20 said the *Tindana* had the most power (80%). The non-chiefly groups as a socially identifiable group trace their social identity to the first settler family and a ritual parish (land). The head of the family is also the priest/leader (*Tindana*) of community residing in the ritual parish. Identification with the land and the *Tindana* is the basis of their claim to power, ownership and control of land.<sup>35</sup>

The above data support Turner’s (2005, p. 6) view that people are more influenced by their sense of belonging to a social identity group than they are by access to resources. People tend to accept information and to seek approval from their group members with whom they share beliefs, values, and objectives. Turner (2005) contends the standard social science definition of power, as the capacity for influence based on control of resources, presents power as a dependency relationship based on resources rather than a relationship based on organized collective action. Participants’ perceptions of power are influenced by the mode of settlement (first to settle on the land versus by conquest) of their respective social identity groups.

Under the general theme “people with power” the *Tindana* and the chief emerged as people with power in the community. The power of each of them is captured in many

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<sup>35</sup> Land is a source of social identity. A tribe’s identity is intricately linked to land, hence the effort to show some connection to the land either by settlement or conquest. Land is also a commodity that is sold and privately owned. The distinction between ownership and control is a way dealing with the dilemma of land as identity and land as a commodity. Land actually belongs to the gods.

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descriptive ways that are further explored as sub-themes to give more perspective on participants' perception of power.

The above analysis of the data reveals the following sub-themes from participants who perceived the *Tindana* to be the one with the greatest power in the community.

1. He precedes the chief: "Before chiefs we had *Tindanas*."
2. He owns the land.
3. He sacrifices to the land.
4. He controls the distribution of the land.
5. He can find the truth.<sup>36</sup>

The power of the *Tindana* is linked to the earth shrine, i.e., the gods of the land.

The following sub-themes emerge from participants who perceived the Chief as the one with the greatest power in the community.

1. He is the chief of power.
2. He is the owner of power.
3. He is the leader of the community.
4. He upholds culture.
5. He controls the land.

The power of the chief is linked to "power" understood as the power of leadership in the community. The subtle distinctions of chief of power, owner of power, and community leader will be explained in detail below. The important distinction here is that the power of the chief does not come from the gods of the land.

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<sup>36</sup> People go to the *Tindana* to settle their disputes because they believe he has the power because of his relationship with the gods of the land.

### **5.2.1 the *Tindana* as a person with power**

There are a number of sub-themes under the theme “*Tindana* as a person with power”. The *Tindana* is always a male (gender and age are important). He precedes the chief, owns the land, sacrifices to the land, controls distribution of the land, has the capacity to find the truth. These sub-themes give us insights into respondents’ understanding of the nature of the power of the *Tindana*. I explore each of these themes in detail for their meaning and use in context.

#### **5.2.1.1 the *Tindana* precedes the chief**

In this sub-theme, the *Tindana* is perceived to be more powerful than the chief because his family was the first to settle on the land. The institution of *Tindana* precedes the chieftaincy institution therefore the *Tindana* has power over the Chief in matters of ownership and control of the land. The argument here is that the one who settles first on the land claims the power to control the use and distribution of the land. The power of the *Tindana* is in the fact that his family was the first to settle on the land. In the evolution of social structures, chieftaincy is perceived as coming after the structure of *Tindana*-ship was already established. As one of the chiefly group respondents explained; “Ndewura Jakpa (the founding father of the Gonja tribe) met some of the *Tindanas* who were sacrificing to the gods. He gave his respect to them, because they accepted him as chief, so he did not take power from them, he gave them their independence.” Another chiefly group respondent said, “*Tindanas* are the real land owners. Ndewura Jakpa came and met

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them. They are not Gonjas, they own the land, and they do the spiritual rituals.” To emphasize the importance of the power of the *Tindana* over chief, two of the non-chiefly group respondents said the *Tindana* predates the colonial period. “The *Tindana* was the one with the greatest power in the village before the colonial period.” “Traditionally we did not have chiefs, we relied on the community head. The *Tindana* who sacrifices to the earth gods was also the leader of the community.”

The chiefly groups acknowledge the “first settler” status and power of the *Tindana*. They, however, emphasize that the *Tindanas* recognized, accepted, and respected the power of the chief. The chief in turn did not take away the power of the *Tindana*. From the perspective of the chiefly groups, the chief has the capacity to take away the power of the *Tindana* through the use of force (conquest). By recognizing, accepting and respecting the power of the chief, the *Tindanas*, in the view of chiefly group respondents, legitimized the power of the chief who in turn recognized and respected the *Tindana* by “not taking power from the *Tindana*.”

The non-chiefly groups see the first comer status of the *Tindana* differently. For them, the statement “before chiefs, we had *Tindanas*” is more than just first comer to the land. Being the first comer gives legitimacy to the *Tindana*’s claim to power and ownership of the land. By preceding the chief on the land, the *Tindana* received ritual power over the chief. “The *Tindana* can curse the chief, the chief with all his power fears the *Tindana*.” As one respondent explained:

The *Tindana*’s family or clan is the first settler. To settle well, the family or clan enters into a pact with the earth so in that pact, the earth cult gives them rules and

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regulations to enable them settle there well and get what they want. Any new comer gets a piece of land from the *Tindana* to settle and farm. So it is believed that every house that is built in the village, the *Tindana* lays the foundation stone. All the houses are connected to the *Tindana* who has power over them all. (Comment of a non-chiefly group respondent).

As a first comer, the *Tindana* “knows everything about the land,” he can “prevent calamities from befalling the land.” “The *Tindana* has power greater than the chief so the chief pays homage to the *Tindana* who owns the land.” Sixteen (16) non-chiefly respondents and five (5) chiefly respondents, representing 52.5% of all respondents, said the *Tindana* is more important/powerful than the chief.

This sub-theme underscores the fact that the *Tindana* has power because of his membership in the first family to settle on the land. He also has power of seniority and being primogeniture; he is entrusted with the land by the gods of the land. He has the responsibility to take care of the land for the gods and for the benefit of his people. Ethnographic and anthropological literature on the social structures in the Northern Region of Ghana has extensive documentation on the *Tindana* and the fact that the *Tindana* preceded the chief.

#### **5.2.1.2    *the Tindana owns the land***

Central to the power of the *Tindana* is ownership of, control over, rights, duties, and responsibilities towards the land. All 40 respondents linked the *Tindana* to ownership of land on the grounds that his family was the first settler on the land. This sub-theme



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emphasizes the importance of social identity, a sense of belonging to a group, in power dynamics. The *Tindana* is the most powerful person in the community because he belongs to the family that owns the land. Ownership is used here to mean “responsibility for.” The *Tindana* “owns the land” means the *Tindana* has responsibility for the land for the wellbeing of the community. As Moore (1988) has argued, “property is not about things but about relationships between and among persons with regard to things” (p. 33). The idea of “responsibility for” is captured in the expression “in your hands.” The expression “to put something in your hands” implies a relationship between two or more people with regard to an object. Hence the expression “the land is in the hands of the *Tindana*” means someone (the gods) has put the land in the hands of the *Tindana* for a reason. The expression “the *Tindana* owns the land” must be understood in the context of the relationship between the people and the gods of the land mediated by the *Tindana*, and not in the sense of ownership of private property. The *Tindana* is the caretaker of the land. He has the ritual responsibility to protect the land, to take care of all the needs of land so that the land can be productive for the benefit of the people.

Respondents express this idea in different ways. “The land is in the hands of the *Tindana*, he owns the land, and the land belongs to him.” “The *Tindana* is responsible for the land.” A second meaning of ownership in the sense of “having the land in your hands” is knowledge. “The *Tindana* knows everything about the land so people come to consult him. He knows what the land wants to prevent calamities and offers sacrifices for that.” The comprehensive knowledge about the land makes the *Tindana* powerful. “The chief pays homage to the *Tindana* who owns the land.” “The chief respects the *Tindana*,

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the owner of the land.” This idea of ownership as meaning knowledge of the land will be discussed in detail under the sources of power, because it is this knowledge of the land that gives the *Tindana* his power.

There is a link between the right to land (ownership, use, control) and membership in a group. Membership in a group gives one the power to own, use, and control land and other resources. Belonging to a group is defined by control over land. “People can be identified if they have their own land and chiefs,” “land is the livelihood of the people.” You are when you control land, but you can only control land if you belong. To belong gives power and access to resources. One can argue that to have power as in participating in decision-making, you need to belong to a group. To have power, as in control of resources, you need to belong to a group.

#### **5.2.1.3 *spiritual power and impact on economic activities***

Under the sub-theme of spiritual power we focus on the nature of the power of the *Tindana*. The power of the *Tindana* is perceived as a spiritual one with great consequences for the economic activities of the people. The entire livelihood of the community depends on the power of the *Tindana*. The *Tindana* has spiritual powers, which impacts the economic activities of the community. The *Tindana* is the conduit through which supernatural powers flow from the gods to the people through the land. The rituals assure good rains and bountiful harvest from the land, provide protection and game for hunters, and keep the water bodies safe. The rituals also prevent calamities from befalling the land and the people. The livelihood and wellbeing of the people depends on

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the land producing a good harvest. “The *Tindana* performs spiritual rituals, for the wellbeing of the land (so that the land is cool).<sup>37</sup> He performs sacrifices to prevent any calamity from destroying the land” (Chiefly group respondent). “The *Heuhin (Tindana)* has power over the land, he sacrifices to the gods of the land, so when he curses you, you are finished” (Non-chiefly respondent).

The *Tindana*'s control over the rituals of production gives him power over the means of production. He determines who can farm and/or live on the land. As one respondent observed, “the *Tindana* can ask you to leave the land.” This ritual prerogative places enormous economic and political powers in the hands of the *Tindana*. Custodianship of the earth shrine gives the *Tindana* a ritual power that opens him up to economic, cultural, and political power. The exercise of that power is, however, controlled by the gods. Any abuse of power on the part of the *Tindana* is punished with death, disease, or mental illness. The fear of instant divine vengeance holds the *Tindana* in check.

Some of the chiefly group respondents acknowledge the importance of the *Tindana* and his power in relation to rituals of the land for production. They, however, think the *Tindana* is under the chief in the social order and make a distinction between the kingdom and the land. The chief takes care of the kingdom and the *Tindana* the land. “The *Tindana* is appointed and enskinned by the chief to take care of the land.” “The Ya Na (the chief) owns the whole of Dagbon (the Dagomba kingdom) and the Dakpema (*Tindana*) owns the land.” “The *Tindana* is the priest who sacrifices to the land god. If there is a drought the chief will invite the *Tindana* to consult the oracles and see what is

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<sup>37</sup> The word ‘cool’ literally means ‘peace’, a land that is ‘cool’ is a peaceful and productive land.

needed for the sacrifice. The chief provides the gifts for the sacrifice” (Chiefly group respondent).

#### **5.2.1.4    *the Tindana controls the distribution of land***

The control and distribution of land is at the center of the contention over the land. The non-chiefly groups link control to ownership. The *Tindana* owns and controls the land. The chiefly group delinks control from ownership and argues the *Tindana* owns the land but the chief controls the distribution of the land. In this sub-theme, the *Tindana* has power because he controls the distribution of land. He gives out a piece of the land to new arrivals to settle and to farm. He lays the foundation stone for every building on the land. “Anyone coming to the land calls on the *Tindana* for a piece of land. He has power over all buildings: he puts the first building stone on the ground before a building is put up.” As one respondent noted, “the constitution invests lands in the chiefs, but when it comes to giving out land and making sacrifices it is the *Tindana*.” This statement is in reference to a provision in the 1979 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, in which all northern lands were divested from the state and vested “in any such person or in the appropriate skin without further assurance than this clause” (Article 18:3). The vagueness of this article was bound to create conflict as it was immediately interpreted to mean the land was vested in the chiefs. The first conflict over the control of land erupted in 1980. Since then, there have been over twenty five conflicts over ownership and control of land. As Lund (2008) has noted, “the lawmakers assumed that the chiefs were the ‘natural’ customary authorities” (p. 53). This is not a problem in the southern part of the Ghana

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because the chiefs control the land. In the northern regions as the data have revealed, the *Tindanas* controlled land. The *Tindana* has the power to take land away from the people settling on the land. He is called upon to mediate when there are land boundary disputes between families.

### **5.2.1.5    *the Tindana can find the truth***

One of the reasons for the power of the *Tindana* is in his ability to find the truth (in the case of a dispute determine who is right). This capacity makes it possible for him to mediate disputes over land boundaries between families. People come to him when in doubt so that he can help them find the truth. When there is a natural disaster, the *Tindana* can find the cause of the disaster and prescribe a solution. He has power to make peace with the land and among the people who live on the land.

### **5.2.1.6    *summary of the power of the Tindana***

The *Tindana's* power is spiritual and consists in knowledge of and responsibility for the land. Land and its ownership is not about private property, it is about the relationships between the people and the gods, and among the people with regard to the land. Power does not emanate from the land as a physical "property"; power comes from the land as a symbol of a relationship between and among people. The *Tindana* has power because he is at the center of this relationship. This resonates with the conception of power as a social construct nested in social interactions and relationships. As Foucault (1980) has argued, power belongs to a set of relations that generate capacities in human interactions

and institutions. Power gets its meaning from the relationships in social interaction. Power, in Foucault’s view, is relational and power and knowledge are interconnected.

How much of the power and role of the *Tindana* is an ideological construct to establish legitimacy will be explored in the next chapter.

**5.2.2 the Chief as a person with power**

The chief as a person of power is described by the chiefly group respondents as the “owner of power,” “a leader of the community,” “a traditional political leader.” The very word “chief” in their view “is a title of power.” Power, as one chiefly group respondent explained, “is the authority invested in a person by his people to supervise them to perform their laid down regulations. If anyone goes against the rule, he is brought before the chief who, in consultation with the elders, sanctions him.” Below are some of the terms used by respondents to express the power of the chief.

**Table 5. Power of the Chief**

Chiefly Group responses	Non-Chiefly Group responses
<b><i>Rule, Lead, Govern, Supervise</i></b>	
To rule the people and land	Rule the people
Supervise people to carry out their duties	Care for political affairs
Lead the people	
Run the affairs of the tribe	

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Control resources	
Rule, command respect	
Rule subjects	
Govern the land	
Make laws	
Sanction wrong doing	
Make decisions	
<b><i>Protect, Uphold</i></b>	
Protect the people	Sell the land
Protect the land, tradition and culture	Fertility of the land
Protect the kingdom	
Uphold the culture	
<b><i>Prevent Conflicts</i></b>	
Maintain social order “living without a chief is like living in the jungle”	Settle disputes
Arbitrate and mediate	Peaceful coexistence
Provide wisdom	Respect Gonja Customs
Settle disputes	Arbitration
Reconcile the people	Peace and unity
Resolve conflicts	Good and protection
Solve problems	Peace and development
	Peace
<b><i>Mobilize the Community</i></b>	

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Take care of the land and the people	Mobilize the people for communal labor
Ensure blessing and peace	Bring development
Preserve the needs of the community	Guide, care for people
Organize the people for communal labor	Help people
Organize the community	

In the Vagla ethnic group, some *Tindanas* are also chiefs. This explains why we find chiefly group expressions and ideas in some of the non-chiefly respondents e.g. “Ruling the people” refers to the Chief and fertility of the land refers to those *Tindanas* who are chiefs. Those Vagla respondents associated with the *Tindanas* who are chiefs combined the power of the chief and *Tindana*. The Vagla respondents associated with the chief who is not a *Tindana* did not combine the two roles.

The data illuminate following sub-themes on the chief as a person of power.

**5.2.2.1    *the chief is the “chief of power”***

The word chief is often used in Ghana to denote “a big man,” an important person, the head or leader of an organization. The Principal of a school is called “chief” or “boss” or “the big man.” The expression “chief of power” means head of power, the leader of those with power. As one respondent explained, “power in Gonja refers to strength, ability to do something, or to control something or another person. It gives authority to whoever has it.” “He has the power who can say something and everybody will agree to it.” The chief is the most powerful person in the community because his word is final. The



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expression “chief of power” means he is the head of power, above him there is no other human being more powerful than him. “Power is vested in the king who is regarded as the overall supreme being of the land. Whatever he says is final, whether it is on land, chieftaincy, or farming, and everybody respects it that way.” The chief is the all-powerful person in the community and his pronouncements on land, chieftaincy matters, and farming are final. The chief has absolute power, but acts in consultation with his council of elders: “He consults them and with their advice he makes the pronouncements.” The chief is at the helm of power in the community.

#### **5.2.2.2     *the chief is the owner of power***

This sub-theme goes beyond the chief as the leader of people with power to the chief as the “owner of power.” The chieftaincy of the chiefly ethnic groups in the northern region of Ghana, Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprussi, and Nanumba, originated from itinerant raiders who conquered the local people and settled among them as their chiefs. Ownership of power in this context is in the sense of capturing and keeping power as a private property of the family. The power belongs to the chief and he passes it on to his sons. There is a second notion of ownership that is not about a personal capability, or a private property. The chief as owner of power is in the sense of a relationship between and among people with regard to social order and peaceful coexistence. In the view of the respondents, a chief is someone in whom the community vests power to lead and govern the community for the wellbeing of the community. “The Ya Na is the owner of power, he is the chief of all power. The one with power rules, the chief of power rules over all, but to get power

you need good character.” In the context of the second meaning of ownership, there is a moral dimension. The chief must be a person of good character.

### **5.2.2.3    *the chief must have a good character***

Several respondents emphasized the importance of good character as a condition of becoming a chief. “The chief of power (Ya Na) rules over all, but to get power, he needs to have a good character.” “The people give the chief power depending on his character.” “Good character is important for the chief’s power.” “A chief with truth is more respected than a rich chief.” “The chief is a respectable person who recognizes and respects people or else he will not be respected.” The chief consults before taking a decision therefore his decisions are always representative of the community.” All these statements stress the importance of the moral character of the power of the chief. A chief is powerful not because of his position as a chief but because of the quality of his character as a human being. It is precisely because of this character of his person that the community entrusts power to him and makes him a leader of the community.

### **5.2.2.4    *the chief is the leader of the community***

The chief is also perceived as the leader of the community. His power is for leadership. All forty (40) respondents perceive the power of the chief as a power to lead and govern the community. All the chiefly respondents described the power of the chief as the power to rule, to govern, to lead, guide, to make decisions and to sanction wrongdoing. The chief has the power to protect the people and the land, tradition and culture, the power to

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protect the kingdom and uphold the culture. The chief has the power to maintain social order and peace. The chief has the power to organize and mobilize the people for war and development. The chief is vested with power to lead his people, to lead the society.

The non-chiefly group (except for one respondent) perceives the power of the chief as “care for the political affairs of the community, the people, peace, unity, and development.” The power of the chief is for “helping people, settling disputes, and ensuring a peaceful coexistence among the people.” The chief is perceived as a caretaker, a helper of the people and not one who lords it over the people.

#### **5.2.2.5    *the chief has limited powers***

This sub-theme underscores the fact that the power of the chief has limitations. The power of the chief is limited to the community in which he is the chief. It is dependent on the people recognizing and accepting the power of the chief. “The people in the community entrust their power to the chief to exercise on their behalf. If the community does not accept the chief, he has no power.” “A chief is no chief if the people do not recognize him.” Power in this context is dependent on legitimacy, which is the recognition and acceptance by the people. Conversely, people can be manipulated to recognize and accept the chief. “Being one of us” is an important means of legitimacy. Where the chief is perceived “as belonging to the group,” it is easier to recognize and accept him.

At the family level, the oldest in the family is the most powerful. He makes the decisions and not the chief. Unlike the *Tindana* whose power is both at the family and community level, the chief’s power is limited to the community where he is the chief. “In

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the family there is no chieftaincy, the senior brother is the head.”

One of the uses of the chief’s power is to settle disputes. The chief, however, has no power settle a dispute in which the *Tindana* is involved. As a mark of respect for the *Tindana*, “the chief does not sit in judgment in a case involving the *Tindana*.” The level of peace, social order, and wellbeing of the people also determine the power of the chief during his reign. The chief in whose reign there was abundant rain, good harvest, low child mortality is considered a powerful chief. The people prefer a wise chief to a powerful and rich chief. Wisdom is more cherished than power, however an unwise chief cannot be replaced because of his lack of wisdom.

#### **5.2.2.6 summary of the power of the chief**

The chief’s power comes from the people for purposes of leadership and governance. A chief is someone entrusted with power by the community, because of his good character, to lead and govern the community. Power and its ownership is not about an individual capacity or charisma, it is about the relationships between and among people as they interact socially. The chief owns power precisely because of the relationships emanating from social interactions and the need for social order. The power of the chief is presented as if it were a tangible, objective and measurable phenomenon nested in people, systems and structures. Power is perceived as the capacity, ability, and potential to lead and govern. Power is here conceptualized in relation to control, domination, and influence, very similar to what Sharp et al (2000) describes as dominating power. The power of the chief from the analysis also resonates with the conception of power as a social construct

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nested in social interactions and relationships. Power belongs to a set of relations that generate capacities in human interactions and institutions. Power gets its meaning from the relationships in social interaction.

The data are, however, very clear that the power of the chief is not a ritual power, and it does not come from the land. None of the respondents (0%) mentioned land as the source of the power of the chief. The chief owns power in the sense that power is given to him by the people for a purpose.

Question1a: *Who are the people with power in your ethnic group?*

Theme: *People with Power: Tindana*

**Table 6: People with power –*Tindana***

<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>How used</i>	<i>Statistics</i>
<i>Tindana</i> has power because he precedes the chief	The first family to settle on the land	Before chiefs we had <i>Tindanas</i>	52.5%  (16 non-chiefly and 5 chiefly)
<i>Tindana</i> owns the land	First settler on the land. The land is entrusted to him, he knows the land	The land is in the hands of the <i>Tindana</i>	100%
<i>Tindana</i> has spiritual power	The gods of the land give him the	He is the custodian of the earth cult, the priest who	62%  (10 non-chiefly)

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	power	sacrifices to the land god	and 19 chiefly)
<i>Tindana</i> controls distribution of land	The <i>Tindana</i> knows everything about the land	Anyone coming to the land calls on the <i>Tindana</i> for a piece of land	75% (20 non-chiefly and 10 chiefly)
<i>Tindana</i> can find the truth	The <i>Tindana</i> consults the gods to find the truth	The <i>Tindana</i> has spiritual powers that enable him find the truth	75% (16 non-chiefly and 14 chiefly)

Question 1: *Who are the people with power in your ethnic group?*

Theme: *People with Power: Chief*

**Table 7: People with power – Chief**

<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>How used</i>	<i>Statistics</i>
The chief is the chief of power	The chief is the head of all who have power	The chief of power rules over all. The chief in Gonjaland is the head of power	57.5% (4 non-chiefly and 19 chiefly)
The chief is the owner of power	The chief is entrusted with power	The chief rules the people on the land	75% (11 non-chiefly and 19 chiefly)
The chief must have a good	The chief must be respectful, honest	The people give the chief power depending on his	100%

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character	and fair. He must be a good person	character. The chief is a respectable person	
The chief is the leader of the community	The chief is a leader at the community level	The chief must be able to protect the community. The chief has responsibility to take care of the community	100%
The power of the chief is limited	The chief's power is within the community where he is chief	The senior brother in the family is higher than the chief when it comes to family matters	100%

**5.3 SOURCES OF POWER**

The second theme under which power is explored is the sources of power of the *Tindana* and the Chief. Below is a summary description of the themes represented in participants' answers to the question.

