

# Naam Making in Dagbon and the Legitimation of Traditional Authority

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the “*naam*” making processes—or the installation of chiefs and the investiture of the king—which has been neglected by scholars writing about the Dagbon chieftaincy in the Northern Region of Ghana. Rather, scholars have paid attention to the internal chieftaincy disputes that have bedeviled the kingdom for about a century now. Using content analysis and in-depth interviews with selected chiefs, their elders, kingmakers, and drum historians of the Dagomba in the Northern region of Ghana, this paper provides an analysis of king making as well as chief making process. The paper argues that whilst chieftaincy as an institution could be sociologically considered non-rational, successful “*naam*” making legitimates the chieftaincy institution enabling its actors (the chiefs) to interact with modern state institutions.

## Keywords

Chieftaincy, *Naa*, *Naam* Making, Investiture, Authority, Legitimation

## 1. Introduction

In political terms, the kingdoms of Dagbon, Mamprugu, Nanung and the Mossi were “formerly known as the ‘Mossi-Dagomba’ complex of centralized states in the Volta Basin” (Schlottner, 2000: p. 52). These kingdoms have a common historical origin (Tamakloe, 1931), traceable to the legendary ancestor called *Tohajie* (the Red Hunter). Within these kingdoms, skins<sup>1</sup> are the symbols of office, *Naa* (sometimes *Na*) the office holder and *naam* (sometimes *nam*) the office or title represented by a skin. Each office-holder is described as “owner of *naam*” (*naam-dana*), and his “title” (*naam-yuri*) might be viewed as the name (*yuri*) of the portion of *naam* which is acquired directly or indirectly from the king at the installation rituals (Drucker-Brown, 1975: p. 31). Kings in the Dagbon kingdom

and by extension in her sister kingdoms of Mamprugu and Nanung are dependent on *tendaana*<sup>2</sup> for the reproduction of *naam*, involving rituals which in all their forms are called “the eating of *naam*”—*naam-disibu* (Drucker-Brown, 1975). The owner of office (*naam-dana*) cannot be removed from office except through death, and although death may physically remove a person from office, he remains the “owner” of the office until power is transmitted to, and utilized by his successor (Drucker-Brown, 1975: p. 31). Similarly, in the enskinment process of the Nanung kingdom, “each new chief receives his title and *naam* (office, authority) in a ceremony of ‘enskinment’ (*namleebu*); i.e. putting on a skin” (Skalnik, 1983: p. 13).

Tamakloe (1931: p. 1) reminds us that there is almost a forgotten tradition among the present-day Dagbamba people that their country was formerly inhabited by giants whom they called “kondor” or “Tiawomya” (Cardinal, 1931: p. 232) and that this extinct race of giants was said to have been of so extraordinary a stature that if hawks swooped down on their chickens, they simply had to rise up and snatch them back. Furthermore, so tall and large were they that their voices, when singing to their drums, could be heard some twenty miles off; their armlets so large that the biggest man of modern times could easily go through them. Tamakloe’s description of this early race is so intriguing that it requires further information not only for the purpose of background information, but significantly because their progeny were actually the Dagomba people upon whom came later, the invaders. These giants of people were said to be part of the descendants of Ad, the grandson of Ham, who was said to be the progenitor of the Adites, the first to inhabit the Arabian country. Ad married a thousand wives, had four thousand sons, and lived twelve hundred years with his descendants multiplying considerably. Some of the descendants of Ad wandered on till they arrived in the country which is today called “Dagbon” and their progeny were called “Dagbamba” (Tamakloe, 1931: p. 2). Tamakloe further noted that the Adites practiced paganism and were ruled by fetish priests who sat on cow skins and used ornamented lion and tiger skins as their authority (*Naam*) which they called “Ada gbon” meaning Ada’s skin. Hence, the name of the country now corrupted to Dagbon and the inhabitants “Dagbamba”. It is thus an established fact that the name “Dagomba” itself may have been that of the indigenous people, assumed by the invaders (Tamakloe, 1931: p. 3; Duncan-Johnstone and Blair, 1930; Staniland, 1975: p. 3). Dagbon and other states were created by superior, politically competent group that conquered a disorganized set of people

<sup>1</sup>As symbols of authority, these skins are of various animals representing the powers of the occupants. Whilst cow skins usually represent the authority of sub-chiefs and divisional chiefs (paramount chiefs), the kings of the Mole Dagomba kingdoms of Mamprugu, Dagbong and Nunung actually sit on Elephant, Lion and Leopard skins respectively, and ruling their kingdoms independent of each other. Whilst the skin symbolizes chiefly authority in Northern Ghana, it is equivalent to the stool in the south (Lund, 2003: p. 589; Drucker-Brown, 1975: p. 31; Skalnik, 1983: p. 13). Such a stool is usually a carved wooden chair and served as a symbol of the office of the chief and at the same time as an embodiment of the “soul” of the community (Simensen, 1975: p. 11).

