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Chieftaincy and Kingship in Africa: How Lessons from the Government in South Africa Can Address Ghana's Maladroitness in Inter-Ethnic Relations

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Abstract:
Although the Authority of chiefs was undone by colonial rule in Ghana, traditional rulers have served as important adjuncts in the administration of post-colonial governments in Africa. This paper examines the evolution of chieftaincy, particularly as an agent of administration, with particular reference to the Ghanaian and South African experiences. Indeed, post-colonial Ghanaian and South African governments have all come to rely on traditional rulers to aid in development activities. Historical tensions related to chieftaincy conflicts in South Africa led to government intervention post-Apartheid to address colonial injustices. Ghana can learn from this approach to resolve disputes, especially among the Konkombas and Dagombas in its Northern Region. As such, the paper concludes that the administration of justice by the Government, coupled with positive institutional political interference, will bring trust and an end to the banner of traditional conflicts through resolution mechanisms.

Keywords: *Chieftaincy, paramountcy, konkomba-dagbon conflicts, traditional wars, South African traditional conflicts*

1. Introduction

The root causes of all conflicts in northern Ghana today lie in the past, as there are either cultural, traditional, ethnic or territorial reasons behind such conflicts dating back decades. Chieftaincy has a deep historical background, extending approximately 4,000 years. Scholars argue that communal living, crop farming, and animal domestication predated the emergence of kingship (Mendonsa, Eugene L, 2002). In West African studies, anthropologists have identified present-day Ghana as once inhabited by "simple foragers, fishers, and hunters" who were nomadic, relying on wild fruits and animals for sustenance (Keulder, 1989). In Ghana, early settlers were pressured to farm and domesticate animals for food, became less mobile, and formed groups, usually of the same kin, around water bodies. As human communities developed within various clans, the need for a leader, or chief, to manage interactions between households and individuals living in a community arose. Chiefs provided religious, judicial, and cultural functions before formal colonial and modern administrations. Chieftaincy thus served as the socio-political and military unit around which local tribes were organized, offering a focal point for common action. Consequently, chieftaincy is integral to many ethnic groups in Ghana, except for a few acephalous (chiefless) tribes like the Konkombas, the Basaris, and others. According to the Statistical Services of Ghana, there are eight major categories of ethnic groups: the Grushi, the Mande-Busanga, the Aka, the Ga-Dangme, the Ewe, the Guan, the Gurma, and the Mole-Dagbang (2000 Ghana Population Census document). These groups reflect the diverse cultural heritage and organizational structures that have shaped Ghanaian society. Each major ethnic group in Ghana incorporates broad sociological elements of chieftainship and kingship, though with unique structural compositions and socio-political significance. According to the 2020 Census, the Akans—comprising subgroups like the Ashanti, Fante, Kwamu, and Akwapim—constitute about 49.1 percent of the national population, making them the largest ethnic group in Ghana. Akans are prevalent in seven out of the sixteen regions of Ghana, with their chiefs known as the Omanhene (paramount chief). Chiefs are selected by a group of kingmakers representing every clan within the stool's jurisdiction. Candidates for the chieftaincy are nominated by the queen mother from royal lineages or families. The queen mother, typically the mother of the reigning king, is considered the mother of the royal lineage. Her role in the Akan chieftaincy setup is crucial, historically being the tribe's overall leader and delegating a male royal lineage member as the chief. This delegation reflects the shared leadership in Akan chieftaincy institutions, where the most important positions are divided

between men (as chiefs) and women (as queen mothers). The queen's mother's significant influence underscores her vital role in the sociopolitical and cultural framework of the Akan people. In the Ga tribe of Ghana's Greater Accra region, a chief is elected through two stages. First, the dzase, members of the stool house analogous to royal clans, select a nominee. This nominee is then presented to the manbil, the group's military officer, who conducts the actual election. Only the manbil holds the authority to elect or reject a proposed candidate for chief in Ga tradition.

2. Northern-Region Demographics

In the northern region of Ghana – the focus of this study – we have the Mole-Dagbani group, the Grushi-Gurma group – the Konkomba-Bassari-Komba and Nawuri group and the Mande-Busanga ethnic groups. The Mole-Dagbani group and the Gushi-Gurma groups are two distinct ones. In some groups, a prince contesting the position of chief must present himself before a college of kingmakers to claim the "skin" office. The kingmakers consider factors such as seniority, character, and popularity. Among the Mole-Dagbani, particularly the Dagombas, the Gate system is practised, alternating the selection of chiefs between two competing royal families. Conversely, the Konkomba–Komba–Bassari ethnic groups in Ghana base their chief's selection on the recommendation of a land priest, creating a power structure that divides authority between the chief and the high (land) priest. The priest, known as the Utindaan in Likpalkpaln, was the land custodian before the British colonizers and settlers like the Dagombas and Nanumbas arrived in the northeastern part of northern Ghana. The Utindaan is chosen through divination and consultation with a soothsayer due to his spiritual role as the community's land custodian. Similar systems are found among the Ga/Ga-Dangme people in the Greater Accra region, the south-eastern part of the Eastern region, and parts of the Upper East and northeast regions of Ghana. These traditional structures underscore the varied and intricate methods of leadership selection among different ethnic groups, reflecting the cultural diversity and historical depth of Ghanaian society. Within the Adangbe and other ethnic groups, oral history and tradition confirm that the Ga and Adangbe did not have chieftaincies and were instead ruled by the priests, known as *w*omen. However, chieftaincy was introduced years later after learning from other ethnic groups like the Akans and Dagombas in the northern and southern parts of Ghana.

