The Role of Chieftaincy in Ghana's Hybrid Security Governance Architecture

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1. Introduction

Chieftaincy is the institution that regulates traditional authority in a given society. It is a complex institution with norms and traditions. These include achieved and ascribed statuses and roles, as well as sets of duties, privileges, rights and expectations that stakeholders demand of each other or the public. Chieftaincy is situated within complex belief systems and is regulated by principles, surrounded by both material and abstract symbols and artifacts. Not only is chieftaincy an institution; it also links and interfaces with other institutions in society. It achieves this linkage in such an intricate way that it makes sense to talk of the cultures of chieftaincy in societies where they have taken root. Chieftaincy includes such state functionaries as linguists, servants, Asafo, executioners, traditional drummers and traditional singers, among others (Odotei & Awedoba, 2006)

2. Origin of Chieftaincy

The institution of chieftaincy emerged in communities in Ghana in different ways. In most cases, first setters or autochthons do claim chieftain based on aboriginality. In other instances, the conquest of an already existing group in an area led to the establishment or imposition of chieftaincy in such areas. Over the years, there has been the transmogrification of priestly rulers into chiefs. In such instances, the issue of legitimacy is traceable to traditional priesthood. At the time of colonialism, some areas witnessed the establishment of chieftaincy to replace the earth priest, such as the tindana, who, until then, were, indeed, priestly rulers or priestly kings.

Whether by settlement, conquest, colonialism, or priesthood, ethnic groups have developed chieftaincy around specifically defined positions such as Kings, Paramount Chiefs, Divisional Chiefs, Sub-Chiefs, Female Chiefs, earth/land/sea/river priests, among others.

According to Article 277 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, a chief is 'a person who hailing from the appropriate family and lineage has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage' (Constitution of Ghana, 1992). Following the constitutional definition, Arhin (2002) also seems to have provided some perspectives regarding the definition of who a chief is. According to Arhin, 'A chief may be defined as a person elected in accordance with customary law and usage and recognised by government to wield authority and perform functions derived from tradition or assigned by the central government within a specific area (Arhin, 2002).

When the term chief is used within the context of chieftaincy, it has a specific sense of meaning. It means the head or leader of an ethnic group, clan, town, or village, who is in charge of, and answerable to, the people that he/she leads (Brobbey, 2008). An important attribute of chieftaincy and chiefs is the provision of security in their respective areas. Some specific chiefly positions are reserved for the performance of duties that are directly related to security.

3. Understanding hybrid security: Towards a definition

Hybrid security is a situation where formal state security institutions, such as the military, police and allied security institutions, exist side-by-side with traditional authorities, including chiefs. According to the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance report: "The concept of hybrid security involves non-state security actors, often considered as either formal or informal; they may also be licit or illicit, armed or unarmed. Very critical highlights in the definition is the extent to which hybrid security offers a lens through which to examine security governance relationships that might involve or impact state security but are outside the direct control of the state. Examples are security companies, private sector security clients, community self-defence groups, militias and armed groups. In summary, hybrid security is about more than just non-state actors; it describes how security of both people and the

state is affected by the interactions and relationships these actors might simultaneously have with the state, communities and one another.[1]

It is acknowledged from the above definition that hybrid security is very broad and includes a number of actors and groups. This paper is concerned about the traditional or indigenous forms of security that are directly linked to ethnic groups through their chieftaincy institution which has been part of communities and ethnic groups from the pre-colonial period to recent times. Chiefs in Ghana continue to contribute to governance processes, including the provision of security, especially when the state appeared to be failing in its mandate to provide the needed security. Chiefs have used norms, traditions, kinships and social alliances in communities, as well as key actors such as asafo, hunters, warriors and vigilantes, to shape hybrid security operations and governance processes by strengthening government institutions and serving people in their respective communities.