<sup>2</sup>Tendaanas owners of the land in the Dagomba area (Arhin, 1985: p. 49). Also, sometimes tindana or tendana according to usage by different authors.

whose leaders had merely religious capacities (Wyatt, 2013: p. 15). Though Dagbon and her sister kingdoms of Mamprugu, Nanung, are traditionally linked and culturally similar, yet Dagbon stands apart from the others in its supposed origin in the conquest of the indigenes and the extermination of their leaders; it is also larger and more centralized (Wyatt, 2013: p. 21). The king, the Ya Na (lit. Owner of Might) presides over several hundreds of divisional chiefs, paramount chiefs, sub-divisional chiefs, sub-chiefs and village chiefs all under his jurisdiction and to whom they all owe allegiance. It is the Ya Na who enskins all divisional chiefs and paramount chiefs who in turn enskin chiefs under their respective jurisdictions.

Due to internal power struggle that has ravaged the kingdom for more than a century, a lot of intellectual energy is expended in analyzing the dispute popularly referred to in literature as the Dagbon Skin Affairs or the Dagbon Chieftaincy Crises (Sibidow, 1969; Ladouceur, 1972; Staniland, 1975; Mahama, 1987; Anamzoya, 2008). Whilst all these previous studies are various analyses over the struggle for authority (*naam*), none of these has paid attention to *naam*, as a traditional authority, especially the *naam* making process. It is this intellectual vacuum that this paper attempts to make a modest contribution towards filling. This paper benefited from two main sources of data. Empirical data was collected in 2013 and 2014 as part of a postdoctoral work on *Private Lives of Dagomba Chiefs in Northern Ghana*, under the African Humanities Programme of the American Council of Learned Societies. Secondary data was largely from anthropological and historical sources.

## 2. Conceptual Considerations: Cosmogony and Investiture

### 2.1. Cosmogony in a Context

In historical analyses of the formation of kingdoms in Africa, fratricide is sometimes committed paving the way for the establishment of another kingdom with its new ruler the stranger (killer/murderer) and his descendants as future kings. Cosmogony is translated into this epic tale of dynastic succession. That is, the advent of this stranger-king of violent dispositions, who typically marries the daughter of an earlier or indigenous ruler, assassinates the latter, and so gains the kingdom (Sahlins, 2011: p. 77). Such usurpers according to Sahlins, are foreign, celestial and their predecessors are aboriginal, or relatively so by contrast, and terrestrial. For instance, Perseus came to power by a crime against kinship, purportedly accidental: he killed his mother's father Acrisius, effectively putting an end to the earlier dynasty of the Danaides (Sahlins, 2011). What is worth noting is that the history of the ruler who has to be murdered by the stranger king is usually unknown. However, the relationship between this stranger and the daughter of the murdered ruler, and their subsequent offspring and descendants who went about establishing kingdoms and chiefs centuries later is what is largely recorded by historians and anthropologists.

The idea of the king coming from outside and ascending the throne violently

has another interpretation; the king does not have to come from outside as a stranger into the kingdom but is made to stand out of the kingdom during the investiture process. Graeber (2011) rightly observed that kingship everywhere and at all times has been to some degree a sacred office (*Rex est mixta persona cum sacerdotali*). His view is that a king symbolizes a whole society and must not be identified with any part of it. He must be in the society and yet stand outside it and this is only possible if his office is raised to a mystical plane. It is the kingship and not the king who is divine (Evans Pritchard, 1948: p. 36 as cited in Graeber, 2011: pp. 3-4). Marshall Sahlins has taken all this much further, pointing out, for one thing, that the vast majority of kings, in all times and places, not only try to mark themselves as exterior to society, but actually claim to come from someplace other than the places they govern. Or at least to derive from ancestors who do (Graeber, 2011: p. 4). Kings do not only begin as outsiders; they are made to “stand outside society”. But in contrast to Evans-Pritchard, he insisted this was not just a political responsibility. They stand outside society so that they can represent it to itself, but so that they can represent it before the powers of nature (Graeber, 2011: p. 5). During investiture, the king is expected to make some kind of dramatic gesture that marks a fundamental break with “the domestic order” and domestic morality. Usually this consisted of performing acts such as murder, cannibalism, incest, the desecration of corpses that would have been, had anyone else performed them, considered the most outrageous crimes. Sometimes such “exploits” were acted out symbolically, such as pretending to lie next to one’s sister or stepping over one’s father’s body when taking the throne. At other times they were quite literal: kings actually would marry their sisters or massacre their close kin. Always, such acts marked the king as a kind of “sacred monster”, a figure effectively outside of morality (Graeber, 2011: p. 4) whose actions cannot be measured with the morality of the community he is coming to reign over. Both cosmogony and investiture are acts which collectively provide weight and legitimacy to the authority of the king in the eyes of both the subjects and the larger state within which they operate.