3. Statement of the Chieftaincy Problems in the Northern Region

In contemporary Ghana, chiefs play significant roles in governance, with their relevance and functions varying by ethnic group and tradition. A chief's legitimacy relies on the strong support, loyalty, and reverence of their people. In the Northern region, post-colonial administrations, like their pre-colonial counterparts, operated through chiefs, placing the Konkombas and allied tribes in a difficult position. The British colonizers and subsequent governments assigned the Dagombas and Nanumbas as leaders of these tribes without their consent, causing tensions and challenges in local governance. As such, the relegation and non-recognition of Konkombas-Komba-Bassaris by the government and the kingship groups' efforts to adjust to this rule-based kingship is the bane and the primary reasons today that the Konkombas and its allied clans are constantly in arms, with the Dagombas, the Mamprusis and Nanumbas. Today's conflicts or disagreements are basically the prevention either directly or indirectly by the chiefly people (the Dagombas, Nanumbas, Gonjas) to allow Konkombas and others to make direct contact with the government for the recognition of their elected or selected chiefs in accordance with the laws of Ghana.

In essence, the Konkombas and their allied tribes wanted to emulate Ga or the Ga-Adangbes, who did not have chiefs and instead were ruled by priests, known as *women,* before the arrival of the British colonization or Ghana's independence. Indeed, the Konkombas and their allied (chiefless) tribes want to be given the opportunity to establish their own way of chiefly kingdoms – like those of the Dagombas, Nanumbas, and the Gonjas. In summary, the chiefless tribes now seek political organization through the installation of their chiefs, which constitutionally guarantees them seats in the Northern Regional House of Chiefs as outlined in Ghana's constitution. This paper offers a guide to ending the perennial conflicts between the Konkombas and their allied tribes against the Dagombas and Nanumbas. It addresses the Konkombas' aspirations to rectify their past by:

- Redefining their cultural, traditional (kingship), and ethnic territorial claims from the central government, emphasizing their presence in the Gold Coast before the Dagombas settled in Dayiri along the Tamale-Bolgatanga road in the current northern/North-East region of Ghana;
- Highlighting their ongoing requests to chiefly neighbors or the central government, which often cause conflicts; and
- Recognizing their recent awakening through education, history, and knowledge. Rather than relinquishing the caretaker role assigned to the Dagombas by the British colonizers over all chiefless tribes, the Dagombas and Nanumbas wished to remain perpetual "shepherds" of the Konkombas and their allied tribes despite cultural differences.

This analysis aims to foster mutual understanding and respect, promoting a harmonious co-existence by acknowledging and addressing historical grievances and contemporary aspirations.

4. The Problem and Solution

In this paper, we are suggesting a government solution to the perennial chieftaincy conflicts engulfing the Northern Region of Ghana by emulating the example set by the post-Apartheid South African government. This is a Republic of South African success story, not apartheid, in which the government empowered a Reconciliation Commission of Inquiry to, once and for all, settle long-standing disputes between the Inkanta Freedom fighters and the Zulus Warriors, among other ethnic groups in the country after the country's independence in 1994. In the South African narrative, the President Mbeki

post-apartheid democratic government was able to realign chiefs, eliminate fake chieftaincy titles, and restore glory to those marginalized during the British colonial/Apartheid era. If emulated, Ghana will be able to settle - if not all the feuding ethnic conflicts over kingship and chieftaincy in Ghana - but at least end the protracted Konkomba versus Dagomba/Nanumba animosity over territorial claims and kingship in the present northern region of Ghana.