It is in this regard that the specific manifestations of the role of chieftaincy in Ghana's hybrid security architecture are discussed. Methodologically, the paper relies on archival information, oral interviews and personal observation. The paper focuses on Ghana's geographic divide – the south and the north of Ghana. In the south, some specific chiefly positions and the traditional military (asafo) are discussed. In the north of Ghana, the paper highlights traditional institutions such as warriors, hunters and the female cult of Okule. It is important to indicate that the author of this paper is aware of the lack of homogeneity in the security systems of the different ethnic groups in both the north and the south. For example, the security architecture of the Ga and Ewe communities may differ from the security arrangement of the Larteh or Ashanti areas, even though they are all ethnic groups in the south. In the same manner, the security architecture of the Dagomba people may differ from that of the Konkomba or Birifor communities, even though they are all in the northern part of Ghana. Different hybrid security systems exist in Ghana. The selection of particular chiefly positions, asafo, warrior and hunter groups, and the female cult of Okule is for purposes of illustration and their direct connection and relation to the chieftaincy institution in Ghana. This illustration is particularly important since in most parts of Africa, security governance is based on a complex amalgam of statutory and non-statutory actors and institutions, which form the security (Bagayoko, 2012).

Security has become a big issue in Africa since the 1990s; because during the last decades, Africans have been subjected to an extraordinary variety of sources and forms of violence: civil wars, ethnic pogroms, religious conflict, political repression, forced migrations and the upheaval associated with structural adjustment (Hutchful, 1998:1). It is due to the increasing insecurity, coupled with limited state provisions for security, that one needs to pay attention to the time-tested security establishments, such as the asafo, hunters and cults, and their operations and linkage to the chieftaincy.

4. Chiefs and Hybrid Security in Southern Ghana

Chieftaincy and security go hand-in-hand. One cannot discuss chieftaincy without reference to issues of security. Whether in the south or north of Ghana, or the middle belt, security is key to the functioning of chieftaincy.

4.1. Wing or Warrior Chiefs

In most of the Akan societies, the omanhene or paramount ruler in every given state is supported by a hierachy of chiefs many of whom are described as wing or military chiefs. They are responsible for the security protection of the paramount chief or ruler of a community or town. They include the

[1] Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance Hybrid Security: Challenges and Opportunities for Security Sector Reform Insights from Burkina Faso, Colombia & DRC. Geneva Switzerland

Adontehene, Kyidomhene, Benkumhene, Nifahene and Ankobeahene. The Adontehene, for example, is responsible for general security. In fact, the Adontehene is most often the commander-in-chief of the entire state – *oman*. This position is also replicated at the town and village levels. As the one in charge of security, especially at the time of frequent wars, he organises the war front (Brobbey, 2008). In spite of the fact that wars are not frequently fought now, the Adontehene still holds the specific duty of ensuring the security of other chiefs and community members at all times. For example, during traditional celebrations, including the performance of rites and rituals, he plays a very key role.

Assisting the Adontehene in the discharge of his duties are other traditional office bearers. For example, the Nifahene is responsible for security on the right of the Adonthene. Essentially, any kind of danger emanating from the left of the chief, if he is present, or the left of any community, needs to be checked by the Adontehene. The Benkumhene is responsible for the left side of the Adontehene. Kyidomhene is in charge of the rear guard, and he normally stays behind the chief. The Ankobeahene is responsible for the chief's household and the palace whenever the chiefs go to war or travel. In recent times, this could mean traveling out of the jurisdiction for official business.

4.2. Asafo

The asafo is the system of military bands that are organised in villages, towns and traditional states. Membership is automatic and generally based on patrilineal succession. All towns and large villages have them. Asafo is, essentially, of a military or para-military nature, with wo/men, and particularly the young, being most prominent members (Ansu & Porter 1971). As far as hybrid security is concerned, the asafo plays a very critical role, especially in areas of defense, conflict resolution and governance.

As already noted, the asafo primarily is a military unit formed to defend a village, town, or community. Till date, it is very visible in various fields. It still operates as a police force in certain circumstances, such as in the apprehension of criminals, the organisation of a search party for missing persons, the killing of dangerous animals that threaten a neighborhood, or the foiling of an attempted suicide (Ansu & Porter, 1971).