## 2.2. Investiture in the Mossi-Dagomba Kingdoms

While the nomination is done by electors, (elders) the investiture is done by the *tindaanas* (Wyatt, 2013: p. 82) who themselves are descendants of the first settlers. In both the nomination and the investiture the *tindaanas* perform crucial roles. One key difference between the *naam* making process of a king and that of other chiefs is that, in the case of the latter, the ceremony is done openly and the items used to enskin—a gown, a cap and a skin—are seen by all present. However, in the case of the king, the whole process of installation (the investiture) is secretive in Mamprugu (Drucker-Brown, 1975: p. 126), Dagbon (Staniland, 1975; Tamakloe, 1931) and Nanung (Skalnik, 1983, 1996). Also, in the case of other chiefs, cola can be given to indicate the offer of *naam* (*naam tibu*) whilst the *naam leeibu* (the actual enskinning) takes place days or even months later.

However, in the case of the king, the moment the candidate is nominated, the actual investiture process follows immediately and secretly (Wyatt, 2013: p. 47). To that extent, the difference between *naam tibu* and *naam gbaaibu* (lit. catching *naam*) is so closely knitted that the roles of selectors (those who nominate) and those elders who perform the investiture flow into each other but might not overlap. Staniland describes the role of king selectors and kingmakers in the selection and the investiture of a new *Yaa Naa* (title for the king of Dagbon). The electors are Gushie-Na and selected divisional chiefs who do not aspire to the Lion Skin of Dagbon and the kingmakers are Kpatia, Gomli and Tuguri naam. After the elders responsible for selecting the right candidate have divined and consulted the oracles, they “would meet with the Gushie-Na...and confer with him about the succession”. After they reached a decision, the “Gushie-Na then proceeded to Yendi where he rode ceremonially three times around the burial chamber... From the burial chamber, the Gushie-Na went to the royal court...seized three pieces of straw from the palace roof and handed one to the successful candidate. The Gushie-Na left Yendi, custom forbidding him to spend the night in the town after indicating the identity of the new king” (Staniland, 1975: p. 24). After the electors have done their work (i.e., *naam tibu*), the kingmakers would immediately arrest (*naam gbaaibu*) the candidate on an appointed night and perform the investiture on him in a sacred room called *katini*. It is the investiture which is done by the kingmakers, different from the electors. The king spends seven days in this sacred room emerging on the seventh day as a *bumbiogo* (an object of Tabu)<sup>3</sup>.

In Mamprugu, Drucker Brown observes that Mamprusi drummers always speak of kingship as “catching” the king and when singing the names of deceased kings, the name of each is usually preceded by the phrase “which woman’s child did the *naam* catch?”. The singer thus describes kingship as an autonomous external force which “seizes” the chosen prince and during one phase of the installation ceremony, the king is in fact seized and “dragged like a slave” or “like a thief” (Drucker-Brown, 1975: p. 126). While an electoral college (formed in 1965) of elders and some selected sub-chiefs nominate the candidate to be installed as a *Nayire* (King of Mamprugu), an entirely different set of elders perform the investiture rites. A “successful prince is led by the *Sagadugunaba* and the *Sapkanaba* to the abandoned house of his predecessor... He is taken the way one catches a slave”. The prince is dragged “protesting that he cannot do the work”. This protest is part of the ritual and though it is well known that all princes desire nothing more deeply than to become king, the chosen prince must “cry his crocodile tears”. He is reassured by the elders that his ancestors will aid him (Drucker-Brown, 1975: p. 153; Rattray, 1932: pp. 557-558). The senior *Tendaana* performs the bathing and feeding ritual. After he is bathed, the *Tendaana* sends the new king into the ancestors’ spirit room (Rattray, 1932). In the Nanung kingdom for instance, there is a belief that the land they dwell on is not

<sup>3</sup>Duncan-Johnstone and Blair (1930: p. 31).

just a geographical setting but also a spiritual world with which the community has to establish and maintain a relationship through sacrifices at the land shrine, with the *tindana* being the only legitimate person to perform these sacrifices (Wienia, 2003: p. 4). Thus, when one of Wienia's respondents remarked that "the stranger owns the land but the land is for us" (Wienia, 2003: p. 5), it was in reference to the *naanima* who are believed to be the descendants of conqueror and founder of the Nanung kingdom-Nmantambu. The land is for the *tindani-ma*, (pl. *tindana*) the the autochthonous first settlers of Nanung. Besides, a *tindana* could call a *naa a sana*, stranger not only because "the *naa* comes and goes" (like official state ministers) and the "tindana stays", but also "that the *naa* is a descendant of the migrant Nmantambu" (Wienia, 2003: p. 33). These originally "acephalous" autochthons play a decisive role in the procedures and rituals of *naa's* funerals and selection of his successor (Skalnik, 1996: p. 113; Wyatt, 2013: p. 82). The leader of the *naakpamba* (elders) who is Juo Naa, sits in the *paani* (eldest wife's room of the palace of the deceased Bimbilla Naa (occupant of the Leopard Skin). The Langiri Naa and the Gambuxu *naa* enter the room with the selected candidate of the naam of Bimbilla, holding him tight...The candidate is presented to the Juo Naa with the words: "*Ti baya [gbaaiya] a bla la*" which means "we [have] captured your slave". The Juo Naa answers: *A yanim ni sona [sofja], A bani ma n' sona [sofja]* meaning "[your] [G]randfathers will help you". "[Your] [F]athers will help you" (Skalnik, 1996). The candidate is then bathed in a special herbs bath. Besides the Juo Naa, the Langiri Naa and the Gambuxu Naa also the Kpatihi are present. Kpatihi then performs *naam kparbu* by putting the chiefly gown and cap on the candidate (Skalnik, 1996: p. 116).