**Table 8: Data on sources of power of *Tindana* and Chief**

Non-Chiefly respondents	Chiefly respondents
<i>regarding the Tindana</i>	
<b>Age:</b> The oldest male of the family.	Ndewura Jakpa met some of

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<p><b>Settlement/Land:</b> The oldest male of the first settlers. The <i>Tindana</i> knows the land and knows what the land wants to prevent calamities. <i>Tindana</i> knows everything about the land so people come to consult him.</p> <p><b>The Earth shrine:</b> The <i>Tindana</i> is the custodian of the earth cult, the priest who sacrifices to the land god (so that the land will be cool).</p>	<p>the <i>Tindanas</i> who were sacrificing to the gods.</p> <p>The chief respects the <i>Tindana</i>, the owner of the land. The <i>Tindana</i> is responsible for the land and the chief for the people.</p>
<p><i>regarding the Chief</i> — Non-Chiefly respondents</p>	
<p>Appointed by the Paramount chief to represent him in the village.</p> <p>Appointed by the clan heads.</p>	
<p><i>regarding the Chief</i> — Chiefly respondent</p>	
<p><b><i>By birth/lineage/Royal family</i></b></p> <p>One is made a chief by virtue of the fact that he comes from a lineage. You have to belong to the family of chiefs to become a chief. To be chief you must come from a royal family. Chiefs get their power through inheritance. Your father or grandfather must have been a chief. Chieftaincy power is by virtue of birth. To be a chief you must come from the royal family or a family that custom has bestowed some power to do one thing or another. In Gonja you must come from Ndewura Jakpa's clan to be a chief.</p> <p><b><i>Tradition/custom/Kingmakers/Ancestors/institutions</i></b></p> <p>The gods and the ancestors give the chief the power. The chief is the living representation of the dead. The skins on which the chief sits gives him the power. The skins represent the customs of the ancestors. The ancestors established chieftaincy. Chief-</p>	



taincy is part of our culture because our leader was a chief. Chiefs are selected by divination. The kingmakers have the authority to bestow power on chiefs. They get the power by virtue of their office. Through the office, custom bestows that power. The warriors, Muslim cleric and kingmakers give the power to the chief.

***The people***

Invariably all these offices have some recognition that comes from the people giving the recognition to the chief. The people give the chief the power. He is mandated by the community to act on its behalf. Without recognition you cannot operate the power. The chief's power is the result of people coming together and agreeing to give him power. The people give the chief power depending on his character. The chief must recognize and respect people or else he will not be respected. Power is given to the chief for the good of the people.

***Economics, prestige and land***

Because of economics, prestige and local land control the chiefs are powerful. The prestige, control and economic aspects give chiefs political and economic power. The chief takes control over everything including the land, but who is the real owner of the land? This is the challenge.

Two sources of power emerge from the data representing participants' perception of the sources of power of the *Tindana* and the chief – land and people respectively. The distribution below is respondents' perception of the sources of power of the *Tindana* and chief.

Data Analysis



Figure 2. Source of Power of the *Tindana* – primary themes

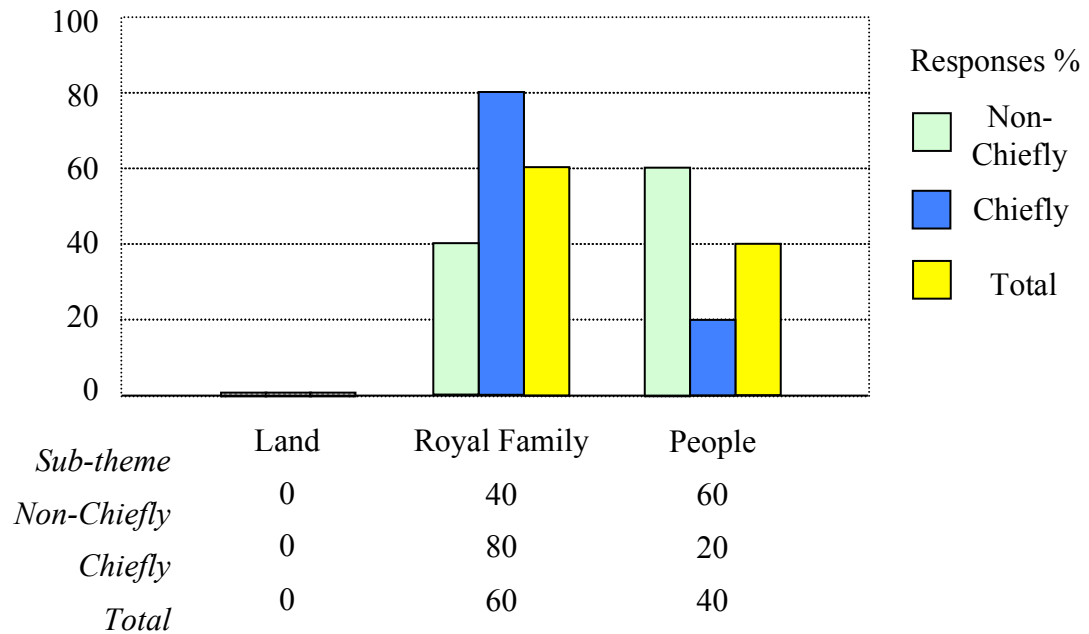


Figure 3. Source of Power of the Chief – primary themes

The data in Figure 2 and in Figure 3 above reveal that none of the respondents

## *Data Analysis*

perceived the “royal family” as the source of power of the *Tindana*, and none of the respondents perceived land as the source of power of the chief. None of the non-chiefly groups mentioned “the people” as a source of the power of the *Tindana*. Four (4) chiefly group respondents mentioned “people” as a source of power of the *Tindana*. This is because one ethnic group (Vagla) has the system where some villages have the *Tindana* as the chief and others have the *Tindana* separate from the Chief.

Below are the detailed distribution of the responses, in Figure 4 and in Figure 5.

### **5.3.1 Sources of power of the *Tindana***

The sources of power of the *Tindana* are related to the land. Land represents the physical soil/earth on which the people settle, build their homes and bury their dead. It represents the soil on which they farm to feed themselves. It is a symbol of their relationship with the gods of the land and of a membership in a group (family, clan, ethnic).

The right to land is determined by membership in a specific community. Land has a ritual, social, political, and economic dimension. Land is a means to power; the ritual control of the land that can be converted into political and economic power. Land as a source of power is captured in words such as: age, settlement, earth shrine and tradition.

The following sub-themes emerge under land as the source of power of the *Tindana*: (1) first settler on the land, (2) the earth shrine, (3) knowledge of the land, (4) age, (5) tradition.

*Data Analysis*

<i>Sub-theme %</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Settlement	60	0	30
Birth/Tradition	0	35	17.5
Earthshrine	35	35	35
People	5	30	17.5

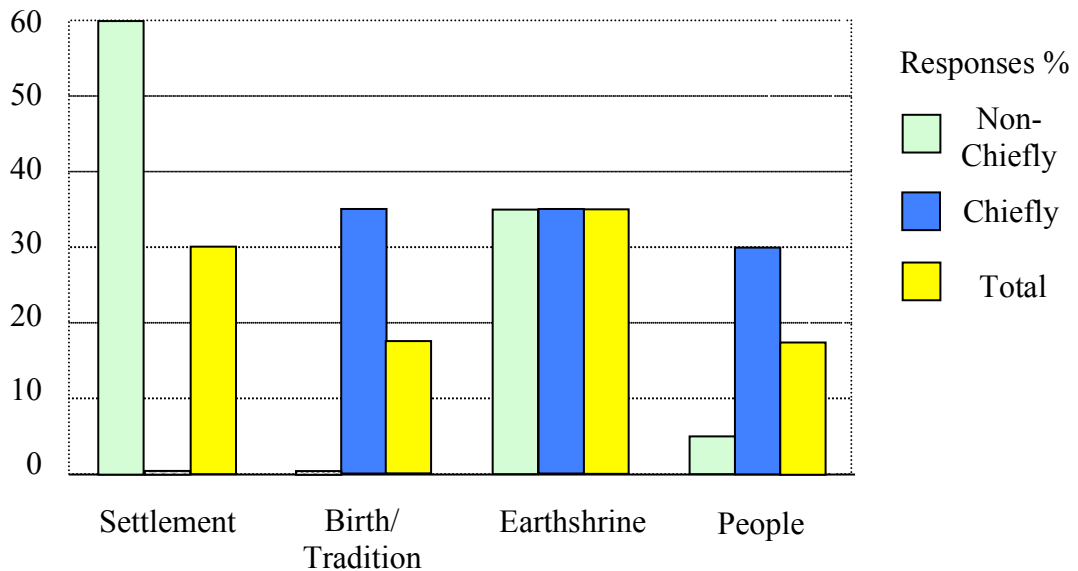


Figure 4. **Source of Power of the *Tindana* – sub-themes**

**5.3.1.1 *first to settle on the land***

Twelve (12) non-chiefly group respondents mentioned settlement as the source of power of the *Tindana*. “The *Tindana*’s clan is the first settler.” None of the chiefly group respondents mentioned settlement as the source of the power of the *Tindana*. Some respondents from the Gonja tribe said their founding father found some *Tindanas* on the land but do not mention settlement as a source of power.

### *Data Analysis*

The *Tindana*'s family was the first to settle on the land and entered into a pact with the gods of the land. This sub-theme, "settlement," draws attention to the fact that access to land "is mediated by membership in specific communities or groups which is based on descent, shared history of migration or flight, physical proximity and political allegiance. The boundaries of these groups, however, were and continue to be notoriously fuzzy, meaning that membership needs to be negotiated" (Kuba and Lentz 2006, p. 8).

As Lentz (2006) has noted, people make claims to land by claiming to belong, by virtue of descent, or by some other criterion, to the community of "first settlers."

First-comers are believed to have established a special relationship with the spirits of the land, often symbolized by shrines at which regular sacrifices are offered in order to ensure the fertility of the land and the well-being of the community. First-comers and their descendants distributed land to later immigrants, they grant the right to build houses and bury the dead, and often still mediate in conflicts over land boundaries and land use. (p. 8)

Lentz (2006) acknowledges that these first-comer claims are fraught with ambiguity because the chronology of the foundation of settlements and extent of the first-comer status (single lineage or the lineage's entire ethnic group?) can be manipulated in multiple ways. Settlement is invoked when the need arises to determine who is the legitimate owner of the land. Settlement also connotes a sense of belonging. People who settle together belong together. Settlement is also about social identity. Identification with the land becomes a category around which people mobilize and build a sense of belonging.

**5.3.1.2 *the earth shrine***

The second sub-theme on the source of power of the *Tindana* is the gods of the land (earth shrine). The *Tindana* gets his powers from his relationship with the gods of the land to pacify and purify the land. Seven (7) of the chiefly group said the *Tindana* gets his powers from the gods of the land and seven (7) of the non-chiefly group mentioned the gods of the land as a source of the power of the *Tindana*. This subtheme emphasizes the fact that the power of the *Tindana* does not come from a human source: it is spiritual and comes from the gods. “The *Tindana* is the custodian of the earth cult.” “The *Tindana* has spiritual powers that enable him to find the truth.” The choice of the *Tindana* is by divination i.e. “caught by the tail” of the diviner.<sup>38</sup>

**5.3.1.3 *age/gender as source of power of the Tindana***

The *Tindana* has power by virtue of being the oldest male in the family. The oldest male is always the family head with the responsibility of providing for the family, keeping the family together and resolving all problems related to the family. Seniority and gender are the source of power in this sub-theme. Whenever participants mention “birth” in relation to the source of the power of the *Tindana*, it refers to the oldest by birth. Respondents who referred to age as the source of the power of the *Tindana* also mentioned the *Tindana* as the family or clan head. In a compact society, the oldest member of the community is the leader. He (in patrilineal societies) carries out the religious, cultural, social, and political roles and tasks. His claim to power is his age and gender. Implicit in

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<sup>38</sup> The diviner uses the tail of a goat, sheep or cow for his work of divination. “Caught by the tail” refers to the tail he uses in the process of finding out who the gods have chosen as *Tindana*.

### *Data Analysis*

age is the idea that he has more experience and is therefore more knowledgeable about the land and the community's relationship with the gods of the land.

This sub-theme underscores the fact that the office of the *Tindana* is genealogically senior to the chieftaincy institution. The *Tindana* technically is the primogeniture, the first born on the land and so he inherits the title to all prerogatives and possessions of his father. Hence the *Tindana* is more powerful than the chief just by being the "first born" on the land. The *Tindana* has power of seniority and through primogeniture is entrusted with the land by the gods of the land. He has the responsibility to take care of the land for the gods and for the benefit of his people. This gives the *Tindana* the "power of attorney" to administer the land on behalf of the gods for the wellbeing of the land and the people. The *Tindana* has power because of his "age" and his relationship with the gods, the land and his people.

#### **5.3.1.4    *knowledge of the land***

Age, settlement, and the gods of the land are all related to the land as the source of power of the *Tindana*. The power is in the knowledge of the land the *Tindana* acquires because of the length of settlement on the land and his relationship with the gods of the land. The *Tindana's* power consists in his knowing what the land wants (to avoid calamities), how to respond to the needs of the land and knowledge of the boundaries of the land. "The *Tindana* knows everything about the land." Because of this knowledge, the *Tindana* has power to "prevent calamities from befalling the land." This sub-theme of knowledge of the land as power resonates with Michel Foucault's views on discourse of power/know-

### *Data Analysis*

ledge. Foucault (1979) argues “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27). Knowledge in Foucault’s view is power over others, the power to define others, hence the power to produce reality, to produce domains of objects and rituals of truth (p. 194). Discourse is the vehicle through which knowledge and subjects are constituted. Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart (Foucault 1992, p. 100). The data reveal how the discourse on the *Tindana’s* knowledge of the land gives him power and control over the people and the land. One could argue that this discourse is created and sustained precisely in order to claim rights to the land. The existence of land disputes among the first settlers on the land is a testimony to the fuzziness of the boundary demarcations. As Lentz (2006) notes, these boundaries were “usually marked off by ditches, paths, hedges of shrubs or marks on trees” (Kuba and Lentz 2006, p. 9). This raises questions about the accuracy of the *Tindana’s* knowledge of the boundaries of the land.

#### **5.3.1 Sources of power of the Chief**

The sources of power of the chief are related to people, a cultural community, a group of people with a common worldview, a common field of experience, and a meaning and value systems. The people empower their chief to rule them.

The choice of the chief is determined by birth into a family with a history of chieftaincy. One’s father must be a chief or come from a chiefly tradition before one is



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born into a royal family. Chieftaincy can also be given to someone with no history of chieftaincy. Once made a chief, his family down the generations becomes a chiefly family. The emerging sub-themes under the theme sources of power of the chief are: (1) birth/lineage, (2) institution of kingmakers, (3) the people, (4) economics and prestige, (5) land.

<i>Sub-theme %</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Settlement	15	0	7.5
Birth/Tradition/King	0	85	42.5
Earthshrine	25	0	12.5
People	60	15	37.5

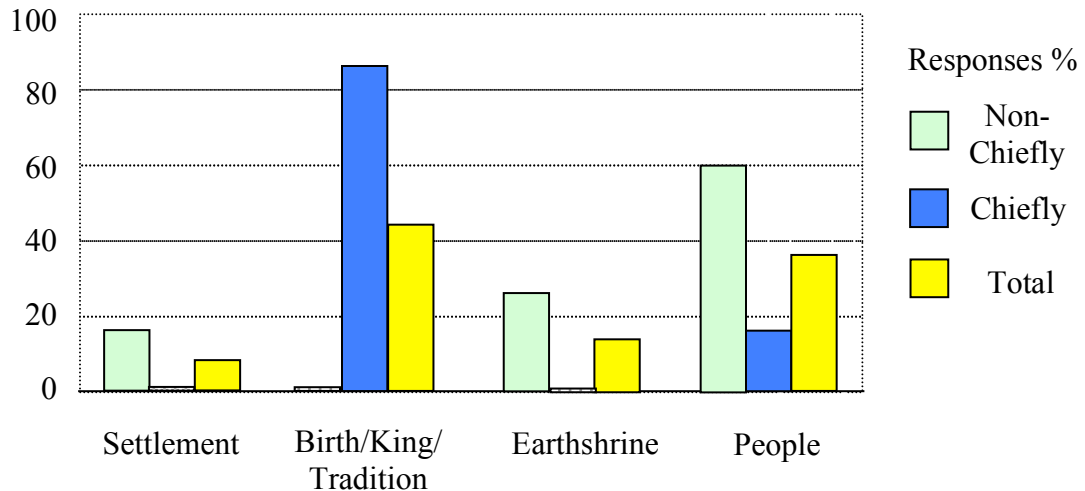


Figure 5. **Source of Power of the Chief – sub-themes**

Birth/Tradition/King as source of power means being born into a royal family. Tradition means a history of chieftaincy in the family and king means the paramount chief who has the power to appoint chiefs. The chieftaincy is received from the king.

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Birth is also associated with a sense of belonging, being born into a family makes one a member of that family. To be born into a family, to a social system (e.g., chieftaincy, *Tindana*-ship, etc.), to an ethnic group means to belong, to be a part of the group. Settlement and birth become the content of social identity and the reason for power. Under the theme sources of power of the chief, the following sub-themes have been identified: (1) birth/lineage as the source of power of the chief, (2) institution of kingmakers, (3) the people give the chief power, (4) economics and prestige as a the source of power of the chief, (5) land as a the source of power of the chief.

### ***5.3.2.1 birth/lineage as the source of power of the chief***

Birth is the main source of power of the chief. By birth means being born into a family of chiefs. Birth however is not the only source of power. One can be made a chief without necessarily coming from the family of chiefs. Respondents refer to coming from a family of chiefs as coming from the lineage of chiefs.

Among the non-chiefly respondents, eight (8) mentioned the royal family as the source of the power of the chief and twelve (12) mentioned the people. Sixteen (16) of the chiefly group mentioned the royal family as the source of power and four (4) said the people. Sixty (60%) percent of all respondents perceive the royal family to be the source of the power of the chief. The history of a royal family begins with a father becoming a chief. Succession is by the rule of primogeniture. A chief sits on the skin of an animal as the symbol of his power. The skin is passed on from father to son. Hence the process of becoming a chief is known as “enskinment.” A chief is “given” his chieftaincy by another

### *Data Analysis*

chief. All the chiefly tribes claim ancestry from a legendary great grandfather chief. The Gonja chiefly tribe traces the origins of their chieftaincy to the great ancestor Ndewura Japka and believes that all present paramount chiefs are his sons and grandsons. The Dagombas, Mamprussis and Nanumbas all regard Naa Gbewa as the first ruler. Naa Gbewa's sons established these three kingdoms.

The non-chiefly groups attribute the power of the *Tindana* to his family being the first to settle on the land while the chiefly groups attribute the power of the chief to the first ruler of the community. The idea of the first settler and first ruler are social constructs, legitimizing ideologies, nested in a sense of belonging to a group. Turner (2005) notes that in-group mutual influence generates power, which enables group members to gain and control resources. These legitimizing constructs are used to justify present power dynamics when there is a contestation and are presented as if they were historical facts.

What the sub-theme indicates is that the primary means of becoming a chief is by birth. One must be born into a royal family as a pre-condition for qualifying to become a chief. Birth into the royal family is not the only means of becoming a chief. A chieftaincy can be given to a friend of a chief or a person of good character. The sub-theme also draws our attention to the movement from explanatory narratives to legitimizing ideologies.

#### **5.3.2.2     *institution of kingmakers***

The sub-theme “institution of kingmakers” as the source of power of the chief

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emphasizes the institutional framework surrounding the power of the chief. The primary source of the power of the chief is birth into the royal family, in that it qualifies one to be a chief but it does not necessarily make one a chief. The kingmakers are people designated by the traditions of the tribe to select and enskin the chief thereby empowering him to rule his people. They are people designated by the community to determine who among the qualified candidates should be the chief. This choice is made by divination, a process by which the ancestors participate in choosing the chief. The general rules of primogeniture were followed unless there was a compelling reason to by-pass the first-born son of the deceased chief and give the chieftaincy to someone else.

#### **5.3.2.3    *the people give the chief power***

The “people” represents a cultural community, with a set of meanings and values that inform a common way of life and worldview. The community is a group of people with “a common field of experience, common and complementary way of understanding, common judgments and common aims. It is the community that is the carrier of a common world mediated by meaning and motivated by values” (Lonergan 1985, p. 7). As groups of people interact socially, they develop over time, commonly understood and commonly accepted ways of cooperating. The community also begins to delegate certain powers and entrust certain tasks to individuals within the community to be performed on behalf of the community. The sub-theme, “the people give the chief power” means the community that has existed down the ages. It also means the institutions, rules and processes that have evolved over time through social interactions. This is captured in

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statements such as; “the ancestors established chieftaincy,” “the skins give power to the chief,” “people give power to the chief depending on his character,” or “custom bestows power on the chief,” “the kingmakers bestow power on the chief.”

The concept of “the people” is in contradistinction to “the gods of the land” as the source of power. The power of the chief comes from the community.

### ***5.3.2.4 economics, prestige, land as the sources of power of the chief***

This sub-theme explains the role of wealth and the struggle for the control of resources in the power dynamics between the *Tindana* and the chief. Power is perceived as control of resources. The chief has power because he controls the resources. Agriculture and trade were for a long time two ways of acquiring wealth. Agriculture depended on the forces of nature and so the *Tindana* played a key role. Control of the trade routes created wealth through taxation. Whoever controls the trade routes, controls the source of income. The chief’s power was judged by how much control he had over the trade routes and the markets. Prestige is about respect and having a place of honor in the society. Control over resources and the means of production gives power and honor to the chief.

### ***5.3.2.5 land as the source of power of the chief***

Land as a source of power comes from claims to land on the basis of conquest. The first warrior king to invade the land is perceived to own the land by virtue of conquering the people who were already settled on the land. The chiefly group participants make a distinction between the land as kingdom and land as a family property. The chief owns

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the land in the sense of his area of jurisdiction.

