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Becoming Konkomba:

Recent Transformations in a Gur Society of Northern Ghana

By

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ABSTRACT

Acephalous peoples in sub-Saharan Africa have frequently found themselves to be subject to the imposed authority and dominion of neighbouring chiefdoms and states before, throughout and beyond Africa's colonial period. The Konkomba of northern Ghana are such a people, for throughout much of their history they have been perceived by the peoples of the neighbouring chiefdoms of Dagomba, Nanumba, Mamprusi and Gonja as leaderless migrants and hinterland thugs and they were subject to territorial and economic control by these chiefdoms. For much of the twentieth century, the Konkomba were forced to pay tribute to these regional overlords in the form of goods and service. However, through skilful manipulation and monopolization of the yam cultivation, transport, and marketing business in Ghana the Konkomba have managed to escape this regional and territorial subjugation to wield significant economic power in the north and throughout Ghana and now possess a considerable amount of financial capital and influence. The Konkomba have become the number one producers of yams in the guinea region of West Africa, however, the old stereotype persists and they are still considered by many to be little more than roaming, itinerant farmers with little order or structure to their society and less respect for authority.

Through analyses of their structures of political and ritual leadership, patterns of clanship and the negotiation of their identity across ethnic boundaries the present work will construct what it means to be and to become Konkomba. Further, this project will also flesh out those aspects of Konkomba ethnicity that have become salient in the context of the new economic niche occupied by the Konkomba in Northern Ghana. The primacy of the earth cult and the location of political authority within the lineage of the

earth, crucial factors in defining Konkomba ethnicity, were largely suppressed as possible factors in promoting ethnic solidarity among the Konkomba by the controlling chiefdoms until the Konkomba's economic ascendancy. It is through the increased economic power the Konkomba now wield, that these ritual and political aspects of Konkomba existence now combine with a longstanding resistance to foreign control to express Konkomba ethnicity and unity.

PREFACE: Why Africa? Why Ethnicity?

Upon my return home after my fieldwork in Ghana I would often be asked “Why did you go to Ghana, I mean, what do you want to prove?” or “Does your work contribute anything?” These are casual questions, offered and accepted at face value, and I would usually reply with a summary statement about my desire to work in Africa, in an English speaking country and to work with a people whose level of political organisation was radically different from that of the people who surrounded them. I would also note that I held something of reverence for some of the classics of early anthropology, mostly written about African societies or, and perhaps this is closer to the truth than I often admit, I simply wanted to get away to somewhere new, to study the exotic. As a person with something of a continuous wanderlust, I of course snapped up the opportunity to get to Africa.

I do believe though, that there are one or two slightly more profound reasons for why I undertook this study. The recent influx of tragic new stories from Africa has caused many to label the continent as something of a basket case. A popular weekly news magazine weekly recently labelled this land of so much misery “The Hopeless Continent” and to be sure, if one allows oneself to be overwhelmed by the number of seemingly catastrophic tales of war, ethnic strife and disease it would be understandable if one were to believe that the situation looked extremely grim. The continent is beset by rebellion and civil war, however, the cause of many violent outbreaks in Africa is often glossed over or ignored by the news media and many who have not visited Africa are forced to utter something akin to “the Africans are fighting amongst themselves again”, a statement I have heard all too often.

One might be tempted to say that the African continent is finally receiving some small measure of attention from the global media and that the typical ambivalent attitude that has prevailed since the onset of the post-colonial period is finally being overturned. However, every story which we see coming out of Africa only goes to enforce the stereotype that this most beautiful of continents is nothing but a home to fatal diseases and continuous ethnic warfare. There is war in Africa, to be sure. The people studied in the present work, the Konkomba, have been accused by many in their home country of Ghana many of being savages or thugs always ready to war against their neighbour. This type of charge is levelled against many African ethnic groups and nations by people from all over the world, unfamiliar with the complexities of African society and history.

This is an academic work but I do hope that it does, in small part: contribute to a more general understanding of African peoples and why sometimes they are caught up in the mire of ethnic conflict.

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Finally, and most importantly I wish to thank Dr. Doyle Hatt. He gave me the autonomy and freedom to pursue this work in my own time. During bumps in the road he maintained his support and confidence that I would complete the work I had set out to do. The writing process took a little longer than anticipated and Dr. Hatt's patience was invaluable.

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Becoming Konkomba:
Recent Transformations in a Gur Society of Northern Ghana



Allan Charles Dawson

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CHAPTER 1: PEOPLE OF THE NORTH

But proud and industrious, oblivious to considerations of status...the Konkomba are making a useful contribution to the economy of Ghana as well as to their own pockets; their voice will soon be heard and the... hierarchy will receive a rougher jolt from these new migrants whom it has rejected than from the old ones whom it has assimilated long since. (Goody 1970: 128)

Ethnic Interaction in Northern Ghana: A Brief History of the Ethnographic

Situation

The Konkomba people live in the eastern half of the Republic of Ghana's Northern Region and across the border in the adjacent territory of Togo. The most recently

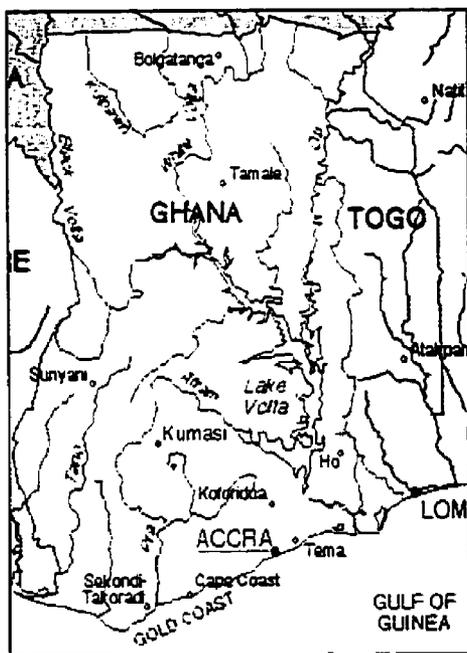


Figure 1.0 The Republic of Ghana

published census data indicates that there are approximately 400,000 Konkomba residing in Ghana and approximately 50,000 in the adjacent border region of Togo. The Konkomba have, for almost five hundred years, occupied the Oti flood plain, a region that suffers from flooding and severe drought. Stretching from the ridges of the Gambaga escarpment down into the northern edge of the Volta region, the Oti plain alternates between swampy fields of red-clay soil and flooded red canyons of impassable

crimson mud during the rains and arid dust bowls filled with patches of shrub grass during the dry season. During Harmattan, visibility drops down to a few hundred metres as the sky and the air is thick with airborne sand swept down from the Sahara. Shade temperatures during the vernal day regularly exceed 40 degrees Celsius and only occasion-

ally does one receive a dose of nocturnal relief from a downpour washed in from the Guinea coast.

The Konkomba refer to themselves as *Bekpokpam* and their language as *Lekpok-*

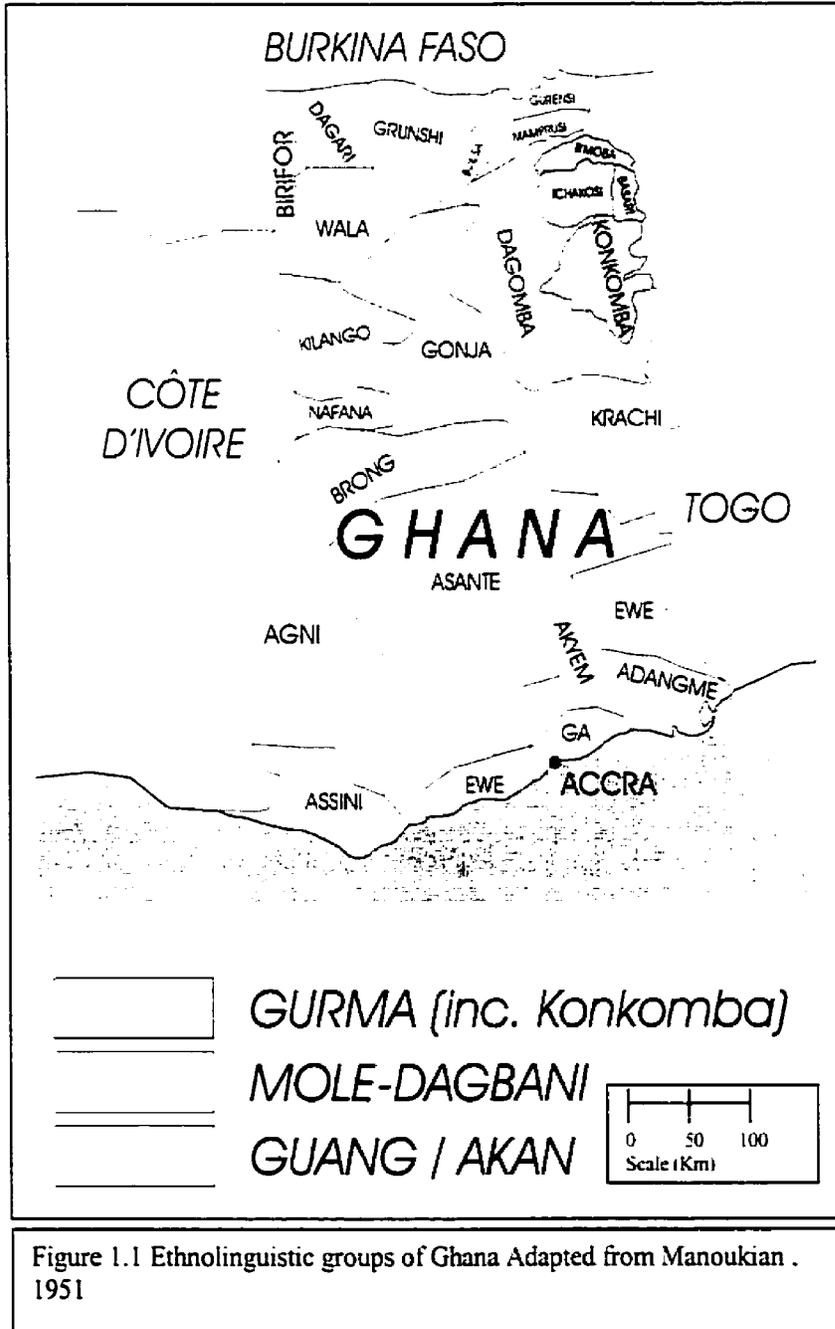


Figure 1.1 Ethnolinguistic groups of Ghana Adapted from Manoukian . 1951

pam. I will, as other writers have before me, use the term Konkomba to describe all of the tribes subsumed by the term *Bekpokpam*, and their territory will be referred to as Konkombaland. They are a Gur people, a branch of the Gur linguistic stock, whose language bears consider-

able resemblance to that spoken by the neighbouring Mole-Dagbani peoples. Linguistic

similarities aside though, the Konkomba have, since being forcefully displaced eastwards from their traditional centre of Yendi, maintained an almost continuously antagonistic re-

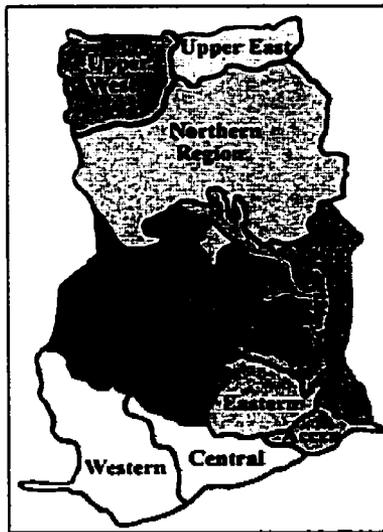


Figure 1.2 Regions of Ghana

lationship with their closest neighbours, the collected Dagbani peoples. The Dagomba, Nanumba and Mamprusi chiefdoms along with the ancient over-kingdom of Gonja who surround the Konkomba from the south-east, across the Oti plain, across the widening White Volta and north to the ridges of the Gambaga escarpment, have long considered the Konkomba to be backward and unsophisticated hinterland farmers. The Dagbani chiefdoms imposed territorial chiefship upon

the Konkomba, exacting tribute and compelling Konkomba compounds to acknowledge the authority of the Dagbani *Naa* or paramount chief (Rattray 1932).

Within Ghana the Konkomba are divided into two groups, the Northern Komba and Southern Bimotiev, which the Konkomba refer to as two of the "tribes" of *Bekpok-pam*. The Komba reside primarily within territory claimed by the Mamprusi chiefdom around the town of Nalergu, the traditional centre for the Mamprusi and the seat of power for the *Na-Yiri*, the Mamprusi paramount chief. This is the administrative region of East Mamprusi district. The Komba's traditional centre is at the village of Namong, a settlement, which, although it has the status of a *de facto* capital or tribal centre, has never witnessed the enstoolment of a paramount chief, the highest form of traditional authority found amongst the Voltaic peoples of West Africa. The same can be said of the southern Bimotiev Konkomba, whose traditional centre has until recently been the border town of

Sangur. Both groups of Konkomba have, throughout the colonial and post-colonial period resisted the investing of political authority in one particular individual, as their own traditional political organization has, as far as we know, always been decentralized, and their experience with the institution of chiefship, in their relations with the Dagbani peoples has been one of oppression and extortion by Dagbani chiefs. This relationship of subjugation is one that has been well documented by Tait, Skalnik and others and was constantly the focus of any discussion I had with Konkomba elders regarding transactions with their powerful neighbours. It is this resentment of chieftancy that I believe has been one of the most important and fundamental factors in moulding what has become Konkomba ethnicity over the past century.

Entrenched in the histories of all of the Dagbani chiefdoms and of the Gonja is a tradition of "making war" on the acephalous Konkomba (Barker 1991: 2). However, it is perhaps the Dagomba who are the most important of all of the Konkomba's neighbours as it was they who expelled the Konkomba from Yendi district, just east of White Volta. Originally all of Yendi district was Konkomba but local oral history suggests that approximately ten generations ago the Dagomba King, Na Luro, founded Yendi as his capital after being pushed eastward by the Gonja and thus displacing the Konkomba (Cardinall 1918: 45). The Konkomba still regard the earth shrine at Yendi as belonging to them.