It is significant to note that this practice of autochthons conferring *naam* on late comers is found in other parts of Africa. For instance, among the Ndembu in Zambia, "the ritual powers of the senior chief were limited by and combined with those held by a senior headman of the autochthonous Mbwela people, who made submission only after long struggle to their Lunda conquerors led by the first Kanongesha" (Turner, 1969: p. 98). Among kingdoms in Central Africa, iron has been identified as the in the investiture process of kings in precolonial times. Since establishment of the Kongo kingdom in the thirteenth century, it was not until the seventeenth century that the roles of rituals in investiture are described clearly and in more detail, For instance, the royal regalia conferred by the Na Vunda included an iron chain, indicating a *simbi* function. In the provinces the investing priest, the *kitomi*, "god of the earth" was associated with rocks, water and special trees (Wyatt, 2000: p. 214). And among their neighbours the Bakuba about the same time, the Proto-kuba arrived from the north bringing with them the Mongo pattern of chiefly insignia including the leopard skin, the stock of chalk for investiture, and the legitimating role of the localized nature spirits (*ngesh*). "The priest of the nature spirits, who played a necessary role in investiture, was the head of a clan supposedly descended from the conquered autochthonous population; he was the guardian of certain royal charms

and made offerings on behalf of the chiefdom to its tutelary *ngesh* at a river or lake” (Wyatt, 2000: p. 214). Among the people of Kongo, Kuba, Gabon, Lamba, southern Lunda, and Bakongo in largely Central Africa, smiths are invaluable in their investiture. Smiths significantly either control the investiture process, or kings have a special relationship with smithing (Herbert, 1993). “Kuba traditions also linked smithing with kingship, from the epic confrontation with the hammer and anvil...in proto-historic times, to the affirmation that since the early days of the kingdom, all men of royal lineage had to be acquainted with the art of smithing” (Herbert, 1993: p. 133). To Blakely, smiths control the investiture process. A smith, for instance, brings all of his ritual potencies to bear on the investiture; his specialized knowledge, which may translate into the secrecy of his rituals; the ability to make the land produce, and his ability to interact with ancestors, spirits of the wild, and autochthonous spirits (Blakely, 2013: p. 163). Blakely writes about the equations between kings and craftsmen, royal regalia, and rituals of investiture. For instance,

The founder of Fipa royal line fell from the sky, bringing the skills of iron working with him; the regalia of the Oba kings of Benin in Nigeria include hammer, anvil and tongs. The investiture ceremony of Luba kings includes the beating of the candidate’s knees, while the initiator intones that the anvil is the secret of power and progress; the rulers of Chad are “smelted” in the rituals of investiture...in the seventeenth century, ...the king of Gabon was a blacksmith for his living...[and]...in northwestern Zambia...many chiefs [were] eager to learn the profession of smithing (Blakely, 2013: p. 166).

Blakely explained the relation between iron and traditional political power by locating its centrality in four key fundamental areas; agriculture, warfare, hunting and trade. In concluding this section, it is significant to note that, similar to other East and Central African kingdoms, the Mossi-Dagomba kingdoms of Dagomba, Mamprugu, and Nanung, there are different roles the electors of *naam* and those who do the investiture of *naam*. This role differentiation is crucial in ensuring that power is not concentrated in one entity with its possible authoritarian consequences, and that the king, though appears to have absolute powers, yet is controlled by the gods and earth spirits whose knowledge, power, and invocation lie largely with another power: the earth priests, the *tindana* or the smith. A complete investiture process without controversy and which is accepted by all kingmakers involved in the process, leads to the legitimation of the king in the eyes of his people and the larger state within which the ethnic state is located. This legitimation in turn makes it possible and acceptable for the king to invest *naam* on any other chief within his kingdom who in turn can invest *naam* on other chiefs within their various chiefdoms. The next section empirically describes how *naam* is made at the lower level of the kingdom to lesser chiefs.

### 3. *Naam* Making of Lesser Chiefs

All chiefs under the king of Dagbon, are considered lesser to the king and every

*naam* in the kingdom emanates from the Gbewaa Palace (the king's palace). The *Yaa Naa* obtains his authority through investiture. Senior Divisional Chiefs including the Tolon Naa, the Gushie Naa, the Kumbun Naa, the Nanton Naa, Yoo (Savelugu) Naa, the Karaga Naa, the Mion Lana directly receive their *naam* from the king. Some of these divisional chiefs have as many as more than hundred sub-chiefs under them some of whom are directly enskinned by the king and others by the individual divisional chief. Every enskinment in Dagbon, even if it does not occur at the Gbewaa Palace, is sanctioned by the *Ya Naa*. On daily basis there is a competition to one vacant chieftaincy or another, and, filling in of a vacant chiefship. "*Naam* never dies" was a statement repeatedly made by respondents:

When *naa* dies, *naa* is made. *naam* existed before our fathers' fathers became *nanima* [chiefs], and today we are *nanima*. When we die, there will be *nanima*...So whilst a *naa* can die, *naam* itself never dies.