Question1b: *Where do the people of power get their power from?*

Theme: *Sources of Power: Tindana*

**Table 9: Meaning and application of power – matrix of the *Tindana***

<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>How used</b>
Age/gender	The oldest male in the family	The oldest male in the family
Settlement	First family to settle on the land	The <i>Tindana's</i> family was the first to settle on the land
The gods of the land	The earth shrine	The gods of the land
Knowledge of the land	Knows the boundaries of the land and understands the needs of the land	The <i>Tindana</i> knows what the land wants and offers sacrifices for that

Question1b: *Where do the people of power get their power from?*

Theme: *Sources of Power: Chief*

**Table 10: Meaning and application of power – matrix of the Chief**

<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>How used</b>
Birth/Lineage	Born into a family with a history of	One must belong to the

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	chieftaincy	royal family to be a chief
Institution of kingmakers	A group of elders designated by the community to select and enskin the chief	The kingmakers bestow power on the chief
The people	A cultural community with a common experience, and worldview	The people vest the power in the chief
Economics, prestige, and land		The chief has power because he controls the land.

The sources of power as perceived by the participants point to their understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of power. The power of the *Tindana* is different from that of the chief. The uses of the power further elaborates on the difference in the nature of power.

**5.4 USES OF POWER**

The third theme under which power is explored is the uses of power of the *Tindana* and the chief. The summary below on the uses of power reveals a difference in the power of the chief and the power of the *Tindana*. The power of the chief is for leadership: to rule, to govern, to lead, to make laws, to make decisions, to give focus and guidance, to sanction wrong doers and to care for the political affairs of the community. The chief uses his power to organize and mobilize his people for peace, development, communal labor, war, etc., and to maintain social order by settling disputes, solving problems,

keeping the general order, and maintaining the peace. He also cares for the well being of his people. The chief also uses his power to give visibility and respect to the community.

The *Tindana*, on the other hand, uses his power to purify the land, to prevent calamities, to protect the people from hunger, sickness etc., and to offer ritual sacrifices for the peace of the land. He promotes the well being of the people (peace, unity, consulting the oracles for the truth). He guides and controls people. His is ritual power.

**5.4.1 Summary of participants’ perception of the uses of the power by the *Tindana* and the Chief**

**Table 11: Uses of power by the *Tindana* and Chief**

<b>REGARDING THE TINDANA</b>	
Non-Chiefly respondents	Chiefly respondents
<b><i>Purification and pacification of the land</i></b>	
<p>The <i>Tindana</i> knows the land and knows what the land wants to prevent calamities. He makes the sacrifices for that. He consults the oracles in the case of a drought. The <i>Tindana</i> owns the land and performs spiritual rituals, for the wellbeing of the land (so that the land will be cool). The <i>Tindana</i> has spiritual powers that enable him to find the truth. He performs sacrifices to prevent calamities from destroying the land.</p>	<p>Stands in the foot-steps of the ancestors. Sacrifices to the land gods to prevent calamities. Sacrifices to the gods for peace on the land.</p>



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<b><i>well-being of the people</i></b>	
<p>The <i>Tindana</i> knows everything about the land so people come to consult him. Anyone coming to the land calls on the <i>Tindana</i> for a piece of land. He has power over all buildings (he puts the first building stone on the ground before a building is put up).</p>	<p><i>Ndewura Jakpa</i> met some of the <i>Tindanas</i> who were sacrificing to the gods.</p>
<b>REGARDING THE CHIEF</b>	
Non-Chiefly respondents	Chiefly respondents
<p><b><i>To lead/govern:</i></b></p> <p>Chieftaincy is one form of leadership among many. The chief holds power. The chief gives orders and people obey. If there is no chief things will not go well. They bring order. Gives focus or direction to community living. Chiefs ensure respect of Gonja customs, care of political affairs.</p> <p><b><i>For protection of the people and the land:</i></b></p> <p>We have no police station so we</p>	<p><b><i>To lead/govern:</i></b></p> <p>The chief is a leader at the community level. The chief is a traditional political leader. The chief leads society and upholds culture. The purpose of the power of the chief is to lead people in war, religious practices, development process, public relations, as intermediary between government and the people.</p> <p>The chief rules the people on the land. The chief uses his power to command, to rule, to govern. The chief rules the land (he does not own it)</p> <p><b><i>For protection of the people and the land:</i></b></p> <p>The power of the chief is for protection of the chief, the people the community, and the land. The chief provides the offerings for sacrifices but does not offer the sacrifices himself. The people expect the</p>

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<p>have to go to the chief's palace.</p> <p><b><i>For peace and social harmony</i></b></p> <p>Chieftaincy is important for solving problems. Chiefs promote peaceful coexistence, in Murugu we send our problems to Busunu chief or Damongo. If we have our own chief we will solve the issues there in Murugu.</p> <p><b><i>For development</i></b></p> <p>Chiefs mobilize the community for development and act as spokes-person for the community. Organizing the community for communal labor. Chiefs put things in order in the village.</p>	<p>chief to protect the kingdom. Power is given to the chief for the good of the people.</p> <p>The chief is expected to bring wisdom to the people.</p> <p>A chief is powerful if in his reign the harvest is good, children do not die. The chief has to ensure there is a good year, good harvest etc.</p> <p><b><i>For peace and social harmony</i></b></p> <p>Chiefs administer the area so that there is no conflict. The chief ensures peace and co-existence in the ethnic group. The chief reconciles families. Chiefs help keep order in society. Without a chief, the rich man and the youth will over run the poor. Living without a chief is like living in the jungle. Where there is no police station, there is the chief, where there is no school there is a chief.</p> <p><b><i>For development</i></b></p> <p>The chief gives land for development. The chief brings development.</p>
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The data below capture the summary statements of participants under the sub-themes of leadership, protection of land, and protection of people.

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Protection of land captures all the spiritual activities of the *Tindana* in relation to the land and to sacrifices of purification and pacification. Protection of people means spiritual protection from illness, drought, death, etc. Leadership means managing the affairs of the community for the wellbeing of the community. In the view of the respondents, 75% of power is used for leadership, 15% for protection of the land, and 10% for the protection of the people. The chiefly respondents perceive leadership as the use of power (100%). The non-chiefly respondents perceive the use of power for leadership (50%), protection of land (30%) and protection of the people (20%).

<i>Function</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Protect Land	30	0	15
Leadership	50	100	75
Protect People	20	0	10

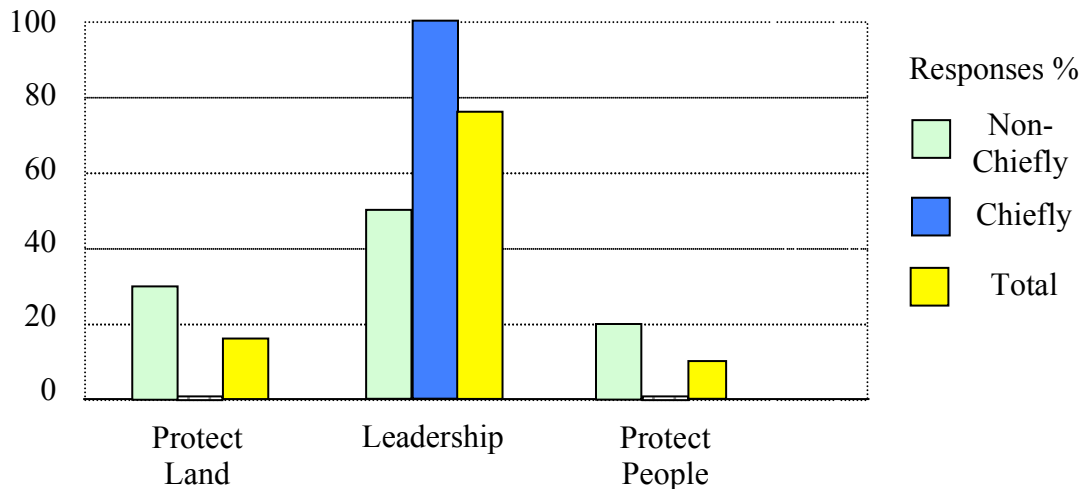


Figure 6. **Uses of Power by *Tindana* and Chief**

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The following two figures show the uses of power by the *Tindana* and the chief *separately*, in relation to the three functions: pacify and protect the land, leadership, and protection of the people.

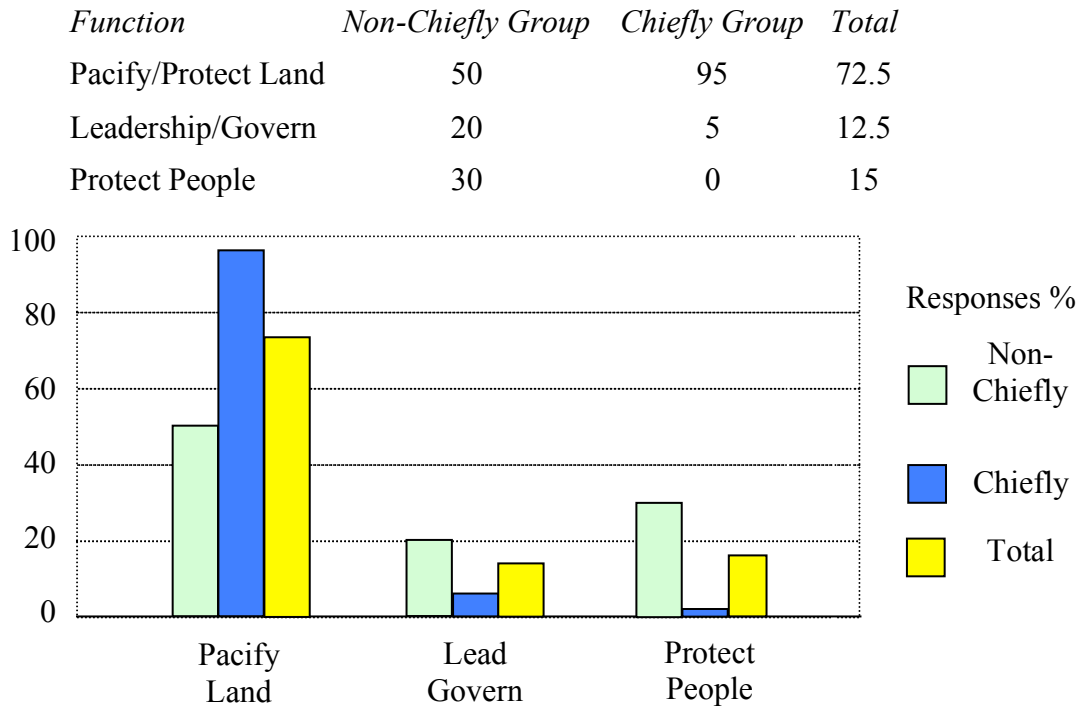


Figure 7. **Uses of Power by *Tindana* Only**

62.5% of all respondents are of the opinion the power of the *Tindana* is for protection (purification) of the land. 95% of the chiefly group and 50% of the non-chiefly group perceive the use of the power of the *Tindana* as purification of the land. What this means is that there is a general agreement on the part of respondents that the use of the power of the *Tindana* was for spiritual (ritual) purposes. There are non-chiefly communities in which the *Tindana* plays the role of both *Tindana* and chief. In those

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communities the leadership role of the *Tindana* is emphasized.

75% of the participants perceive the chief’s power as a power of governance. Again 80% of the non-chiefly group and 70% of the chiefly group perceives the chief’s power as one of governance. What this means is that there is a general perception among respondents that the power of the chief is used for leadership in the community. In the *Tindana*/chieftaincy combination, 75% of all participants perceive power as used for governance. 100% of the chiefly group and 50% of the non-chiefly group perceive power as governance. In this combination the chiefly functions of the *Tindana* are emphasized more.

<i>Function</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pacify	0	0	0
Leadership/Govern	80	70	75
Wellbeing	20	30	25

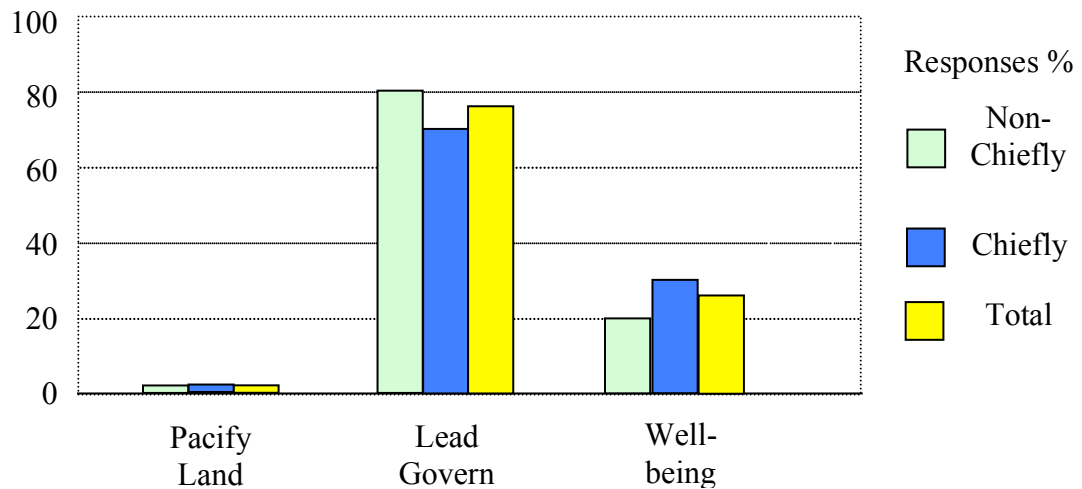


Figure 8. **Uses of Power by Chief Only**

#### **5.4.2 Uses of power of the *Tindana***

Ten (10) non-chiefly respondents and nineteen (19) chiefly respondents representing 62.5% of all respondents said the power of the *Tindana* is spiritual, that is, for the pacification of the land. None (0%) of the respondents see the chief as performing this role.

This sub-theme underlines the fact that the nature of the power of the *Tindana* is clearly distinct from the power of the chief. All except one (1) of the chiefly respondents perceive the power of the *Tindana* as spiritual and for purposes of purifying the land. Land represents a relational entity with a religious and spiritual dimension. This spiritual and religious dimension is manifested in the rituals of the *Tindana*.

##### **5.4.2.1 *pacification and purification of the land***

The power of the *Tindana* is a spiritual power he has received from the gods for rituals of purification and pacification of the land. The Land has a religious meaning; it belongs to the gods. When a family arrives on a piece of land, they enter into a pact with the gods of the land. The *Tindana* is responsible for ensuring the terms of the pact are respected. The *Tindana* is the priest who sacrifices to the gods of the land to maintain a good relationship between the people and the gods with regard to the land. “The *Tindana* performs spiritual rituals for the wellbeing of the land, offers sacrifices to prevent calamities from destroying the land.” “He has spiritual powers that enable him find the truth, he consults oracles in case of a drought.”

The *Tindana* becomes the channel through which supernatural efficacy flows from the gods to the people at large through the “fruits” of the land. The rituals of the

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*Tindana* are tied to the general productivity of the land. The *Tindana*'s control over the rituals of production gives him power over the means of production. He determines who can farm and/or live on the land. As one respondent observed, "the *Tindana* can ask you to leave the land." This ritual prerogative places enormous economic and political powers in the hands of the *Tindana*. Custodianship of the earth shrine gives the *Tindana* a ritual power that opens him up to economic, cultural, and political power. The exercise of that power is, however, controlled by the gods. Any abuse of power on the part of the *Tindana* is punished with death, disease, or mental illness. The fear of instant divine vengeance holds the *Tindana* in check.

Respondents used the general term 'sacrifices' to mean the various rituals the *Tindana* performs on the land. "There are certain things the chief does not do, only the *Tindana* does them." "The *Tindana* is the priest who sacrifices to the land god, he has spiritual powers that enable him to find the truth." The ritual powers of the *Tindana* are tied to the economic activities of the people that are totally dependent on the land.

The ritual power of the *Tindana* is a relational resource that can be converted into an economic right or privilege and a political power exclusive to the family, clan, or tribe of the *Tindana*. It is actually used to legitimize claims to land. The non-chiefly tribes use these ritual rights of the *Tindana* to argue that they are the original owners of the land. The chiefly tribes make a distinction between the ritual/spiritual protection of the land and the protection of the kingdom from physical attacks, invasion, or war. The kingdom is a political construct representing both the land and the people. The idea of ethnic kingdoms (land and people) is at the center of some of the conflicts in the northern region

of Ghana because these kingdoms encompass a number of ethnic groups who are contesting what they perceive to be a domination imposed by the colonial government.

#### **5.4.2.2 *well-being of the people***

The *Tindana* is the mediator between the gods of the land and the people to ensure the land provides for the people and the people respect the land. The ritual powers he uses for the purification of the land ensure the well being of the people which consists in good harvest of their crops, good health, no deaths and peace. “The *Tindana* performs spiritual rituals for the wellbeing of the land, offers sacrifices to prevent calamities from destroying the land.” The wellbeing of the land translates into wellbeing of the people who depend on the land for their existence.

#### **5.4.3 Uses of power of the Chief**

There is a general consensus among participants that the power of the chief is for leadership. The function of the chief is to ensure the physical safety and wellbeing of his people. He is to protect his people from external attacks, to lead his people in war and to ensure peace, security and social welfare in the community. He uses his power to make laws, to make decisions, to give focus and guidance, to sanction wrongdoers, and to care for the political affairs of the community. The chief uses his power to organize/mobilize his people for peace, development, communal labor, and war. The chief maintains social order by settling disputes, solving problems, keeping the general order, and maintaining the peace. The chief also uses his power to give visibility and respect to the community.



**5.4.3.1 to lead / to govern**

All forty (40) respondents said the chief uses his power to lead and govern the community for the wellbeing of the community. Respondents said the power of the chief is for ruling, governing, leading, guiding, making decisions, and sanctioning wrongdoing. In their view, the chief uses his power to protect the people and the land from physical attacks. When a disaster strikes the entire community, the chief has the responsibility to provide the animals for the *Tindana* to offer the sacrifice for the restoration of order. The chief uses his power to prevent wars and protect the tradition and culture of the people. The chief uses his power to maintain social order in the community. “Living without a chief is like living in the jungle; no order, no progress.” The “chief cares for the political affairs of the community, the people, peace, unity, and development.” The power of the chief is for “helping people, settling disputes and ensuring a peaceful coexistence among the people.”

The chiefly group respondents described the power of the chief with words like: rule, govern, lead, guide, make decisions, sanction wrongdoing, etc.; while the non-chiefly respondents used words like “care for the people” and “helping people” to describe the leadership functions of the chief.

**5.4.3.2 to protect the people and the Kingdom**

A major component of the leadership function of the chief is the use of his power to protect the people. “The power of the chief is for the protection of the chief, the people and the land.” “The chief has the responsibility to take care of the community.” “He is to

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protect the people and the land and not to discriminate.” “The chief must recognize and respect people or else he will not be respected.” “Power is given to the chief for the good of the people.” “The chief must be able to protect the community.” The chief ensures the wellbeing of his people by keeping them safe from external aggression. The chief also protects the most vulnerable in the community. As one respondent noted: “without a chief, the rich man and the youth will overrun the poor.” “A chief is powerful if in his reign the harvest is good and children do not die.” The chief uses his power to protect the kingdom. “The people expect the chief to protect the kingdom.”

#### **5.4.3.3 to promote peace and social harmony**

The chief ensures peace and co-existence in the community. “Where there is no police station, there is the chief, where there is no school there is a chief”. “The chief administers the area so that there is no conflict.” “The chief reconciles families.” “The chief helps keep order in the society.” “The chief brings wisdom to his people.”

#### **5.4.3.4 to promote development**

“The chief brings development.” “The purpose of the chief is to promote development in the community. He is the intermediary between government and the people.” “The chief gives land for development.”

From the above analysis, the power of the chief comes from the community for leadership and the maintenance of social order in the community. The role and functions of the chief are distinct from that of the *Tindana*. Power in the communities in the

Northern Region of Ghana is a relational phenomenon to ensure social order and the well being of the members of the community.

#### **5.4.4 A comparative analysis of the perception of power between the Chiefly and non-chiefly tribes in the Northern Region**

There is a general agreement between the chiefly and non-chiefly tribes that there are two structures of power: the power of the chief and the power of the *Tindana*. The nature of the two power structures is different. The power of the *Tindana* is mainly spiritual but in some tribes he can also function as the chief with powers of leadership. What is also very clear between the two groups is that the chief cannot play the role of the *Tindana*. Both groups are also agreed on the fact that the *Tindana*'s family was the first to settle on the land and therefore to own the land. A distinction is made, however, between ownership and control of the land, between kingdom and land. The *Tindana* owns the land and the chief owns the kingdom, defined as the land and the people. The chief controls the land although the real owner is the *Tindana*. There is disagreement over who is more powerful or more important when it comes to access to power and resources.

Participants are clear about the difference in the source of power between the Chief and the *Tindana*, the people and the land respectively. Both are in agreement that power is generated from relationships, either with the people or with the land. Regarding the use of the power, participants are clear in presenting the view that the *Tindana*'s power is for ritual purposes and the chief's power is for leadership.

Differences between the chiefly and non-chiefly groups on power emerge where

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there is competition for control of resources and power. Each group seeks to gain advantage over the other group by presenting one aspect of the dual power structure as the more powerful or more important. Such a comparison is out of place because the power structures are distinct with some connections. For instance, a *Tindana* can exercise the power of leadership in a community but a chief cannot sacrifice to the gods of the land. He may give the offerings for the sacrifice but he cannot do it himself unless he is a *Tindana*.

The chiefly/non-chiefly distinction does not wholly reflect and account for the indigenous power structures in the Northern Region of Ghana. In the non-chiefly groups, not every member of the group belongs to the *Tindana* family. There is a distinction within each ethnic group between the family of the *Tindana* and the rest of the community. The family of the *Tindana* owns the land and not everyone in the tribe. In the chiefly groups not every member comes from the royal family.

The chiefly/non-chiefly distinction is an external imposition of the Colonial administration internalized by the people of the Northern Region of Ghana as a social category around which social identities are mobilized. This distinction became very strong after the 1979 Constitutional provision in which lands in the northern part of Ghana were returned to their owners. In the Northern Region of Ghana, this Constitutional stipulation deprived some people of land and access to political power. The chiefly/non-chiefly distinctions were revived and are used as a tool for mobilizing social identities.