The entire Konkomba worldview revolves around the earth and that which grows from the soil. Konkomba interviewees explained that the earth of Yendi is kin to the spirits of their ancestors and so in a very concrete way, denial of access to the earth of Konkomba Yendi by the Dagomba is an obstruction to the proper veneration of the an-

cestors. The Dagomba are aware that the “gods” of Yendi are not of their lineage and will not attempt to serve the earth and ancestor shrines of Yendi.

The Dagomba, you know, they can't touch it! The tree, it looks like a “croc” [crocodile]. They can't do the gods of Yendi because it belongs to us. Yendi is for us, the earth from Yendi, from the gods, is for us. Dagomba will say, after the war only, Konkomba get power from this place. *(Interview with Mr. JB/Tamale, 19/6/1999; the tree he is referring to is a large Baobab tree on the north side of Yendi)*

Dagomba have taken our gods only. But we can't go there and look after our land. Yendi is for us but they took it from us. And so we must make our gods somewhere else, but not at Yendi and its not correct, we shouldn't have to go somewhere else when we know that it is our land. *(Interview with Mr. LN/Sangur, 10/8/1999).*

The Dagomba invasion had the effect of expelling many Konkomba from their homes; and the mixed ethnic makeup of many Dagomba towns around Yendi suggests that the invaders absorbed or assimilated many others. Along the edge of the Dagomba advance, in areas where Konkomba territory overlapped with that of the Dagomba, the Konkomba were evidently slowly drawn into the structure of Dagomba society, yet remained steadfastly against foreign rule. Under British control, the Dagomba began to appoint Konkomba “liaison” or “sub-chiefs” in the Konkomba areas; however, these individuals possessed little authority throughout the colonial period and still wield only illusory power in the contemporary context. These men were still forced to gain the approval of the ‘elder for the land’ before enacting any political decision that might affect the village as a whole, and although the Konkomba had always, through their pattern of dual lineage leadership had two primary elders within each village, one for the land and one for the people, the individual who spoke for the land, always spoke with authority. Tait notes that during the 1940s, a Konkomba chief near Saboba was “forced to walk to each hamlet in turn to discuss matters” (Tait 1961: 11). In a Dagomba village, individu-

als involved in any decision making process would be forced to visit the palace of the chief and pay their respects. Today, as it was fifty years ago under colonialism, the Konkomba liaison chief still holds little real power. A similar pattern is found in areas where the Konkomba are subjects of other Dagbani paramounts.

To sum up, then, the Konkomba have lived in close proximity with the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Nanumba and Gonja for almost two-hundred and fifty years, and have continuously resisted any movement towards assimilation and incorporation and have been only too well able to strike back at any attempt at subjugation.

Despite the pressures on them, the Konkomba have been able to maintain themselves for a considerable period of time as a distinct and forceful group, maintaining their own "social structure and religious system, their own beliefs and culture throughout the centuries" (Tait 1961: 12). This forcefulness has been attained not solely through a fierce and aggressive opposition towards invaders although, after a number of quite bloody skirmishes, the Konkomba have emerged with the reputation of being almost indomitable warriors, but also through the mercantile savvy of a large number of Konkomba cultivators and village elders in the latter half of the twentieth century. Through skilful monopolization of the yam and transport business in the north of Ghana and penetrating into the markets of southern Akan country, the Konkomba have been able to establish themselves as important players in the economy of the Northern region. From Accra, the nation's capital, to Tamale in the north and throughout the Voltaic region, the Konkomba are considered to be the primary producers of yams and a number of grain crops such as sorghum, guinea corn and ground nuts.

Through projection and mobilization of a unique identity the Konkomba have

come to be perceived as a powerful, yet somewhat “unsophisticated” people, a people closely linked to the earth, happiest when their hands are in the soil. However, the perpetuation and manipulation of identity based on perceived notions does not entirely explain the process through which Konkomba ethnicity is forged. This project attempts to apprehend the multiplex forces that have combined to forge Konkomba ethnicity — forces that emerge from action across ethnic boundaries, and those that emanate from within.

The Voltaic Peoples

The Konkomba, people of the Gur ethnolinguistic cluster, are, more generally one of West Africa’s many Voltaic peoples. The Voltaic region is, to some extent, a microcosm of African society in that it displays a diverse array of political and social formations, from territorially dispersed acephalous groups to large hierarchical chiefdoms. The region, which stretches from the northern extremes of Ghana’s Lake Volta and the watershed regions of the Oti and Volta Rivers to the Niger Bend, is a mosaic of ethnic groups, divided into clusters on the basis of linguistic affiliations. In northern Ghana, the primary ethnolinguistic categories are¹:

GRUSI: This group, which straddles the border between Ghana and what is now Burkina Faso, includes the Builsa, Dagari, Degha, Grunshi, Lilse and Vagala peoples.

MOLE: The Mole peoples include the three large Dagbani chiefdoms that occupy the majority of the eastern half of Ghana’s northern Region. These chiefdoms are the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Nanumba. It also includes the Birifor, Gurenshi, Tallensi, Mossi, Naudeba and Wala peoples.

GUR: The Gur ethnolinguistic cluster includes the Konkomba, Basari, Bimobas or Bmoba and the Basari (considered by northern Komba to be

¹ Adapted from Murdock’s *Africa: Its Peoples and Culture History* (Murdock 1959: 80)

Konkomba).

TEM: The Tem and Kabre peoples who compose this group reside primarily in the southern border Togo border territory of the Northern region.

KWA: The Kwa peoples who inhabit the north of Ghana include the Tchakosi peoples, descendants of Akan mercenaries who served the Dagomba paramounts and the over-kingdom of Gonja, who control western Northern Region.

Political authority among the Voltaic peoples derives largely from a religious association with the cult of the earth. Every community in this region has a local headman or earth priest who is charged with maintaining the village's relation with the earth and with the ancestors. This individual is typically the eldest male of the lineage within the settlement that is understood by village members to have first occupied the land. Among the Voltaic peoples, the cult of the earth is the most important sanction of daily life. Throughout the region there exist similar beliefs and ritual conventions concerning the propitiation of the earth during times of harvest or when untilled land is converted to residential or agricultural use (Manoukian 1951: 83). These earth priests, through the privileged relations they have with the earth shrine within a settlement are also responsible for all acts of sacrifice and libation for the ancestors, whose veneration is essential to maintain a productive and healthy community. These ritual headmen are usually the ultimate authority within a community, most especially among the less politically complex ethnic groups. However, among some groups that have developed into minor states or chiefdoms, the authority of the earth elder has been usurped by paramount chiefs.

Prior to the rise of the Mossi and Dagbani chiefdoms, there appears to have been no history of regional or paramount chiefs in the Voltaic region, only *Tengdaan* or *Ten'dana*, called *Utindaan* among the Konkomba (Rattray 1932: xi). Among the Mossi

and Dagbani groups, these “Priest-Kings” evolved, from their connection with the earth, into territorial rulers not dissimilar from the monarchs found among the great kingdoms of the Akan peoples to the south. Among the Mole-Dagbani chiefdoms such as the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Nanumba, the connection with the earth shrine has been overshadowed by the importance of the monarchical paramount chief. Local chiefs have appropriated traditional authority within the community, or, in the case of the Dagbani paramounts, throughout the entire ethnic group, and have transferred political power into the realm of the secular. Among the chiefdoms, the earth elder may act as a judicial authority, settling disputes between lineages and clans, but he wields only ritual and moral authority and cannot enforce his judgements through physical means (Manoukian 1951: 50).

The majority of Voltaic groups that still maintain the primacy of the earth priest and which do not exhibit a complex form of chieftancy would seem to be, for the large part, the autochthonous residents of the territory they now inhabit. Upon these people, centuries ago, descended “small bands of strangers” from the north, organized regiments who were better armed, mounted, and familiar with the concept of a territorial kingship or chiefship. These marauders attempted to impose the notion of a secular territorial leader in place of the earth priest ruler (Rattray 1932: xi). The power of the *Ten'dana*, similar in many ways to the authority of the Ashanti *Asase Wara*, custodian of the ancestral spirits of the clan, was to be assumed by a territorial leader or *Naa* in the same way the authority of the *Asase Wara* had been superseded by the Ashanti office of *Hene* or king (Rattray 1932: xix) Among many groups, such as the Kusasi and Gurense, they were partially successful, among others however, particularly those of the Gur ethnolinguistic

cluster, this imposition was resisted and this opposition has helped constitute a part of the Gur people's identity as autonomous peoples. This struggle then, between the chiefdom and the acephalous agricultural group under the authority of an earth priest, has defined much of Voltaic history and is at the core of the Konkomba's relationship with neighbours.

The primary economic endeavour of the Voltaic peoples is agriculture and they cultivate all of the crops found through Africa's Sudanic belt including millet and sorghum. The Voltaic peoples have also borrowed extensively from other agricultural complexes, melons, mangoes, bananas and plantains, aubergines, rice, beans and tomatoes are all cultivated in the extremely heterogeneous soil of Volta watershed region (Murdock 1959: 81). The two most important crops grown in this region are yams and maize and which form the staple of most Voltaic diets. The Gambaga escarpment marks a clear ecological division in the distribution of crops in the Voltaic region. South of the escarpment, shifting cultivation is the rule and yams are grown on a larger scale, inter-mixed with maize, millet and sorghum.

Hunting, fishing and gathering occurs throughout the Voltaic country but provide only a moderate supplement to the diet and income of most peoples. Most Voltaic communities maintain at least a few cattle, primarily as draught animals, but no herds are maintained except among the Fulani herdsmen that move through the northern reaches of this region.

Trade is highly developed among all the Voltaic peoples and the weekly village market is the fulcrum around which regional economic activity revolves. The basis of most trade, prior to colonial intrusions, consisted of the exchange of livestock and manu-

factured goods for agricultural produce. Those groups, such as the Konkomba, that have concentrated all of their daily efforts into working the land have frequently maintained an economic relationship in village markets with regional butchers and weavers from neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Bimobas and Yoruba traders. A similar relationship exists between the Birifor and Wala of Ghana's Upper West Region (Murdock 1959: 82).

The characteristic pattern of settlement among the Voltaic peoples is a village of family compounds or homesteads. The compounds are composed of round huts of mud or sun-dried bricks with conical roofs of thatched grass. These huts are grouped into circular walled compounds. Around the compounds are numerous agricultural plots in which a variety of crops are planted. The compound farm is usually very fertile and productive as it is well-manured with animal excrement.

The Grusi, Mole, Gur and Tem peoples all seem to possess a pattern of social organisation characterized by patrilocal residence, patrilineal descent, segmentary lineages, patrilineal inheritance and kinship terminology of the Hawaiian type (Murdock 1959: 83). A settlement or village is usually inhabited by a localized major lineage, although in many settlements one often finds that this major lineage is divided into two contraposed lineage segments between which ritual roles are divided. These minor lineages are quartered in clan-"barrios" within the village with members of the senior lineage often occupying the more favourable land within the community.

Certain totemic beliefs, similar throughout the entire Voltaic region are associated with the lineage and the clan. Each lineage or clan has totemic avoidances, usually in association with strictures against the consumption or sacrifice of particular animals, and

these are obligatory for all members of a group (Manoukian 1951: 96). Avoidances are usually stated in the form "we do not eat such and such an animal". For example, among the Binamiin clan of the Komba, ducks are never consumed or sacrificed for the ancestors and are not usually kept in the homesteads. There appears to be no concept of a special tie or kinship between a group and its totem animal.

To sum up then, there appears to be a significant amount of congruity in the ritual and social formations of the Voltaic peoples. The primary point at which these people diverge is the way in which political authority is configured within these groups. Throughout this region we find groups in which there is little concentration of authority, or in which authority is limited to one particular aspect of quotidian life, and also regional chiefdoms in which there exist specialized, full time leaders who wield their power over the land and all the people. There are also a significant number of peoples, such as the Bimobas and Kabre, who have begun to move towards chiefdom-level complexity, groups in which the position of the earth priest has been weakened considerably. The Voltaic region presents a continuum of political complexity that has subtly altered and adapted what appears to be a common, or at any rate, very similar set of social configurations.

The Form of the Argument

The preceding history of Konkomba inter-ethnic interaction provides a brief synopsis of the major theme of this study. My principal aim in this work is to flesh out the processes through which Konkomba ethnicity, as it exists today, emerged. To this end, the fieldwork was conducted with a mind to the ways in which the Konkomba have shaped themselves in response to the exigencies of interaction with neighbouring groups

and with the nation state of Ghana. The study attempts to analyse the patterns of clanship and the territorial layout of Konkomba clans and kin-based compounds and how the web of interlinking kin and non-kin networks serve to facilitate a certain form of ethnic solidarity. Remaining aware that ethnic groups are “categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people” (Barth 1969: 10), the study will attempt to examine the actions of particular individuals within groups, the place of the charismatic entrepreneur within the social group and their impact on the movement of the group. Looking internally again, the persistence of locally situated perceptions rooted in ritual practices that combine to create a certain “Konkomba-ness” will also be considered and examined here as a powerful force in the creation of Konkomba ethnicity.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Konkomba were forced to move eastwards, not in search of new cultivable land but in response to the administrative and military pressures of neighbouring chiefdoms. Through movement they created communities based not just on lineage and kinship but also on territorial proximity with non-related lineages, communities based on neighbourhood. These communities took on distinctive shapes and structures through interlocking kin and spatial networks which thrust forth a number of potent and charismatic individuals in Konkomba, men born of the lineage of the earth elder, the true authority within the village, who were able, I was told, to organize Konkomba cultivation across Konkombaland towards the end of overthrowing the control of Dagbani paramounts. These individuals were able to mobilize the Konkomba disdain for the yoke of foreign chiefs and the Konkomba desire to control the fruits of their labour. The effective social

groupings resulting from the actions of these individuals were organisational categories in which the creation and maintenance of antagonistic boundaries was essential.