The Dagbon Traditional political structure is in a promotional system where a young prince would normally start from a smaller community and climb to the father's skin. That is, rise to the last chieftom his father ever occupied. In the promotional process, a prince cannot rise beyond his father's skin. Thus, the inspiration of every prince is to get to his father's skin. In between the demise of one *naa* and the making of another, the office can temporarily be occupied by the senior-most elder, the *Wulana*, or the regent of the deceased chief (popularly called the *Gbon-Lana*, literarily "owner of skin"). He is the oldest surviving male son of the deceased chief. This is similar in the case of the Ya Na whose death sees the ascension of the senior most surviving male child of the king to the throne. The *Gbon-Lana* occupies the throne and takes over the palace until the final funeral rites of the king are concluded which includes officially installing him a *Gbon-Lana*. The *Gbon-Lana* acts in the capacity of the king exercising powers as his late father, capable of filling vacant skins and giving out lands to interested persons or parties. This could be one of the reasons why the *Gbon-Lana* does not willingly relinquish the throne and would also put in his bid to compete for the *naam* with (mostly) his paternal uncles.

The death of a chief automatically opens the gate for competition even before he is buried. In the case of neighbouring Mamprugu kingdom, all the candidates to a vacant *naam* would wear a white turban both as a public display of their participation in the contest and as an indication that the province was without a chief (Tonah, 2006: p. 28). All competitors would normally assist in the burial and final funeral rites of the deceased chief through their emissaries, the *cham-lana* (lit. owner of walk). One of the respondents explains the role of the *cham-lana* as follows:

He is normally somebody the skin-maker has a respect for. So that when the competition becomes keen, the enskinning authority cannot look your *cham-lana* in the face and say "I am sorry your man didn't get it." There-

fore, he must be a man of respect and authority or even wealth.

There are however other influential individuals in the palace whose voices are very strong when the skin-maker is to determine a new *naa* out of many competitors. These are the *Wulana* (*naa's* senior-most elder/linguist), the *Paani* (*naa's* senior-most wife), the *kom-lana* (*naa's* latest wife), and the *Naa-zo* (lit, *naa's* friend).

### 3.1. Gate Keepers and Lobbyists

One individual who can on his own, or in collaboration with any one of these other three influential individuals, overturn a *naa's* earlier decision, including the question of which candidate succeeds to a vacant chiefly position, is the *Wulana*. Every *naa* with the exception of the *Yaa Naa* has a *Wulana*. The *Wulana's* office, like that of other elders such as the *Kpana-Lana*, *Bomahi Naa*, *Bot-ing-Naa*, and the *Gushie-Naa* are indigenes of the chiefdom such that they are offices whose occupants do so by birth right, their fathers' fathers once occupied those offices. From the perspective of modern governance, these elders serve as public servants whose tenure of office transcend several chiefs in the chiefdom and are hardly affected by the installation of a new chief. Their offices are also terminating points. That is, if one's father ended as a *Wulana*, one cannot easily rise above their father's position. Thus, a newly enskinned chief would have come to meet this council of elders, already in their offices and he is expected to work with them. He cannot also change any of them; upon their death, the *naa* is still expected to fill the position from members of the same lineage. The *Naa-zo* is a friend of the *naa* who occupies this office at the behest of the *naa*. He is usually the *naa's* confidant and trusted friend. Age does not matter here; the *Naa-zo* can be as young as a teenager. He is always with the *naa*; the first to be with him when he wakes up till when he retires to bed. The *Naa-zo* is one of the very few people in a *naa's* palace who has access to the *naa's* bedroom, sometimes assisting the *naa* to select which outfit is fit for a particular occasion and actually dressing him up for occasions. The *naa* is never seen alone. The *Naa-zo* is the last person to be seen with the *naa*, running quick errands for the *naa*, and sitting down quietly when the *naa* is eating or dozes off. Sometimes, the *naa* converses with the *Naa-zo* on immediate past events or upcoming events within the chiefdom or issues of national dimensions.

The *Kom-lana* literally, "owner of water" is the *naa's* latest, youngest wife, and mostly (but not always), the *naa's* most beloved and trusted wife who spends more time with the *naa* especially at night than any of the *naa's* wives<sup>4</sup>; she basically hands over the *naa* to the *Naa-zo* in the morning and he in turn hands over the *naa* back to her when the *naa* is retired to bed at night. Thus, if a *naa* oversleeps, and is not sighted in the morning, the elders first direct their enquiries to the *Naa-zo*, while the *Paani* (described below) on behalf of the *naa's* wives will

<sup>4</sup>All the male respondents had more than four wives. One respondent actually had twenty wives (20) and had hoped to increase the number; his father had seventy (70).