The categorization of African communities into societies with centralized authority (states) and societies without centralized authority goes back to the work of

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Fortes and Evans Pritchard. In the Northern Region of Ghana, the Colonial administration identified tribes with centralized and hierarchical system of leadership (chiefly ethnic groups) often characterized as “kingdoms” or “States.” Those with a more defused or communal system of leadership are often mistakenly characterized as people without chiefs (non-chiefly people). As our data have indicated, these “chiefless”<sup>39</sup> tribes were organized around the Earth shrine priests, clan, and family heads. Out of the 17 indigenous ethnic groups in the Northern Region, four are categorized as “states,” “kingdoms,” “chiefly” tribes and “majority” tribes. They are Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja and Mamprussi. The rest of the tribes are categorized as “stateless,” “chiefless,” and “minority” tribes. The post-colonial government maintained these typologies. The major inter-ethnic conflicts were between the chiefly and non-chief groups.

I have analyzed indigenous power, its sources and its uses from the perspective of the chiefly and non-chiefly ethnic groups in the Northern Region of Ghana, because social identities are defined around these categories and are used as the bases for claims to ownership of lands and access to political power.

The *naam* or chieftaincy is the uniting principle, the basis of a common identity for those who define themselves as chiefly people. In social identity terms, chieftaincy is the social category around which the group’s identity is mobilized. The ethnicity of these chiefly groups is built around a foundation myth that stresses the role of chieftaincy as its unifying principle. The emergence of a common chiefly ethnic group is based on a politico-ritual pact between the *Tindana* who accepts the chiefly people with their

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<sup>39</sup> Chieflessness is often mistakenly associated with leaderlessness. As the data indicate, the chiefless tribes have a system of leadership.

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institution of chieftaincy. The arriving chief accepts the religious shrines of the earth cult of the autochthons (original indigenous inhabitants) and submits himself to the requirements of the earth cult and the *Tindana*. The *Tindana* usually plays an important role in the selection, enskinment, life, death, and burial of the chief.

The non-chiefly groups are usually the autochthons that lived on the land before the arrival of the chiefly group. They have the *Tindana* as their ritual leader who is the center of all religious, social, economic and political activities. They accept, internalize, and respect the existence of the chieftaincy, its rules, and its hierarchies.

In Skalnik's (1987) view, the chiefly and non-chiefly social systems are not incompatible; rather they are two poles of the same system. Their political cultures are not so different as to lead to war between them.

### **5.5 SOCIAL IDENTITY**

In this section on social identity, the analysis will focus on understanding respondents' conceptualization of self, derived from their membership in an emotionally significant social group. The data are organized around the following questions. What does it mean to you to be a member of your ethnic group? What makes you proud to be a member, what are your norms, values, beliefs, and practices that define who you are as an ethnic group? What makes your ethnic group distinct from the other ethnic groups in the Northern Region? What are the dos and don'ts of your ethnic group and the value of land and chieftaincy in your ethnic group? These questions sought to elicit from participants their understanding of their social identities in relation to ethnicity and chieftaincy. The

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questions sought to understand what people are looking for in an identity group. What makes people want to be a part of an identity group, what makes them proud to belong to an identity group? The data are captured under the following themes:

- Proud to be a member of my ethnic group
- Values, norms and beliefs
- Distinct from others
- Dos and don'ts
- Value of land and chieftaincy.

### **5.5.1 Proud to be a member of my ethnic group**

Respondents were asked what makes them proud to belong to their ethnic group. Below is a summary of their responses to the question.

**Table 12: Responses on proud to belong**

Chiefly	Non-chiefly
<i>a sense of belonging</i>	
I am part of a rich culture. I feel I belong to a group. I need to identify with a group. It is important to belong to a group. It gives me a sense of belonging. We understand each other because we belong to one grand-	Gives me a strong sense of belonging. My parents and people have concern for me. I feel proud to belong to the Vagla group. So that people just don't see me as an individual but see me as belonging to a

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<p>father. I belong to the tribe. When there is a problem they can help you out. Everybody wants to feel they belong to a group, the need to belong and not to be alone. Not to belong is to be like a floating vessel.</p>	<p>group. I am part of a very rich tradition and it makes me happy</p>
<p><b><i>a sense of identification</i></b></p>	
<p>My ethnic group shows who I am and where I am coming from. I am identified as a community member and will participate in anything that constitutes the group 'We'. It is my origin.</p>	<p>Every human being has to identify with a group. My ethnic group is what I call myself. It is what I am known as, that is my identity, it recognizes my origin.</p>
<p><b><i>uniqueness of the group</i></b></p>	
<p>Unique customs and our unity. Language, tradition, culture, respect for elders, our chieftaincy system. My ethnic group is unique. It is a unified group and conflict has no place. We have peaceful enskinning of chiefs. Gonja land is peaceful. We have the capacity to solve problems peacefully. We are a superior and fulfilled people with laid down structures and systems and clearly defined ways of behaving.</p>	<p>We speak a different language. We are few and everywhere I go people are eager to see me. I feel special. Our culture, dance, funerals, bride price are different. We are simple people. Unique to belong to the Vagla ethnic group. Our language, culture, ancestral history. Our culture is different from others. We have the Gintiny festival which is different. Our culture and language are unique. We are trained to be</p>



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<p>Descendants of a great leader/warrior. We have a great founder.</p>	<p>independent, to work hard, to cater for ourselves and to respect others.</p>
<p><b><i>a sense of dignity, recognition and respect</i></b></p>	
<p>Everybody in the country wants to belong to my ethnic group. We have power, where we came from, we were powerful, we passed through so many empires and conquered them. Hence we are powerful. We are well known in the region and the nation. You are recognized. Dagombas created a sense of superiority and fulfillment in our identity so others are inspired to be like us and to join us. Our chiefly status gives us standing in society.</p>	<p>We are hardworking, truthful, honest and respectful of others. A Konkomba man is somebody who believes in hard work. He needs to work to eat, to entertain his visitors. You will never see a Konkomba girl as a “kayayo” (head porter). God has blessed us with intelligence and wisdom. I am proud to be a Hanga because our people are brilliant. Whatever they want to do they do it. Then they learn, they know it more than the other people.</p>
<p><b><i>good</i></b></p>	
<p>We are patient people. A Gonja is peaceful and understanding. He relates to people of different ethnic groups. He wants to share the peace of the traditional area with people.</p>	<p>Our tradition and culture practice is very good. We are honest and hardworking people. A Konkomba man is honest and truthful, he does not tell lies, he is patient, protects his property.</p>
<p><b><i>unity</i></b></p>	
	<p>We are united; we are our brother’s keeper.</p>

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Under the theme ‘proud to be a member of my ethnic group’ five (5) sub-themes emerged from the data above. Participants are proud to belong to their ethnic group (social identity) because:

<i>Sub-themes %</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Identification	50	25	37.5
Belonging	50	75	62.5

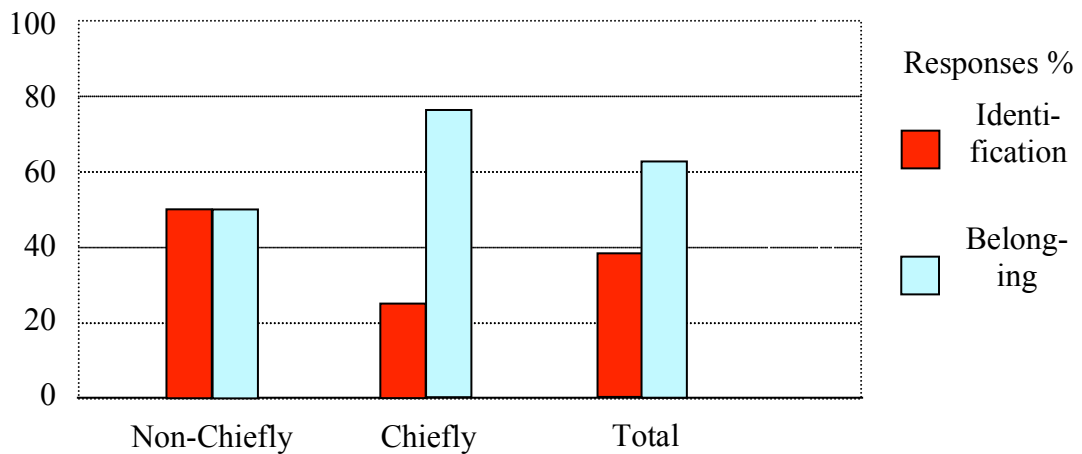


Figure 9. **Proud of One’s Ethnic Group**

1. It gives them a sense of belonging: “I am proud of my ethnic group because I feel I belong” (62.5%).
2. It gives them a sense of identification: “My ethnic group is my source of identification, that is my identity, it recognizes my origin. It is who I am” (37.5%).
3. It gives them a feeling of uniqueness: “My ethnic group is unique” (100%).

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4. It gives them a sense of dignity, recognition and respect: “I feel special, we are few and people notice us” (52.5%). It gives me a sense of goodness and unity: “We are good people” (12.5%).

The sub-theme ‘proud to belong’ is perceived as belonging, as in being part of a group or a system. “I am part of a very rich tradition and it makes me happy.” “I feel I belong to a group,” “My ethnic group gives me a sense of belonging.” A second meaning is reflected in the concept of identification, i.e., my ethnic group is a means of telling people who I am as an individual or where I am coming from. “My ethnic identity is what I call myself, it is what I am known as, that is my identity, it recognizes my origin.”

When asked to identify themselves people will mention their ethnic group: “I am a Gonja, Vagla, Dagomba or Konkomb,” before they mention their personal name. The distribution between belonging and identification is 62.5% and 37.5% respectively of the respondents. Among the non-chiefly participants it is 50/50 and 25/75 among the chiefly group. Within this broad conception of the sense of belonging to a group, participants further identified themselves by birth, custom, unity, history or people.

### ***5.5.1.1 a sense of belonging***

Belonging is perceived as being part of a group or system. “I am part of a very rich tradition and it makes me happy.” “It is important to belong to a group,” “it gives me a sense of belonging.” Respondents were not only interested in belonging to a group but they were interested in belonging to a group that was good, visible, powerful or unique. “I am proud to belong to my ethnic group because we are powerful.” “Because we are

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united and peaceful,” etc. Respondents mentioned tradition, culture, history, chieftaincy, etc., as qualities of their groups that make them proud to be a part of the group. Under this sub-theme, respondents express a sense of being a part of a group or a system that is distinct. This sense of belonging to something distinct sets them apart from the “other.” Participants were proud to belong to their ethnic group because of the culture, power, recognition, and the unity of the group.

**Table 13. Sub-theme of the sense of belonging – % responses**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Non-Chiefly</b>	<b>Chiefly</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b><i>Culture</i></b> (tradition, language, history)	45	30	37.5
<b><i>Power</i></b> (chief, ancestors)	0	20	10
<b><i>Recognition</i></b> (dignity, unique, respected)	30	30	30
<b><i>United</i></b> (security, participation)	25	20	22.5
<b><i>Total</i></b>	100	100	100

Respondents who understood their concept of ethnic identity as being a part of a group where proud to belong because of the culture, tradition, language, and history

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(37.5%; non-chiefly respondents, 45%; chiefly respondents 30%). Of those proud to belong because of chieftaincy in their group (10%), chiefly respondents were 20% and the non-chiefly group were 0%. 30% of the respondents were proud to belong to their ethnic group because of the recognition and respect the ethnic group enjoyed; of the non-chiefly respondents 30% and chiefly respondents 30%. Respondents who were proud to belong because of unity, security and participation in group life and activities (22.5%), non-chiefly 25% and of the chiefly group respondents 20%. The majority of participants (90%) are proud to belong to their social identity group because of social constructs such as culture, recognition, and unity. Only 10% are proud to belong because of the power of the Chief.

This sense of belonging to something distinct sets them apart from the “other” and creates a boundary between them. Boundaries are assumed to separate what they distinguish. Identities, according to Barth, are predicated on boundaries. These boundaries are regarded as authentic markers of difference between groups of people. Without boundaries people will be disoriented. Social boundaries are people’s cognitive proclivities, which are underpinned by and are expressed through their social practice. Boundaries construct an assumed shared homogeneity within the group and cultural difference between groups (Barth in Cohen p. 30). Boundary is a separation that surrounds a social group and divides it from other groups and from its surrounding environment (p. 34). Being born into a tribe (ethnic group) gives a strong sense of belonging. It gives a sense of origin (where am I coming from?) “Everyone wants to feel they belong to a group and not feel alone.” “Not to belong is like a floating vessel (moving around aimlessly).”

Tilly (2003) has argued that social identity centers both on the boundaries separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ and on the shared stories about our distinctive characteristics and the origins of our difference. Social relations within boundaries signals among in-group members a common membership, while cross boundary relations govern transactions between groups. And the purpose of these boundaries is for making claims, for legitimacy, for recognition, and for representation (Tilly 2003, p. 32).

**5.5.1.2 *my ethnic group is a means of self-identification***

The second sub-theme under the theme “proud to belong” is the perception of the ethnic identity as a means of self-identification.

Respondents expressed their sense of belonging in terms of self-identification. Their ethnicity is a sort of identity badge that they carry around with them wherever they go. This sub-theme underlines an important function of social identity, the provision of recognition.

People want to belong to a group because in and of themselves, they do not feel confident enough to identify themselves based on their individual self. Respondents would introduce themselves first by their ethnic group before they mention their own name. In the words of some of the respondents, “belonging gives a sense of who I am; I can be identified as belonging to this or that group.” “My ethnicity is what I call myself, it is what I am known as, that is my identity, and it recognizes my origin”. Some participants perceived their ethnic identity to be primordial, “whoever you are, you can not change. If I am not proud of who I am, what else can I be proud of?” a respondent

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asked me. The identification with the ethnic group is based on birth, custom, unity, history, or people. The distribution of responses is given below and in Figure 10.

Respondents identified with their ethnic group into which they were born (32.5%). They also identified with their ethnic group because of its customs (22.5%), the unity among members (15%), the history of the ethnic group (20%). 10% of the respondents identified with their group “because they are my people.” In sum, it is worth noting here that 32.5% of respondents identify with their ethnic group by birth and 67.5% by social constructs such as custom, unity, history, and people.

<i>Sub-themes %</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Birth	50	15	32.5
Custom	15	30	22.5
Unity	25	5	15
History	5	35	20
People	5	15	10

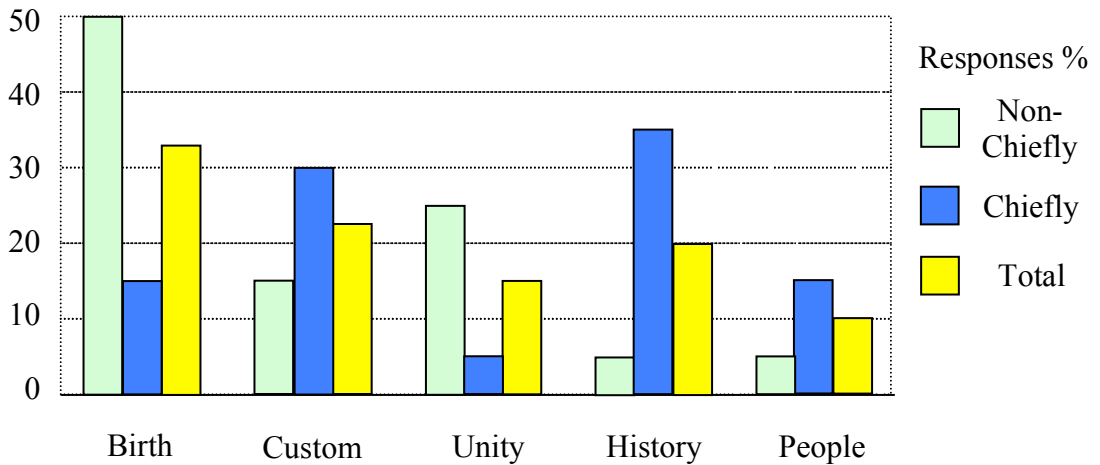


Figure 10. **My Ethnic Group as a Means of Self-Identification**

As Korestelina (2007) stresses, social identity is a feeling of belonging to a social group, a feeling of a strong connection with a social category, an important part of our mind that affects our social perceptions and behavior. Our social identity is socially constructed and influenced by the processes of existing social structures. “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).

### ***5.5.1.3 proud to belong because we are unique***

A recurrent theme in respondents’ reasons for taking pride in their ethnic group was the uniqueness of the group. Respondents are proud because they belong to something unique, distinct, and special. By ‘unique’ respondents meant “different.” Their history, origins, sense of unity, culture, tradition, customs, make them different from others. This gives them a sense of feeling special. “I feel special because we are few and people notice us.” “I am proud to belong to my ethnic group because our culture is unique.” “Because we are unique, everyone wants to belong to our group.” The uniqueness of the group also makes the individual feel unique. “Belonging to my ethnic group makes me feel unique.” This uniqueness is translated into goodness. “We are good people, peaceful, patient, and understanding. Each knows his place in the society.”

Brewer’s optimal distinctiveness theory holds that human beings have two powerful social motives: “a need for inclusion which is satisfied by assimilation of the self into large collectives and an opposing need for differentiation which is satisfied by



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distinguishing the self from others” (Brewer 2003, p. 39). The theory explains the human desire to belong to groups that transcend their own personal identity and the need to feel special and distinct from others. Both needs are satisfied through inclusion in distinctive social groups where the boundaries between those who are members of the in-group category and those who are excluded can be clearly drawn (Brewer 1991). According to Brewer (2003), experimental evidence shows that “when the balance between inclusion and differentiation is threatened, individuals respond by increasing their preference for distinctive in-groups” (p. 40). Distinctiveness plays a major role in the selection and strength of social identities. This distinctiveness is independent of the positive evaluation associated with membership in particular social category.

The need to feel unique and different leads to the creation of boundaries, which are then regarded as authentic markers of difference. Barth (1969) has argued that categorical ethnic distinctions are “social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories” (p. 10). Social distinctions are the very foundation on which embracing social systems are built. Barth (1969) concludes that ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by actors themselves, and thus have the characteristics of organizing interaction between people. Studies of ethnic groups should focus on the ethnic boundaries and their maintenance rather than on internal constitution and history of the various groups. In Barth’s (1969) view, ethnic groups are ascriptive and exclusive and their continuity is dependent on maintaining a boundary. Barth is of the opinion that the idea that ethnic groups are culture-bearing units is false. He contends that

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culture is the result and not the primary and definitional characteristic of the ethnic group because the cultural features that signal the boundary may change, the cultural characteristics of the members may be transformed but the dichotomy will remain (pp. 11-14).

Being unique is translated into being special, superior, and deserving of respect from the others. The concept of uniqueness also underlines the need to belong to a group that gives recognition and dignity, a group that is good. The uniqueness gives a sense of positive distinctiveness to the group. Members of the group seek positive advantage for the in-group over the out-group, thus enhancing their in-group's value in comparison to that of the out-group. This uniqueness has implications for conflict. In his "narcissism of minor difference" Freud (1917) notes that it is precisely the minor differences between people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them" (p. 199). People emphasize these minor differences to maintain their distinctiveness as a group.

**Table 14. Sub-theme of distinctiveness of the group – % responses**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Non-Chiefly</b>	<b>Chiefly</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Respect for chiefs</i>	0	15	7.5
<i>Language / Culture</i>	85	55	70
<i>Good</i>	5	20	12.5
<i>Unity</i>	10	10	10
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100

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All participants emphasized the distinctiveness and uniqueness as a quality of their ethnic group and the reason why they were proud to belong to their ethnic group. Respect for chiefs (7.5%), language and culture (70%), goodness (12.5%), and unity (10%) were the reasons given for perceiving their ethnic group as unique. While only 7.5% perceive respect for their chiefs as a mark of uniqueness, 92.5% link their uniqueness to language, culture, goodness, and unity. Interesting to note here is the fact that groups are divided into chiefly and non-chiefly groups and yet only 7.5% perceive respect for chiefs as an ethnic boundary. Under the theme “proud to belong” the data seem to suggest that we are who we are as a group because we are different, distinct, unique, and therefore special. The differences between us and the other are: chieftaincy, cultural practices, unity, and moral goodness. This difference gives us recognition and respect (or because we are unique and special, we must be recognized and respected). This recognition and respect gives us dignity (pride) and self-respect. A sense of belonging and pride comes from the feeling of being unique, good, and united as a group. This feeling is captured in the data as “belong.” There is also a sense of identification. “I am identified (recognized by others) as a member of this ethnic group.” This is captured in the data as “identification.”

#### ***5.5.1.4 a sense of dignity, recognition, and respect***

“Belonging to an identity group gives me a sense of dignity, pride, recognition, and respect. We are powerful, we conquered people, we are respected, we are popular, we are respectful of chiefs, we command respect, and we have a name.” 30% of all participants said belonging to their ethnic group gives them a sense of dignity, pride, recognition, and respect.

**5.5.1.5 moral goodness**

There is a moral component in the reasons why respondents were proud to belong to their ethnic groups. They perceived members of their ethnic group to be good, patient, ideal, respectful, hospitable, and understanding. They were peaceful, knowledgeable, capable and intelligent, and have peaceful enskinment of chiefs.

**Table 15. Sub-theme of moral orientation– % responses**

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Non-Chiefly</b>	<b>Chiefly</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Good</b> (patient, ideal, respectful, hospitable, understanding)	50	50	50
<b>Peaceful</b> (enskinment)	0	50	25
<b>Intelligent</b> (wise, knowledgeable, capable)	50	0	25
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

Social identity is the conceptualization of self, derived from membership in an emotionally significant social category or group (Turner 1985). As individuals tend to think of themselves as having characteristics that are representative of that social category or group, they tend to focus on the group success and achievements or perceived good qualities. The above data show respondents' perception of who they are because of their

membership in the ethnic group. The group to which they belong is emotionally significant because of culture, power, recognition, and moral goodness.