5. Theoretical Framework of the Study

The debates surrounding the causes of war often result in disagreements about what constitutes a war. Taking a metaphor from the studies in criminology, theorists disagree on whether to focus on means, motive or opportunity ( ). While some emphasize opportunity structures, like the anarchic international system, as a "permissive cause" for war, others focus on motives, such as the presence of territorial disputes. Indeed, power transition theory focuses on the means available to one state relative to those of its rival. This article argues that to be fully satisfactory, a theory of war should account for all facts – motives, opportunity, and means. The theory should make sense both as a way of accounting for particular wars and explaining broader patterns of war, and it should account for civil and international wars. Besides, the theory of symbolic politics can explain how individual attitudes can result in collective action using mobilization theory, with social organization and framing by leaders explaining which attitudes become political actions. According to the symbolist logic, important causes of war include aggressive symbolic predispositions among leaders or mass publics, heightened threat perceptions and strong political organizations backing aggressive leaders. Crises and enduring rivalries make war more likely because they strengthen hostile predispositions and threat perceptions, thereby promoting mobilization for war. Therefore, the framework around ethnic conflicts and a conceptualization of how ethnic symbols are powerful and often become barriers to peace is when they are being politicized for war (by political forces). The symbolic politics theory, as articulated by S.J. Kaufman, posits that individuals respond to emotionally potent symbols, making it a more accurate account of ethnic conflicts compared to the rationalist theory. This model attributes the outbreak of extreme violence to both elite politics and the socialization of competing identities. Symbolic politics involves political elites using emotional appeals to gain and retain power rather than educating the masses through rational discourse. This theory is particularly relevant in deeply divided democratic societies like Ghana, where such 'elite politics' exacerbates dissonance and instability. Politicians often exploit irrational emotional appeals, such as ethno-nationalism, to secure political positions. In Ghana, symbols significantly impact the masses, especially among economically and socially disadvantaged groups, who often interpret political, ethnic, and religious rhetoric literally. This influence underscores the theory's relevance in understanding the dynamics of ethnic conflict within the Ghanaian context. Hence, when politicians employ symbols and myths, it is often with such underlying political undertones, which serve to enable them to cling to power without addressing other pressing socio-economic questions. To induce people to make choices, political actors make use of existing or primordial identities of targeted groups such as language, settlements, land ownership and religion, ethic values and political power. The identity of the groups always matters and is sensitive because it shapes their decisions and existence. Thus, it is likely that groups would respond positively to the needs of political actors when the latter sympathetically play politics on the formers' identity.

Moreover, these symbols often work well in non-peace situations or to mobilize war against ethnic enemies. These symbols, on the other hand, would induce the people to make choices and support hostility or war against the others who do not share their symbols. Symbolic politics theory posits that humans naturally form groups based on constructed communal identities centered on shared narratives and adversaries. It also explains how elite political actors pursue policies that extend beyond mere survival, often driving ethnic policies with predatory aims, such as genocidal or irredentist campaigns, to exploit and inflame mass hatred rather than simply address insecurity. Furthermore, symbolic politics offers a comprehensive approach to resolving ethnic conflicts, addressing both state and individual levels where dissimilation originates, whereas rationalist theories often misplace accountability solely on elite politics. This theory emphasizes the profound impact of symbols and narratives in shaping political dynamics and conflict. The denial of 'rights of paramountcy,' inheritance, and territorial claims in the Northern region of Ghana, based on the 'chieflessness' of the Konkombas and their allied clans, can be attributed to a protracted survival narrative rooted in group myths and a persistent drive to deny their humanity. Understanding a chief's role involves recognizing their primacy in regulating social behavior within their community while refraining from interfering in others' affairs. A chief, or traditional leader, is defined by ancestry and holds a stool that is recognized and accepted by their people, appointed according to local traditions and customs. Additionally, a chief is a traditional leader within a specific community, exercising authority over headmen according to customary law or overseeing an area where multiple headmen exercise their own authority. So why will another tribe or tribes maintain an opposite stand that they will not entertain other chiefs or herdsmen when they are duly selected according to their customs and traditions?

6. A Review of Relevant Literature of the Study

In colonial history, pre-colonial wars between the Konkombas and their allied tribes - against the Dagombas, Nanumbas, the Mamprusis and others - began far back in 1888. The wars were two-fold: those from the nineteenth century (1892-1893; 1895-1895) involving the Gonjas and the Konkombas, and the other involving raiders by lieutenants of Samory Toure. The second group comprised those fighting the French, including Babatu, the 'Zabarima Warrior,' who resided in the Yendi area and frequently attacked the Konkombas, driving them to flee across the Oti River into Togo. A notable episode occurred in 1940 when violent opposition to chiefly demands erupted following the attack on the Dagomba village of Jagbel. Known as the 'Cow War,' the conflict resulted in the death of the village chief, his family, and

retinue. This violence stemmed from the chief's attempt to exploit a colonial vaccination program to impose a fine on the owner of unvaccinated Konkomba cattle (Staniland, 1975).

According to Ladouceur (1979), successive Yaa Nas raided Konkombas, Bassaries, and Komba settlements to capture slaves and repay debts to the Asantehene. Armed men would attack villages at dawn or during the day, seizing people and property, including cattle, sheep, and goats. More so, there was a series of clashes between these cephalous and acephalous tribes within the former northern region, now divided into the Savannah, northern, northeast and Oti regions (Ladouceur, 1979). Today, the Northern Region of Ghana is one of the country's sixteen administrative divisions, comprising nine administrative districts. It includes the Mole-Dagbon, which consists of the Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Nanumba—among the largest ethnic groups—and the Konkomba, Basari, and Bimoba, which are the largest within the Gurma group. The Konkomba, in particular, are the second-largest ethnic group in the Northern Region. Besides these, there are small groups, such as the Chokosi, that are linked to the Akan group but who migrated north to settle among the Konkombas. In summary, complex ethnic conflicts have arisen between the Konkombas and their allied clans (Bassaris, Bimoba and Komba) and the Dagombas and their associates (Gonja and Nanumba). These conflicts often center on issues of ethnic identity, group history, and rights. They are primarily driven by the majority tribes —Dagomba, Gonja, and Nanumba — exerting social, political, and economic dominance over the minority tribes — Konkombas, Bassari, Bimoba, and Komba. Disputes over land rights and marginalization have significantly contributed to these ethnic tensions in Ghana.