However, it was the “cultural stuff” enclosed within these boundaries, — in the case of the Konkomba, a devotion to cultivation and for the earth, — which fashioned not only the nature of the relationship between the Konkomba and their neighbours but also the essence of what it means to be Konkomba.

From a strict Barthian perspective, Konkomba ethnicity, as it exists today, might be a very different beast if the Konkomba had less organisationally complex neighbours (Barth 1969: 19). However, what it means to be Konkomba also flows from an attachment to cultivation and to the land and from a desire to see that only the Konkomba may from profit and be protected by the fruit of the land that they reside on. Understanding this passion, the individuals it created and the ritual and history in which it is rooted, are as important in the understanding of Konkomba ethnicity, as is apprehending the processes of interaction that occur at the social boundaries of Konkombaland.

Throughout the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth century, it appears the Konkomba had always paid their tribute to the Dagbani paramounts and regional chiefs in the form of agricultural products such as guinea corn, sorghum or yams, depending on the growing cycle. During the middle third of the twentieth century yams began increasing in importance as the staple starch crop of Ghana’s north and throughout the northern Voltaic region. In June of each year, the time when the first yam mounds are excavated and the harvest is brought in, the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Nanumba paramounts would typically require a particularly hefty payment in the form of fresh red

and white guinea yams. Konkomba fields were able to provide enough produce to pay tribute and feed the Konkomba themselves but it seems that there was little left in the way of surplus for sale or storage. The chiefdoms would consume little of this produce, preferring instead to transport a considerable portion of the crop to Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti Empire and further south to Accra.

Within each village one typically finds two fictively related agnatic lineages. This form of dual leadership, present in nearly all Gur society (Horton 1971: 94), and that appears to have arisen from patterns of migration and lineage fission, provides for one elder within each village who oversees all ritual matters concerning land and ancestor rites and for a second elder "for the people" who administers interpersonal disputes and inter-village matters. The elder "for the land" is the most venerated individual within a village and it is his lineage that is senior in all matters.

During the late nineteen fifties, just after Ghana's independence, in the village of Namong, the traditional centre for the Komba, individuals within the earth lineage began organizing trips to the local centres of Wale Wale and to the regional capital of Tamale to sell Konkomba yams from the entire district. The profits received from these yams were used in part in lieu of the traditional tribute to the Dagbani paramounts but were also sufficient to purchase trucks and other vehicles that could be used to transport greater quantities of produce further afield. These vehicles were owned primarily by Konkomba men who had moved to cities like Accra and Kumasi and who had become urban brokers for Konkomba agricultural produce. Eventually, the Konkomba began to become the primary cultivators of yams in the Northern Region, and Mamprusi, Dagomba and Nanumba revenues began to decline. This activity began to spread across Konkombaland,

out of northern Mamprusi country down into Nanumba held territory. The Konkomba now own fleets of cargo lorries that regularly ply the main highway from Tamale to Accra, laden with yams from the fields of small compound horticulturalists. This has led to the Konkomba being labelled as “interlopers” or “migrants from Togo” by many disgruntled neighbours. Indeed, even Goody in 1970 was still under the impression that the Konkomba were recent arrivals from the east (Goody 1970: 128). Ultimately, that which helped to define Konkomba — the defiance and besting of a neighbouring chiefdom — was based on the cultural beliefs found within the boundaries of a social group. Surely an examination then, of those beliefs that, through their emergence and development affect inter-group transaction deserves as much attention as the transaction itself.

Situating the Argument: Ethnicity

What do anthropologists mean when they talk about ethnicity, and more specifically, what do anthropologists mean when they speak of ethnicity in Africa? Ethnicity is an often ambiguous category that is no longer solely the domain of anthropologists, sociologists and other social scientists. It is now a part of the general lay-lexicon used as frequently by political commentators and community action groups as professional ethnographers. The term itself is, for anthropologists, as for most of the social sciences, a relatively new one, only truly becoming part of current usage in the 1960s. Wolf sees its current ubiquity in ethnographic work as a consequence of the general shift in analytical framework from the notion of ‘race’ to ‘culture’ (1994: 4). Jenkins however, views it as part of a re-conceptualization of the ultimate unit of study in anthropology; a movement away from ‘tribe’ towards ‘ethnic group’ and the ramifications such ‘groups’ have for

state of nationhood (1986: 172). These arguments can be traced to Aiden Southall's seminal paper which spoke specifically to African ethnicity and called for the replacement of 'tribe', a term then current among many Africanists, by "ethnic group". His argument was that the former term was not a genuine ethnic term and simply referred to a nominal group people 'over there', or was bestowed on the other to designate all those who spoke a different language. Tribe, Southall believed, was an ostensible term that simply meant, in a very ambiguous way, 'the people' and moreover, carried with it a number of derogatory connotations that offended the subjects of ethnography (Southall 1970: 32-37).

A second charge levelled against the term tribe resulted from Leach's influential critique of tribal reifications as part of the legacy of earlier ethnographers who had "often only managed to discern the existence of 'a tribe' because he took it as axiomatic that this kind of cultural entity must exist" (Leach 1954: 291). However, with the analytical shift from tribe to ethnicity has come a host of new problems. To be sure, the objections made to the term tribe as part of the western tradition of assuming that bounded ethnic entities always existed in isolation with the characteristics of "atemporality" and atavism were legitimate. With the universal acceptance of the new term came the problem of dealing with the comparison of ethnic phenomena. Fardon believes that the rejection of the term 'tribe' in favour of ethnicity emphasised a viewpoint that stressed a grasp of context but with the assumption that ethnic differences could only be of a single type (Fardon 1987: 183). It needs to be understood that ethnicity is a polythetic category, which is brought about and composed of different things in different societies (Fardon 1996: 119). Among some groups, particularly those which live in an extremely polyethnic region with many

cleavages, ethnicity may often be defined solely through opposition or through fundamental differences in ideology, a classic we/they dichotomy. The boundary between the Asante and others, for example, is maintained, in part, because others cannot hook into or access the matrilineally-based links through land ownership, succession and inheritance rights which affect the peoples' lives (de la Gorgendière 1996: 11). In other areas, ethnicity might simply be reckoned as the difference between those who live in the hills and those on the plains.

Ethnicity is always understood to be defined by the nature of the cleavage between two groups. To have salience however, this cleavage must be accepted as involving an important concept or issue. If for example one group of individuals is barred from achieving desired ends, as we will discover, the Konkomba were, then a potentially salient issue, as Cohen understands it, is available for mobilization (1978: 196). This can lead to a belief in ethnic unity based on all of the diacritics that the particular group has in common. In a polyethnic society where a potentially salient issue, such as religious differences, is made to seem less of a problem. The salient issue has to be taken and shaped by instigators within the group.

What differentiates one understanding of ethnicity from another are the mechanisms of self-identification. The process of creating ethnicity is regionally and historically specific and is an idiom of personal and collective identity (Lentz 1995a: 324). Ethnicity can provide the basis of a moral community; it can also become a resource for client networks and political mobilization. Ethnicity can represent the difference between an acephalous ethnic group and a large chiefdom and ethnicity can represent the difference between goat herders and cattlemen. Ethnicity is ultimately however, the vehicle

through which differences between them and us are articulated, a grouping of assumptions, fraught with the influence of tradition and dynamic manipulation about one's identity, derived from membership within a group. With an understanding of what ethnicity is, we turn now to the ways in which ethnicity has been studied in Africa.

In approaching the topic of ethnicity in the African continent, one is faced, from the very onset with the looming presence that Fredrik Barth's *Ethnic groups and Boundaries* (1969) has in this field and how this work has long towered over any analysis of identity and inter-group transaction in Africa. This approach, which privileges the interaction between ethnic groups and the negotiation of boundaries over the description and analysis of the "cultural stuff" within the boundary has come to be widely regarded as the cornerstone of the instrumentalist approach to ethnicity and as one of the foundations of neo-structuralism. Instrumentalist or generative approaches attempted to refute "primordialist" or essentialist explanations of ethnicity as fundamental, arising from ineffable qualities of human society; locating the forces of ethnicity away from internal dynamics, towards the end of almost exclusively understanding inter-group interactions (Eller and Coughlan 1993).

A number of recent Africanist works have treated this transactional approach almost as dogma. Baxter's work on the Oromo asserts that identity necessarily needs the presence of other comparable identities in order to define itself and that Oromo identity is defined in opposition to other comparable national identities (Baxter, Hultin, and Triulzi 1996). Schilder's study of the Mundang people of northern Cameroon focuses primarily upon their relationship with the Islamic Fulbe and on how the Mundang carve out a place and an identity for themselves within the context of the wider society. To accomplish

this task, he employs the notion that ethnicity is not static and involuntary but rather that it is shaped by the perceptions of both “insiders” and “outsiders”. Consequently, Schilder believes that ethnic boundaries are rather ambiguous and constantly shifting. He suggests that this instrumentalist approach is particularly appropriate for Africa, where he feels that ethnicity is a relatively new concept and also because it transcends the determinism inherent in the “primordial explanation” (Schilder 1994). Schilder’s main argument is that Mundang identity maintains no objective existence of its own but is determined by the Mundang peoples’ desire to assert their culture within the wider society. He feels that the Mundang identity is defined and indeed created by the group’s cultural relationship towards the Fulbe but that any borrowed aspect is denied in order to maintain Mundang “timelessness and uniqueness”. This analysis seems to correspond perfectly with the general trend in West Africa. Groups that live with the omnipresence of Islam typically define themselves in terms of whether they have been Islamised or not. One’s ethnic affiliation is determined not by birth or geography but in the way in which one earns a living and in the religion that one follows or to which one converts (Schilder 1994).

Boundaries contains a number of similar examples. Haaland discusses the Fur and Baggara people of the Western Sudan (Haaland 1969: 59). Both are Muslims and interact with each other ritually and in the market place. However, the articulation of their relationship is based on the “complementarity” of the goods they produce. The economic system is such that as an individual alters their mode of subsistence based on the ecological constraints placed on cattle husbandry within the region they are often incorporated into the other group as a result of shared criteria for “value judgment” and codes of conduct. In this case, it is economic factors alone that determine the difference

between Fur and Baggara; there exists not a hint of primordialism about these two categories.

However, without diminishing in any way the value of the contribution that this group of “Barthians” have made, I would suggest the transactionalist framework is not without its limitations. Barth sees social organization as a product of the choices made by individuals from the possibilities available and he goes on to describe how these choices accumulate to transform and mould structure. Barth believes that individuals in following the choices made by those who through role manipulation attain higher status, choose what is in their best interest. However, what they choose will always, for Barth, be what they value most. The argument is circular (Wallman 1986: 232). The reason for choice cannot always be considered to be rational. What of individuals who choose to accentuate their ethnic role even when assuming that role carries with it a significant social stigma. The process of boundary maintenance is not in question, but rather the motivation for making one particular choice over the other.

Another criticism of Barth’s approach has been its innate ahistoricism. Barth focused attention away from the social level to the individual, thereby removing the process of change through transaction out of a historical context. Recent work by Barth has sought to remedy this situation (Barth 1984). Barth now sees the transformations wrought by transaction as “part of an ongoing process” within the “streams of tradition (Barth 1984). It would seem that this acknowledgement of history entails what Jenkins calls a search for pattern within a wider social arena (Jenkins 1994: 198).

Paine believes that the aggressive, market based conception of maximizing personal choice imbued in humans by Barth suggests a rather ethnocentric and obtrusive

position (Paine 1974: 29). We must remember that this problem, if it indeed exists, is one which faults the mechanism for choice accumulation. Whatever the mechanism for the creation of social constructs, the interactionist nature of these constructs does not necessarily have to be discarded. Paine's statement is founded on his belief that Barth fails to demonstrate the link between choice and integration of accumulation into a negotiable structure (Paine 1974: 20). He also notes that there exists a lack of common structure or commensurability between the definitions shuttled back and forth between communities. This problem, he believes, negates any possibility of transaction (Paine 1974: 21). Essentially, can we assume that the process of grasping the nature of the "other" is universal? I don't believe that such an assumption is necessary. It is, after all, only in the subject group's understanding of their system of categorization and subsequent response that the definition has any weight. Comparisons of the emic nature of definition do not, I believe, affect categorization.

A final objection to the instrumentalist approach is one which offers that Barth's accumulated whole, the form resulting from the collection of individual choices, has, for a number of theorists taken on a life of its own in much the same way as Geertz's ineffable qualities did (Geertz 1973). This reification results in placing the result of accumulation ahead of the processes of decision making. One cannot, (and I believe that Barth did not intend for anyone to do so), assume that the existence of a form of social organization is more than the sum of its parts. It is the process that is important, not the ends. Ethnicity as a social entity, exists simultaneously with and because of the process of interaction; the two cannot be severed and it is the cultural differences that are communicated in the processes of internal and external definition that make comparisons

of social formations possible. The actual difference that exists between cultures can often prove difficult to approach; however, the communication of cultural difference between groups can readily be observed. What must be remembered though is processes of differentiation, decisions made in response to actions, are as much a product of interaction with others as they are of the time and place in which they are made. The privilege afforded to process cannot come at the expense of neglecting historical and social fact.