### 5.5.2 Beliefs, norms and values

Bar-Tal (1998) argues that in addition to theories of social identity and social categorization, group belief is another cognitive representation, which underlie a person's social

<i>Sub-themes %</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Leadership	15	60	37.5
Respect for others	15	0	7.5
Land	35	5	20
Cultural practice	15	30	22.5
Unity	20	5	12.5

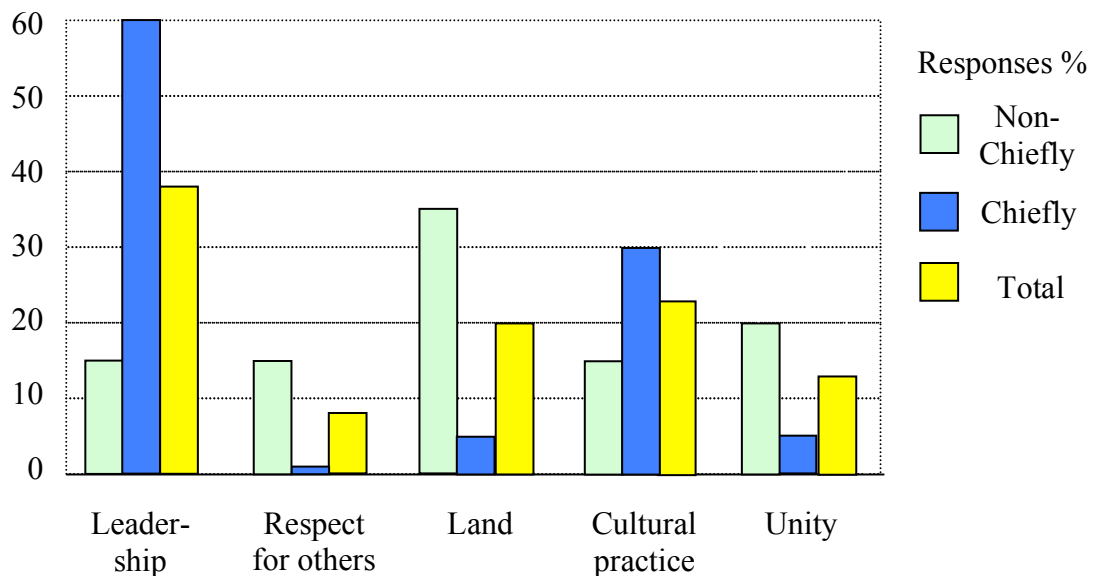


Figure 11. Values, Norms, Beliefs, Practices

*Data Analysis*

identity. Group beliefs, in Bar-Tal’s view, are convictions that group members are aware they share, and consider as defining their “groupness.” Group members perceive their group beliefs as defining the essence of their group. Group beliefs provide the cognitive basis that group members view as uniting them as one entity.

<i>Sub-themes %</i>	<i>Non-Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Chiefly Group</i>	<i>Total</i>
Leadership	5	5	5
Social order	50	25	37.5
Development	35	5	20
Source of social identity	0	50	25
Source of unity	10	15	12.5

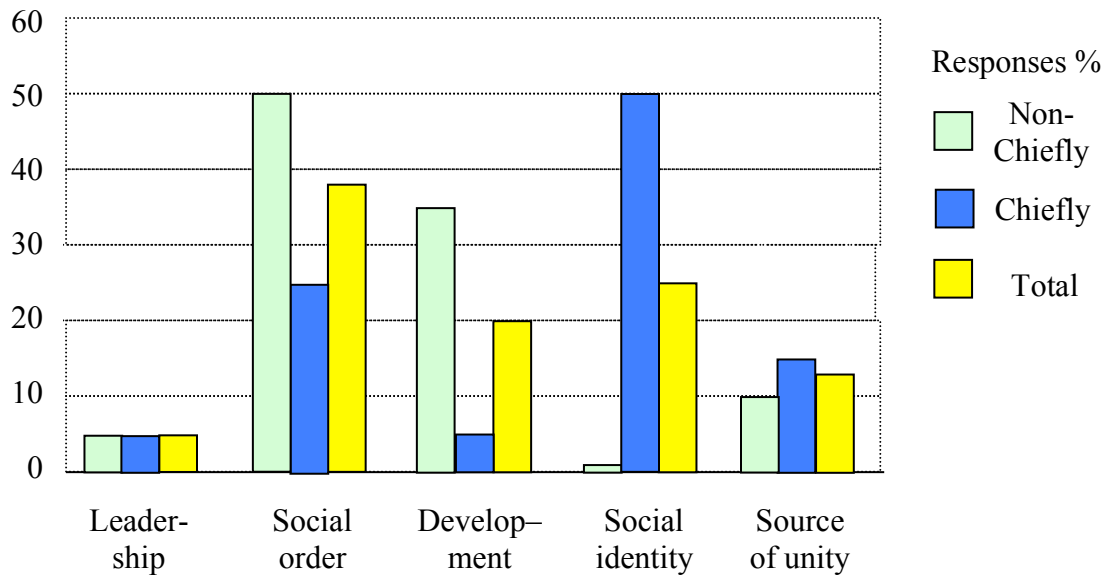


Figure 12. **Values of a Chief in Community**

Individuals regard group beliefs as characterizing them as group members and as defining the boundary of the group (Bar-Tal 1998, p. 94). Group beliefs unify group

### *Data Analysis*

members and differentiate them from out-groups. Group beliefs often provide a criterion for differentiation between groups. Norms and values are categories of group beliefs. Group norms specify what group members should do, ought to do, and are expected to do, in a given circumstance. Norms are customary rules that govern behavior in groups. Group values are principles used to define what is right, good, and just. Values serve as criteria for evaluating objects, actions and events (Bar-Tal, in Worchel, Morales, Paez and Deschamps, 1998). Participants expressed their beliefs in the chieftaincy system, elders and ancestors, respect for others, the land, and their cultural practices. Below are the statistics on the beliefs.

The data on the value of a chief in the community are more revealing. All respondents perceive the role of the chief as one of leadership. 37.3% think the leadership role of the chief is to maintain social order, 5% see his role as care for the people and land. 25% of respondents, all of them from the chiefly group, perceive the chief as a source of social identity, and 12.5% see the chief as a source of unity.

#### **5.5.2.1 *leadership as a value***

Respondents perceive leadership as the most important value in their ethnic group (37.5%). However, the understanding of a leader differs between the chiefly and non-chiefly respondents. The chiefly group respondents perceive leadership in terms of the chieftaincy institution, i.e., present chiefs and elders, ancestors who were chiefs and elders, and power related to chieftaincy. 60% of the chiefly group respondents perceive leadership as the most important value. “We value our chieftaincy tradition and have

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great respect for our chiefs,” “living without a chief is like living in the jungle, no order, no progress, no development. The chief brings order and helps us move forward.” “We believe in chieftaincy, the chief is the most powerful person in the community.” “We believe in the paramount chief as head of Gonjaland.” “It is important to have a chief to provide leadership.” “You cannot become a chief over your father. When you become a chief, all your predecessors who have become chiefs are behind you.” “We value chiefs and our festivals.” “The founder’s name, Ndewura Jakpa, whenever it is mentioned leads to success.” “Gonjas have to lie down and greet their chief as a mark of respect.” “Where there are chiefs, there is unity and they solve problems amicably. Chiefs solve problems and that is the difference between us and people without chiefs.”

The non-chiefly respondents perceive leadership in terms of family, tribal elders, chiefs, and ancestral elders, i.e., elders who have died. 15% of the non-chiefly respondents said leadership (chiefs and elders) was the most important value. “We value our ancestors by giving them food and drink and by praying to them for protection and guidance.” “We respect our elders.” “We believe in the gods and our ancestors,” “We value the ancestors, the dead live with us and see us, we serve them food.” “We value respect for elders.” “Chieftaincy is important because you cannot live in a village without a chief. You need a leader, even in the animal kingdom there are leaders. Chiefs solve problems for the people.” “Chiefs put things in order in the village. We have no police station so we have to go to the chief’s palace. They bring order.”

The participants perceive belief in leadership differently. The chiefly group participants perceived chieftaincy as the ultimate form of leadership and a distinguishing



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category of their group. The non-chiefly group on the other hand perceived chieftaincy as one form of leadership among many.

### **5.5.2.2 *cultural practice as a value***

Several things are lumped together under cultural practice: culture, tradition, custom, rituals, language, history, dance, festivals, funerals, food, clothing, etc. 22.5% of respondents believe in the cultural practices of their ethnic group and perceive them as defining the uniqueness of the ethnic group. “We value our festivals, they bring unity to the community.” Each respondent considers his/her cultural practices unique and a marker of difference between their ethnic group and the other. “I am proud to be a member of my tribe because of our unique custom and our unity.” “Our culture, dance, funerals, bride price are different and that makes me proud.”

As Korostelina (2007) has noted, “the meaning of social identity is contingent on group beliefs, norms, values, goals and worldviews ... The meaning of social identity develops on the border between groups and constitutes both the content of group membership and the specificity of interrelations with out groups” (p. 74).

### **5.5.2.3 *land as a value***

Under the sub-theme land as a value, a big gap is noted between the chiefly and non-chiefly respondents. While 20% of all respondents perceive land as a value, only 5% of the chiefly group and 35% of the non-chiefly group perceive land as a value. “Land is highly valued and we believe in our land.” “People can be identified if they have their

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own land and chiefs.” “Land is very valued, everyone wants to have land.” “Land is important because of agriculture and buildings. Land is the livelihood of the people.”

Non-Chiefly respondents: “land is valuable, we are farmers and hunters so land is important. Weaving, carving all depend on the land. Many of our gods take care of the land.” “Land is property and provides food. Each ethnic group should have their own land.” “Every family has land.”

The disparity can be explained by the fact that land for the non-chiefly people is about their identity and their livelihood. The chiefly group perceives land as a means of control and a symbol of power.

#### **5.5.2.4 *unity as a value***

Respondents perceive unity as a distinguishing mark of their ethnic identity. 12.5% of all respondents see unity as a value in their ethnic group. Amongst the chiefly groups 5% perceive unity as a value. The chief is the source of this unity. Amongst the non-chiefly groups 20% of the respondents perceive unity as a value and see the land as the source of their unity.

#### **5.5.2.5 *respect for others as a value***

None of the chiefly respondents mentioned respect for others as a value. They, however, see the chief as a defender of the rights of the poor and the weak. The non-chiefly respondents (20%) mentioned respect for others as a value and a distinguishing mark between them and the others.

### **5.5.3 Distinct from others**

Focusing on distinctiveness will help us understand the content of social identity (what makes us different) and how ethnic diversity is socially articulated and maintained through boundaries. This has been discussed above under the sub-theme uniqueness.

### **5.5.4 Perceptions of social identity**

Social identity is about the concept of self in relation to membership in a social group or groups; it is about the value and significance attached to that membership. Membership in a social group tends to influence an individual's perception of the self, of society, and behavior. Social identity involves a feeling of belonging to a social group, a strong connection with a social category and is an important part of our mind that affects our social perceptions and behavior (Korostelina 2007). This perception of self as an integral part of a group is achieved through a cognitive process of categorization, assimilation, and search for coherence. The process of categorization involves an "us"/"them," an in-group/out-group, distinction; it involves a bonding with an in-group and finding meaning in the events of daily life. Social identity provides individuals with a sense of security, dignity, and self-esteem. Social identity is socially constructed and influenced by the processes of existing social structures. Social identities are often perceived as primordially intrinsic and inherent, immutable and invariable, rather than socially determined and in an evolving state of flux. In the Northern Region of Ghana, social identities such as ethnicity and chiefly and non-chiefly groupings are perceived in primordial terms rather than being perceived as social constructs. The general argument of tradition, culture, and

### *Data Analysis*

custom is used to maintain the status quo, as these three elements are perceived as intrinsic, inherent, immutable, and unchanging. The statements “it is the tradition,” “it is our culture,” or “it is the custom,” are another way of saying this cannot change. A primordial perception of social identity influences the dynamic of social conflict in negative ways; any attempts at changing the very conditions that have created the conflict in the first place are resisted.

The data generally reveal a feeling among participants, of belonging to a group, a sense of self-identification with their ethnic group, and a sense of pride in belonging to the group. The reasons for feeling connected to the ethnic group vary from language, culture, history, custom, unity, goodness of group members, food, clothing, etc., which are perceived as authentic markers of their difference from the other ethnic groups. The content of these ethnic identities are nested in cultural practice, power (chieftaincy), moral goodness, and unity. The perception among participants is that belonging to a unique group of people confers recognition and respect. Participants seem to argue thus: We are who we are because we are different, distinct, unique and therefore special. Because we are different, we are recognized and respected (or must be recognized and respected). This gives us dignity and self-esteem.

The data are consistent with social identity theories and confirm the theory that social identities are predicated on boundaries which are regarded as authentic markers of difference from others (Barth 1969). These boundaries are assumed to separate what they distinguish. It also consistent with Korostelina’s (2007) view that social identity is contingent on in-group traditions and values (culture), language, history, ideology, and

out-group image. Group beliefs, norms, values, goals, and worldviews serve as borders between groups and constitute both the content of group membership and the specificity of interrelations with out-groups (p. 74).

According to Korostelina (2007), an identity is salient when an individual feels the in-group goals and values take precedence over his/her goals and values. Salience of social identity occurs when there is: (1) predominance of in-group aims over individual ones, (2) the readiness to forget all internal conflicts in a situation of treat to the in-group, and (3) the readiness to unite against out-groups. The higher the level of in-group primacy for in-group members, the stronger their willingness to disregard their own goals and values and to follow the ways of behavior required by the in-group.

### **5.5.5 Conclusion**

The data analysis in this chapter reveals two distinct perceptions of power. A ritual/political power exercised by the *Tindana*, and a political power exercised by the chief. The source of the power is linked to membership in a social group and expressed in terms of land and people. The social group of the *Tindana* is associated with the family, the clan, a ritual parish, and land. Membership in this group is centered on the family and land, and the group's beliefs, values, norms, and interests influence the perception of power. Power in this context is the ability to manipulate the forces of nature and ensure the land is peaceful and productive for the benefit of group members. Legitimate power and authority comes from belonging to the "right" group. Membership in the group gives access to resources.

### *Data Analysis*

The social group of chief is associated with conquest, domination, and control. History, tradition, culture, and custom are all centered on the chieftaincy. The history of conquest and domination, and the tradition of chieftaincy legitimize claims to power and resources. Membership in the family of the mythical great warrior king, who established a kingdom by conquest of the indigenous people on the land, is the basis for claims to power and resources.

The data however, present a different picture of the source and uses of the power of the chief. The power of the chief is understood as coming from the people and is used to lead, guide, and protect the people. The chief uses his power to maintain social harmony, to promote peace and development. He is responsible for the general political affairs of the community. The chief can only exercise his power if he is recognized and accepted by his people. The legitimacy of the chief's claim to power comes from the people, hence the emphasis on respect for the people by the chief. Power in this context is closer to the classical realist view of power as control and dominion and consists of tangibles such as an army, property, and size of kingdom. To belong to the royal family gives power and access to resources. The ability to participate in decision-making, be it at the family or community level, was predicated on "belonging." One way of excluding people from decision-making or access to land was to ask: "*a ya nbong?*" literally translated as "is this your home?" In other words, you do not belong here.

These findings will be discussed in the next chapter in the light of the colonial administration and post-colonial state.

## **Chapter 6**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study is to use theory and research to explain the deadly social conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. Research on the social conflicts in the region indicates chieftaincy, ethnicity, and land as factors influencing the social conflicts in the region. What is it about chieftaincy, ethnicity, and land that is precipitating the protracted and cyclical social conflicts in the Northern Region, yet not in the other regions of Ghana? And what can be done to mitigate these conflicts?

This chapter discusses the findings from the above data analysis using social identity theory to explain how social identity is used to shape conceptions of power and legitimacy. It explains how and why the influence of social identity on power and legitimacy has impacted the dynamics of conflict in the Northern Region of Ghana.

The chapter discusses, first, the findings on indigenous understanding of identity, power, and legitimacy: then it investigates the transformation of chieftaincy – a centralized and hierarchical form of politico-cultural leadership and status symbol – into a core element of cultural (ethnic) identity: and, finally, it explores ways of mitigating such conflicts and how this study can contribute to conflict analysis and resolution theory in general.

## *Discussion of Findings*

### **6.1 FINDINGS ON INDIGENOUS PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY**

The findings reveal that in Northern Region, individuals self-identify as members of a social group. Asked what it means to be a member of their social group? 62.5% of participants said membership in their social group gave them a sense of belonging: “I am proud because I feel I belong.” 37.5% said their social group gave them a sense of identification: “My ethnic group is my source of identification, that is my identity, it recognizes my origin. It is who I am.”

To ascertain the “emotional significance of membership in a social group,” participants were asked: What makes you proud to be a member of your group? Responses to this question revealed participants were emotionally attached to their social group because of the culture, language, history, and tradition (37.5%), for recognition (30%), and for security (22.5%). Only 10% of participants were proud to belong to their ethnic group because of chieftaincy. In a further analysis of belonging in terms of identification, participants identified with their social group because of culture (custom, history) 42.5%, birth 32.5%, unity 15%, and people (chiefs) 10%. When asked, what makes your social group unique? 70% of participants said their culture and language, and 7.5% said respect for chiefs. The findings indicate that culture, tradition, history, and language give meaning to social identity and are used as markers of identity, and not power (chieftaincy).

The findings are consistent with the view that social identity “fulfills the individual’s need to belong to a group that provides protection, and confidence, and



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inclusion into a system of social relationships be they primary, primordial or socially constructed” (Korostelina 2007, p. 19).

The human need to belong to a group, to be identified with a group, is a strong reason why people self-identify with a social group. One participant expressed this need as follows:

There is the need to belong and not to be alone. Not to belong is to be like a floating vessel; because of my ethnic identity people just don't see me as an individual but as a member of a group. It is important to belong to a group, it gives me a sense of belonging.

The expression: “floating vessel,” captures the idea of an “aimless wandering”, a life without meaning or purpose. Such a life is not worth living. A sense of belonging gives meaning to the individual's life. Participants were proud to belong to their ethnic group because of the culture and traditions; which range from the food they eat, clothes, dance, and rites of life (birth, adulthood, marriage, death etc.), language, and history. Participants' dignity, i.e., self-worth and self-esteem, increases when they associate with a group that is recognized and respected.

My ethnic group shows who I am and where I am coming from. I am identified as a community member and participate in the activities of the group. It is my origin. My ethnic group is what I call myself. It is what I am known by, that is my identity, it recognizes my origin.

Participants always identified themselves first by their ethnic group before they mentioned their personal name. The concept of identification with a group underscores

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the depersonalization that takes place in the process of identifying with a social group that is valued. The individual takes on and personalizes the cultural practices, language, history, values, norms, and beliefs of the group. When asked, What makes you proud to be a member of your ethnic group? one participant found it strange that I would ask a question like that and retorted: “if I am not proud to belong to my ethnic group, what else will I be proud of?”

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals identify with already existing groups that can offer them a positive social identity or they organize and mobilize to protect their group advantage or to deal with a disadvantage. Participants take pride in their cultural group because they feel the group is unique, distinct from the other groups. All participants (100%) said belonging to a cultural group gives them a sense of uniqueness. Participants perceived belonging to a unique group of people as conferring recognition and respect. Participants seem to argue that they are who they are because they are different, distinct, unique, and therefore special. This distinctiveness calls for recognition and respect. Recognition and respect give them dignity and self-esteem.

From the social identity theory we learn that people make social comparisons between groups to establish a positive in-group distinctiveness. Every participant insisted his or her group was unique. The theory holds that in-group members bond together and act as a group in relation to the out-group. This self-identification with the group gives them recognition and pride, but also a loss of individual freedom, as they tend to behave and act as group. Where the group identity is salient, there is a depersonalization of self-perception while mutual and collective similarities are enhanced. Participants made

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comments to this effect, e.g., “we Gonjas respect our chiefs,” “you will never see a true Dagomba behaving in that way.” Behavior is defined in terms of the group norms, values, and beliefs, and not in terms of the individual.

Participants expressed the idea that land is part of their identity and access to land is based on their membership in a social group:

People can be identified if they have their own land. Any ethnic group that wants to identify itself as a group must have land to point to as your identity base. Owning land is a great pride. Man cannot live without land. Land is the most valuable asset God has given to man. Every family has land. If you live on somebody’s land you don’t feel comfortable. In some areas you are not free to farm because they ask you to contribute.

Tengan (1991) has noted, land is central to the worldview and self-definition of subsistence farmers. Economic, social, political, and religious activities find their meaning in the institution of the Earth cult. Land so pervades people’s lives that they can hardly think of existing without being linked to a piece of land. Early communities moved around in search of arable land as families. Groups of families settled on a piece of land as long as the land was productive. The concept of tribal ownership of land was non-existent. However, as the settler communities stabilized, territoriality emerged, that is, the “recognition of a group’s political integrity and its relationship with particular land” (Wallace and Williamson 2004, p. 124). The concept of land as identity slowly evolved into a complex system of economic, social, and political rights, linked to different economic and ritual activities. Land rights are constantly contested, negotiated,

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and change over time, but they are intimately tied to membership in specific communities. Access to land became a condition for defining membership in a social group. The institution which has the power to define and enforce land user rights exercises a lot of power, and thus any time land rights change, power, and wealth are redistributed. Land becomes a source of identity and power.

### **6.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS FOR CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE NORTHERN REGION**

Participants expressed the feeling of belonging to a social (cultural) group, a strong connection with their culture, tradition, and history that affects their perception and behavior. These cultural groups are mis-characterized as ethnic groups, thus confusing, in the process, cultural identity with mobilized identity. This creates the false impression that the region's culturally distinct groups leaves it perpetually vulnerable to conflicts because of ancient hatreds. This perception ignores the high levels of mixing through interethnic marriage, economic partnerships, and shared values. The people in the region share more in common culturally and linguistically, and their differences are very minor. Culture is certainly the predominant category around which social identity is organized, but cultural identities do not cause conflict.

Korostelina (2007) has observed that there are three basic forms of social identity: (1) *cultural* identity based on the characteristics of the everyday life of the group that are perceived as essential or given and are never questioned; they are learned through socialization; (2) *reflected* identity based on a reflective or advanced understanding of a

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group's past, present, and future; and (3) a *mobilized* identity resulting from intergroup comparisons of position, power, and status (Korostelina 2007, p. 85). All three forms of social identities are present in the Northern Region of Ghana.

### **6.2.1 Self-concept derives from membership in a cultural group**

The findings indicate that participants' self-concept derives from knowledge of membership in a cultural group.

I am part of a rich culture, it gives me a sense of belonging.

We have unique customs, language, traditions and culture.

I am proud to belong to the Vagla group.

My ethnic group is what I call myself.

Our culture, dance, funerals, bride price are different.

Our language, culture, ancestral history are different.

Our culture is different from others.

Who they are in relation to others is defined by their culture. Their shared identity, that is, the basis of their shared social action, is their culture. The meanings associated with their shared identity are products of their collective history and the present. One participant said; "Everybody in the country wants to belong to my ethnic group." This statement was in reference to the fact that the current president of the country comes from his ethnic group. I use the term cultural group intentionally because participants used the terms chiefly tribe, non-chiefly tribe, tribe, tribal group, ethnic group interchangeably to define their group, but they always described their groups in cultural terms. The term 'culture'

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includes culture, custom, tradition, history, and language. Where they specifically used the word ‘culture’ the meaning ranged through values, norms, beliefs, practices, food, clothes, etiquette, etc. Their social groups are actually cultural groups. Membership in this cultural group has value and emotional significance because of the culture. The culture provides a reservoir of symbols and rituals upon which social groups are formed and organized. It also serves as a boundary distinguishing “us” from “them.” Tajfel (1981) acknowledges the choice and content of the social categories upon which social groups are formed and organized is generated over a long period of time within a culture, but leaves the mode of transmission to cultural historians.