Justice is an important component of security. Where there is injustice, there is a likelihood of conflicts occurring. It is in this regard that some asafo groups try to ensure that there is justice in communities where they operate. The house of the leader of the asafo, that is, the Asafohene, serves as a place where some matters are adjudicated. As a unit that is mostly made up of the youth, the asafo has been able to deal with issues of youth violence by serving as a counter force to youth groups whose actions are inimical to peace. In some cases, the Asafohene, Supi and other leaders serve as arbitrators in disputes. Settling disputes is an important aspect of security. In recent times, the volatile nature of elections in Ghana, both at the local, parliamentary and presidential levels, have provoked some conflicts in some parts of the country. As a result, some members of asafo have acted as partial militia to protect parliamentary candidates or ballot boxes during elections. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in the coastal regions of Ghana.

The asafo have also mostly composed themselves into rescue teams and search parties in cases of disaster or misfortune. For example, when people drown or go missing, the asafo transforms into a search and rescue team in search of those lost or drowned. During ceremonies, the asafo plays a critical role by serving as a police force and ensuring order and peace.

Closely related to the asafo are vigilantes. At the district level, chiefs have cooperated with government institutions, such as district, municipal and metropolitan assemblies, to establish community vigilantes to protect infrastructural and developmental projects. It is important to mention

that there have been latent or even visible cases of individuals empowered to ensure the security of trade and the protection of central/strategic trade/commercial routes for traders. Among the Akan, the position of Batahene is precisely to provide security and offer or ensure the safe passage of traders and travelers into and out of communities.

5. Hybrid Security in Northern Ghana

It is evident that in the south, the asafo is a visible institution that perform a very critical role as far as hybrid security is concerned. In the north, unlike the south, the provision of hybrid security by the chieftaincy institution is found in unique warrior and hunting institutions and cults, which all fall under the control and supervision of chiefs. This section discusses the warriors or kabonse of Dagomba, hunters/akpanpu of Nawuri and the female cult of Okule or Aliji.

5.1. Kambonse of the Dagomba

Among the ethnic groups in the north, the Dagomba hold a large territory. As a result, they introduced different security structures that could help them in the effective administration of their area. One policy that facilitated the incorporation of hybrid security in chieftaincy was that chiefs could not be installed without the presence of warrior groups. That was the first attempt at recognising and incorporating hybrid security into the chieftaincy institution. By their presence, chiefs already incorporated them to be part of the traditional state whereby the head of the warriors becomes part of the chieftain apparatus. From thence, their operations are not only traditionally legitimised but also empowered to ensure compliance with the bye-laws enacted by chiefs.

Just as already observed among the Akan, the Dagomba have a complex security system which is chieftaincy-based. The leader of the security system is the Kambona Kpema who is at the centre. His right-wing commander is called Kyirifo, and the left-wing commander is Demonkum. All of them are sub-chiefs of the Ya Na, and are located a few kilometers from the Ya Na. Even though their appointment is hereditary, it also requires some traditional military experience.

In the case of the Dagomba, the establishment of hybrid security was but a critical necessity. Migrating from somewhere in the Chad, to Zamfara in Northern Nigeria and to the Gruma in present-day Burkina Faso, the Dagomba migrants were accompanied by warrior clans. It is, therefore, not out of place to find these clans well integrated into the security structure of the Dagomba in their current place in Northern Ghana. The clans followed their warrior leader and King Tohajie (The Red Hunter). The presence of the warrior clans ensured that any threat to their security was dealt with.

Arriving in Ghana, there was the continued urgency to maintain and expand the security apparatus even in their present location because they faced many security challenges. For example, they had to fight the Konkomba when they arrived in their current area. Their 'senior kinsmen', the Mamprusi, located further north, were, invariably, not at peace with them, but not as compared to the other ethnic groups, such as the Gonja. Within Dagomba itself, all was not peaceful, as the struggle for chieftaincy was a frequent affair among royals, posing a lot of security challenges.[2]

The menace to Dagomba was not limited to only northern ethnic groups and royals. The Ashanti Kingdom was a continuous danger to Dagomba, especially as the former was making inroads into the north, and that northward push had put the Ashanti against the Dagomba and other ethnic groups, such as the Gonja. Ashanti's growth in might and power led to constant invasions in the north.