Within a typical Barthian analysis, all members of a particular social group are often seen in combined opposition to other distinct groups, very often neglecting the sometimes subtle but often radical processes of intra-group differentiation. One vital component in constructing Konkomba ethnicity and indeed more broadly, who the Konkomba are, is an understanding that despite a newly forged sense of unity and solidarity, brought about in no small part by a combined resistance to the control of neighbouring chiefdoms, is that within Konkomba there exist significant regional and tribal differences, most especially in ritual and religious contexts. Konkomba land and ancestor rites are, as noted earlier, intimately connected with the almost sacrosanct devotion that Konkomba have for all things from the earth. This devotion is played out in their relationship with the Dagbani chiefdoms in the market, but is also diagnostic of significant diversity between northern and southern Konkomba clans, groupings that have enjoyed incongruous associations with their neighbours. How is one to grapple with nuanced internal differences in ritual and practice in a study that would seem to necessarily require a search for factors of contradistinction between groups rather than within? I believe that a number of analytical projects brush over many of the unique and

widely varying forms of ritual behaviour in an attempt to broadly understand the negotiation of social solidarity. This study will not go in this direction. The goal of this work is to understand what makes the Konkomba unique, different, in the shifting melange of ethnicity that is Northern Ghana, but not at the expense of providing a rich and detailed description.

A rigorously Barthian approach to ethnicity and boundary management often ignores the power relationships which exist within social groups. Ethnic groups are not homogenous; internal struggles are vitally important in determining how a group reckons itself. As I have already briefly outlined, the recent accumulation of Konkomba economic and social capital within Northern Region has been a direct result of the political machinations of a number of important individuals within Konkombaland. The struggles which took place within Konkomba households, compounds and villages, struggles that have led to the Konkomba's financial ascendancy in the North, were one's which grew out of the dyadic opposition that exists within every Konkomba village; between "first-comers" and "late-comers".

The Konkomba, more regionally heterogeneous and diverse than first recorded by Tait, may be considered to be a group out on a frontier, albeit a local one. Although, not entirely the ethnically ambiguous marginal society suggested by Kopytoff, the Konkomba do present something of a miscellany of regional cultural traits. It is a society that corresponds in a number of ways to Kopytoff's category. Konkomba political institutions, offices whose power is ambiguous at best, are frequently called into question, not only by the governing powers of regional metropolises but also from within. All of Konkomba territory is now divided between 'landowners' or 'first-comers' and

'latecomers', resulting in a high degree of complementarity between groups within a district (Horton 1971: 95). The 'latecomers' need to acquire access to cultivable land from the 'land owners', those who first founded a village, whilst the 'first comers' require the 'late comers' to help them hold their land.

This thesis does not attempt to go completely against the grain of Barth's project. Indeed, in an attempt to tease out the complex nature of Konkomba ethnicity, this project will most certainly pay attention to the forces of ethnicization that reside at the borders of social categories. However, it will also, through a more detailed and focused account of social behaviour within the group, avoid some of the analytical shortcomings that have oft been reproduced by many ethnographers and social historians working in Africa. I believe that this thesis will provide more than just an account of how a particular ethnic grouping conducts itself and thereby defines itself in the context of regional and more broadly Ghanaian society. It will trace an ethnogenesis out of pre-colonial history, through the colonial period and into the modern era, providing in essence, a social history of Konkomba ethnicity. By focusing on regional differences in religious praxis in the field of earth and ancestor veneration, it will also attempt to provide a glimpse into the richness and "Konkomba-ness" if you will, of quotidian life in Konkombaland. A dual focus will thus be achieved: Firstly, one that vectors in on the dynamic and Barthian fluidity of ethnic boundaries, and secondly, a centripetal focus, centre-seeking, striving to flesh out some of the minutiae of Konkomba existence, often regarded as superfluous or irrelevant by a number of theory-bound ethnicity researchers who have regarded the "cultural-stuff" within to be incidental to the process of transaction.

Critics of Barth's model suggest that the transactionalist framework necessarily

conflicts with ethnicity as an essential characteristic of the human condition. However, ethnicity, as a key component of the process of socialization can become as much a part of one's root identity as gender (Jenkins 1997: 79). The processes of internal definition and external categorization become devices for understanding historical events, but are also part of quotidian life. Clearly, for an element of human existence as visceral and as close to the ground as ethnicity, what is needed is a methodological approach which attempts to keep in perspective the power of ethnic attachments. An approach that does not incur the same hegemonic mistakes of earlier, unchanging views of language and kinship but one which does recognize the importance of experience formed from these two focal aspects of existence.

In the present work, the approach used to apprehend ethnicity accepts the instrumentalist framework but also attempts to incorporate what the individual within a particular society says about their position and their people's position within the ethnographic setting. As Moerman notes, "Anthropologists point out that everyone's viewpoint is rooted in his social position, yet suppose that their own observations are unmotivated and their motives invisible" (Moerman 1968: 67). Barth suggested that we put aside the 'cultural stuff' of an ethnic group (1969). That it is the process of boundary construction and maintenance that is crucial. However, when looking at the discourse within a plural society about what accounts for difference, it is invariably the 'cultural stuff' or the inventory of differences that are listed and not process. Surely then, this 'stuff' accounts for something.

Research Methods

The research for this thesis largely made use of oral accounts and interviews, al-

though some written sources were used. I gathered Konkomba oral data by conducting interviews throughout the Northern region with 67 individuals who declared themselves as being Konkomba, all of whom were adult males and females ranging in age from 20 to approximately 80 years of age. 52 of the Konkomba respondents were male, 15 were female. Interviews were conducted from the months of May to September in 1999 throughout the Northern Region of Ghana. I also interviewed approximately 40 individuals from neighbouring chiefdoms; these included members of the Gonja, Nanumba and Dagomba ethnic groups. All interviewees were assured of anonymity during the introduction process as I provided explanations of what I was doing in the region. In interviews with more senior individuals in Konkombaland, a local man who spoke English accompanied me to translate and act as a greeter and introducer, especially when meeting village elders or chiefs. The other interviews were conducted directly by me in English. All interviews with non-Konkomba were conducted in English.

There never occurred a point when formalised interview schedules or questionnaires were used. Questions were typically open-ended, or emerged from casual conversations over a pot of pito beer. They were an invitation for all present to tell stories about their history, their family, their lineage, relationships with neighbours, local and distant and their passion, working the land. Questions were often couched in such a way so as to stimulate discussions of regional interactions with other ethnic groups, and no individual was ever reticent about discussing local factionalism. Questions were also directed at local activities observed in the course of living in a Konkomba village.

Informants were never asked directly what they broadly thought "being Konkomba" meant however, I would frequently receive a summary statement such as "Kon-

komba are farmers, we farm” or “Konkomba feed all of Ghana” but at no time did I ask a Konkomba individual to describe what they felt it was to be Konkomba. Certainly personal narratives are grounded in experiences and history, often very contradictory experiences; however, in reconciling similarities and incongruities one is forced to construct a coherent picture of patterns both of behaviour and interaction within and beyond the group.

Written sources include documents from the regional archives in Tamale and the national archive in Accra. It also includes old research reports deposited by ethnographers such as Goody and Tait at the University of Ghana at Legon. There was also considerable newspaper and media research done in Accra at the University of Ghana. Scanning newspaper reports of the continued and often very bloody movements across Konkombaland by various ethnic groups was extremely useful in providing this researcher with an idea of how the national media in Ghana and indeed how Ghanaians themselves perceive the Konkomba. These reports were never taken to be representative of historical fact, but rather, as expressive of how the developing nation state constructs a marginal acephalous people such as the Konkomba.

Research was conducted in the entire eastern half of Northern Region. From Wale Wale, close to the border with Upper East Region, as far south as Salaga, East to Yendi and very often across the border into neighbouring Konkomba country in Togo, which economically and culturally is as much part of Ghanaian territory as it is officially Togolese. Residency periods in villages, town and cities lasted anywhere from six weeks to three days. In the traditional centres of Namong and Saboba, I spent three weeks and one month respectively, recording data through interviews and observations of religious,

agricultural and household activities. The rest of the time was spent visiting the numerous outlying hamlets and villages by trails that only vaguely resembled actual roads.

Most importantly, special care was taken to ensure that the data collected did not solely focus on one aspect of Konkomba existence. The interview and observational data presented here provides a glimpse into the activities of daily life and the turning points in recent Konkomba history; both of which are crucial to an understanding of Konkomba identity.

Chapter 2 discusses the early history of the Konkomba people and their ethnic origins. It will illustrate the patterns of movement of the Konkomba over the territory they now inhabit in response to the expansion of the Mole-Dagbani chiefdoms from the North and the consequences said expansion had for Konkomba economy and political institutions. Chapter 2 will also discuss the history of Konkomba subjugation by regional chiefdoms and the processes by which this imposed form of administration was used by the British to extend their usual pattern of indirect rule in the northern territories of Ghana, then the Gold Coast. It will introduce a number of important individuals whose foresight and charisma enabled the Konkomba to circumvent the regional metropolises of power in order to position the Konkomba to take advantage of the development of the national markets in Ghana in the post-colonial period.

Chapter 3 will explore the patterns of clanship and alliance set up by the forced migration and displacement that the Dagbani expansion prompted. It will discuss the forms of territorial and lineage segmentation that are seen in Konkombaland and how these patterns of segmentation directly influence the forms of political authority found within Konkomba. To reiterate, the Konkomba seem to have an intense dislike for the

institution of chief and see it is as an office designed to do little more than fleece villagers of their crops and their cash. This perception is set up by past dealings with powerful regional chiefs, determines the nature of association with neighbouring chiefs, and is possibly a consequence of the form of migration that the Konkomba have undergone. Chapter 3 will also discuss some of the political and structural foundations of the Konkomba attachment to the earth, and the ways in which this connection is played out in offices of authority.

Chapter 4 focuses on the religious and spiritual complex of the Konkomba – particularly how the earth priest and earth / ancestor rites reflect and determine much of what is Konkomba ethnicity. In the religious and social life of the Konkomba patterns of lineage and power distribution are directly linked to the “cult of the earth”, and so an understanding of religious practices is concomitant to understanding power brokering and negotiation in Konkomba.

From a discussion of Konkomba religious behaviour necessarily flows an exploration of ecological and agricultural activities. Chapter 5 deals with modes of farming and cultivation and the impact that certain crops have had on the Konkomba economy. The Konkomba passion for the land will be related in the words of Konkomba farmers and the reader will hopefully understand the devotion that these people have for the fruit of the earth. Rudimentary demographic information is presented to display the age at which Konkomba youth are pulled from school in order to work the land and discussion of the low level of literacy in villages is used to begin an analysis of the perception that the Konkomba are nothing more than unsophisticated ruffians, happy only with dirt on their hands, hefting a shovel.

The Konkomba farmer making war on his enemies has become something of a cliché for the national press. Violence, dismissed simply as something salubrious by the press or as the Daily Graphic put it in late February of 1994, as “a flare up over the sale of a Guinea-fowl”, seems to ignite instantly into all-out assaults by the Konkomba upon their neighbours. Consequently, the Konkomba have become the folk-devils of the North, a people who are perceived by many as little more than marauding gangsters who have, in the words of one Ghanaian citizen, “lost the sympathy of all peace loving people”.

This perception of the Konkomba as unsophisticated, uneducated thugs is one that is projected time and again in the Ghanaian media. The most recent example of this depiction occurred during the recent conflict in 1994 in which over 2000 individuals were



Figure 1.3. The elders (seated left) and earth elder or *Utindaan* (right) of Nansuan village, East Mamprusi District.

killed and many more were left displaced from their homes.

Chapter 6 unravels the ways in which the Konkomba are depicted and understood

regionally and nationally by focusing on Konkomba and regional attitudes to the numerous conflagrations that have taken place over the past fifty years. It is my contention that

the Konkomba are aware of how they are perceived and actively play up to the oft-negative image that their neighbours and the country possess in order to accrue clout and capital. Here again will see the ways in which influential individuals within a community direct the image and movement that a society presents. Members of a new elite, the Konkomba youth association, have recently taken up the reigns of leadership within Konkomba. These individuals have been instrumental in directing the future and the nature of Konkomba society. This chapter will examine said direction.

CHAPTER 2: POLITICAL ORIGINS AND RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURING PEOPLES

The Konkomba claim to have always, despite assertions by the Dagbani chiefs that the Konkomba are nothing more than marauding migrants, inhabited the region which slopes down from the Gambaga escarpment to the headwaters of the Oti and down through its flood plain their home, with the villages of Namong and until recently, Yendi, as the traditional centres of the two principal Ghanaian branches of the Konkomba. After an extremely bloody conflict in the early part of the nineteen forties that lasted for almost four years (Skalnik 1987: 308), the southern Konkomba, the Bimotiev tribe, were forced to move away from their home in what is now south-eastern Dagbon to look for new lands in the territory of Nanun, around the settlement of Bimbilla, traditional centre for the Nanumba (Tamakloe 1931). The Konkomba found in neighbouring Togo are largely Komba and Bas Konkomba who interact primarily with the Komba community surrounding the Gambaga escarpment.

Skalnik suggests that events such as the conflicts in the 1940s and the far more bloody clashes in the 1980s were crucial in the evolution of modern Konkomba ethnicity. The Konkomba, who up until the beginnings of their political opposition to the Nanumba and Dagomba over the issue of chiefship had little or no linguistic identity nor any form of political expression as a people (Skalnik 1987: 308). I am inclined to agree with this assertion, however, I believe that this observation ignores the fact that the Konkomba were united by one very important tradition, a strong ritual connection with the land, a connection which I believe motivated and provided the infrastructure of communication

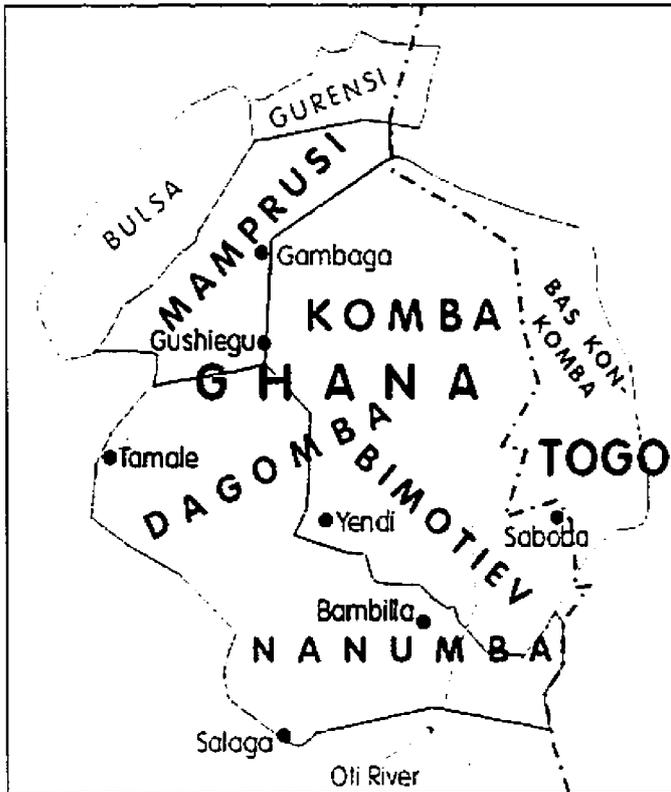
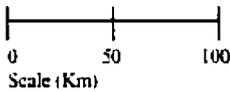


Figure 2.0 Map showing the approximate distribution of various chieftaincies and peoples mentioned in the text.



for the form of ethnic interaction that will be under consideration in this chapter.