Socially identifying with the cultural group “fulfills the individual’s need to belong to a group that provides protection, and confidence, and inclusion into a system of social relationships be they primary, primordial or socially constructed” (Korostelina 2007, p. 19). Everyday cultural practices and events are perceived as markers of identity, differentiating groups from each other. The cultural beliefs, values, and norms have an impact people’s perceptions and behavior. Two distinct cultural groups emerged from the findings, the cultural group of the *Tindana* and that of the chief.

#### **6.2.1.1    *the cultural group of the Tindana***

The cultural group of the *Tindana* is organized around kinship, lineage, land, and the ritual parish of the earth cult. It is a patriarchal society in which group-based hierarchies are based on age and gender. In this cultural identity group, old men and middle-aged adults have disproportionate power over children and young adults, and males have more

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social and political power compared to women. The oldest male in the family, clan, or territorial parish takes on leadership roles. Culture, tradition, custom, and history are centered upon the family and clan, and the oldest male has power and authority in the group. Land is central to their worldview and self-definition. Their economic, social, political, and religious activities find their meaning in the institution of the Earth cult (Tengan 1991). Their values, beliefs, norms, and practices are based on the land and the earth cult. Kinship, land, and the earth cult become cultural categories upon which social organization and mobilization takes place. Their characterization as “non-chiefly” and stateless is the result of an imposition of the European concept of a State as an institution with a legitimate monopoly of the use of force. In this cultural group, there is no centralized control of the means of production because the economy is based on subsistence farming and the land is plentiful albeit poor. Power in this cultural identity is defined in terms of age, gender, and control over the means of production (land). Legitimacy is defined by primogeniture and settlement on the land. The *Tindana*, clan head, and family head have power.

#### ***6.2.1.2 the cultural group of the chief***

The cultural group of the chief is organized around the chieftaincy institution. Its worldview and self-definition is associated with conquest, domination, and control. The culture, tradition, and history are about the origins of the power and authority of the mythical great warrior chief who established a kingdom by conquest of and dominion over the indigenous people of the land. He put his sons in charge of the various

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communities as political leaders. Access to land is based on conquest. In this cultural group, belief in the chieftaincy institution, respect for the authority of the chief, power, leadership, status, and prestige are important values. Membership in the cultural group is defined by belonging to the royal family in one way, shape, or form. The highest honor an individual can attain is to be a chief.

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. Leadership comes in turns and once it is your turn, no one can take it away from you. Seniority by birth comes in turns. You cannot aspire to become a family head, and you cannot contest for a clan head. In the event you do not want to be a leader, someone in the family will take up the responsibility in your name.

In its cultural identity form, chieftaincy is a status symbol; it is a prestigious position the individual aspires to attain. Among the Dagombas, chieftaincy is based on seniority: “you cannot become a chief over your father.” Chieftaincy is more than an office; it is the aspiration of every young man to attain some form of leadership position in the community. This Dagomba participant’s perception represents the concept of chieftaincy as a cultural value and not as a political identity. Chieftaincy is a cultural symbol upon which social identification is organized and mobilized. Their values, beliefs, attitudes and norms are all integrated into the chieftaincy institution. The data on values,



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norms, beliefs, and practices indicates chieftaincy are a core element of their identity. On the value of a chief in the community, the chiefly participants (50%) said the chief was the source of their cultural identity and none (0%) of non-chiefly group participants associated the chief with their cultural identity. The chiefly group participants said leadership (60%) and cultural practices (30%) are important values. The non-chiefly group participants value leadership (15%) and cultural practices (15%). The symbolism, rituals, and cultural practices surrounding chieftaincy give meaning to life among this cultural group.

“We value our chieftaincy tradition and have great respect for our chiefs.”

“Living without a chief is like living in the jungle, no order, no progress, no development. The chief brings order and helps us move forward.” “It is important to have a chief to provide leadership.” “We value chiefs and our festivals.”

The chieftaincy institution becomes a marker of identity and a cultural boundary indicating the difference between “us” and “them”.

“Where there are chiefs, there is unity and they solve problems amicably. Chiefs solve problems and that is the difference between us and people without chiefs”.

From the data, chieftaincy is a core cultural element used to organize a cultural identity of the chiefly group participants. Cultural identities can also be mobilized for power, status, and privilege. The categorization of ethnic groups into “chiefly” and “non-chiefly” groups, and the perception that chieftaincy is the core element in the social identity of the chiefly ethnic groups, is a mobilized identity, deployed to increase the power and status of the ethnic groups. This mobilized social identity has the capacity to

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generate conflict because of competition seeking to gain advantage over the other.

### **6.2.1.3 *land is perceived as part of the cultural identity***

Land so pervades people's lives that they can hardly think of existing without being linked to a piece of land. In the data, however, land is perceived in terms of beliefs and values. According to Bar-Tal (1998) group beliefs define the essence of the group, by providing the criterion for differentiation between groups. 20% of all participants said land is a value. Among the "non-chiefly" participants, 35% said land is a value and 5% of the "chiefly" perceived land as a value. For the "chiefly" group, leadership 60% and cultural practices (30%) was more valued than land. In terms of their cultural identity, land has more value for the "non-chiefly" groups while leadership is more valued in the "chiefly" group. Groups of families settled on a piece of land and identified with the earth shrine of the area. Land and the earth shrine cult have higher cultural significance for the "non-chiefly" cultural groups. The non-chiefly group use settlement to legitimize their claims to land, and the chiefly group use conquest to legitimize their claim to land. Both claims are legitimizing myths to justify present claims to power and access to land.

### **6.2.2 Self-concept derives from membership in a mobilized group**

Social identity is defined in terms of ethnicity and chieftaincy in the Northern Region. It is only region in Ghana where some ethnic groups have no "officially" recognized chiefs and land of their own. Ethnic groups are further categorized into "chiefly" and "non-chiefly" ethnic groups. The "ethnic" conflicts between: Gonja/Vagla, Gonja/Nawuri,

### *Discussion of Findings*

Nanumba/Konkomba and Dagomba/Konkomba were the result of demands for the right of the non-chiefly tribes to have their own chiefs officially recognized by the government. Mobilized identities as Korostelina (2007) has explained, emerge from intergroup comparisons of position, power, and status.

The values and beliefs of in-groups and out-groups are perceived in the context of intergroup interactions and contradictions. Such ideologization of identity results in the perception of competition among groups and the incompatibility of goals. The core aim of an in-group is to increase its status or power which leads to conflict intentions and a readiness to fight against out-groups ... the main content and meaning of this identity are contradictions and competition among groups (p. 86).

In its mobilized form, chieftaincy is conceived in relation to “non-chiefly” groups with the purpose of increasing in-group status or power.

We are who we are because we have a chief and people recognize and respect us because of our chieftaincy. Chiefs represent the whole community at functions. One person is seen as many. Chieftaincy is important because you cannot live in a village without a chief. Having a chief in your community gives you respect and recognition.

The mobilized form of social identity ideologizes a cultural symbol and uses it to legitimize power or status. In its cultural identity form, the two distinct cultural groups have different notions of power and authority, meaning of identity, and land rights. The two systems exist side by side, contesting and negotiating their notions of authority,

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identity status, and land rights. As mobilized identities, they become social identities, i.e., a set of values and norms, custom, tradition, and history that is socially based, contingent, negotiable, with consequential assertions in response to the identity question of “who are you?” “Who are we?” and who are they? (Tilly 2005, p. 209). Tilly adds “identities become political identities when governments become parties to them” (ibid, p. 210). The socio-political context of the Colonial and post-Independence history of Ghana has impacted in significant ways the mobilization of social identities for power, status, and privilege. The colonial government’s choice of, and alliance with, the chieftaincy institution, influenced the mobilization of social identity around the chieftaincy institution.

The two distinct cultural identities, the *Tindana* and the chief, became social identities with political, social, and economic consequences. They were categorized into “chiefly” and “non-chiefly” groups. Chieftaincy transitioned from a cultural status symbol to a core element in the social identity of the chiefly groups. Belonging to a chiefly group in the Northern Region meant access to political power, respect, and recognition of your identity group and rights to land ownership. The “chiefly” group became the dominant group possessing a disproportionately large share of political authority and power, high social status, access to land, and other resources. They are described as the indigenous people, owners of the land, chiefly people, etc. The “non-chiefly” group became the subordinate group with no political authority and power, of low social status with no recognition and respect, and having little or no access to land. They are variously described as settlers, strangers, landless, and chiefless people. Notions of power and authority, identity and land rights became “episodes of contentious politics” (Tilly 2005).

## *Discussion of Findings*

Shared-identity became the basis organizing and mobilizing for shared social action.

### **6.2.2.1 mobilized social identities: the “non-chiefly” groups**

The State–Chiefs alliance de-legitimized the power and social identity status of the office the *Tindana* as a traditional authority with the power and authority to legislate on land rights. All the cultural groups without chiefs were provided with chiefs by the State or put under cultural groups with chiefs. Social identities were defined in terms of the chief-taincy institution. Those cultural groups without the chiefly form of leadership resorted to settlement on, and relationship with, the land through the earth cult to mobilize a “non-chiefly” social identity. The office of the *Tindana* became the natural social category for organization and mobilization.

Social Categorization Theory explains the choice of a social category by a group is based on two factors, the concept of fit and accessibility. A social category becomes salient for a group if it fits comparatively or normatively. In other words, the *Tindana* is a category of leadership totally different from the chief. “Comparative fit refers to the social organization of similarities and differences between people in a given context ... Normative fit from the (expected) content associated with similarities and differences between people.” (Reicher et al. 2010, p. 54). Normatively the *Tindana* is related to settlement (not conquest as the chiefs) and to the land. The concept of accessibility (perceiver readiness) means “a given category is more likely to become salient to the extent that a perceiver is psychologically predisposed to use it as a basis for perception or action because it has prior meaning and significance” (ibid. p, 54). The *Tindana* is a social

### *Discussion of Findings*

category that represents a group of people in the Northern Region who define themselves in relation to their settlement on a piece of land and their ritual relationship with the land. The office of the *Tindana* evolved from a simple family religious practice in which the oldest male in the family offered sacrifices to the gods of the land for a bountiful harvest, or to appease the gods in the event of any human infractions, into a centralized system of ritual, economic, social, and political leadership. The *Tindana* became a community leader with power and authority from the gods of the land to take care of the land for the wellbeing of the community. The powers of the *Tindana* were defined and limited by the community. His authority was exercised in consultation with family heads as he dealt with the various disputes of the community. Social power was hierarchical, centralized, age, and gender based. The oldest male in the family, clan, or village settlement community exercised power. He made decisions about farmlands, production, and distribution of food, and the general wellbeing of the family. His power was consent based, and family members who disagreed with his exercise of power asked for a share of the family land or simply moved to a new settlement. Decisions for the common good of the community were taken in consultation with the family and clan heads. Membership in the family or clan was the condition for access to the decision-making processes. Women were particularly disadvantaged in this power structure. Women born into the family could not take positions of power because they were considered “property” of the family they would marry into. Women who married into the family were considered “strangers” from another family and therefore not fully integrated into the family. “Illegitimate” children, i.e., the mother came to the family with a pregnancy, and slave children were

### *Discussion of Findings*

considered outsiders, and could not assume leadership roles in the family or participate in certain family meetings or ritual ceremonies. The “non-chiefly” groups mobilized their social identity around the *Tindana*, and ideologized the office of the *Tindana* to resist their de-legitimization by the State–chief alliance in the region.

#### **6.2.2.2 mobilized social identities: the “Chiefly” groups**

The State–chief alliance privileged the chieftaincy institution as the legitimate system of traditional governance with power, status, and prestige. Self-identifying with a group with social status, power, and privilege gave the individual the privileges of membership in the group. The more the individual depersonalized and identified completely with the group values, beliefs, norms, and cultural practices the better for the individual. Chieftaincy as social category became salient because of comparative and normative fit and its accessibility. Chieftaincy was a privileged position of power and leadership and it clearly distinguished groups with the chiefly system of leadership from groups with the *Tindana* system of leadership. Chieftaincy became a core element in the social identity of the chiefly cultural group, and shifted from a cultural identity to a political identity because of the State intervention. Through the State–chiefs’ alliance, chiefs were given the power through customary law, to define and to impose their version culture, tradition, custom, and history over the “non-chiefly” tribes under their jurisdiction.

These cultural and mobilized identities influence conceptions of indigenous power in the region.

### **6.2.3 Relevance of social identity and social categorization theories**

Social identity theory seeks to make sense of in-group bias, social conflict, and inter-group relations in society. This theory investigates how the need for positive social identity, which requires people to establish a positively valued distinctiveness for their own group compared to other groups, interacts with specific intergroup status differences in society.

Tajfel (1982) defines social identity as that part of individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel 1982, p. 2). Of interest in social identity theory is how members of a group in a social relationship would react to their position in the society (high or low status) as they perceive the status difference to be either secure or insecure. In other words, if the status difference is perceived to be legitimate or stable, or illegitimate or unstable, what are the different strategies ("individual mobility," social creativity, and social competition) that could or would be used by group members if their social identity were to be challenged (see Turner and Reynolds 2004, pp. 259-262).

Tajfel (1974, 1978) was interested in the degree to which a person will act as an individual or as a group member in terms of interpersonal relationships. He argued that as behaviors became more inter-group, attitudes to the out-group within the in-group tended to become more consensual and that the out-group members tended to be seen as homogeneous and undifferentiated members of their social category (cultural, ethnic, or religious). He suggested that the perceived impermeability of group boundaries tended to



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be associated with an ideology of “social change,” characterized by a belief that people cannot resolve their identity problems through individual action and mobility, but are only able to change their social situation by acting collectively in terms of their shared group membership. Social identity theory is very relevant to understanding the conflicts in the Northern Region, most of which are between the dominant “chiefly” cultural groups and the subordinate “non-chiefly” cultural groups who perceive their subordination to be illegitimate. In the Gonja and Vagla conflict of 1980, the Vagla youth accused their elders of having “accepted unquestioningly the status quo of Gonja domination of Vagala.” (Awedoba 2009, p. 175). In the Gonja and Nawuri conflict of 1991, the Nawuris rejected the Gonja claims to rulership of Nawuris in the Kpandai area. The Nanumba and Konkomba conflict of 1981, the Konkombas rejected Nanumba chief’s claims to rights and privileges over them. In 1993, the Konkombas petitioned the National House of Chiefs for the creation of a Konkomba Paramountcy “to free them from subservience to Nanumba, Dagomba, Mamprussi, and Gonja” (ibid, p. 225). In all these conflicts the “non-chiefly” social groups resisted their subordinate status. In all these instances people acted as a group.

The following discussion focuses on the processes of mobilizing, organizing and acting as a group in order to change a social situation. Social categorization theory explores how people are able to act psychologically in a collective way as group members. Social identity theory holds that self-perception or self-conception varies between personal and social identity. As one moves from defining self as an individual to defining self in terms of social identity, group behavior becomes possible and emerges.

## *Discussion of Findings*

When a shared social identity becomes psychologically operative, or salient, there is a depersonalization of self-perception such that people's perception of their mutual and collective similarities are enhanced. Group behavior is people acting more in terms of social than personal identity (Turner and Onorato 1999). Social identity theory provides a new way of thinking about social groups.

### **6.3 FINDINGS ON INDIGENOUS CONCEPTS OF POWER**

In the Northern Region of Ghana, social identities, social boundaries, social ties, and their accompanying mythic stories i.e. culture, tradition and history, revolve around land and leadership. Shared cultural identities are defined by mode of settlement on the land (settlement/conquest) and system of leadership (ritual/political) in the community. Power and legitimacy are defined in the context of these shared identities. It is in these communities that power is generated and deployed to respond to the basic need, goals and interests of the individuals and the community. As social interactions tend to be comparative and competitive conceptions of power are ideologized and used to justify positions of advantage or resist perceived domination. Indigenous conceptions of power are elicited from participant's perceptions of people with power, the nature, source and uses of the power.

#### **6.3.1 People with power**

The findings reveal that participants' perceived cultural identities and mobilized identities, impacted their conceptions of social power.

### Discussion of Findings

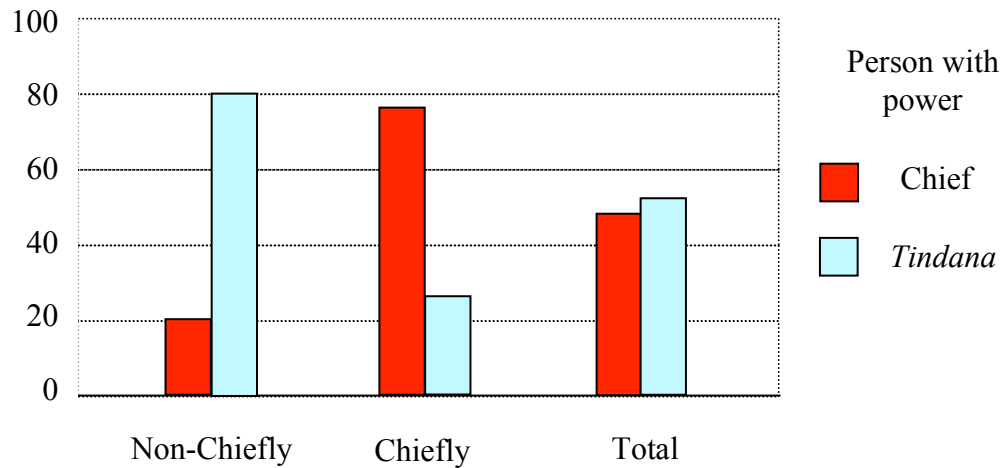


Figure 13. **People with power – non-chiefly and chiefly responses**

When participants were asked who are the people with power in the community, 52.5% of them said the *Tindana* and 47.5% said the chief. When asked who is the most powerful person in the community, 80% of the “non-chiefly” participants said the *Tindana* was the most powerful person and only 20% said the chief was the most powerful. Among the “chiefly” group participants, 75% said the chief was the most powerful and only 25% said the *Tindana* was most powerful. See Figure 13.

In responding to the question of who is the most powerful in the community, participants were very much aware of the differences in the sources and uses of the power between the *Tindana* and Chief, they were aware of the fact that the *Tindana* is not very visible publicly, yet the non-chiefly group participants (80%) said the *Tindana* was more powerful than the chief. The chiefly participants clearly stated that the chiefs have great respect for the *Tindana* (the King of Dagbon sits on the floor when he visits the *Yunduni Tindana*) yet 75% of the chiefly group participants said the chief was more

### Discussion of Findings

powerful than the *Tindana*. In comparing the two power systems, participants are interested in increasing their group's power and status, hence the high rating of their cultural power symbols (icons).

#### 6.3.2 Sources of power

Participants are more objective on the sources of social power. There is a consensus on the sources of the power of the *Tindana* and the chief. All the non-chiefly participants (100%) said land is the source of the power of the *Tindana* and none (0%) of the chiefly group participants mentioned land as the source of the power of the chief.

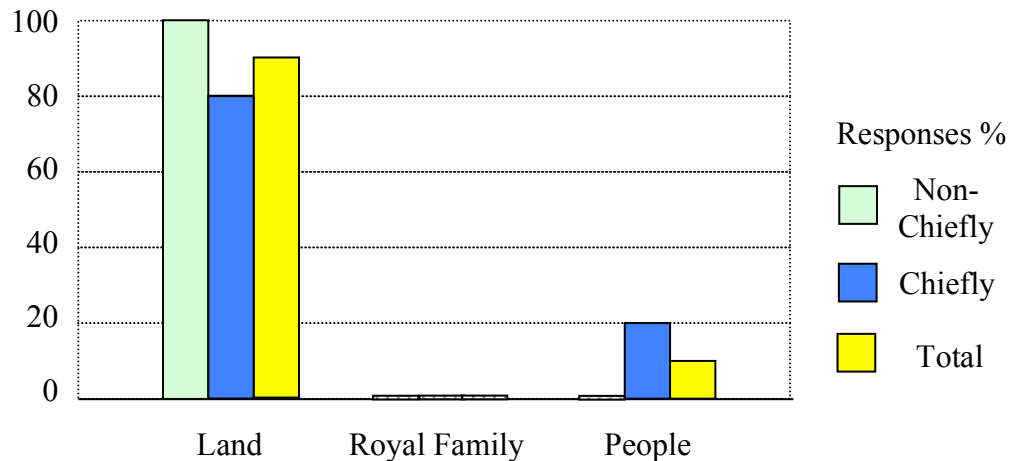


Figure 14. Source of Power of the *Tindana*

On the power of the chief, participants are 100% agreed that his power comes from people. The chiefly group participants emphasize the royal family (80%) as the source of power of the chief. See Figure 15.

## Discussion of Findings

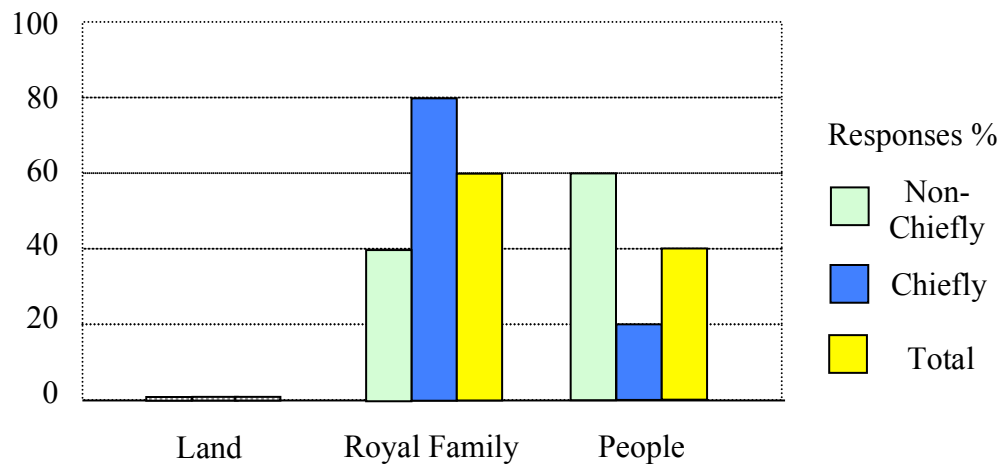


Figure 15. **Source of Power of the Chief**

### 6.3.2.1 *land as a source of power*

The office of the *Tindana* represents a conception of power in relation to the land. Power comes from the land and is used to pacify the land for the wellbeing of the land and the wellbeing of the people who depend on the land for their livelihood. Power in this conception is the ability to harness the mystical forces of the universe to advance an individual or a community's needs, goals, and interests. The power of the *Tindana* is generally perceived to be a form of ritual power given by the gods of the land for the pacification of the land. Of all the participants, 90% said the power of the *Tindana* comes from the land. None (0%) of the chiefly group participants mentioned land as the source of the power of the chief. None mentioned pacification of the land as a function of the chief's power. Participants are agreed on the conception of the power of the *Tindana*, its source and uses.