[2] Public Records and Archives Administration Department (Here after PRAAD), Tamale, NRG 8/2/1. The History and Organisation of the Kambonse in Dagomba

Beyond threats from ethnic groups and warfare, the state of kidnapping at that time, as well as surprise sorties, robberies and land disputes in the present meant that the kabonse had to be on constant guard to avoid further plunder and devastation of their communities and kingdom. Essentially, the precolonial inroads made by neighbours of the Dagomba, including distant Ashanti, as well as internal upheavals related to chieftaincy and land conflicts, and intermittent robberies and electioneering violence did not allow the Dagomba to forget their warrior and security traditions. They had to retool as a hybrid security system to complement that of the state. At the moment, the kabonse are almost permanently under arms just as occurred under the precolonial and colonial period. In all instances, the command structures are under the Dagomba King – Ya Na but exercised through the Kambona Kpema. Beyond the Dagbon Kingdom where the Ya Na and Kambona a are key, at the town, or village level, threats to security are handled by units from lesser chiefs such as divisional and sub-chiefs who owe allegiances to the Ya Na.[3]



Group of Kabonse providing security during a funeral in Northern Ghana in 2013. Note the umbrella atop the Kambona, chief of security.

From the discussions so far, it is evident that warriors are key to the security architecture of the Dagomba. The combined activities of warriors reinforce the power of the chief and provide him/her with the necessary leadership needed to serve, including the protection of culture, traditions, customs, property and life. According to Sowatey and Atuguba (2014), several reasons account for this reality. The fact that the traditional security systems, including indigenous policing, have been time-tested, making it a bit difficult for public or so-called modern policing institutions to replace the indigenous form. This reality, coupled with the endurance of some indigenous policing groups, has been partly driven by the understanding of the local dynamics, including flexibility, sensibility to local justice and security needs, which at times involves the engagement of metaphysical and socio-cultural matters (Sowatey & Atuguba, 2014: 74).[4]

[3] Public Records and Archives Administration Department (Here after PRAAD), Tamale, NRG 8/2/1. The History and Organisation of the Kambonse in Dagomba.

[4] On issues of the metaphysics and security we shall return to it in discussing the female security architecture of the Okule cult and environmental and social justice.

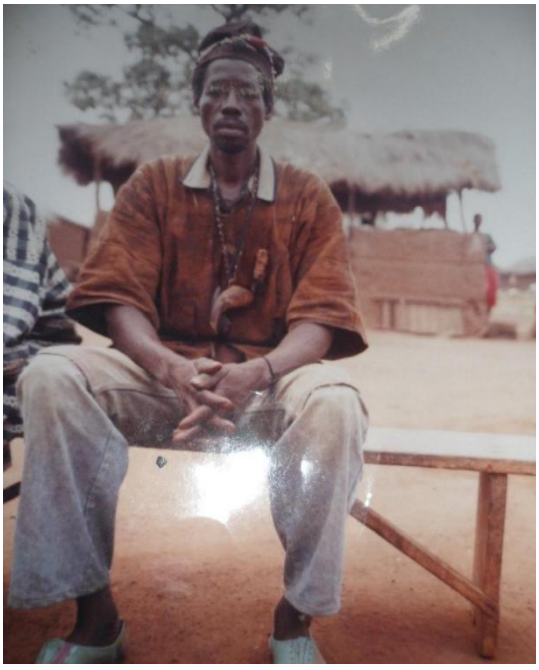
5.2 Akpampu/Okule of Nawuri

Nawuri hunters are known as Akpanpu, and they have embarked on several hunting expeditions, sometimes venturing into areas beyond their boundaries. The motivation for going to distant places to hunt was the contest for honorific titles that come along with killing animals. But beyond honour, their hunting and mastery of territory have enabled them to assume respectability in society, thus, placing them in a better position to be responsible for matters of security.