Figure 1

7. Significant Reasons for This Study

Ethno-political and chieftaincy conflicts, particularly in Ghana, have become a concern now to international organizations, as well as intergovernmental, regional, and sub-regional organizations, for several reasons. First is that there is an emerging phenomenon where conflict societies are gradually becoming the sanctuaries for terrorist groups like – Al-Shabaab, Al-Qu'ida in the Maghreb region, Boko Haram activities in Nigeria, political turmoil in Guinea and Mali and heightened tensions in Liberia and other places close to Ghana. Secondly, the Northern region has become the scene of sporadic ethnic conflicts with a high recurrence rate. Third, with the estimated more than a hundred chieftaincy and ethnic disputes across the country, the northern region alone accounts for 70 per cent of them (Tona 2012: Seini and Tsikata, 2004). Since the return of democracy in Ghana in 1992, several inter-ethnic conflicts have erupted in the northern region, including the Konkomba-Bimoba wars of 1984, 1986, and 1989, which resulted in significant loss of life. Modern ethnic conflicts in the region began in 2010 (Jonsson, 2007; Lund, 2003; Kaye & Beland, 2009). During these conflicts, chiefless groups have united to challenge dominant ethnic groups over land rights, seek emancipation from perceived "overlords," and address other abuses. Among the most devastating costs to the tribes and government were, for instance, the Gonja-Vagla, Konkomba-Nanumba, Mamprisi-Kusasi, and the alliance between the Konkomba and Nawuri in pandas to fight the Gonjas, which lasted for several months; destabilizing the peace of the area completely (Paul, 2003). Following the end of the 'alliance war,' the Konkomba and Mossis in Saboba engaged in their own territorial conflict. This was succeeded by the 1994 "guinea-fowl war," which was even more intense and devastating for families in the north-east of the region. Sparked over the price of a guinea fowl – the clash, initially between two men – a Konkombaman and a Nanumbaman soon engulfed the small town of Nakpayili and its surroundings, causing 2,000 deaths, 23,000 displaced persons and the destruction of over 500 villages (Brukum, 2001; Mahama, 2003; Awodoba, 2009; Tonah, 2012). Indeed, conflicts are bound to occur in situations where one ethnic group desires to assert its authority over others (Huntington, 1996; Turton, 1997; Kaldor, 1999). In Ghana, the causes and prevalence of intra-ethnic conflicts, coupled with the lack of inter-ethnic institutions for resolution, heighten the risk of ethnic wars. Additionally, recurring conflicts in ethnically divided societies are largely attributed to weak political institutions and electoral systems characterized by entrenched patronage and winner-takes-all politics (Akwetey, 1996; Horowitz, 1995).

8. Statement of Chieftaincy Problems in South Africa

In South Africa, a chief is a traditional leader defined by ancestry, holding a stool of an area in accordance with local traditions and customs. This role grants the chief traditional authority over the residents of that area (Williams, 2010). Additionally, a chief is described as a traditional leader within a specific community who exercises authority over several headmen according to customary law. Alternatively, within their jurisdiction, multiple headmen may also exercise

authority (Bizana-Tutu, 2008). In South Africa, chieftaincy remains a prevalent authority among black Africans. During the pre-colonial period, communities were fluid, and Amakhosi (chiefly people) had poorly defined authority over the "imizi" (chiefless ones) within their jurisdiction. Despite this, they were connected through kinship, marriage, or clientelism, relying on the allegiance of subjects. Authority functioned through the distribution and redistribution of accumulated tribute, often in the form of cattle (Mkhize et al., 2005). Section 212 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa stipulates that: (i) National legislation may define a role for traditional leadership at the local level on issues affecting local communities. (ii) It addresses the role of traditional leaders, customary law, and community customs under a system of customary law. Specifically, national or provincial legislation may establish Houses of Traditional Leaders, and national legislation may create a Council of Traditional Leaders (SA Constitution).

9. South African Case Study and Resolution

During British rule in South Africa, two distinct systems were implemented to govern the indigenous population. The first system aimed to undermine chieftaincy by employing colonial bureaucracy, particularly evident in the Eastern Cape (Bizana-Tutu, 2008). Under this system, the powers of chiefs were restricted through direct magisterial rule. Each district in Transkei was overseen by a White magistrate who served both as a judicial and administrative officer. These districts were further divided into locations managed by appointed headmen, who were sometimes chiefs or individuals lacking traditional authority (SA Constitution).