Traditional power emerged in response to the needs of subsistence farming

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communities who depended on the land for their livelihood. For these people, the land was everything. Traditional power and authority consisted of mobilizing the forces of nature to provide organization and structure to advance their interest as a group, that is, ensuring peace, harmonious, and productive relationship with the land. In these undifferentiated traditional societies, the various leadership roles, ritual, economic, social, and political resided in one person the family or clan head or the *Tindana*.

This conception of power based on the shared cultural identity is ideologized and used to mobilize the “non-chiefly” social identity to resist the domination of the “chiefly” group. The statements that

*The Tindana was the one with the greatest power in the village before the colonial period. Traditionally we had no chiefs, we relied on the community head, the Tindana, he who sacrifices to the earth gods was also the leader of the community.*

are at once a statement of fact and a socially constructed political statements with consequences in the competition for power, identity and land. It is one thing to acknowledge the cultural power of the *Tindana* over the land, but it is a totally different story to use that fact to argue for the right to land.

#### **6.3.2.2 *people as a source of power***

As societies differentiated, leadership roles were also differentiated as different people specialized in different roles. The community delegated certain powers and entrusted certain tasks to individuals within the community to be performed on behalf of the community. The chieftaincy institutions slowly emerged as a form of leadership distinct

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from the office of the *Tindana*. The people, and not the land, became the source of the power of the chief. Power comes from the “people” who give it to the chief by recognizing and accepting him as their leader. The chief needs the consent of his people to exercise his power and authority. He depends on the acceptance and recognition of his people to function. The character of the chief plays an important role in his power.

The King of Dagbon rules over all, but to get power, he needs to have a good character. The people give the chief power depending on his character. The chief is a respectable person who recognizes and respects people or else he will not be respected.

In most of the communities the office of the *Tindana* participated in the selection and installation of the chief. As two of the chiefly group participants explained:

Ndewura Jakpa (the founding father of the Gonja tribe) met some of the *Tindanas* who were sacrificing to the gods. He gave his respect to them, because they accepted him as chief, so he did not take power from them, he gave them their independence. The *Tindanas* are the real land owners. Ndewura Japka came and met them.

The chief pays homage to the *Tindana* who owes the land. There are certain things the chief does not do. Only the *Tindana* does them. The *Yunduni Tindana* is the chief of all Dagomba *Tindanas*. When the Ya Na goes to Yunduni he sits on the floor, a mark of respect for the *Tindana*. The chief respects (fears) the *Tindana* because he can curse the chief.

“The people” represent the community, and the institutions, rules, and processes

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of choosing a leader. The people as the source of the power of the chief is expressed in the following statements:

The ancestors established chieftaincy.

The skins give power to the chief.

People give power to the chief depending on his character.

Custom bestows power on the chief.

The kingmakers bestow power on the chief.

“The people” as the source of the power of chief, distinct from “the gods of the land” is both a statement of fact, and a political statement with consequences for power, identity, and land rights.

#### **6.3.3 Uses of power**

The basic function of power is to facilitate the need to secure and control basic resources and valued outcomes. Individuals combine their efforts working as a social group to control their environment and secure needed or desired outcomes. The identity group defines the desired outcomes. Power roles emerge from coordinating such efforts as the group strives to satisfy its needs and interests (Guinote and Vescio 2010). Power in the indigenous sense is always for a purpose, for a function, mainly to acquire, protect, and defend, to heal and arbitrate disputes, or to appease the gods. The primary purpose of power, in all its forms, is for preservation of life, wellbeing and peace. Power is for protection of the individual, the community, and the land from spiritual and physical harm. The *Tindana* through ritual sacrifices ensures the wellbeing of the land, and the people.



### *Discussion of Findings*

He also mediates their disputes and promotes social harmony and order in the community. The chief protects his people and the land from external physical harm, and maintains social harmony and order through the settlement of disputes. On the uses of the power, participants are agreed that both the *Tindana* and the chief use their power for leadership (75%). Leadership is perceived in terms of protection of the land and the people. The participants agree that the power of the *Tindana* is for protecting the land and the chief for protecting the people. 95% of the chiefly group participants said the power of the *Tindana* is for protecting the land, and a 100% of the non-chiefly group said the power of the chief is for protecting the people. This means that other than the ritual role of the *Tindana*, both the *Tindana* and the chief are leaders in the community.

#### **6.3.3.1 uses of power of *Tindana***

As settler communities stabilized disputes emerged over the organization of land rights and the appropriate authority to legislate and regulate access to and use of communal land. The office of the *Tindana* became the appropriate authority to settle disputes. According to the non-chiefly group, the *Tindana* is the public authority with power to determine land rights, generate rule, and enforce compliance. His ritual power is converted into economic and political power as he takes control over land distribution.

Anyone coming to the land calls on the *Tindana* for a piece of land. He has the power over all buildings. He puts the first building stone on the ground before a building is put up. The *Tindana* has a lot of power, he can ask you to leave his land. *Tindana* is powerful because of the land.

### *Discussion of Findings*

The “traditional authority” for defining and enforcing land rights in the Northern Region in pre-colonial times was the office of the *Tindana*. Land belonged to individual families and a major part of the *Tindana*’s function was settling land related disputes. In all these conflicts land was never perceived as a private property, ownership was mostly in the context of membership in a family or ritual parish, and the *Tindana* was the public authority responsible for formalizing access to and use of the land. He organized admission of strangers to the land. He was the authority people turned to in times of natural disasters or land related disputes. The *Tindana* pacifies the land but does not own it. Land in the Northern Regions was plentiful and the population was very sparse, so the power of the *Tindana* was not about control over territory, it was power to ensure the land was “cool” (suffered no natural disaster and was productive). This ritual power became economic power as people depended on his ritual services for good rains and good harvest. The *Tindana* had the power to influence productivity by ensuring a good harvest. This cultural ritual role of the *Tindana* is later used to mobilize disadvantaged groups to resist their perceived domination and to justify claims to land.

#### **6.3.3.2 uses of power of the chief**

Social power is fundamentally for ensuring peaceful coexistence with the environment and between groups. The primary role of the chief is to maintain social order, to ensure peace through the resolution of disputes and to promote development. The chief is given power to lead and to govern his people.

The chief is perceived as the father of all, protector of the people, and the land,

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promoter of peace and peaceful coexistence and promoter of development.

Power is vested in the chief to protect the land and not to discriminate. Power is given to the chief for the good of his people. The chief rules the land he does not own it. The chief administers the area so that there is no conflict. He ensures peace and coexistence in the ethnic group, reconciles families. Where there is no chief, the rich man and the youth will over run the poor. The chief brings development to the area.

The above statements from participants underscore their perception of role of the chief in the society. There is a consensus among participants that the power of the chief comes from people and not the land (100%). The chiefly group participants said the power of the chief was for leadership (100%) in the community, and the power of the *Tindana* is for protecting the land (95%). Participants observed that a chief is chosen and mandated by the people to manage the affairs of the community. The power of the chief is for leadership and governance in the community.

The chief rules the people and the land, supervises people, leads them and run the affairs of the tribe. The chief controls resources makes laws and decisions and maintains social order. The chief is a person with power over others. “He has the power who can say something and everybody will agree to it.” The chief is the most powerful person in the community. “Power is vested in the king who is regarded as the over all Supreme Being of the land. Whatever he says is final, whether it is on land, chieftaincy or farming, and everybody respects it that was.”

The power of the chief is for the general administration of the community to

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ensure social order, peaceful coexistence, and development.

#### **6.3.3.3 *conclusions on the sources and uses of power***

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the findings on the indigenous conceptions of power.

(1) Indigenous power is generated within a shared cultural identity group for the preservation of life, wellbeing, and peace. The group defines the desired outcomes and the rules guiding their attainment. As social interactions tend to be comparative and competitive, power is mobilized and deployed to maintain an advantage or resist a perceived domination. Indigenous power tends to be multidimensional, contextual, relational, and consent-based. Power emerges from social relations, and the power holder needs the consent of the subjects of the power to exercise power, and be accountable for the power entrusted to him/her.

(2) Two systems of social power existed side by side – the *Tindana* and the chief – each making claims, contesting, and negotiating the right and authority to generate and enforce rules for social living, land access, and use. Belonging to a shared cultural group became a means of legitimizing social groups and their claim to power over land rights.

(3) Consent gives legitimacy and accountability to power. The power holder has the responsibility to act according to the role demands and expectations associated with the power. The gods and ancestors ensure that power holders act within their powers and use the power for the purpose for which it was given. The punishment for abuse of power is sickness or death. The people who are subject to the power holder demonstrate their

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consent by staying in his jurisdiction or moving to another jurisdiction. People punish their chiefs by deserting them.

(4) Legitimacy is continuous contestation and negotiation through social dialogue. That process of was interrupted by the State-Chief alliance, which recognized and supported chiefs as the “natural leaders” of the native peoples. The chieftaincy institution became “the traditional authority” legitimized by Colonial Ordinances and Customary law.

(5) This State-Chief alliance legitimizes one version of traditional authority and de-legitimizes the other, with consequences for cultural group states and land right. Existing shared cultural identities were mobilized for social action to maintain this legitimation or to resist the de-legitimization.

#### **6.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS FOR CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION IN THE NORTHERN REGION**

The findings in this study reveal two forms of social identities: cultural identities (ethnic) and mobilized identities (political). In the cultural identities, people self-identity with their social group because they share the same cultural values, beliefs, practices, tradition, and history. Cultural differences become markers of identity. People see value in their shared identity and are emotionally attached to the group because it gives them a sense of belonging. Culture in this context is a set of values, beliefs, norms, and practices that give meaning to life and affect behavior of people. The primary purpose of power in cultural identity is to preserve live and to promote wellbeing and peace. Power is the ability to harness the forces of nature to advance an individual or community’s desired outcome.

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There is also mobilized identity, in which cultural symbols are used, but this time as social categories for organizing and mobilizing a shared social identity for purposes of power, prestige, and status. The values, norms, and beliefs of the mobilized identity are perceived in terms of contradictory and incompatible goals. Chieftaincy is a value among chiefly groups that cannot be shared with non-chiefly groups. In other words beliefs, values, and norms are defined in exclusive terms. The purpose of such exclusivist approach is for the in-group to increase its power and status. Culture is simplified, ideologized, and used as a legitimizing myth for a political or ideological agenda (Avruch 2006, p. 12). Social identities can also be reflected, that is, can be organized based on a deep understanding of the group's past, present, and future, and the groups relationship to other groups. The cultural and mobilized forms of social identity are present in the data. Groups in the Northern Region demonstrate their shared cultural identities in their ethnic (tribal) affiliations, but they also demonstrate a mobilized social identity using salient cultural categories, e.g., the chief and *Tindana*. The findings underline the importance of the connection between culture, ethnicity, and identity in understanding how social identity influences the conception of power and legitimacy. Indigenous conceptions of power come from shared cultural identities and history of the *Tindana* and the chief. However, in the context of Colonial influences, persisting long after Independence, the conceptions of power as salient cultural categories are used for mobilization and organization for power, status, prestige, and property.

#### **6.4.1 State-Chief alliance, power asymmetry, and social conflicts**

The Northern Region of Ghana is unique for its cultural and linguistic diversity. It is also the only region in Ghana where some culturally and linguistically different ethnic groups do not have their own officially recognized chiefs. The reason for this anomaly is the erroneous classification, by Colonial administrators, of indigenous tribes by their systems of leadership; those with a centralized and hierarchical system of leadership, and those with a diffused democratic system of leader. Based on this distinction, the Colonial administration either created chiefs in communities which did not have chiefs or grouped the chief-less communities under the leadership of the already existing chiefs of neighboring communities. The latter process of amalgamation of several different cultural and linguistic groups under one chief took root only in the Northern Region of Ghana. For administrative purposes, the Colonial government put all “non-chiefly” ethnic groups under the jurisdiction of the four “chiefly” ethnic groups: Gonja, Dagomba, Mamprussi and Nanumba. This arbitrary categorization of the society into “chiefly” and “non-chiefly” groups ignored the fact that two distinct centralized systems of traditional leadership existed and exercised traditional power and authority in the Northern Region. The argument that “non-chiefly” groups did not have a centralized system of leadership does not present a complete picture because the office of the *Tindana* evolved from a ritual activity of a family head to a centralized system of ritual, social, economic and political leadership existing side by side the chieftaincy institution. There are also some of the “non-chiefly” tribes where the *Tindana* is also a chief.

Herbst (2000) has argued that the most contentious issues in politics in Africa

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today are the relationship between central government and local leaders (chiefs). From Colonial attempts to strengthen certain institutions for effective governance to post-colonial governments' reliance on local leaders, chiefs have taken advantage of governments' inability to project power over distance to construct a traditional political domain for themselves.

The Colonial and post-Independent States have played and continue to play an important role in legitimizing and delegitimizing the different notions of authority, identity, and ownership of land. Recognizing this role of the State in contributing to the conflicts is an important step toward resolving some of the conflicts. The Colonial State defined the power and jurisdiction of the chief, structured chieftaincy into a Native Authority, and supported it for colonial administrative purposes through the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance (No.8, 1878 and No.5, 1883).

In this ordinance unless the context otherwise requires – “Head Chief” means a chief who is not subordinate in his ordinary jurisdiction to any other chief, and includes the chiefs known as Ohen, Ohene, Manche and Amagah. “Division” means the portion of the Protected Territories under the supervision of the Head chief. “Native” includes Mulattos, and all persons resident in the Country, other than those commonly known as Europeans. “Native Tribunal” means a Head chief, or the chief of a sub-division, or village, as the case may be, sitting with the Captains, Headsmen, and others who by Native Customary Law are the Councilors or Assistants of such head chief or chief (Metcalf 1964, p. 390)

The Ordinance created a structure of Head, Divisional, and Village Chief. The



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chief's area of jurisdiction – “Division” was the “portion of the Protected Territories.” The people (his subjects) were defined as “Natives”, i.e. Mulattos, and all persons resident in the country, other than Europeans.

In the Northern Territories, the Colonial government, without clearly defining the functions of the chief, empowered the native tribunals “to exercise the jurisdiction heretofore exercised by them in the same measure as such jurisdiction has been heretofore exercised” (Kimble 1963, p. 487). Chiefs were authorized by the Colonial administration to draw up the customs, laws, and history of their people to serve as the basis for drafting a Constitution to guide their operations as chiefs (Native Authorities). The Constitutions of the Gonja, Dagomba, Wala and Mamprusi were drawn up in the 1930s as a result of this exercise.

The State–Chief alliance legitimized the power of the chief and delegitimized other systems of power and authority in the region. It empowered chiefs to create culture and tradition through customary law. The Colonial administration elevated chieftaincy to “the traditional political authority” with legal backing through the various Native Ordinances and the codification of customary law. Legitimate power shifted from a continuously contested and negotiated social arrangement – that is, spontaneous democratic politics at its finest – to a legally enforced system of power and authority. The Colonial government gave chiefs the right to impose their culture and tradition on their subjects, thus in the process denying the right of the distinct cultural groups to acquire a similar form of political right and exercise. Native Ordinances defined and legitimized traditional authority, identity status, and property rights.

### *Discussion of Findings*

Chieftaincy became territorial, and jurisdiction over the land defined legitimacy and extent of authority of the chief. Official government business was transacted with these officially recognized chiefs. The office of the *Tindana* was suppressed and those tribes whose indigenous system of leadership was not recognized by the colonial government became non-chiefly tribes and were forced under the jurisdiction of the State recognized chiefs. In Tilly's (2005) view, when people make concerted public claims that involve governments as objects or as a third party, their social identities become political identities. These political identities serve as springboard for claim making

Stacey (2009) has argued that from the Colonial period through Independence to the present, the interaction between traditional and modern political spheres, particularly between chieftaincy and the state, has created "a dynamic institution [chieftaincy] officially removed from the modern political sphere, but whose legitimacy ultimately is based on it, which allows a partly formal political space to be utilized, that rests on codification of the customary or tradition" (Stacey 2009, p. 14). In his view, this State-Chief relationship in the society has empowered chiefs to create custom on their terms and for traditional elites to maneuver within and influence state action to forward community interests. Pul (2003) has hypothesized that "recourse to violence in ethnic disputes is highest when actions of elite groups compromise the neutrality of the State" (Pul 2003, p. 17). The authority and legitimacy of the chief is based mainly on their relations with the state. This State-Chief alliance created group-based social inequalities, power asymmetry, and social conflict as subordinate groups resisted their domination.

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### ***6.4.2 State-Chief alliance, legitimacy of traditional authority, and social conflicts***

In Ghana's new democratic constitutional form of governance, with emphasis on local governance, the local government officials assumed the role and functions of the chief. In the Constitution of Ghana, the district assembly is the highest political authority in the district. with deliberative, legislative, and executive powers. The district assembly is responsible for the development, improvement, and management of human settlements and the environment in the district. It is also responsible for the maintenance of security and public safety in the district.

This raises the issue of the role of the chief as a traditional leader in the district. The role of the chief in promoting the welfare and common good of the community, the methods, limits, and objectives of that leadership need to be redefined in the light of the role of the District Assembly. The lack of clarity or the inability of the government to enforce the role distinction is a source of conflict.

The findings reveal of a crisis of legitimacy of traditional authority in Ghana in general and the Northern Region in particular. The crisis of legitimacy begins with the interruption of the normal processes of legitimacy generation through contestation and negotiation between the ruler and the ruled. What is often contested and negotiated is the perception of fairness and justness of the social order, that is, the group differences in terms of power or status, the distributive and procedural forms of justice, and the fairness of outcomes (see Guinote and Vescio 2010, pp. 255-257).

The State–Chief alliance that continues in the decentralized system of local

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governance raises questions about the legitimacy of the traditional authority of the chief. Supporters of the chieftaincy institution are determined to legitimize the authority of chiefs with myths from culture, custom, and tradition. What needs to be developed is a deeper reflection on the role and function of the chieftaincy institution in a democratic, constitutional state. Such a reflection must re-investigate the legitimizing myths of the origin, nature, and source of power and authority of the chief. As Sally Moore (1958) has advised, the utopian idealization of chiefs will not help anyone. The ideal of chieftaincy is presented instead of the real situation on the ground. The real picture tells a different story. The tendency to repeat the chroniclers' stories rather than re-investigate the nature of chieftaincy and land tenure is not helpful. A deeper understanding of the current status and position of the chieftaincy institution and its role in society today will contribute to reducing the numerous conflicts around chieftaincy and land.

#### **6.4.3 State–Chief alliance, group-based social inequalities, and social conflict**

The State–chief alliance created group-based social inequalities with the “chiefly group” as the dominant group and the “non-chiefly group” as the subordinated group. According to the social dominance theory, the dominant group tends to possess a disproportionately large share of positive social values, e.g., political authority and power, high social status, access to land, and other resources, etc. The subordinate group tends to possess a disproportionately large share of negative social values, e.g., low power, low social status, and no access to resources (Sidanius and Pratto, 2004). The individual enjoys social power, prestige, and privilege by virtue of membership in a group with social power and

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status. Three types of group-based hierarchies exist, according to social dominance theory: (a) an age system in which adults and middle-age people have disproportionate social power over children and young adults, (b) a gender system in which men have a disproportionate social and political power compared to women, and (c) an arbitrary-set system filled with whatever socially constructed groups human imagination is capable of constructing (Sidanius and Pratto, 2004, p. 316). The third type of group-based hierarchies, the arbitrary-set system, exists where there is the production of economic surplus, and is associated with the greatest degree of violence, brutality, and oppression (Sidanius and Pratto, 2004).

All three types of group-based hierarchies – age, gender, and arbitrary-set – exist in the Northern Region, but it is the arbitrary-set system that is most pervasive and greatest source of conflict because of the group-based social inequalities it creates. Social group distinctions, e.g., chiefly/non-chiefly groups, indigenous/strangers, land owners/settlers, master/slave, etc., exist in the region. These distinctions are arbitrary and produce group-based social inequalities through the unequal distribution of land and power. The dominant group, the chiefly tribes, possesses a disproportionately large share of political authority and power, high social status, and access to land in the Northern Region. Social dominance theory argues that unequal distribution of social values is usually justified by and defended by the use of social ideologies, beliefs, myths, and religious doctrines (Sidanius and Pratto, 2004, p. 320). In Northern Region the subordinated majorities, the non-chiefly groups, are contesting these group-based inequalities with a counter narrative in which they present a counter-claim to land and power

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calling forth the legitimizing myth of first settlers on the land. Most forms of group conflict and oppression, social dominance theory argues, are different manifestations of group-based social hierarchies.

The Northern Regional House of Chiefs (NRHC), the collegial body of traditional authorities in the Region is comprised of five ethnic groups, Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprusi, Nanumbas, and Mo. The other ethnic groups are not represented in this traditional governance body.

According to social identity theory, individuals identify with groups that can offer them a positive social identity. Individuals will organize and mobilize to protect their group advantage or deal with their disadvantage. The conflicts are a call for social change and social justice. Social identity theory and social dominance theory help explain the impact of social hierarchies and power asymmetry on social conflicts in the region. The arguments of culture and tradition are legitimizing myths. Conflict resolution strategies must move beyond these legitimizing myths and address the issues of social justice, group and individual rights and responsibilities.

#### ***6.4.4 State–Chief alliance, land administration, and social conflict – the problem of competence***

Conflicts over chieftaincy and land are a result of the contestation over the legitimate traditional authority to legislate on land rights in the region. There is confusion over land ownership and land management. These two are distinct and do not necessarily have to be under the authority of a chief. As the findings have revealed, land is part of the ethnic

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identity of the people, and ownership of land is all about a place to call home. This is a fundamental human right and no one should be denied it. Land management, however, is a complex and highly specialized economic activity that is beyond the capacity of the traditional authority system in the region today. Land management has to do with the emerging land market in which land is commoditized, securitized, and traded as an abstract entity. On land as identity, the next generation has a right to their identity. The chief as a cultural leader has the obligation to ensure that his people benefit from the rewards of the land. This calls for a system of land administration that promotes the trading of land as a commodity.

The traditional power and authority to legislate on land rights resided in the *Tindana*. It was to him people turned with their land disputes indicating they recognized his authority to legislate on land matters. He received the power from the “gods of the land” for service to the people by ensuring a harmonious, productive, and peaceful relationship between the people and the land. Chiefs traditionally had no business meddling in land matters.