I would like to suggest that in addition to the potent antagonism which developed between the Konkomba and their Dagbani neighbours in the twentieth century, there has probably existed a strong tradition of resistance to the political institutions and leadership of the Dagbani peoples amongst both northern Komba

Konkomba and Southern Bimotiev Konkomba, despite Nanumba and Dagomba assumptions made during the colonial period that Dagombas Naa's or paramounts were "known and trusted by the Konkombas" (Stainland 1975: 73). The basic difference in type, between a centralized, stratified state and a leaderless, acephalous people would seem to be sufficient to explain a history of antagonism. When the Dagbani traditions of denying the Konkomba access to their sacred places and exacting tribute in the form of agricultural produce are considered, this ill feeling is better understood.

Konkomba / Dagbani relationships have thus shaped the political landscape of the eastern half of Ghana's Northern Region for a considerable period of time. Before em-

barking on an analysis, however, of the Konkomba position in this ethnic milieu, a discussion of their origins and political traditions, such as they are known, is called for.

Towards this end I turn now largely to oral history related to me during my time among the elders of Komba and Bimotiev as well as the work of David Tait. These two sources however, seem to diverge in a number of places.

To begin, it seems now that the Konkomba recognise the Basari people, who reside to the northeast of the Komba, and northeast of the Gambaga escarpment, as full Konkomba. Three main tribes have been identified as Konkomba, all of who speak a variant of *Lekpokpam*. These are the Komba, the Bimotiev and Basari or Bas Konkomba. I was unable during the course of my fieldwork to visit the Basari areas and thus to gain a sense of their sense of their relationship to the Konkomba. Tait notes that the Basari, who, whatever their precise linguistic status, are certainly Gur speakers, resemble the Konkomba considerably in their form of settlement and compound, and both use the term Bimotiev, or *Bemwatib* as Tait renders it in his transcription to describe the more southern people, indeed Bimotiev translates in *Lekpokpam* to mean the river people. However, he also notes that there exist a number of cultural differences in the domain of magic and religion. Basari diviners are all women whereas among both the Bimotiev and Komba, all diviners are male. Also, in Basari, there are reportedly significantly more curative shrines in and around their compounds than found among the other two tribes (Tait 1961: 2). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the Komba have very few shrines or medicine piles, mound of medicinal leaves, in their settlements, preferring instead to concentrate their rituals onto the earth and its formations and landmarks as a focus of ritual. It would seem that the recent inclusion of the Basari as full Konkomba is in response to the aid

that the Basari provided to southern Bimotiev Konkomba during their clashes with the Nanumba in the early 1980s and 1990s around Bimbilla. I believe that the Konkomba, especially the Komba, have always considered the Basari to be part of their ethnic group, however, it seems that this relationship was not maintained until recently due to the position of Tchakosi and Bimobas settlers on the land around the Gambaga escarpment cutting off the Bas from Komba traditional territory. It was frequently the practice of young Konkomba males to ferry weapons to the Bimotiev by carrying them in nondescript vehicles up along the Togo side of the border, through Basari country and with their complicity, and into Nanun. Many Konkomba today seem to think of the Basari as one of the three sons of the Konkomba's eponymous ancestor, the other two being Komba and Bimotiev. To be sure, ethnicity and alliance don't transmute into one another quite as easily as this assertion made by the Konkomba would seem to suggest. However, I was informed of this incorporation by mainly young Konkomba elite and businessmen, individuals who do seem intent on solidifying some notion of Konkomba unity and military readiness. The few Basari people that I met did confirm their very close association with the Konkomba since the 1981 conflict and called the Konkomba their "brothers". however, I could find no historical data of an ethnic association between the Konkomba and Basari except for the word of one or two informants in Nakpanduri who told me that the Basari would help the Komba when they were raided by the Tchakosi.

The Komba and the Mamprusi

Now, the Komba, or as Tait sometimes refers to them, the Mamprusi Konkomba, live, as Tait's label would suggest, alongside and under the regional control of the Mamprusi paramount chief at Nalerigu. The Mamprusi refer to themselves more commonly as

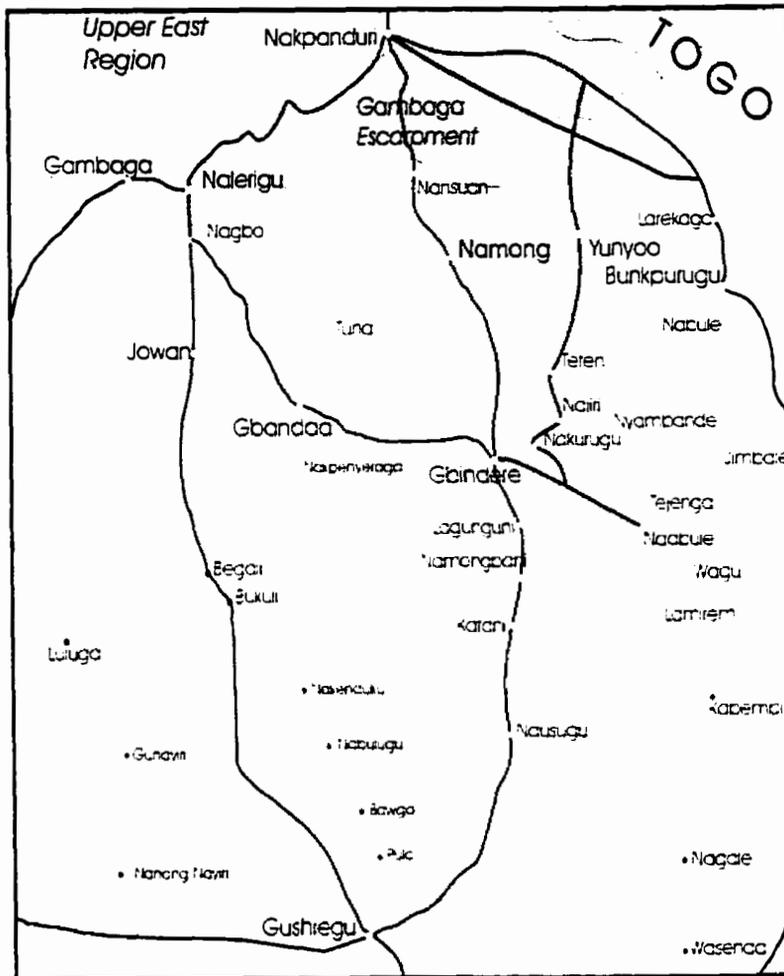
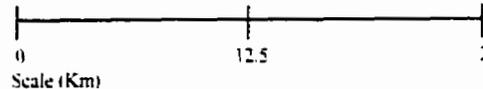


Figure 2.1 Administrative district of East Mamprusi, Northern Region, Ghana.



“Dagbamba”, a term used by most residents of the north to refer to the Dagomba and Nannumba, stressing the kindred relationship that the Mamprusi, and more importantly, the Mamprusi king, the *Na-Yiri*, has with the chiefdoms found further south (Drucker-Brown 1967: 15). Residing along the

southern slopes of the Gambaga escarpment, the Mamprusi scarp as it is called, the Komba have apparently never been forcefully displaced from the territory in which they would seem to be autochthonous residents. Komba clans still have access to their earth shrines and one might be tempted to agree with Tait’s belief that relations between the Komba (it should be noted that Tait himself never actually used the term Komba to describe these people) and the Mamprusi, the first of the Mole-Dagbani chiefdoms to sweep

down from Mossi country, have usually been friendly (Tait 1961: 4). However, in oral traditions that I collected, the Anufo or Tchakosi people, descendants of Akan mercenaries hired by the Mamprusi, I was informed, did in fact war against the Konkomba at the behest of the Na-Yiri, the Mamprusi Naa, in contradiction to Tait's assertion that this never occurred (Tait 1961: 4). This was related to me by a number of Komba elders who would impart this information to me after we had just departed from a Mamprusi village in which I had been informed by the local Mamprusi chief that the Konkomba and the Mamprusi had always been allies.

The town of Gbindere, approximately 50 kilometres south-southeast of Namong (see fig. 2.1), is a settlement that I discovered was, until very recently, a Mamprusi village with an enstooled Na. The town is now ethnically Konkomba, after being returned through threat of an armed revolt in the wake of violence further south and financial pressure placed on the regional Mamprusi chief, the Yunyoo Naa, Ranatooka II by the Konkomba residents. According to my informants, Gbindere had been under Mamprusi control for the tenure of twelve or possibly thirteen Gbindere Naas. If one calculates a minimum of ten years for the reign of a chief, as Tait has (1961) then Gbindere, a town in which Konkomba outnumber Mamprusi 3 to 1, was under Mamprusi control for more than a century. There has long been intermarriage and interaction at a social level between Konkomba and Mamprusi in Gbindere, however, there was a sense in the town among Konkomba that things, after a very long time, had finally been set right after its return to Konkomba control.

In Yunyoo itself, long a Mamprusi settlement, I was told that the chief must always be married to Konkomba woman in order to legitimate his authority.

No one listens to the Ranatooka because he is the chief, people understand him because he took a Konkomba woman as wife. In Yunyoo you have to marry a Konkomba to be the chief (*Interview with Mr. AN/outside Yunyoo, 20/6/99*)

Nor would the chief of Yunyoo be allowed to remain in power, I was told, if he betrayed or did wrong by his Konkomba subjects. Drucker-Brown reports that the Mamprusi often marry outsiders, and in such cases, the marriage is established and performed according to the practices of the other group when a non-Mamprusi woman is involved (1967: 20). As I discovered in Yunyoo, non-Mamprusi that marry into a Mamprusi compound continue to observe their own rituals and such practices are often continued by descendants.

In Mamprusi territory, as noted, the Konkomba have never be forced to move in recent history, and have apparently never been re-located but there does exist a tradition relating to the imposition of something of a *Pax Mamprusi* upon the Komba. Through raids carried out by the Tchakosi, never directly by the Mamprusi, village takeovers and subsequent extraction of the ever-present tribute, the Mamprusi established themselves as the dominant political authority in the area of the escarpment; an authority that was later solidified with arrival of the British.

Under the direction of C.H. Armitage, a captain who entered the Gold Coast Civil Service in 1894 and served until 1920, the Northern District Commissioners office began its attempt to unify the chiefdoms of Dagomba and Mamprusi (Stainland 1975: 57). The colonial policy of administering through indirect rule would obviously have been made significantly easier with a strong united Dagbani chiefdom under the control of the British, who — even in the late nineteen twenties — remained numerically few in number in the Northern Territories. Stainland notes that even as late as 1928 there were only twenty

European residents in Western Dagomba district, as it was difficult to remain in good health owing to outbreaks of yellow fever and malaria (Stainland 1975: 50). According to local oral history in Gambaga and in a number of Komba and Bimobas towns in and around the escarpment, during the years immediately following the First World War, Armitage, then Chief Commissioner, Northern Territories, embarked on an expedition to the escarpment, an area not as fully explored as British and German Dagomba land. Armitage was convinced that the Dagomba people wanted to be completely free of German control and be united under British rule, and we can surmise that his expedition was something of an attempt to also bring the Mamprusi 'into the fold'. Armitage's wish that Dagomba be united was fulfilled with the signing of Treaty of Versailles which gave Britain mandate over the German parts of Mamprusi and Dagomba land in what became British Togoland under the administration of the Chief Commissioner at Tamale (Stainland 1975: 72), however, Armitage was never able to formally unite the Mamprusi and Dagomba under one Dagbani paramount, a seemingly impossible task at best. As it was related to me, Armitage had been travelling for almost a week out of Tamale before he reached the settlement of Gambaga. His guides informed him that the Na-Yiri, the Mamprusi paramount, was still a one or two day travel into the 'scarp'. Apparently though, Armitage, weary and exhausted by his journey made a decision on the spot that he had gone far enough and that he wished for his guides to go to the Mamprusi chief and bring him to Gambaga, along with the chiefs of any of the other regional ethnic groups, including, as it happened, the Komba. Armitage was unprepared to go on to Nalerigu and so the Nalerigu Na was brought to Gambaga along with the paramount of the Bimobas people, who also inhabit a portion of the escarpment, the Yunyoo chief and an individual

identified only as a Komba earth elder of the Gushiegu area. Gambaga was formalised as the administrative centre for Mamprusi district despite the fact that Nalerigu was the traditional centre for the Mamprusi. The Komba elder was installed as the regional Komba chief by the Mamprusi and by Armitage, although I am told that he only acquiesced to be called by the title chief in his dealings with the Na-Yiri and maintained his authority at home through his position as earth elder. Through the enforced bureaucracy and administration of the British, the Mamprusi and Komba were drawn into a colonial peace. It is however an historical irony that the Mamprusi be called to Gambaga to formalise Komba authority as it seems that centuries ago the Komba originally inhabited Nalerigu and were driven out by Atabea, the fifth recorded Mamprusi paramount in the region of the escarpment, after they abandoned the Gambaga as their first capital (Rattray 1932).