The second system, introduced through the Shepstone System, was divisive and foreign to the traditional patrilineal chieftaincy system. Under this system, the Governor-General was granted the title of 'Supreme Chief of Indigenous People' and held the power to appoint and remove traditional leaders. This eroded the traditional succession process, placing chiefs in a precarious position. They were expected to balance the preservation of their constituencies with the administration of colonial interests. Chiefs who aligned with the colonial government often lost their legitimacy, while those who supported their people were deposed.

Thus, the role of a chief during colonial occupation was fraught with challenges, navigating between maintaining traditional structures and accommodating the culturally insensitive demands of the British regime. Southall and Kropiwnicki illustrate how chiefdoms were transformed into units of local government, noting that this transformation involved introducing an administrative system that transcended tribal boundaries.

10. South African Chieftaincy under *the 'Apartheid System'*

Under the Apartheid system in South Africa, chieftaincy was significantly reshaped during the latter period. Government officials, assisted by compliant anthropologists and black information officers, extensively surveyed rural districts to identify and institutionalize remnants of chiefly lineages. This process involved defining tribes, creating tribal and regional authorities, and installing chiefs with elaborate pseudo-traditional ceremonies. Chiefs were also granted salaries and opportunities for personal gain, effectively securing a conservative or reactionary rural hierarchy that could mitigate broader national unrest (Beinhart, 1985). As Beinhart (1985) asserts, modern chieftaincy under Apartheid was a construct of the state. In his work, *Chieftaincy and the Concept of Articulation: South Africa ca. 1900-1950*, he explores this assertion.

During the pre-colonial era, traditional leaders held significant roles in local governance, managing daily administration and overseeing the lives of indigenous people. Their authority was grounded in governance, and they were accountable to their subjects. However, the South African Act of 1909, which controlled 'native affairs' under the Governor-General, aimed to curtail the military power of African chiefdoms (Banks et al., 1996). Consequently, a system of direct rule was imposed on chiefdoms. Banks and Southall (1996) describe how this system transformed chiefdoms into units of local government by introducing an administrative framework that disrupted traditional tribal boundaries. A grid of twenty-seven magisterial districts was established, disregarding old political units. Each district was managed by a headman appointed by the administration, although succession was typically inherited. The headman was subject to bureaucratic rules of censure and dismissal, effectively side-lining traditional chiefs. The primary reduction in authority occurred in the judicial sphere, where chiefs and headmen were stripped of their powers to decide criminal cases and had limited roles in civil disputes. Disputants dissatisfied with arbitration could appeal to magisterial courts (Banks & Southall, 1996).

Furthermore, both colonial and Apartheid administrations complicated traditional leadership by introducing hierarchical titles such as 'paramount chief,' 'sub-chief,' 'independent headman,' and 'supreme chief' (Bekker, 2008). Bekker (2008) argues that the title 'supreme chief' was established by the colonial regime to grant the Governor-General supreme authority over Africans and later over the state president. Titles like paramount chiefs and independent headmen were used to elevate or demote certain Africans within the hierarchy (Ibid).

11. South African Leadership under the 1994 Constitution: A Democratic Era - Date

After South Africa gained independence and established a democratic government, it embarked on negotiations to rectify the damage inflicted on traditional systems of leadership by previous administrations, including both the British colonial rule and the Apartheid governments. In the discourse regarding the role of chieftaincies and kingship in the post-Apartheid era, the contribution and influence of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), a prominent liberation movement, are significant. Founded on March 21, 1975, by a group of dedicated individuals led by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the IFP has a strong support base among the Zulu ethnic groups. The party places a high value on traditional leadership and authority. However, its focus on ethnic interests rather than national unity was criticized for exacerbating divisions, particularly

during the civil conflict between supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) and IFP members in KwaZulu-Natal. This strife contributed to the IFP's decision to withdraw from the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiations and led to threats of boycotting the first democratic elections if their concerns were not addressed. In response to avoid a boycott, the Constitution was amended to stipulate that provincial constitutions would define the roles, authority, and status of traditional monarchs, with specific provisions for the Zulu Monarch in KwaZulu-Natal. Despite these amendments, the powers and responsibilities granted to traditional leaders were less extensive than those their representatives had advocated for during the negotiation process (Banks & Southal, 1996).

12. South African Government Intervention – to Correct 'Earlier Wrongs'

In its effort to address historical injustices from the pre-British era through British colonial rule and Apartheid, the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) government enacted the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act 41 of 2003. This legislation imposes a duty on the government to uphold and safeguard traditional leadership institutions. The Act outlines the framework for interactions between traditional leaders and government authorities, specifying that:

- Both national and provincial governments must foster partnerships between municipalities and traditional councils through legislative or other means;
- Such partnerships must be based on mutual respect and recognition, guided by the principle of cooperative governance and
- Traditional councils may enter into service delivery agreements with municipalities. Additionally, the government established the 'House of Traditional Leaders' under Act 10 of 1997, as mandated by the constitution.