In reality, among the Nawuris, once a child is born, a gun is fired into the air to announce the arrival of a new member of the family. In some instances, the same gun that was fired is kept in the room where the newborn baby sleeps. From that moment, the child is already introduced into the security architecture of the community where he/she is born.

As an ethnic group that privileges hunting over any other profession, as soon as a child turns seven, the child begins to accompany hunters into the bush. His/her duty at this stage is to carry water and gunpowder. By the time the child turns 12, he/she may be given the duty of firing a gun during funerals. By age 17 or 18, the skills of the child are already known and he/she will occasionally be given a gun to go and hunt birds, antelopes and other small animals. At that stage, such hunters are not initiated and, hence, do not have much respectability in Nawuri society. Their role in security may include the separation of fights, usually at the market square, or separating fights involving two individuals.

There are also hunters described as high-level whose position in society is known through titles, such as Ekpanpu Kpatakpiri, who would have shot big games like buffalo or lion. There is also the Wampugiri, who usually would have killed several animals, including elephant. The overall of them is the Kokotriko. This is usually a title for those who put aside their hunting weapons and go into physical contest with the animals. They would have gone for other metaphysical powers beyond the gun. The most common metaphysical are Lurigu and Obadu, who offer the power of invisibility before animals or the ability to enter into an open fight with the animals.



A hunter poses for a picture. Note some of the spiritual articles used in hunting and security operations around the neck

Hunters who graduate to such high levels are usually initiated into a hunters' cult, which involves several hunters from all over the territory where the ethnic group resides. Initiation involves the performance of dances and rituals with hunting implements such as guns, bows, arrows and spears. But the critical moment is the oath-swearing of which each hunter promises to defend their fellow hunter and the communities that they hail from. With such an oath, usually sworn in the presence of chiefs, the entire community entrusts their security into the hands of the hunters, especially the elite or titled hunters such as Ekpanpu Kpatakpiri, Wambugiri and Kokotriko.

Ekpanpu Kpatakpiri, Wambugiri and Kokotriko, due to their expertise, become very critical in matters involving security and installation of chiefs. They must be part of the installation process because in times of war, they are those who decide. With fights involving communities, it is the Kpatkpiri that

takes command of affairs, but in respect of fights involving entire ethnic groups, the Wambugiri and Kokotriko take charge. They, along with the chiefs, take the final decision. In some cases, they try to avoid confrontation and might engage in mediation with the opponents, but in the unlikely event of war, they must take the lead. In recent times, they have become critical in ensuring that communities are protected by mobilising all Akpampu-hunters in the community to perform different security roles such as protecting property and curbing armed robbery. In that case, one could argue that elite hunters and those below them play the role of vigilantes to ensure that their communities are very safe.

From the discussions, it is evident that hunting, with its associated deployments, is part of the Nawuri culture and ritual life. Their initiation into the hunting cult gives them the visibility and privilege of moral and social guardians in the course of performing their security duties. Their understanding of the territory within which they operate makes them ideal as security agents who monitor people and troublemakers. This point is particularly important because the Kpandai District, which is the aboriginal place of the Nawuri, has fewer police posts; indeed, there is only one recognisable police post in Kpandai itself. This limited security resource and police visibility make it imperative for hunters to intervene to enforce rules and resolve disputes or apprehend criminals and robbers. Nawuri hunters have often offered communal defense and, through enforcement of taboos, they have resolved many resource-based conflicts, such as overfishing and logging. Their frequent display of dances, such as enynawo (brave peoples dance), or Kakpancha (hunters dance), amidst wielding of arms and weapons during funerals, festivals, installation of chiefs and other public ceremonies, reinforce social cohesion and a sense of security.