enquire from the *Kom-lana*. The *Naa-zo* will then be duly informed of the reason either by the *Paani* or the *Kom-lana*. Also, the general health of the *naa* is ascertained from the *Kom-lana* and *Naa-zo*. The *Paani* is the official opposition for the senior-most surviving wife of the *naa*. The office moves to the next wife in line in a descending order upon the death of the *Paani*. It is a privileged position occupied by a woman who would have married the *naa* many years prior during the *naa's* youthful age when perhaps he was just a common prince and might have shared unforgettable excitements and challenges with the young prince; therefore, no matter how many women are added to the *Paani*, she still has a dominant voice in the palace regarding crucial decisions including *naam* making choices in competitive chiefly contests. Her position is more entrenched if she bore the *naa* his first male child and for that matter his future successor to the *naam*. Any one of these individuals can influence the decision of the *naa* regarding the filling of a vacant chiefly position. As a result, competition to any chieftaincy position, no matter how small the village is, is always keen, for besides everything, it could be the stepping stone to bigger chiefdoms including the kingship itself.

### 3.2. Greeting the *Naa*

Mondays and Fridays are the two important days in the Dagbon kingdom within which people go to greet the chief or *puhi nayili* (lit. greet the chief's palace). On these days, subjects and citizens alike, chiefs, elders and state officials who intend to greet the chief will throng to the chief's palace and do so through the *Wulana* or any respectable elder. Before anybody appears before the *naa*, however, the *Wulana* or the elder available in the palace at the time of the visit would have known the name and mission of the person and conveyed same to the *naa*. Thus, a visitor does not surprise the *naa*. A person interested in a vacant *naam* will ensure that his *cham-lana* would constantly—and he himself, occasionally—visit the *naa* and the elders on these days to ensure that his face not be forgotten in the palace. At early stages, the *cham-lana* on behalf of the competitor would visit the palace with money and other items such as askola for the *naa* and the elders, and items such as salt, fish, and women's cloth for the *naa's* wives (personal communication, March 20, 2013). "If a *naa* has twenty wives and you are looking for *naam* in his palace, you have to buy twenty pieces of women cloth for each of them, and sometimes not just once", according to one of my respondents. Beyond these, the competitor or his *cham-lana* also has to make sure that the competitor is in the good books of the *Paani*, the *Wulana*, the *Kom-lana* and the *Naa-zo*, each of whom can influence the *naa*. The *Paani* can cry to the *naa* the night before the cola is given, the *kom-lana* can also plead with the *naa*, and while the *Naa-zo* could also be telling the *naa* that he should "use this *naam* to compensate him for the number of years he has served him as *Naa-zo*", the *Wulana* would also be constantly reminding the *naa* of the competitor who has been visiting and doing good to both the *naa*, his elders and the household.

### 3.3. Giving Kola (*Naam Tibu*) and Enskinning (*Naam Leeibu*)

With the probable exception of funerals, kola plays a crucial role in the rites of passage of the ordinary Dagomba. Kola is sent around to announce the out-dooring day of a new baby. It is also used as part of the items sent when a young man through emissaries, officially announces his interest in a woman to her parents (the knocking ceremony). Kola is also given to a visitor to welcome him/her to a family. In the context of *naam*, kola is given to signify the lucky candidate who has been given a particular *naam*. The day of giving kola is a day of happiness for the candidate who is eventually given the kola. The enskinment (*naam dibu* lit. eating of *naam*) is the actual ceremony of putting the gown on new *naa*. Thus, whilst the enskinning authority gives kola (*naam tibu*) and enskins (*naam leeibu*), the new *naa* receives the kola, (*naam deeibu*), and eats the *naam* (*naam dibu*). Both the giving of kola and enskinment can happen the same day or different days. The quest for *naam*, and the complexity of enskinment, depends on the types of the skin being sought. On the morning the kola is to be given, all contestants, their supporters, sympathizers and well-wishers, would gather in the hall (*zong*—a big round hut) for no one knows who will “wear the crown”. The *naa* with the enskinning authority will dress in his best, normally a big traditional smock over smaller outfits, and comes out from the small house (*yili bla*) to the *zong* where everybody would have been seated, the crowd overflowing outside of the *zong* into the larger forecourt of the *naa*'s palace. The *Wulana* introduces the contestants to the gathering and speaking on behalf of the *naa*, announces the person with the lucky head and calls upon him to rise up and come to the *naa* to receive kola from the hands of the *naa*. Thus, even though the *Wulana* can announce the lucky candidate, it is still the *naa* who hands over the kola, the *naam* to the new *naa*. Accepting the kola and paying for the *naam* calls for additional financial commitment from the new *naa*. Thus, a new *naa* can plead with the skin-maker to allow him return home, and to reinforce himself before coming back for the enskinment. However, on occasions like this each candidate comes prepared, and can receive additional financial support from the supporters and well-wishers who might have come with him. If the new *naa* is ready, the enskinment is done there and then. The skin-maker instructs the appropriate elders in the palace to lower the new *naa* gently on a cow skin three times and, upon the third count, made to sit on the skin. Then the elders spread a white gown over the head of the new *naa*, lift and lower it three times over his head and upon the third count, they wear him the gown. The same procedure is followed through when putting the hat on the head. After a successful enskinment, there is drumming and dancing with women singing as the new *naa* returns to his new home, to his new province. He has eaten *naam*. Throughout the country several efforts are being made to ensure that a chief, or a king does not make himself. Whether in the larger Northern Ghana to which Dagon is part of, or in the Southern part of Ghana, the chief making process is to ensure some level of separation of powers between those who make the chief or

king, and the chief himself.