This Act aims to bolster the role of traditional leadership within the democratic framework, promote unity and understanding among traditional communities, and provide advisory support to the national government (Banks & Southall, 1996). Despite these interventions by the ANC government, there were still big challenges to reconciling traditional leadership with democracy. The traditional system was contradictory to its newly Western/European style of governance, whose leadership focuses on a hierarchical hierarchy of authority.

To address the injustices of the colonial and apartheid eras, a decision was made to redesign traditional leadership roles. This change aimed to rectify past errors and restore traditional customs. Historically, there were three levels of traditional leadership to be reinstated: Kingship, Chieftainship, and Headship. In 2003, President Thabo Mbeki appointed a panel of experts to investigate traditional leadership disputes and claims dating back to 1927. The panel found that, of the 13 paramount kingships, only six were eligible for formal recognition as kingships or queenships.

13. Arresting the Maladroitness of Ghana's Inter-Ethnic Conflicts

Two distinct systems of traditional rule existed in northern Ghana prior to the arrival of colonial rule. On the one hand, was the highly centralized system of the Dagombas, Gonjas, Nanumbas, Walas and Mamprusis, referred to as the 'invader tribes' (Stride & Ifeka, 1971:83). The 'invader tribes' encountered the acephalous tribes as highly organized and militarized groups with established traditions of kingship and chieftainship. This system, unfamiliar to the northern territories of the Gold Coast, was a foreign import. The invader tribes had defined roles, succession rules, and structured distribution of authority and responsibilities. Additionally, these tribes were governed by royal dynasties, which centralized power and ensured succession through patrilineal inheritance (Staniland, 197). The others, who were indigenous to the lands - the Konkombas, Bimobas, Bassaris and Kombas – had a decentralized system with no recognizable single head as the locus of political power for any of them. Among these groups, one could not pinpoint a single individual as the chief, headsman or the king. The most senior member of the acephalous tribes was the oldest clan-head-in-council, a system reflecting their decentralized leadership structure (Fortes, Tait; Arhin, 1985). However, following the arrival of colonizers in 1899, the British sought to manage the extensive land and diverse ethnic groups. To achieve this, they formed a secret alliance with the 'invader tribes'—including the Dagombas, Nanumbas, Gonjas, and Mamprusis. This alliance was established to enlist the support of these tribes in controlling the acephalous groups, as the British had frequently encountered resistance and humiliation from them. Such clashes, most of the time, prevented the British from operating freely within the northern landmass. Therefore, despite written notes about the assertion of suzerainty by the Dagomba, Gonja Mamprusi or Nanumba over the Konkombas and their allied clans, it was not effective, according to Staniland (1975:5): the Dagombas did not have close control over the Konkombas as claimed. The little encounters of administration took the form of slave raids and expeditions for the British. Thus, the Konkombas were not assimilated by the Dagombas or other 'invader tribes.' In fact, this relationship remained that way until 1956, when the elected Convention Peoples Party (CPP) government took over the control of Ghana from the British.

Indeed, the CPP led by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah took over political power but had his government very hostile towards chiefs. Nkrumah's government saw chiefs as vestiges of the colonial era. The modern government, therefore, initiated reforms to weaken the chieftaincy institution through legislation and various forms of administrative controls. Before the CPP, the Local Government Ordinance of 1951, the State Council Ordinance of 1952, and the Municipal Council Ordinances systematically undermined the economic power of chiefs by annexing stool lands and restricting the revenue streams from these lands. Under the 1951 Ordinance for example, local councils replaced native authorities. Baffour-Authur notes that post-independence, the trend persisted with the Akim Abuakwa (Stool Revenue) Act, 1958 (Act 8), the Ashanti Stool Act, 1958 (Act 28), the Chiefs (Recognition) Act of 1959 (Act 123), and the Concessions Act, 1962 (Act 124). With all these Acts in place, the CPP government had achieved all that it wanted to control and further weakened even the most powerful chiefs in the south, who, under the British, had a lot more autonomy than their Northern counterparts.

14. The Restoration of Chieftaincy Act of 1971 – The Genesis of Conflicts in the Northern Region Today

The Chieftaincy Act of 1971 (Act 370) restored the chieftaincy institution to its pre-independence status. Here, the 1971 Act reinforced chiefs' strong hold on the masses of the people within the limits of the law and yet was weak enough to be a threat to the operation of the central government. This section examines the repeal of prior laws and the restoration of the rights and privileges of politically prominent chiefships, often at the expense of acephalous groups. In Ghana's northern region, particularly among the Dagombas and their allies, the Konkombas faced significant hardships. Concurrently, the National House of Chiefs was established, with the authority to adjudicate chieftaincy matters, including succession disputes and interethnic claims of suzerainty, both as an original and appellate court. Regional Houses of Chiefs were also created across various regions, endowed with similar adjudicative powers. This, in effect, meant that all groups laying claims to new chiefships were, henceforth, to submit their requests to the existing chiefs under whom the claimants were subjected by the colonial arrangements.