More recently, clashes between the Bimobas and the Komba have occurred in villages of mixed ethnic composition in Mamprusi territory. In 1985, after the death of the previous Na-Yiri and prior to the installation of the new king, Konkomba who inhabited Bimobas villages which were headed by a Mamprusi-appointed Bimobas chiefs became restless and began to attack the compounds of Bimobas traders who had attempted to exact taxes on behalf of the Mamprusi from Konkomba who did not export all of their produce to the large Konkomba yam market in Accra but also sold some yams in the local Bimobas markets. Publicly and privately, the court at Nalerigu was extremely upset that the fighting was, to some extent, taking place in the name of the Mamprusi (Drucker-Brown 1988: 92). The Mamprusi it seems, were however, quite concerned by rumours at the time that the Konkomba were once again mobilizing throughout the Northern Region. Drucker-Brown believes that among the Mamprusi, who she claims have always had

peaceful relations with the Konkomba, the Konkomba are much feared and have a propensity for fighting (1988: 93). It seems that the Konkomba predisposition towards violence was enough of an explanation for Konkomba actions, however, the Mamprusi did not take into account the continued imposition of taxes by the Bimobas. These taxes, akin to salt in a very old wound, again reminded the Konkomba of an age-old relationship of tribute, a relationship they sought to end with the death of the Na-Yiri.

The history then, of the relationship between the Komba and the Mamprusi, might be characterized as one of grudging acceptance of each other's presence within a single space and of course it has often been one of enforced or attempted assimilation and control by the Mamprusi. There is a history of raiding and making war by the Mamprusi and through their hired mercenaries, the Tchakosi, upon the Komba, not to the extent that is to be found in the territory of the Dagomba, but, underlying this Pax Mamprusi, there does exist a clear pattern of antagonism.

The Dagomba

I turn now to a discussion of the Dagomba, perhaps the Konkomba's most important neighbours in terms of historical interaction, and their dealings with the Bimotiev. The Dagomba, along with the Nanumba, form the southernmost edge of an expansion of peoples that took place in the early fourteenth century (Murdock 1959) and are part of a network of chiefdoms that includes the Mossi, Mamprusi and Nanumba which spans the territory from "the forest bend in the south nearly to Timbuktu in the north; from the Volta bend in the west to Northern Nigeria in the east" (Tait 1954: 1). The Dagomba, for their part, have always maintained a cordial relationship with the Mamprusi and there would appear to be no record of war between them, however, Dagomba relations with the

Bimotiev Konkomba have and continue to be considerably bloodier than the Mamprusi's interaction with the Komba.

As discussed earlier, the Dagomba, who expelled the Bimotiev Konkomba from their home territory, are one of the groups perhaps most responsible for shaping Konkomba ethnicity. The territory that the Dagomba annexed, territory that became eastern Dagomba was formerly German mandated Togoland. This event, a sort of Ghanaian Battle of the Boyne, is exalted as a great triumph by the Dagomba in drum chants and as a noble victory; and the Konkomba forever bemoan it. After being defeated by the Gonja, a conflict in which the Ya-Na Muhammad Zangina was slain, the Dagomba in the second half of the seventeenth century, pushed into the Oti plain (Wilks, Levtzion, and Haight 1986: 122) and occupied a considerable portion of Bimotiev territory. Tait places the date of the conquest of Yendi somewhere in the middle of the sixteenth century; he reaches this date by approximating ten years to the reign of each Ya-Na since the occupation. Wilks' mid-seventeenth century date is recorded in an Islamic text entitled the *Kitāb Ghanjā* authored in the eighteenth century (Wilks 1986). It was also during this period that the Dagomba became instituted as a state under the rule of one man, the new Ya-Na at Yendi. One of the first steps taken by Na Luro, the first Dagomba king at Yendi was to follow a pattern already set in motion by Zangina, and slay a large number of *tindamba* or Dagomba earth priests who occupied a role not unlike the Konkomba earth elder, replacing them with royal chiefs (Stainland 1975: 4). These royal chiefdoms were to stand guard against possible Konkomba reprisals. A Konkomba elder related the story of the Dagomba advance into Bimotiev territory to Tait. This elder told Tait of his childhood, of how his father would tell him of the days when "our forefathers stayed in

Yaa [Yendi, also called Yaln in Komba]” but then the “Dagomba rose and mounted their horses. We saw the horses, that is why we rose up and gave the land to the Dagomba...and went ‘across the river’” (Tait 1961: 4). The Dagomba also pushed north towards Gushiegu and south into present day Nanumbaland (Tait 1961: 4).

The early new Dagomba state was composed of a hierarchy of chiefdoms. These chiefdoms were of two different types, “royal chiefdoms or *YaNabihinama*” and “elder chiefdoms or *YaNaKpamalnama*” (Tait 1961: 6). Chiefdoms throughout this region are known metaphorically as ‘skins’, and the chief will sit on a pile of skins, typically cow hides, each one representing an ancestor through whom his authority has passed, although before over hunting and habitat destruction decimated their population, lion and leopard skins were often draped over a chief’s stool. Now however, only the Ya-Na sits on a lion skin. Each royal chiefdom is embedded within another more powerful skin, and each chiefdom is considered a ‘gate’ to Yendi (Tait 1961: 6). That is, one must pass through the leadership of a lesser chiefdom to be considered for ascension to the stool at Yendi. Chiefdoms are classified as either ‘nighttime’ or ‘daytime’ chiefdoms. Nighttime chiefdoms are terminal or ‘non-gate’ chiefdoms. Such chiefdoms form something of a ‘cow-hide ceiling, meaning that the chief of such a chiefdom may not accede to authority over at a higher level, and apparently, all night-time chiefdoms were, when founded, commanders over military outposts established to defend Dagbon from the Konkomba. Royal chiefdoms, led only by the sons and grandsons of the paramount chief and former paramounts are little more than territorial units, usually some distance from Yendi, that enforce Dagomba authority over annexed territory and place individuals on the ground who can extend the sphere of influence of the Ya-Na and the elder chiefdoms. The chief of

Miong, one of the day-time royal chiefdoms, claimed to Armitage in 1920 that he had gained the confidence of the “wild Konkomba Tribe” in the area and that Armitage would be free to travel everywhere in his chiefdom to help consolidate a re-united Dagomba (Stainland 1975: 74). Elder chiefdoms are ruled by elders appointed by the Ya-Na himself, and are typically found within the territory of the capital, and again, some are night-time and some daytime chiefdoms. (Tait 1961: 7). In Bimotiev areas where the Dagomba form the administrative authority, members of the junior lineage within the village were, as we have seen in Mamprusi territory, recruited as chiefs under the immediate rule of a local royal or elder chiefdom. These chiefs however, were in a position as impotent as that occupied similar chiefs in Komba territory. (Tait 1961: 11).

It was and still is in eastern Dagomba, the region to the east of Yendi, that one finds the greatest degree of interaction between the Konkomba and Dagomba. During the time of German occupation in what is now western Togo and some of Eastern Ghana, from 1896 until the end of World War I, independent Konkomba were distinguished from conquered Konkomba; however, with the imposition of British rule and the strengthening of relations with the Mamprusi, who also, as discussed earlier, were forced to deal with the “wild” Konkomba, Dagomba chiefs began to exert greater degrees of authority over the Bimotiev Konkomba (Tait 1961: 9). In the 1920’s, there began a continual cycle of raiding and retaliation between the Bimotiev and the Dagomba:

After the World War I, the Dagomba got strength from the British. They thought they could do whatever they wanted. But whenever they took one from us, we would take ten from them. We would always thrash them when they tried to battle us. Oh! (*Interview with Mr. DB (elder)/ Saboba, 8/22/99*).

Tait notes, “It is hardly too much to say that the Dagomba fears the Konkomba” even though the Dagomba claim in numerous drum chants to have “pushed pepper up the

noses of the Konkomba” (Tait 1961: 9). The Konkomba however, despite their fierce reputation, were unable, owing to the lack of a regimental system and no cavalry, to mount the kind of defence that might put an end to Dagomba raiding. The Dagomba would ride forth into the empty bush, out of the fortified royal chiefdoms on horseback, a tradition I was told which they received from the Hausa in the eighteenth century, a time when some Dagomba paramounts began converting to Islam (Wilks 1986), in search of slaves for the annual tribute they needed to pay to Ashanti and their less frequent though no less draining requirements for tribute in the form of sorghum from Konkomba. Tribute that was then sold to maintain the Dagomba cavalry and infantry divisions. Labour was also sought after by the Dagomba in the form of Konkomba who were captured and kept in the court of royal and elder chiefs to grow food (Stainland 1975: 35). Goody has noted that the Ashanti desire to acquire slaves for the European trans-Atlantic trade in human life led to pressure upon the Dagbani states of the north to produce “human booty”, which in turn led to cavalry raids upon the horseless, groups such as the Konkomba (Goody 1971: 57). Groups such as the Konkomba, the LoDagaa and the Tallensi were regarded as pools of manpower and were unable to resist the onslaught of mounted raiders and so tended to occupy territory which was difficult to access on horseback (Goody 1971: 57). For the Konkomba this meant the riverine land around the Oti and the mountainous territory around the Gambaga escarpment. A similar strategy can be seen in the rocky crags inhabited by groups such as the Dogon of Mali or some of the Tallensi of northern Ghana.

The ultimate authority for the land in Dagomba is the Ya-Na or *Yannaa*, who delegates control to appointed rulers of the different elder chiefdoms and the hereditary

chiefs of the royal chiefdoms and village chiefs, while individual household heads maintain usufructory rights over the lands in their village (Oppong 1973: 17). These chiefs have judiciary power over disputes concerning the boundaries of a family compound's agricultural plot or in boundary disagreements between villages. The preceding system applied in ethnically Dagomba areas. By contrast, the Konkomba received no such rights of access or arbitration and were forced, with the complicity of the British in their attempt to strengthen the chiefdoms, to pay tribute in return for the right to work the land. Tait records the District Commissioner's confiscation of two whole lorry loads of sorghum in 1950 from the Ya-Na who had required it from the Konkomba settlement at Saboba, with the declaration that "The European says it has got to be paid" (Tait 1961: 9). I was informed by elders at Sangur that around fifty years ago it was not uncommon for Konkomba carts and the few trucks they owned during this period to be stopped and for all goods on board to be confiscated. Tait's work would seem to confirm this recollection, he writes "Konkomba were stopped by Dagomba on their way into Yendi market and their headloads of new yams taken, on the grounds that they had paid no tribute to the Ya-Na" and of this confiscated lot, one load went to the D.C., one to the Yendi sergeant of police and the rest to the Ya-Na (Tait 1961: 9-10).

Another incident, demonstrative of growing Bimotiev resistance, occurred in 1944. A violent and bloody event, Tait mentions he was unable to get a single Konkomba to discuss it openly. The Konkomba who lived around the town of Wapul, one of the royal chiefdoms, rebelled against continual extortion by the Dzagberi Na. The Konkomba living in Wapul raided the house of the chief, killed him and his courtiers and wives and left the chief pinned to a tree with arrows. Tait says that the Konkomba he

spoke to were “wholly unrepentant” and when asked why they killed the womenfolk as well, received the quizzical response “who was getting the yams?” (Tait 1961: 10). Some youths that I met in a town named Benja, just southeast of Wapul — which I was unable to visit — had heard of this event. One evening, over a drink in Benja, a town that just happened to fall on an alternate road that I was taking back to Yendi after visiting Saboba, I was informed of the folk memory relating to this incident:

You have to watch it to talk about that in here. Dagomba don't like it, but all Konkomba have heard about it. That Na wasn't so bad, some Konkomba liked him, but he was giving our corn to Ya-Na so that was bad and it should be ended. So when Konkomba now alight in Wapul we are very careful. (*Group interview with three Konkomba youths, names unknown/ Benja, 10/29/99*).

In response to acts of Konkomba revenge directed at Dagomba chiefs, D.Cs (District Commissioners) would burn compounds and foodstuffs in Konkomba villages that had been fighting. The D.C. of Tamale district in 1929 is noted to have said “I hate these fine men to kill each other when I am convinced that by burning their compounds, fights would very soon stop” (Stainland 1975: 43). I could find no record of a Dagomba compound being burnt by the office of the D.C. On the contrary, Stainland notes that in August of 1934, a police corporal had seized livestock from a Konkomba village and stored his capture in the court of Mbadugu Na. Although the D.C. at the time asserted that these men, the Dagomba, had “nothing to be proud of”, no action was taken in response to this incident. (Stainland 1975:108).

Gushiegu, a town in which the Konkomba were most closely integrated into the Dagomba system, and a town that, unfortunately, this researcher was unable to visit, is said by many in Bimotiev country to have often been singled out for the harshest treatment from the Dagomba. Tait writes that in 1951, after the death of the Gushiegu Na, the

local conquered Konkomba refused to accept that any man from the line of the dead chief may again attempt to exert authority over them, so severe was the imposition of taxes and tribute (Tait 1961: 10). I was informed in Namong that it was not uncommon for the old Gushiegu Na to simply sweep into town on a whim and request yams at any time of year, even before the seed yams had started to grow, or to make extravagant requests such as the immediate provision of 100 guinea fowls.

In summary, the history of Dagomba / Konkomba relations has been one of invasion, raiding and displacement from the land, and outright exploitation on the part of at least some chiefs. Along the eastern edge of the Dagomba advance, military outposts were set up to protect the state from marauding bands of Konkomba and to facilitate raids upon those Konkomba who remained outside Dagomba control. Under British rule, Dagomba authority over the acephalous peoples in their dominion was strengthened and the regional royal and elder chiefs began to appoint Konkomba sub-chiefs under the control of regional elder or royal chiefdom. As noted in the introductory chapter though, these chiefs had no power to authorize new compounds within settlements, and had no authority to make decisions involving the land and wielded a highly derivative form of authority, which was power always seen as secondary and inferior to a Konkomba village earth elder and which came from abroad and was, therefore, of little import. In Mamprusi territory, similar chiefs were usually chosen from the ranks of the secondary lineage within a village, the 'lineage for the people', and this was also the case in Dagomba. Tait suggests that this individual was little more than a mediator for minor squabbles between Konkomba and neighbouring Dagomba villages.