5.3 Female Cult of Okule and Environmental Security

Among the middle Guans, particularly the Nawuri, Achode and Adele, they have a special hybrid security system entirely operated by women's cult called Okuoku. The cult originated from Nigeria and received the support of chiefs who, up to date, are the chief patrons. The Okuoku have developed their own unique language called 'Kiligi'. In some respects, they are collectively called Aliji, which is the plural of Kiligi, the language. The language is a pidginised form of Yoruba. As already noted, the cult originated from the precolonial period for purposes of policing ill-behaviour in society, resolving health-related matters, especially the outbreak of epidemics, and environmental protection. There is a power structure among the Aliji. Their leader is called the Olami. She is the custodian of the cult and caretaker of the sacred metallic objects. The Aliji take instructions from the Olami. The second in command is the Onigbo. The third in command is Banimafor.

Aliji operates on a recruitment system. When the time for recruitment comes, which is usually around July or August, any female can get recruited. But within each period of recruitment, respectability is accorded to the recruits according to the time of arrival. Indeed, names are even given to mark out the order of arrival. For example, the name Chignini is for the last recruit, and Dudu is for the first recruit. In spite of this differentiation, they learn the Kiliji language collectively in the house of the Olami. Senior members are responsible for the linguistic instructions. Usually, within three months, all should be able to speak the language and sing songs in Kiliji. Usually, group bonding in the Olami's house facilitates the learning of the language due to the frequency with which senior members speak with each other and the recruits.

Once a recruit goes through the training, she becomes a member and responsible for maintaining the security of the community, while addressing issues of injustice and protecting the environment. Their involvement in environmental issues clearly aligns with recent calls for the definition of security to extend beyond its political and military meaning to encompass other forms of security, such as the satisfaction of basic needs, right to a sustainable environment and protection of cultural and religious identity(Hutchful 1998).

As Ntewusu etal (2020) note, in the course of their training, senior members and the recruits often spend some time in the wild/forest, often moving from place to place and returning, usually after two – three hours each day. These movements in and out of the bush are meant to allow them know the flora and fauna that are under threat and which need to be protected to prevent further destruction. Having built a mental register of all animal and plant species, on their return, they develop rules and place taboos on the exploitation of endangered resources. The taboos become rules that empower the Aliji to confront members of the community who violate the rules, including the extraction of resources.



A basket containing objects placed on a mound to serve as a reminder to community members of some of the taboos related to social and environmental balance Sometimes the basket is placed at the boundary between communities. By that they are able to ensure security of land and property since each community is reminded of their boundary. (Photo by Jonathan Brindle, 2013).

In most instances, the Kiliji language serves as a security code which enables members to communicate among themselves and to agree on which line of action to take once there is a problem. They, for example, decided whether an offender should be brought to the Olami's house for mediation, or should be given a fine, or should face instant justice. In the case of the latter members normally verbally or physically attack the offender. In instances when the women resort to physical discipline, the offender might have proven rebellious or uncooperative to warrant such actions.
One thing that often invites their immediate intervention is when endangered trees are cut or some animals are killed, although it is considered to be a taboo to do so. Such animals include reptiles, and they will do everything to protect them. Invariably, they have members who perform surveillance services to ensure that offenders are apprehended.

From the discussion, the Okule plays a critical role in ensuring order by regulating farming, fishing, water use, hunting and general utilisation of resources through ritual and social sanctions. For example, the taboos ensure that resources are not overexploited. There have been instances where

they even physically put objects such as baskets at specific areas to ensure that the resource there is not overexploited. This has been very critical and necessary as most state security institutions have become very powerless in handling or policing natural resources.

In fact, it is reasonable to say that they play a critical role in ensuring balance through equitable exploitation of resources, and contributing to a general sense of security without resource conflicts, which would have been rampant, especially in that part of the north ith limited resources. Lack of state visibility in remote areas, such as Kpandai, has made their role very important in limiting tensions, conflicts and social discord.

5. Conclusion

In discussing Ghana's hybrid security, chieftaincy is very critical. Local institutions and cultural bearers, such as warrior chiefs, hunters and female cults, have been central and pivotal in the expression of cultural authority. Such authority has been used to ensure the security of persons and property, as well as the resolution of conflicts and provision of balance in the exploitation of resources. Such practices have ensured good governance through the deployment of community-based policing, which takes into account community values and checks and balances.

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