Therefore, the Konkombas and their allied clans could only lay claims to chiefships when they submitted their requests to the existing and (rival) chiefs under Act 370, whom the claimants were subjected to by the colonial arrangements. The promulgation of the Chieftaincy - the act of 1971 – empowers recognized paramount chiefs to vet and recommend all applications for paramountcies to the Regional and/or National Houses of Chiefs for approval. From that time on, the Dagombas, Gonjas, Nanumbas and Mamprusis were the only ones having absolute discretion in the creation and/or elevation of lesser chiefs to the status of Divisional Chiefs within their Traditional Councils. This means the acephalous ethnic groups – the Konkombas, Bassaris, Kombas, and Bimobas could not by themselves elect their own chiefs (even if they had decided to copy others) unless their claims were placed before the Dagomba-Mamprusi-Nanumba-Gonja controlled This Traditional This Councils This This This; This this this and This not This the This Government of Ghana. If, for that matter, social or political custom is regarded as "traditional," that does not mean it is unchanging in modern times. As Hobsbawm and Ranger argue in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), "tradition" is a construct that evolves in response to contemporary pressures and changes. Therefore, the quest from the Konkombas, Bassaris and other cephalous people, who could not mould up to these contemporary changes prior to independence, have constitutional rights at any time to also enstool or enskin their own chiefs or kingsmen in response to these contemporary times or changes. In essence, we argue that traditional {a cephalous} leaders are, by modern challenges, reinventing themselves, where their requests for their elevation to the Regional or National House of Chiefs should not rise to confrontations.

15. The 'Temporal Restoration' of Chieftaincy Rights

In June 1979, Jerry John Rawlings' revolution, marked by the slogan "power to the people," questioned the authority of Ghana's traditional rulers. This slogan inspired the Konkombas and other acephalous tribes to assert their rights. However, in September 1979, the election of Dr. Hilla Limann from the AFRC reinstated the institution of chieftaincy, along with its traditional councils, as defined by customary law under Article 177 (1). Thus, traditional authority was once again formalized and restored. However, despite the short stay in power of J.J Rawlings, there was a realization by Konkombas that they could only demand their emancipation rights through agitation. From September 1979 until the overthrow of Limann again (27 months later), two major ethnic wars between the Konkombas and their allied groups on one end and the Dagombas and other organized groups on the other end occurred. Upon Rawlings' return on December 31, 1981, the Konkombas were emboldened when he publicly questioned the authority of the so-called power holders, including traditional chiefs. By openly sloganing "Power to the people – Rawlings' slogan gave courage to those groups that did not favor the chieftaincy institution to openly challenge its legitimacy and authority. As noted by Boafo-Arthur, Kwame (2001) in one of his comments about the revolution, *early revolutionary years equally witnessed the erosion of the powers of some chiefs as PDC members arrogated to themselves the judiciary powers formerly enjoyed by the chiefs.*

On the 22nd of March 1985, Provisional National Defence Council Law 107 (PNDCL 107) was promulgated to amend Section 48 (2) of the 1971 Chieftaincy Act to re-vest in government the right to recognize or withdraw recognition from a chief. In return to the Nkrumah era, the clause was used to call chiefs into line with government policies. In short, the utterances of JJ Rawlings in one of the gatherings that "no one brought land to this earth" and the resistance of the Dagombas to grant the Konkombas paramountcy from this time on emboldened the Konkombas to prepare for and execute the Guinea fowl War of 1994. After this war, and to appease the Konkombas, the government was able to curve out of the Konkombas traditional towns – Saboba – to create the first district known as the Saboba-Cherponi District. Before drafting the 1992 Constitution, neither the acephalous groups nor the PNDC laws, which had temporarily diminished the role of chiefs, could influence the constitution's framers to retain these laws. Consequently, the 1992 Constitution reinstated the chieftaincy institution to its 1971 status by repealing the clause on the government's recognition of chiefs, which had been reintroduced by PNDC Law 107. The 1992 Constitution explicitly guarantees:

- the institution of chieftaincy, including its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage and
- that Parliament cannot enact laws to
  - ✓ Grant or withdraw recognition from a chief or
  - ✓ Diminish the honor and dignity of the chieftaincy institution.

16. What Is the Bane of Ethnic Conflicts in Ghana?

The causes of ethnic conflicts in Ghana can be attributed to several key issues:

- The decision by the framers of the 1992 Constitution to exclude Provisional National Defence Council Law 107 (PNDCL 107), which had previously regulated chieftaincy affairs;
- The unnecessary amendment of Section 48 (2) of the 1971 Chieftaincy Act; and

- The provisions of Article 274 of the 1992 Constitution confer significant authority to the Regional House of Chiefs (RHoCs) over regional chieftaincy matters. Specifically, Article 274 grants the RHoCs comprehensive powers, including:
  - ✓ Original and appellate jurisdiction to adjudicate applications for new chiefs;
  - ✓ Compilation of customary laws and succession applications for each stool or skin in the region;
  - ✓ Conducting studies and making recommendations for resolving chieftaincy disputes;
  - ✓ Original jurisdiction over matters related to paramount stools or skins, including those involving queen-mothers;
  - ✓ Hearing appeals from traditional councils;
  - ✓ Advising authorities responsible for chieftaincy matters and
  - ✓ Performing functions assigned by Acts of Parliament.