#### 4. Legitimation of Traditional Authority

The word “tradition” comes from the Latin word *tradere* which can be translated as “pass something [over]” or “hand something [over]” Höhne (2006: p. 3). In tandem, traditional authority has been defined as “an institution or power that is received and handed down or over from generation to generation” (Cheka, 2008: p. 72). There is a close relation between tradition and those who hold traditional authority. Those who hold and wield traditional authority are often referred to as traditional authority holders commonly called chiefs or kings in Africa. Weber’s category of traditional authority comprises three bases of legitimacy namely, the sanctity of tradition, convention, and the personal relation of power holder to power-subject (Matheson, 1987: p. 207). Weber makes a distinction between *Macht* (power) and *Herrschaft* (domination/authority). Parsons translated *Herrschaft* as authority, Gerth and Mills took it to mean domination, but for Weber *Macht* is the probability that one actor within the social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance whereas *Herrschaft* (domination) is the probability that a command would be obeyed (Szelenyi, 2016: p. 3). We can thus posit that a ruler is able to dominate based on legitimacy. The first principle of legitimation identified by Weber is that which rests on traditional grounds, where command and obedience are legitimized based on sanctity of immemorial traditions which govern the authority relationship (Szelenyi, 2016: p. 2006). A system of domination can be called “traditional” if legitimacy is claimed for it and believed in on the basis of the sanctity of order and the attendant powers of control as they have been handed down from the past. Weber’s threefold classification of claims to legitimacy which formed the basis of his classification of types of domination actually comprises five separate legitimations: convention, sacredness, personal ties, personal qualities and rationality (Matheson, 1987: p. 199). Out of these five classifications, Dagomba *naam* making, based on “tradition...commonly regarded as sacred,” (Matheson, 1987: p. 202) fits into sacredness. The sanctity of tradition forms a principle of legitimation, and it is found wherever rulers claim a right of command on the basis of the sanctity of immemorial tradition and where legitimacy is claimed on the basis of sanctity of norms, distinct from the sacredness of the person of the authority-holder. Successful *naam* making in Dagbon and elsewhere in Ghana, produces actors and legitimizes their positions. In instances of return chiefs (chiefs chosen from well-educated migrants who returned), they would still need to undergo *naam* making process, gain legitimacy in order to rule over their subjects and on the same basis upon which they interact and collaborate with the modern state. There are several ways to examine how the relationship of command and obedience are legitimized (Matheson, 1987). Whilst basic legitimation could refer to a legitimation of rule situated between Weber’s ideal of legitimacy and compliance based on habit, effect, or interest (Krämer,

2016), *naam* making here is the foundation of legitimating Dagomba chiefs in the northern region as well as their counterparts elsewhere in Ghana. The Ghanaian state does not question the traditional mode of *naam* making in Dagbon nor the customary rules that govern the process elsewhere. As far as the mode and processes are seen to be peaceful and accepted by the king makers, the state endorses its products and makes them part of the modern bureaucratic state. By legitimation, chiefs are capacitated to perform both statutory and non-statutory functions. In spite of its general exclusion of chiefs from participating in active party politics and from membership of the Ghanaian Parliament, the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution makes provision for chiefs to be involved in state governance. For instance, the President of the National House of Chiefs is an automatic member of the Council of State<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, the National House of Chiefs provides representation to the governing councils of the Ghana Prisons Service and the Lands Commission. In a similar fashion, the constitution provides for the governing boards of the Regional Lands Commissions and the Regional Coordinating Councils to have a representation each from the respective Regional Houses of Chiefs (discussed below). Other statutory bodies on whose governing boards chiefs serve include the Forestry Commission, the National Aids Commission, and the Ghana National Petroleum Commission (GNPC).

Traditional authority may not routinize itself in a manner to become what Weber calls legal rational authority. Weber assumed that charismatic bureaucracy, merely a less developed form of bureaucratic organization, would eventually lead to bureaucratic order on a legal-rational basis (Constas, 1958). This perception of Weber of historical life exhibiting growing rationality, an irreversible trend, precludes chieftaincy as an institution. Nevertheless, the chieftaincy institution has not become absolutely anachronistic nor ambivalent in Africa as was expected in the face of increasing modernization and democratization in the 1950s and 1960s. Rather, by the same democratic principles in the 1990s, more spaces were created for chiefs to operate and function (Englebert, 2003) in the context of mixed government across Africa. Throughout Africa, chiefs who have gained legitimacy by being appropriately installed as such have been included in modern governance. To the extent that African states that had outrightly abolished chieftaincy such as Mozambique (in 1975) had to later revise such a policy of exclusion and ensured “their re-inclusion in the performance of a long list of state administrative tasks” including taxation, policing, population registration and justice enforcement (Buur and Kyed, 2006).