The Konkomba have long lived in association with the Dagomba and although

they were at first unable to defend themselves against the onslaught of a horse-mounted cavalry and organized infantry, they eventually worked out means of striking back and taking revenge. More however, will be said in the conclusion to this chapter on the form this revenge would take.

The Nanumba

The final group, whose political structure and history needs to be addressed in order to understand how outsiders have shaped Konkomba society, are the Nanumba. Nanun, as a traditional area falls under the authority of the Bimbilla Naa, who resides at their capital, the town of Bimbilla, located some one hundred kilometres south from Tamale. The Nanumba, like the Mamprusi and Nanumba are a Mole-Dagbani chiefdom, whose ethnicity, according to Skalnik, is expressed through allegiance to a chieftancy called *naam* in the Nanun language (Skalnik 1987: 147). Indeed, I would argue that much of what it means to be a member of one of these Dagbani societies is expressed in the institution of chief or Na. It is through devotion to the authority of the Na that the Dagbani peoples express what it means to be a member of their society. Law, land and riches all flow from the leadership of the Dagbani paramount and it is upon this loyalty to one individual, that the Dagbani peoples articulate their relationship with those around them.

The Nanumba, as stated before, are part of that southern push made by the Mole-Dagbani and Mossi peoples out of what is modern Burkina Faso into the Voltaic region of modern Ghana. The Nanumba claim to be the descendents of Nanun, brother to Dagbon and Mamprugu. The Bimbilla Naa calls the Ya Na and Na Yiri "my brother" (Skalnik 1987: 307) and the Nanun language is practically identical to Dagbane. The

lack of any formal differentiation in criteria of membership between Dagomba and Nanumba until very recently is illustrative of how closely related and similar these two peoples are, and indeed why many Nanumba, who find themselves in Yendi identified themselves as Dagomba. Many Dagomba and Mamprusi who have settled in Nanumba territory now appeal to the Bimbilla Naa without reservation and accept his rulings as they would the Na-Yiri or Ya-Na. The highly situational nature of Dagbani ethnicity transcends the boundaries of the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Nanumba chiefdoms. All three of these groups seem to express their ethnicity through allegiance to a powerful paramount and a hierarchy of chiefdoms. This allegiance would seem to be easily transferred back and forth between chiefdoms. The languages, culture, political organisation of the Dagbani chiefdoms, although not correlating completely, do possess a large degree of congruence. Indeed, if one were to look for some form of discontinuity between these groups it might be in their relations with the acephalous peoples that inhabit and surround their territory.

Skalnik contends that the Nanumba had not been very concerned with making a distinction between themselves and the Dagomba until later in the twentieth century when the Nanumba were drawn into some of the bloodiest conflicts that Ghana had seen since independence with both the Gonja and Konkomba. He states that these conflicts, especially those with the Konkomba have "made clear the concept of Nanumba-ness as distinct from Dagbamba-ness" (Skalnik 1987: 305). To be certain, the Nanumba emerged from their battles with the Konkomba a much-changed people. No longer did the Bimbilla Naa look to the Ya-Na for aid in settling complex disputes that he felt he alone could handle, rather, the Nanumba seem to have re-asserted their independence as

an autonomous state separate from Dagomba in the wake of these wars.

However, as we shall see, these same conflicts did no less for Konkomba ethnicity. Bimotiev clans forced into Nanun territory hundreds of years ago, and who had been forced to live with similar conditions under the Bimbilla Naa as their comrades under the authority of the Ya-Na, struck back impressively, most recently in 1994. but before that, with equal vigour, in 1981 and in the mid-1940s. Indeed, the territory of Nanun has been witness to some of the most intense and most recent manifestations of the Konkomba resistance to the control of a foreign paramount. Nanumba territory, which is located in-between Dagbon and southern Gonja, was refuge to many of the Bimotiev who fled from Yendi in the sixteenth century and is perhaps one of the most ethnically heterogeneous areas of the Northern Region as it is located around two of the most important trading hubs within the Volta region, Salaga and Bimbilla.

In the late 1970's, when Lake Volta flooded and destroyed the main road from Yendi to Accra, farmers from Nanun began to settle the land around the new road that crossed the Oti and connected Yendi to Accra via Bimbilla. To the surprise of most Nanumba, a census taken of this region in the wake of the road construction revealed that there were now actually more self-identified Bimotiev Konkomba living in Nanun than there were Nanumba. Through the rallying and lobbying actions of KOYA, the Konkomba Youth Organisation, the issue of whether or not a minority could actually exert executive authority over the Konkomba began to be raised in the villages surrounding Bimbilla. The Konkomba Youth Association, an organisation founded in part through the aid of Christian churches in Northern Region and the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, was established by young educated Konkomba who had moved to the urban centres and

set up to promote literacy and to act as a representative for villagers in their dealings with Dagbani chiefs and regional governments. This was an awakening period for the Bimotiev and ultimately for all Konkomba. Through the resistance articulated by the Bimotiev in Nanun territory, a form of ethnic awareness would spread through Konkombaland and become the foundation not only for a developing Konkomba ethnicity but also for a new Konkomba political identity, an identity that will be explored in detail in chapter 6. The Bimotiev had long had to deal with the control of the paramount Na throughout their territory, but at this point in their history, they had gained enough economic capital through the sale of their agricultural produce to mount a concerted resistance against their "landlords". Prior to the late 1960s, few young Konkomba had ever attended schools, and their social position throughout the land on which they lived, from Gambaga to Bimbilla, was considered to be the lowest, but now, a change in lifestyle was beginning to occur and KOYA, a group that articulated Bimotiev and eventually Konkomba opinion, was to become, in large part, the instrument through which Konkomba ethnicity would be asserted within Ghanaian society.

In order to understand this incident, the rise of KOYA and the subsequent conflicts in Nanun, a brief return to the colonial period and to the territory of the Mamprusi is required, as it was during the 1950's in the area around the scarp that the movement to assert Konkomba autonomy and ethnicity began. The Konkomba, although hard working farmers had never really been prosperous as a result of the necessity to provide tribute in agricultural goods. This tribute, usually exacted at times during the harvest of a particular crop, was paid directly to the paramount Na or, in the case of the Dagomba was simply hijacked or confiscated by a local military detachment or chief. In or around the year

1953 — informants' memories are uncertain about the actual date — Komba from the village of Gbindere, in defiance of the Mamprusi chief that occupied that town, sent their entire shipment of white yams to the market in Tamale. This was accomplished with the aid of the elder for the earth from the Komba traditional centre of Namong, a man from a well-respected clan, the Binyambob. This individual, named Bilarim Naabu, is said to have invited the Gbindere chief to Namong for some pito beer, while the truck that the Gbindere Konkomba had hired from Basari country loaded up the Konkomba yams and took them to Tamale to sell on the open market. Upon hearing what had happened, the Mamprusi chief at Gbindere was furious and went directly to the Na-Yiri, who attempted to clamp down on any further such attempts by the Konkomba to sell their own yams, but to no avail. Naabu, and elders from throughout Komba country began to transport yams to Tamale and pay their required tribute in hard currency. This led to the Konkomba discovery that their yams, corn and sorghum were being severely undervalued by the Mamprusi and that through selling their usually abundant supply of produce they were able to feed themselves, pay tribute and begin amassing a considerable fortune. The Mamprusi, also farmers, though not to the extent that the Konkomba were, both in terms of the amount of land cultivated and the size of their harvest, were forced to begin buying produce from the Konkomba.

Following their success in Kombaland, which first gave Ghanaian Konkomba a sense of self-assertion, certain individuals began setting up Konkomba settlements outside Ghana's larger cities. The first of these was just outside of Tamale. The purpose of these settlements was to provide Konkomba visiting a major city with a place to discharge their produce and rest before returning to their villages. The largest of these set-

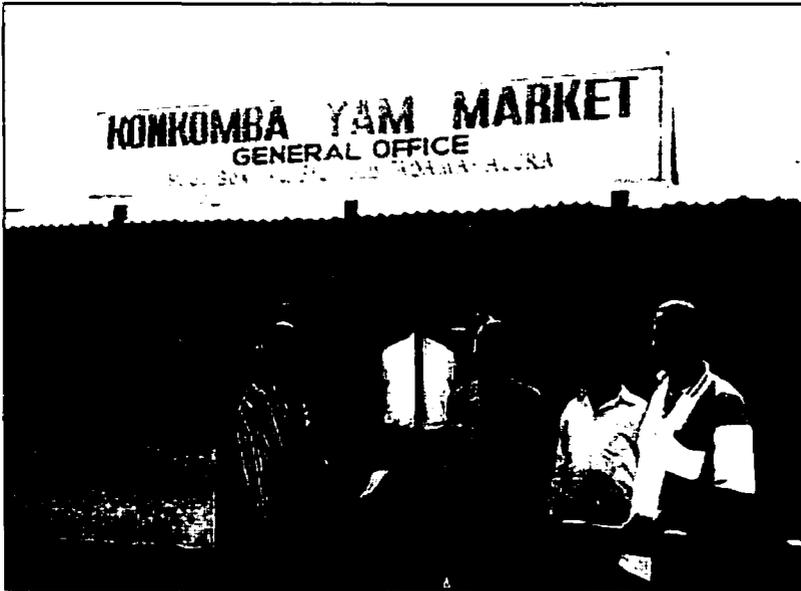


Figure 2.2. Konkomba Yam Market General Office in Accra

tlements was the town of Hejura, around one hour northeast of Kumasi.

Meanwhile, Konkomba who had moved to towns such as Hejura

after the onset of

regular Konkomba shipments to urban markets, soon began cultivating the lands around the settlements and began using the surplus produce grown to make in-roads into Akan markets, such as the large Kumasi *zongo*, a market which until the post-colonial era the Konkomba had apparently never entered, as there exists no record of Konkomba migration into Kumasi to work the *zongo* as traders or, like other northern peoples, as migrant labourers (Schildkrout 1978:74-78)

At some point after independence, the Bimotiev picked up this practice, and for the first time both Bimotiev and Komba began associating with one another in the small Konkomba trading outposts established outside Tamale, Kumasi and Accra. It would seem that some degree of cooperation was taking place at a level that superseded regional or 'tribal' oppositions within Konkomba. The Komba and Bimotiev had not until their entrance into the urban yam and grain markets had much communication with each other. Further, it might have been expected that these two groups would have entered into

something of a competitive relationship within the urban markets. This however, this did not take place. It would seem that the Komba and Bimotiev opposition to the Dagbani chiefdoms and their similar desire to overthrow the paramounts of these chiefdoms through the expansion of agricultural trade, brought these two groups together, indicative of a growing sense of Konkomba ethnic solidarity.

The individuals living in these urban settlements were Konkomba who were removed from village life, and although they enjoyed a very simple life, preferring not to invest their newfound wealth in conspicuous displays of affluence, but rather in assets designed to expand their economic base, their attitudes towards education began to change. Konkomba youth were now sent away to attend boarding schools outside of the village, closer to one of the larger regional cities.

Konkomba production, was henceforth no longer simply a means of subsistence, but rather it became a full blown business and contributed to the creation of a young Konkomba elite, educated and city-savvy, but with strong ties to the village. Many of these educated individuals would go on to form branches of KOYA throughout the north. A wealthy and powerful urban group of elders was also created, elders who facilitated access to southern markets. These new Konkomba elders became involved in ventures designed solely to facilitate the progress and expansion of the primary Konkomba business, farming. Their businesses started included mechanic shops to repair Konkomba trucks, Konkomba rest stops on the Tamale-Accra road and finally, and perhaps most importantly, the establishment of a large Konkomba owned and operated co-operative yam market in Accra. This market, which sells yams from all over Konkomba country, is now, according to Konkomba informants in Accra, the primary source of yams for south-

ern Ghana and exports yams through the guinea coast region. Dagomba markets in Accra, which formerly sold Konkomba yams were overshadowed and many were forced to close down, and Dagomba women, formerly the recipients of Bimotiev yams, were now employed as porters in the Konkomba market. Moreover, the removal of the need to pay Dagbani paramounts in agricultural kind ended a relationship of tribute that went against that which had heretofore defined Konkomba identity, working and receiving life from the land.

Since the mid-1970s, throughout Northern Ghana, numerous associations have been founded that claim to speak for the youth of a particular ethnic group. These youth associations or "Youth and Development Associations" combine the form of organisation that we see in sodalities throughout West Africa, with membership based on origin and ethnic affiliation and a common desire to defend the rights of one's people (Lentz 1995: 3). The names of these groups frequently refer to the ethnic group which composes it; Konkomba Youth Organisation, Dagomba Youth Association, and there is typically no age limit for membership. Lentz suggests that the 'youth' in 'youth organisation means to be politically active or involved with one's mobilizing the opinion of the people (Lentz 1995: 3). In the Northern Region, youth associations have largely acted as the spokespersons of their ethnic group, articulating a collective ethnic identity and through doing so, forging modern ethnicity as contraposed to other groups. These youth associations have been on the frontline of the bloody clashes that have beset Northern Region since the early 1980s, most especially KOYA.

The attitude of the Rawlings NDC government towards the extreme rhetoric of many youth associations has been somewhat ambivalent as the grass roots philosophy is

very close to the government's localized policy of economic development. During town durbars, government officials would often exhort the association's ability to act as agents of mobilization, and regional governments sought to enlist the youth groups in the implementation of its rural development policies (Lentz 1995: 396). Government support for associations that proclaimed an ethnic affiliation provided, it seems, a form of external legitimization for the group's voice. These associations already had the authority of the group, but government support gave the associations political clout in the national arena. In Ghana, legitimating authority requires the fusion of economic and political capital from both the traditional and modern spheres; one requires the support of the apparatus of the modern nation-state and an appeal to the strength of rural connections (Lentz 1998: 64).