These provisions have contributed to tensions by centralizing control and limiting the influence of traditional leadership across different ethnic groups.

Interpretation: So for cephalous groups like the Konkombas, the Kombas, the Bassaris and other ethnic groups in Ghana to install their own chiefs, they will have to:

- First make a request through their rival - the Dagombas, Gonjas, Mamprusis or Nanumbas - incumbent chiefs before such request(s) is (are) passed on to the Government;
- Applications must be submitted to the Regional House of Chiefs, which holds both original and appellate jurisdiction over such matters.

Additionally, the reformation of the chieftaincy institution is entrusted to the existing chiefs, predominantly the Dagombas, Gonjas, Nanumbas, and Mamprusis in the northern or Savannah region. This arrangement implies that requests to confer chieftaincy titles on acephalous ethnic groups are often denied, contributing to ongoing conflicts in Ghana's northern region.

17. How to Arrest the Maladroitness in Ghana's Inter-Ethnic Relations

To address the issues arising from the damage inflicted on traditional leadership systems by previous administrations, including British colonial rulers and subsequent governments such as Busia and Acheampong, the Ghanaian government must undertake negotiations post-independence. This approach is essential to mitigate conflicts in the northern region. This paper argues that the government has a duty to promote and protect the institution of traditional leadership in Ghana. The framework should focus on regulating the relationships between traditional leaders and government authorities. Specifically, the national government should foster partnerships between districts, municipalities, and traditional councils through legislative or other measures and such partnerships must:

- Be founded on mutual respect and recognition of status,
- Adhere to cooperative governance principles and
- Allow traditional councils to enter into service delivery agreements with municipalities.

To address the Ghanaian situation, the government must rectify the wrongs of both colonial and independent regimes by redesigning traditional leadership roles for chiefless tribes. This intervention aims to correct past mistakes and restore traditional customs.

18. Conclusion

Amplifying what has been said from the beginning of this paper, the root causes of all conflicts in northern Ghana today stem from Chieftaincy – the fight for traditional power to control land, mineral resources and people. In Ghana, traditional rulership is the key to territorial lands; therefore, chieftaincy conflicts have a long historical background dating back to about 4,000 years over such ownership. In Ghana, as in many African countries, chiefs are the leaders who manage communities, providing religious, judicial and cultural functions on behalf of national governments. Chieftaincy serves as the socio-political and military unit around which local tribes are organized, providing a focal point for coordinating actions between citizens and their elected government. As discussed in the preface and introduction, not all communities within a country have traditional chiefs; some, such as the Konkombas, Basaris, and Nawuris, are acephalous (chiefless) tribes. These groups were often betrayed by those with chiefdoms and received support from them to invade chiefless tribes. Additionally, during the colonial era, chiefs' powers were restricted by the British through direct magisterial rule. This mirrors the situation in South Africa, where, from pre-colonial times until its independence in 1994, Transkei districts were administered by white magistrates who served both judicial and administrative roles. These districts were further subdivided into locations governed by chiefs. Whereas the indigenous are chiefless tribes, as was the case those days until today – the Konkombas, Bassaris, Nawuris – they are still clannish and further divided (within) themselves and have been alien to the system of chieftaincy. The 'invader tribes,' notably the Dagombas (descendants of the Mamprusis), clashed with the Gonjas along the Kumasi-Tamale road near Lamashiegu over territory (Ayee, 2007). This conflict led the Dagombas to relocate their traditional ruler, the Ya-na, to a site still known today as 'Naa-ya' (chief's settlement). Consequently, the Konkombas from Chare (now Yendi) were compelled to move across the River Oti. Since Konkombas did not want to be part of the Gonja-Dagomba conflict, most left the vicinity, while others were dispersed and forced to move away from the cavalry-moving Dagombas. Moreover, as a directive to some of the aggrieved Dagombas who followed the Yana to Naa-ya, who by virtue of cultural difference and therefore, could not live with the Ya-naa, were shown the current eastern corridor road - the result of how the Nanumbas now occupy Bimbilla and its environs. Following the invasion and alliance with the colonial office of the Governor-General of the Gold Coast, the Dagombas and other chiefly tribes were

designated as 'rulers' over Indigenous people. This designation reinforced their subjugation powers, enabling them to expand their chieftaincy roles and displace Indigenous priests, who had historically served as landowners (Indians) for the chiefless tribes. The disempowerment of the Konkombas and their allied clans, coupled with the denial of their traditional succession rights by post-independent Ghana, has led to a situation where chiefless tribes cannot establish their own traditional councils. This lack of traditional governance has contributed to numerous chieftaincy problems in Ghana's northern region, leaving these communities unable to address their own needs effectively.

19. References

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