Chiefly claims to control over land is a colonial legacy that was taken over, after Independence, by the modern state. A legal arrangement empowered the chiefs to claim control over the land, thus creating in the process a chiefly political landscape. Land becomes a political tool for legitimating the social status of the chief. Land gives the chief power over the territory. A person is not made a chief because of land, but a chief is entitled to land to legitimize his power over the people and the territory. The land legitimizes the chieftaincy institution as a political institution of rule over all inhabitants

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of his territory. It is for this reason the chiefly territorial lands are vested in the office (stool or skin) of the chief, and not in the person of the chief.

All stool lands in Ghana shall vest in the appropriate stool on behalf of, and in trust for, the subjects of the stool in accordance with customary law and usage (Constitution 1992, Article 267, Clause 1).

The land is not a private property of the chief. It is vested in the office of the chief and not in the person of the chief. The chief does not own land. In the perception of participants, the real owners of the land are the gods and the *Tindana* is the ritual custodian. The chief has the responsibility of protecting the land as political territory from external forces.

Land is also a commodity with great economic value. Land is sold and owned as private property. The emerging land market in the Northern Region is so complex it demands good land rights and an effective land administration system.

Trading in land demands that the social recognition of land be transformed from land as a physical thing to abstract concepts of rights and powers in relation to land-based activities. The capacity of a society to visualize land-based activities as a set of rights and opportunities managed by carefully developed restrictions and responsibilities distinct from the physicality of land is fundamental to market development ... a functioning society always needs to rationalize the relationship between people and land; trading in commoditized land is one of the easiest methods (Wallace and Williamson 2006, p. 128).

The present land administration system in the Northern Region is generating



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conflicts because chiefs are simply not capable of managing the emerging land market. The role of the chiefs in land management is limited to the indiscriminate selling land without any accountability to the people. An effective land management system is a conflict resolution mechanism.

Land has always been a source of conflict between and within families. Defining the boundaries of family land has always been a source of conflict. Hence a major function of the *Tindana* and the chief was to mediate these family disputes over land.

The indigenous understanding of land as an identity, source of power, and legitimacy means land is inalienable, a historical and social right to which members of the community should have access. Land belongs to the gods and human beings use the land for their livelihood. Land is technically a communal property held in trust for generations to come. The present inhabitants of the land have a responsibility to preserve the land for the next generation. One could argue that the ritual activities of the *Tindana* were meant to protect the land for posterity. But land is also an economic commodity of great monetary value today. The management of land as an identity and an inalienable right versus land as a tradable commodity is a source of most of the conflicts over land and chieftaincy in the Northern Region.

The conflict over land in the Northern Region is not about the land per se, but about the legitimate “traditional authority” with power to regulate land and property rights. The present land arrangement in which chiefs are custodians of communal lands leaves the thirteen non-chiefly tribes without land and power. These disadvantaged groups are now advocating for social change and social justice. If land is so central to the

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identity of people, denying them land is denying them a basic need and a right. The findings on the power of the *Tindana* and chief, and on the sources and uses of their power, reflects this struggle between the dominant chiefly groups and the disadvantaged non-chiefly groups over the legitimate authority to regulate land rights, and the right to participate in the social, economic, and political life of the community.

The chieftaincy institution, with the help of the state, arrogated to itself authority to create, regulate, and enforce customary rights to land. In a multi-ethnic environment in which there are chiefly and non-chiefly groups, redefining the power of the chief in relation to land is problematic. The power asymmetry created by dispossessing non-chiefly tribes of their land is perceived as illegitimate because it is not fair and just. A power system that supervises a social order in which group differences in terms of power are unfair may be legitimate, but in the eyes of the disadvantaged that power system is illegitimate, dissented, and source of violent conflict. The management of land as identity and commodity in the context of a complex land market calls for a more effective and efficient management of land to avoid conflicts.

The office of the *Tindana* needs to be revisited because the *Tindana* has a spiritual linkage to the land that is symbolic. Every ethnic group has its *Tindanas* who play a cultural role in the society. They represent the spiritual connection to the land as identity. The ownership of the land can revert to the *Tindanas* as ritual custodians with no rights to benefit directly from the land, except for a fixed stipend for ritual services. This would solve the problem of cultural communities in the Northern Region who have no land to call their home. For purposes in the modern economy of Ghana, a professional group will

develop a land market with enforceable rules and regulations.

#### **6.4.5 Misperceptions about the conflicts in the Northern Region**

The findings of this study help to address some of the misperceptions about the conflicts. First, the characterization of the conflicts in the Northern Region as ethnic disputes over chieftaincy and land creates the misperception that the conflicts are about culture and tradition, and that only experts in culture and tradition can find solutions to the conflicts. This perception is manifested in the referral of the long-standing Dagomba chieftaincy conflict to the group of eminent chiefs led by the *Ashantihene*. The inability of the group of eminent chiefs to find a permanent solution to the Dagomba chieftaincy conflict and the fact that the various Houses of Chiefs are inundated with protracted chieftaincy conflicts is a clear indication that chieftaincy conflicts go beyond culture and tradition.

Chieftaincy is a cultural status symbols and a form of leadership. There are people in Dagbon who are chief of economic trees. It is also a social category used to mobilize for social action. People tend to be invested emotionally in chieftaincy conflicts because of the cultural symbolism. Individuals for whom chieftaincy is a salient social category so identify with the institution that any perceived threat to the institution is viewed as personal attack. A chieftaincy dispute tends to involve group members who share the same identity and for whom the chieftaincy category is salient. When a member of the group is attacked all are attached, and any member of the enemy group is an enemy. Chieftaincy conflicts tend to be competition for power, status, and resources. Culture and tradition may be invoked to legitimize a claim. We can appreciate chieftaincy as a

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cultural system of leadership with traditions and customs passed down from one generation to the next. We can also re-evaluation chieftaincy in the light of our lived experience and exigency for meaning. Chieftaincy becomes a cultural form of leadership that responds to leadership challenges of the day. The chiefly/non-chiefly divide no longer becomes a source of division and conflict. The inadequate conception of culture is the result of using culture to legitimize power, identity, and access to land.

Ethnic identities are basically cultural identities, and people identify with their ethnic groups because of culture. Culture plays an important role in the lives of the people because it is “a shared system of meaning that people use to make sense of the world. Culture is expressed in symbols and rituals and narratives, which group members use to make sense .... Culture shapes their lives, and their collective behavior” (Ross 200, p. 2). Culture is a complex and dynamic social and cognitive phenomenon that defies oversimplification. Culture tends to be inadequately represented when it is over simplified or connected, overtly or covertly, to a political or ideological agenda (Avruch 2006, p. 12). Some of the inadequate representations view culture as homogenous uniformly distributed among members of a group, as something independent of human actors. Culture is often confused with custom and perceived as timeless (see Avruch 2006, pp. 12-16). These inadequate representations of culture in the Northern Region of Ghana are most prominent in the areas of chieftaincy, ethnicity, and land. The findings present chieftaincy as a unique cultural form of leadership, a part of the cultural identity of the “chiefly” group, distinguishing them from the “non-chiefly” groups. Requests of the “non-chiefly” groups for chieftaincy are perceived as a threat the core identity of the “chiefly”

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groups. The argument against granting chieftaincy is that the “non-chiefly” tribes have no culture and tradition of chieftaincy. The Mamprussi/Kussasi, Dagomba/Konkomba, Nanumba/Konkomba, Gonja/Nawuri, and Gonaj/Vagla are some of the chieftaincy and land related conflicts in which the argument of culture and tradition has been used. Culture is ideologized and used for political gains.

The Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) was baffled when the King of Dagbon perceived their request for paramountcy as an existential threat. In the Konkomba position paper of July 1994 presented to the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team (PPNT) mediating the conflict in the region, KOYA wrote:

What one does not understand is why petitioning the appropriate authorities concerned for the creation of a paramountcy for a people democratically organized and determined to develop themselves and to contribute their lot to nation building poses a threat to peace and security to anyone, especially Dagombas? What made the Konkomba request for a separate paramount reprehensible?

The fact that the King of Dagbon found KOYA’s petition for paramountcy reprehensible demonstrates how the ideologization of chieftaincy resulted in perception of competition between the two mobilized social identity groups, and the petition for chieftaincy an incompatible request.

The institution of chieftaincy is neither a Youth Club nor a Youth Association. Chieftaincy in Ghana is a heritage given to us by history and tradition. It is not an institution created by statute or by the whimsical wishes of a Youth Association. It is not every one in Ghana who is a chief or who can be a chief. I find it

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strange that it is Konkomba Youth Association which is not part of the Institution of Chieftaincy that sent to me the request for a paramountcy. The request and the procedure followed by the Petitioner shows that were the demand to be granted, the institution of Chieftaincy which has a long history and tradition in Dagbon in particular and Ghana in general will degenerate into a Youth Club or Association and lose the respect given to it by the people of this country. It is the view of the Dagomba Traditional Council that nobody should bastardise chieftaincy or participate in the bastardisation of the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana. It is our proud heritage and must remain so. It is an institution our forefathers established which European Colonizers accepted as good and we have entrenched it in all our Constitutions.

The Dagomba and Konkomba are two distinct cultural identity groups with different cultures, traditions, and history. Dagombas also have a mobilized identity organized upon the chieftaincy institution. The Konkomba Youth Association mobilized the Konkombas into “a people democratically organized and determined to develop themselves and contribute their lot to nation building.” A new Konkomba identity was born which did not exist before, because the Konkombas in Ghana are known more for their independence and scatteredness than they are for unity. Comparisons, competitions, and confrontations were based on their shared mobilized identities and not their shared cultural identities. An understanding of the use of cultural symbols in the mobilized identities is important for conflict analysis and resolution. The contestation between the two groups was because of their mobilized cultural identities, it was the result of the

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politicization of those identities. “Identities become political identities when government becomes parties to them” (Tilly 2005, p. 210).

A conflict analysis and resolution approach seeks to promote a social identity that is reflective. A reflected social identity appreciates the values and the beliefs of the group and its role in society (Korostelina 2007, p.86). A reflected social identity requires an adequate understanding of culture as a complex set of values, norms, beliefs, symbols, rituals, practices, etc., handed down from past generations (tradition and custom), or formulated by individuals or their contemporaries in crucible of immediate lived experience and exigency with which they make meaning, reason, feel, and act (Avruch 2012, p. 94).

Second, there is a misperception that the State does not interfere in culture and traditional matters.<sup>40</sup> It is the domain of the National House of Chiefs to handle these conflicts. The State hides behind tradition and culture to renege on its responsibility to ensure peace and protection for its citizens with the arguments that the State is not competent in culture and tradition matters. The inability of the State to enforce decisions of the Supreme Court has contributed to some of the protracted chieftaincy conflicts in the region.

The third misperception is that the conflicts are irrational, ancient hatreds that defy any rational analysis and resolution. Social identity theory and social categorization theory help us understand the rationality of the ethnic conflicts and why people behave the way they do by emphasizing the power of the group identity to influence a person’s perception and behavior. When people self-identity with a social group they depersonalize and take on the identity of the group. The choice of the mobilizing category is imbued

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<sup>40</sup> This is based on a misreading of the Constitutional stipulation of non interference of the State in Chieftaincy matters.

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with cultural symbolism and has some emotional significance. Any perceived threat to the group becomes an existential threat to the individual. The social identity approach, that is, social identity theory and social categorization theory, and the findings from this study, help us explain and address some of these misperceptions about the conflicts in the Northern Region.

#### **6.4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the findings from analysis of the data on indigenous perceptions of social identity, power and legitimacy using theories of social identity and social categorization to explain the chieftaincy, ethnic and land conflicts in the Northern Region. Discussion of research findings has revealed the power of the group in forming the perceptions and behavior of the individuals as members of a group. People self-identify with groups for positive self-image, but they are also very much influenced by the power of group membership. Their actions may seem irrational but, when analyzed from the point of view of shared social identity, their actions have meaning. Chieftaincy, ethnicity, and land are imbued with cultural symbolism and ritual, which are very important for the existence of the group. However, when cultural categories are used to organize and mobilize, they tend to be vested with emotions. In and of themselves they do not generate conflicts; rather they represent deeper systemic issues that practitioners, policy makers and researcher need to pay attention to in their efforts at conflict analysis and resolution in the region. Chieftaincy conflicts are usually internal succession disputes between competing families or individuals for the throne. These conflicts arise mainly



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because there are no clearly laid down or enforceable rules of succession, or external interference in the election and enthronement of the chief. Inter-ethnic conflicts around chieftaincy is peculiar to the Northern Region and are the result of demands by “non-chiefly” ethnic groups for their own chiefs. The study has revealed that conceptions of power and legitimacy are shaped by shared cultural identities. Each cultural group creates its leaders, and the imposition of leaders from other cultural groups is counter-productive. Legitimate authority is negotiated, not imposed. The fundamental question for practitioners and policy makers is: What is the concept of indigenous power and which groups of people have the authority in a given situation to exercise that power? This study recommends that chieftaincy issues be treated on the basis justice and fairness, and not on the basis of tradition and culture.

Inter-ethnic conflicts over land in the Northern Region are conflicts over power and legitimacy. The conflicts are about the legitimate cultural authority with the right to legislate on land rights and land use. The emerging land market calls for a professional and systematic approach to land administration and land management. Chiefs, merely because they inherited the role of chief, do not possess the competence to manage the land under their jurisdiction in a manner adequate to the requirements of Ghana’s modern-day economic development, with its complex of legal issues and application of modern technology. This issue of lack of competence is a source of confusion, hence open to conflict. Policy makers need a coherent and enforceable land management system that takes into account economic value of land in the Northern Region today.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 THE PROJECT OF THIS STUDY

This study set out to explain the protracted social conflicts around chieftaincy, ethnicity, and land in the Northern Region of Ghana by explaining how social identity shapes conceptions of power and legitimacy, how perceptions of social identity and conceptions of power and legitimacy impacts social conflicts in the region, and what can be done to mitigate or resolve the conflicts. Building on existing research on the conflicts in the region, this study used theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy, to explain the nature and dynamics of the conflicts in the region. The study explored the relationship between ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land in the conflicts by exploring the dynamics of social identity formation and its influence on indigenous perceptions of power and legitimacy. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the processes and motives for group-based identity formation?
2. What is the indigenous understanding of power in northern Ghana and how has it influenced the perception of chieftaincy as a core element in ethnic identity?
3. What processes do chiefs use to legitimize their power through identity and how do these processes impact conflict dynamics and contribute to violence between tribes?

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The study focused on the perceptions and understanding of identity, and on power as experienced by ordinary people in their daily lives. These perceptions were captured in recorded interviews, transcribed, and analyzed under chiefly and non-chiefly categories instead of under the various ethnic groups.

The study was conducted in Damongo, Tamale, and Yendi in the Northern Region of Ghana. The number, intensity, and duration of conflicts among the peoples of that area informed the choice of the Northern Region for the study. The researcher's personal experience of living in the region for over thirty years, and managing a project on conflict analysis and resolution in the region for six years also informed the choice of the case study. The researcher will return to the Region to teach, research, and work with communities suffering in the conflicts.

Chapter One sets the stage with the question of how to address the series of inter-communal conflicts that have plagued the region since 1981. Since most of the conflicts involved chieftaincy, ethnicity, and land, and previous research identified these as the causes of the conflicts, the study wanted to understand the relationship between power (chieftaincy), social identity (ethnicity), and resources (land), and the impact of these three factors on the conflicts.

Chapter Two established the theoretical framework by exploring the theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy. The theories of social identity underlined the fact that people not only chose social categories that are valued, important, and meaningful to them in their defining who they are as a people, but that they internalized their group membership as part of their self-concept, and that their perceptions and behavior were

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influenced by those social categories. Theories of power and legitimacy underlined the fact that power is generated and deployed in social interactions. Legitimate power is negotiated and not imposed by tradition or culture.

Chapter Three described in detail the case study, exploring the historical and ethnographical data on chieftaincy, land, and tribal settlements. This chapter also described the evolution of two traditional power structures prior to the colonial period. The chapter underlined the important role played by the colonial administration in setting the stage for the conflicts in the region, by choosing to align with the chieftaincy institution as “the traditional authority,” thereby delegitimizing the other existing form of traditional authority and creating group-based social inequalities and power asymmetries.

Chapter Four describes and explains the methods used for the collection and analysis of the data. In Chapter Five, the data are analyzed and the findings are discussed in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven sums up the whole study, and indicates some questions for further investigation.

### **7.2 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY**

The study shifts the emphasis from ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land as sources of conflict in the region to the quest to define the legitimate sovereign authority in a modern State (Ghana) in which the existence of “traditional authority” is constitutionally recognized. In other words, ethnicity, chieftaincy, and land conflicts are symptoms of crisis of legitimacy of the “traditional authority” system.

The position of the chief as “the traditional authority” is being contested, and the

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question of who is the right public authority to regulate social living, to define and to enforce land rights today has to be confronted and explored. The argument of tradition and culture as the basis of the power of the chief in a multi-cultural environment must be re-evaluated if the chieftaincy institution is to play a role in conflict resolution, local governance, and development in the Region.

By focusing on the processes of social identity formation and its impact on perceptions of power and legitimacy, this study re-investigated historical and ethnographical data on ethnic identities, the chieftaincy institution, and land rights informed by theories of social identity, power, and legitimacy.

The study emphasizes the importance of understanding the dynamics of culture in social identity formation in the region and the distinction between cultural identities and mobilized social identities in generating conflicts. Stories of origin of the chiefly and non-chiefly tribes and the use of those stories to justify claims to land and power are understood and analyzed as constructed legitimizing ideologies rather than actual historical events.

The study throws light on the nature of power as a relational phenomenon that is constantly contested, and negotiated, and that using force, tradition, culture, and the legal system to maintain power is not sustainable in the long term.

The study shifts the discussion, from the chieftaincy institution as “the traditional public authority” that has power to make and enforce rules with a minimum of voluntary compliance, to the chieftaincy institution as one of the many institutions vying for the position of “public authority”.

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This approach changes the discussion about the future of chieftaincy institution in the Region from the defense and preservation of an age-old tradition to a dialogue and negotiation of the role of traditional leadership in our society today. The focus on ethnicity and land as the source of conflict loses sight of the role of leadership, both traditional and modern, in conflict generation and conflicts resolution. Leadership politics at the state and traditional levels play in the activation of ethnicity as a rallying point for power. The political choices made by states lay the foundation for ethnic mobilization. The politicization of ethnicity and not ethnicity per se stokes the attitudes of perceived injustice, lack of recognition, and exclusion, which are then exploited, so creating the conditions for conflict.

### **7.2.1 Perceptions of identity influences conceptions of power and legitimacy**

Perceptions of who we are as a people, captured in our story, that is, our culture, and in our history, determine how we conceive of power and legitimacy. There is no indigenous conception of power outside of a cultural understanding of who we are as a people, whence we come, how we got where we are today, and whither we are heading. Two basic shared cultural identities exist in the Northern Region: shared cultural identities organized around the office of the *Tindana* and shared cultural identities organized the office of the chief. Power and legitimacy is understood within the context of the shared cultural identities. In both cases power is the ability to protect life and to provide well-being and peace.

Cultural identity can also be mobilized in a competitive environment to maintain

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an advantage/domination or to resist it. In this context cultural identity becomes ethnic identity; the group defines itself by its ties of shared culture, language, religion, kinship or history (Avruch 2012, p. 69). The purpose of this kind of mobilization of cultural identity into ethnic identity is to increase status or power (Korostelina 2007, p.86). How are we to conceptualize culture in such away that it promotes a conception of power as a means to ensuring life, well-being, and peace for all? A culture responsive and adaptive to its environment is a culture understood as a dynamic phenomenon in which the images, encodements, schemas, and symbols both are passed down from generations past (tradition and custom) and also refined, corrected, developed, or newly discovered through the daily lived experience and exigency with which in-group members make meaning, reason, feel, and act (see Avruch 2012, p. 94). What needs further investigation in the Northern Region is how to conceptualize culture to incorporate in present living a heritage of tradition and culture but also to acknowledge the perhaps quite different times in which the present generation is living. How do we initiate the process of developing a reflected social identity in which traditions and culture are explored in the context the daily lived experience of communities in the region?

### **7.2.2 Social identity, power, legitimacy and social conflicts**

Social identity influences the conceptions of power and legitimacy, and therefore plays an important role in the dynamics of the conflicts. Mobilized social identities are conflict prone because of their comparative and competitive nature. Social identity tends to legitimize power asymmetry and status differentials. People are emotionally invested in

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their social identities and where those identities are salient, depersonalization takes place and individuals perceive and behave as a member of the in-group. Members of the out-group in a conflict situation become enemies not because of anything they have done wrong but just by being a member of the out-groups. Irrational violence against innocent people takes on the mantle of rational acting in defense of the interest of the in-group. Where social disparities are institutionalized, legitimized, and justified through a consensually accepted status system with no cognitive alternative to the status quo, inter-group antagonism is minimal. However, when one group rejects the status quo and starts working towards a change, inter-group antagonism emerges (Turner 1979, pp. 37-38). When social inequalities are perceived to be illegitimate, when the actions of the dominant group present practical constraints on claiming valued resources, and there exists cognitive alternatives to the status quo, subordinate groups will react to change their social status (see Reicher 2004). The ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region are not the result of some irrational culture, tradition, or ancient hatred, but flow from a rejection of institutionalized and legitimized social inequalities, which have been constitutionalized the state, and sediment into society by the state–chief alliance. The social conflicts are the result of a legitimacy crisis in the system of cultural (traditional) leadership.

What needs to be further investigated is the role and function of the chief in a modern democratic State. Chieftaincy is a form of cultural leadership in which the chief is the father of all, especially of the poor and the marginalized. Defining chieftaincy as a core element of the cultural identity of a group in a multi-cultural environment is a social construction used to legitimize the claims of the chieftaincy institution to status and



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power. What needs to be explored further is how to redefine traditional authority in ways that are mindful of the cultural diversity in the region, and respectful of the rights of individuals and cultural groups.

### **7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The findings in this study have some implications for conflict analysis and resolution practice.

First, social identity and social categorization theories help us understand the power of group membership in influencing the perception and behavior of individual members of the people. People react to events and other people not as individuals but as members of an in-group against members of an out-group. The group's value, norms, beliefs, and practices influence the group members' perception of reality.

Second, the two theories of social identity and social categorization help us understand the human need to belong to a distinct group, and the processes involved in forming these groups. Understanding that our ethnic identities are socially constructed rather than primordial "blood" groups can reduce the perceived existential threats when status symbols are contested.

Third, the study helps us demystify culture and underline the important role of the present generation in creating culture from their lived experiences rather than relying on the past as the source of culture. In this context role of the State as a conflict generator and conflict resolver may be underlined in any conflict analysis.

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