Administration of justice remains both a statutory as well as non-statutory function of the chiefs. In the Dagbon kingdom, several hundreds of chiefs, including the King, administer justice of various kinds to the subjects within their jurisdictions with wise counsel from their councilors. This non-statutory func-

<sup>5</sup>The Council of State in Ghana is a body of prominent citizens, analogous to the Council of Elders in the traditional political system, which advises the President on national issues. For its existence and mandate, see the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.

tion of chiefs is acknowledged across Africa. In the context of the absence of the Weberian ideal state with its overarching presence, chiefs fill the void.

The Traditional Councils and Houses of Chiefs in Ghana are the institutions within which chiefs perform their statutory functions. These are creations of constitutional and statutory provisions, under the supervision of the common law courts. First were the Regional Houses of Chiefs whose creation formed part of the 1957 Independent (compromised) Constitution of Ghana. In 1969 the National House of Chiefs was established following a constitutional provision to that effect in the 1969 Second Republican Constitution. The National House of Chiefs came to serve as appellate courts to the Regional Houses of Chiefs on matters affecting chieftaincy<sup>6</sup>, otherwise called chieftaincy disputes. In 1971, the Chieftaincy Act 1971 (Act 370), was enacted creating Traditional Councils to serve as court of first instance in a chieftaincy dispute which does not involve a paramount chief. The coming into effect of the Traditional Councils completed a three-tier court structure to deal with matters affecting chieftaincy as they border on customary law, thereby creating a duality and parallelism in structure to the British common law courts but converging at the Supreme Court when a matter is appealed from the National House of Chiefs. Both customary laws and the English common law are applied in the Houses of Chiefs in adjudicating matters affecting chieftaincy. It is only chiefs who have passed through the *naam* making process without a dispute who are considered legitimate to sit as members of tribunals (judicial committees) in the Dagbon Traditional Council, the Northern Regional House of Chiefs and the National House of Chiefs.

Claims that chieftaincy is despotic based on Mamdani's (1996) argument on decentralized despotism needs a mention here in the context of Dagomba chieftaincy. In Ghana, the chieftaincy institution, despite its colonial roots and support, has not become despotic in post-colonial Ghana. Rather, chiefs in Dagbon as well as their counterparts across the country are accommodating democratic principles, respecting the rights of their subjects, not imposing unbearable fines on them and are willing to collaborate with state institutions such the police service and the court system to enforce law and order. This has since changed the face of chieftaincy not only in the Dagomba kingdom but throughout Africa. Evidence abounds of the chieftaincy institution having been transformed into civil chieftaincy in the words of Von Trotha (1996), being neither despotic nor civil but occupying an intermediary position between local citizens and the state

<sup>6</sup>Section 76 of the 2008 Chieftaincy Act, Act 759 stipulates that: "cause or matter affecting chieftaincy means a cause, matter, question or dispute relating to any of the following:

- 1) the nomination, election, selection or installation of a person as a chief or the claim of a person to be nominated, elected, selected or installed as a chief;
- 2) the deposition or abdication of a chief;
- 3) the right of a person to take part in the nomination, election, selection or installation of a person as a chief or in the deposition of a chief;
- 4) the recovery or delivery of stool property in connection with the nomination, election, selection, installation, deposition or abdication of a chief; and
- 5) the constitutional relations under customary law between chiefs; "deposition" means destoolment or deskinment.

(Krämer, 2016).

## 5. Conclusion

Existing studies of chieftaincy in Africa abound, particularly at the institutional level. As an institution, chieftaincy has actors such as chiefs and kings who, unfortunately, have not received much academic attention especially among the Dagomba in Northern region of Ghana. The Dagomba chieftaincy disputes have taken away the attention of academics from other aspects of the kingdom that need attention. Chiefs interact on a daily basis with diverse people, ranging from their immediate subjects to other citizens of national and international origin, and function as mediators and managers of conflicts in most areas where the state is absent or weak. They also engage with the modern state at different levels such as collaborating with other state actors to resolve chieftaincy disputes in Ghana (Anamzoya, 2009, 2014), assisting the state on issues tribal or customary in many African states. One key fact that gives these chiefs and kings the legitimation to engage with the modern state and other actors at these different levels is that these chiefs and kings have gone through the required installation rituals and processes. The fact that they occupy an institution that is largely regarded as non-rational is acknowledged. However, the real basis upon which the modern postcolonial rational African state engages the services of chiefs and accommodates them is largely due to the fact that they have been enrobed with the authority to act as such *by other entities, institutions or persons* variously called skin-makers, kingmakers, smiths, who are usually not part of the king's family or descendants but who play a very important role in the investiture. Having been invested as a king of Dagbon, the Yaa Naa in turn installs other chiefs or supervises their installation; these in turn install several others in their jurisdictions. Legitimation of kingship and chiefship, and the basis of rationality in the eyes of the subjects, is the corresponding basis by which the citizens and the state at large give recognition to any such chief or king.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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