Among the Konkomba these youth groups were largely controlled by the yam brokers and richer Konkomba who inhabited Accra and the settlements outside Kumasi and Tamale. The foot soldiers of these organisations however, men who articulated the economic program of the yam négociants that produce from throughout Konkombaland be sold in cooperative markets, were individuals who had been educated in the regional boarding schools that had been established throughout the Northern Region as a result of Nkrumah's regional development efforts after independence.

These younger members of the youth associations would travel throughout Konkombaland and talk about the necessity of learning Konkomba culture and that Konkomba cultural identity was rooted in an ability to stand up to the regional chiefdoms through economic and military power. These 'ethnic missionaries', as Lentz calls them, write new tribal histories that have to be worked out in the creation of ethnic identity

(1994: 461). The Konkomba youth association, among other groups, has been responsible for drawing out and mobilizing an identity rooted in the Konkomba attachment to the land and opposition to the Dagbani. The reinforcement of this self-identity is responsible for creating a Konkomba ethnicity that transcends regional boundaries between clans or between southern Bimotiev and northern Komba. KOYA speaks with an authoritative 'native voice' (Lentz 1994: 461), while simultaneously receiving leave from the government to do so.

To some extent, the Youth associations have played on the cleavages in northern Ghanaian society. The view of ethnicity adopted in this thesis is that identity of members is to some extent rooted in tradition and history but is subject to manipulations through the active instigation of individuals and organisations that, as Cohen has suggested, aggregate and channel support within often isolated communities for confrontation at a inter-group, inter-ethnic level. KOYA then, is a group of entrepreneurs who shape ethnicity by bringing psychological, historical and social aspects of ethnicity into salience (Cohen 1978: 396).

KOYA then, a group that by the end of the 1970's would have behind it the support of a new and powerful sector of Northern society, would have its first opportunity to stand as an advocate for Konkomba ethnic interests in addressing the disproportionality of representation in Nanumba district, specifically over the issue of marital arbitration. The Konkomba marriage custom prescribes the betrothal of a young man to a new baby girl (Tait 1961: 161). The man is supposed by custom to work for the father of the girl until the young girl goes through puberty at which point the de facto marriage commences (Skalnik 1989: 157). In reality, by the point the marriage begins, the young girl

very often has no desire to enter into relations with a man in his forties and it is not uncommon to for such girls to find another, younger man with whom to associate, and when she is eventually forced into the betrothed marriage, the young girl will often elope (Skalnik 1989: 157). This is, of course, a very serious affair, as the man has given almost twenty years of service to the young girl's father and such cases often require arbitration and judicial ruling. This practice, a form of bride service, would seem to be a custom peculiarly adapted to rural farming societies in which there is next to no wealth accumulation, and so bride wealth is paid in services rather than goods. During the time in which almost all Konkomba produce was used for subsistence and for tribute, the need for labour service would seem to be clear. Increased rebellion by young brides to this custom could be seen as a result of growing wealth among Konkomba farmers, permitting families to pay a bride price in goods or money.

Within Nanumba territory, the Bimbilla Naa enjoyed a monopoly on arbitration and the Konkomba were required to come to him for the settlement of marital disputes. The Naa, knowing only too well that the Konkomba were eager to straighten out their disputes promptly often demanded a large fee to ensure that justice be meted out swiftly and fairly and frequently.

KOYA, voicing the Bimotiev dislike that they were forced to go to an outsider, the Naa, to settle internal domestic problems, proposed two measures to remedy this situation. Firstly they proposed the abolition of the betrothal custom, difficult to accomplish largely due to the resistance of elders, but certainly possible with increased accumulated wealth, but secondly, and more importantly, KOYA decided to set up its own board of arbitration to resolve marriage disputes (Skalnik 1989: 158). The Bimbilla Naa de-

manded of the Bimotiev that these KOYA interventions stop and requested that the Northern Region government expel all Konkomba from his country. The government district chairman, a member of the ruling People's National party of Ghana captured the leader of the Bimbilla KOYA branch and deported him from Nanumba territory by unceremoniously dumping him on the road to Yendi after a six mile ride in the back of a truck (Skalnik 1989: 159). In response to this affront, the Konkomba in Nanumba territory, who were the last to really take advantage of the Konkomba presence around the major centres, stopped selling yams to Nanumba and redirected their produce to the Accra yam market.

This 'boycott' enflamed tensions between the Nanumba and the Konkomba and on the evening of April 23, 1981, a group of Konkomba broke into the Bimbilla Naa's court and shot dead the royal secretary and interpreter. In response to this attack, the son of a Konkomba businessman from Kpasaland was killed. This in turn led to the burning and looting of Nanumba and Konkomba houses in Bimbilla.

During this skirmish, two of Ghana's most widely read papers, the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times* reported dozens of cases of razed villages, fleeing Dagombas and Nanumbas and hundreds killed at the hands of Konkomba youth organizations:

- *Ghanaian Times*, January 5, 1981: "A truck load of fleeing Dagombas and Nanumbas in the East Gonja District reports of impending invasion by Konkombas into Grubi. The Konkombas are alleged to be trying to gain control of the palace of the chief" (Amponsah 1981a).
- *Daily Graphic*, April 28, 1981: Konkomba thugs kill 7 as fighting in the North begins to flare. (Amponsah 1981b).
- *Ghanaian Times*, April 30, 1981: "It is reported the Konkombas suddenly attacked the Dagombas and Nanumbas who had gone to the market. After alleg-

edly killing a number of people, they entered local houses and set them on fire". (Amponsah 1981c).

- *Daily Graphic*, June 16, 1981: "Konkomba youth groups begin conflict in Loloto after they (Konkomba) are ordered to pay fees Gonja Paramount". (Amponsah 1981c).

In June 1981, gangs of young Nanumba warriors, armed and organized by the Bimbilla Naa, crossed the Oti River and attempted to drive the Konkomba completely out of Nanumba territory. This campaign failed and the Nanumba troops were handily defeated by the Konkomba warriors, and only after calling in the national police were the Konkomba finally halted before they sacked Bimbilla itself. The Nanumba lost hundreds of head of cattle, considerable material wealth and a large number of people during this war. They also ended up with something of a political black eye, as the literate Ghanaian public, who detested "old-fashioned, feudal" chiefdoms sided with the "poor, illiterate" Konkomba (Skalnik 1989: 162). The Konkomba, on the other hand, emerged from this conflict with few losses in the form of human life or wealth and with the knowledge that they had the power to terminate, if they chose to exercise it, the yoke of subjugation that they had endured for so long.

For centuries the Konkomba had dealt with the imposed authority of neighbouring chiefdoms, and throughout this period they been forced to continuously express their way of life, and worldview through quiet resistance, through processes of interaction that defied foreign attempts at assimilation but which rarely devolved into all-out warfare. During the Nanumba / Konkomba conflict, Konkomba from throughout their territory were unified in the effort to attack the Bimbilla Naa and everything that he represented; Komba became involved in gun-running through Togo to arm their southern compatriots, and the Bimotiev in Dagomba territory were active in the fighting against Nanumba.

This conflict — different from past skirmishes during the colonial and pre-colonial period in that the Konkomba were now financially able to mount a legitimate defence against the well-armed Dagbani chiefdoms — was a turning point for the Konkomba as it was to some extent the dénouement of the process of rebellion begun decades earlier by the elders of Gbindere and Namong.

With this basic groundwork on the shape that Konkomba ethnic interaction has taken I believe that it is now appropriate to enter into an analysis of some of the internal factors that have moulded Konkomba identity and the Konkomba outlook towards the institution of chief. The domineering and extortive actions of many Dagbani paramounts has, without a doubt, bred a powerful resentment of foreign chiefs in Konkombaland, but this is only a part of the picture. There are also a number of beliefs and traditions which are grounded in the traditional system of economic production and settlement of the Konkomba peoples that have made it almost impossible for the Konkomba to accept that political authority over their lives could be invested in any individual other than the village elder of the earth. The earth elder embodies and oversees the powerful linkage that the Konkomba maintain with the earth and it is this man alone who may determine the destiny of a village. In the following two chapters the office of earth elder and intricacies of Konkomba earth cult will be explored.

CHAPTER 3: VILLAGE ORGANISATION AND CHIEFSHIP

Researchers are often faced with the dilemma of dealing with disparate descriptions of social groupings within an ethnic group made by members of the group themselves. The ethnographer is frequently then forced to reconcile the categories and levels of organisation received in the field with those described by researchers that have covered similar ethnographic terrain. This is a task that at times proves extremely difficult, for one is dealing with the way in which an interpreter or informant orally translates a cognitive system of interlocking relationships within an ethnic group into something which he or she thinks the researcher can understand. The anthropologist has categories and terms such as clan, tribe, major lineage, and very often the description offered by the informant will seem to fit our understood composition of one of these particular categories. Next time round, however, we find that a different ethnographer will construe the same related category in a different manner.

Acephalous people such as the Konkomba do use concepts and categories similar to what anthropologists mean when they use term "tribe" or "clan", these groupings are however often phrased in a manner such as "those that we go with" or "those with which we go only for farming" which do not seem to immediately fit into any pre-determined forms of organisation.

The people we study change and adapt their understanding of how they are organized on the ground almost as frequently as anthropologists and social scientists come up with new definitions to describe these formations. Fox points out that anthropologists are "never happier than when coining natty Latinisms for things" and consequently there

exist a number of derivations and adaptations of a particular term. The use of a new form of a word becomes a substitute for analytical flexibility and authors make conceptual distinctions in order to generate discovery (Fox 1967: 50).

The use of organisational terms relating to the Konkomba in the present work does differ somewhat from the forms used by previous researchers. Through comparison with the benchmark work conducted by Tait and also with work conducted by Froelich in Togo among the Komba, it is hypothesised that changes in how the Konkomba understand and define themselves is indicative of a transformation in Konkomba identity presumably occasioned by the new economic niche that the Konkomba have carved for themselves.

Tait notes that although the Konkomba lack any specialized term for what he terms a village district and which I will discuss as a village, he believes that the village is



Figure 3.0. Komba family compound in Nabule

the largest precisely known territorial unit as it contains a "knowable group of real or putative agnatic kinsmen" –members of a clan – and is therefore the most important unit of territorial organisation in Konkombaland

(Tait 1958: 169). This chapter will focus then on the composition of Konkomba villages

and how this unit fits into the structure of Konkomba society.

East Mamprusi District, the heart of Kombaland, contains thirty-one villages that are ethnically Komba. The northern part of this district also contains the two major Mamprusi towns of Gambaga and Nalerigu and approximately forty-five Mamprusi villages. There are also numerous Tchakosi and Bimobas villages along the border region with Togo. Each Komba village within East Mamprusi contains anywhere from five to thirty family compounds. Family compounds are composed of three to six round huts, made of earth and clay thatched with grass and enclosed by an earthen wall. Each of these villages belongs to one of twenty-five clans found in the region. These clans, listed in figure 3.1 all begin with the prefix 'Bi - ' or 'Be - ' which translates to mean "they who - " or "he who - ", as in "they who know" or "they who fight". Many personal names also begin with this prefix such as "Bimensian", "Bipoba" or "Bilinyimbu". (the name I was given by the Konkomba elders in Namong, which translates to mean "He who wants to be known"²). Each clan, identified by one of the names in figure 3.1, is composed of a minimum of two major lineages, whose common ancestor is taken to have founded the village in the distant past. Members of only one clan inhabit a village, with representatives of both of the clan's major lineages found within each village.

The 25 clans represented in East Mamprusi District do overlap into other administrative districts. Individuals within Nabule and Namong, both villages of the Binyambob clan, told me that their clan had villages in Togo and further south near Gushiegu and also some villages in Gonja country to the west which are part of the network of villages

² I was given this name after I informed the elder that I wanted to visit all the Konkomba settlements in the area, as well as the Mamprusi towns. "Why do you want to see every town, you can learn everything you need to know about the Konkomba right here!" was the response made by one elder to my request.

which have sprung up throughout Ghana to support the Konkomba yam transport business. It is generally accepted by residents of Nabule that they originated in Namong, a village that is considered the traditional center for the Komba. This relationship between Nabule and Namong is generally not discussed unless the authority of the earth lineage within that village is questioned, as it was when the Yunyoo Naa, the neighboring Mamprusi regional chief claimed that the earth shrine of Nabule was a Mamprusi sacred place. The Nabule *Utinduan* claimed that his people had moved here from and were of the earth lineage of Namong, after crossing through the territory of Yunyoo, and had discovered the earth shrine of Nabule. The Mamprusi, according to the elders of Nabule, accepted this claim because the earth lineage of Namong had been in East Mamprusi for "much longer than Na-Yiri" (*Interview with Mr. TT/ Nabule, 24/8/99*). The Konkomba village then, represents, through the earth, the solidarity of a genealogy, and through its territorial position on the land, the solidarity of the Konkomba community.

Members of one clan only occupy each village. Clans are commonly segmented into two major agnatic lineages both of which are usually represented in a single village. There exists no Konkomba term for the concept of lineage, rather, the term *onibaa* or *uti-baa* is used in the phrase "*Ti je onibaa*" to indicate, "We are all the offspring of one man". Tait notes that the terms *odzabaa*, meaning 'one man', and '*mfum mbaa*' meaning 'once' are also used to imply descent from 'one' or 'the one' are also used to denote the lineage (Tait 1954: 214). The two component lineages within a village are contraposed, by this, is meant the separation of ritual roles between them. The two lineages within each village are distinguished as the 'lineage for the earth' or 'earth lineage' and the 'lineage for the people' or 'elder's people'. Tait translates the former role from *Lekpok-*

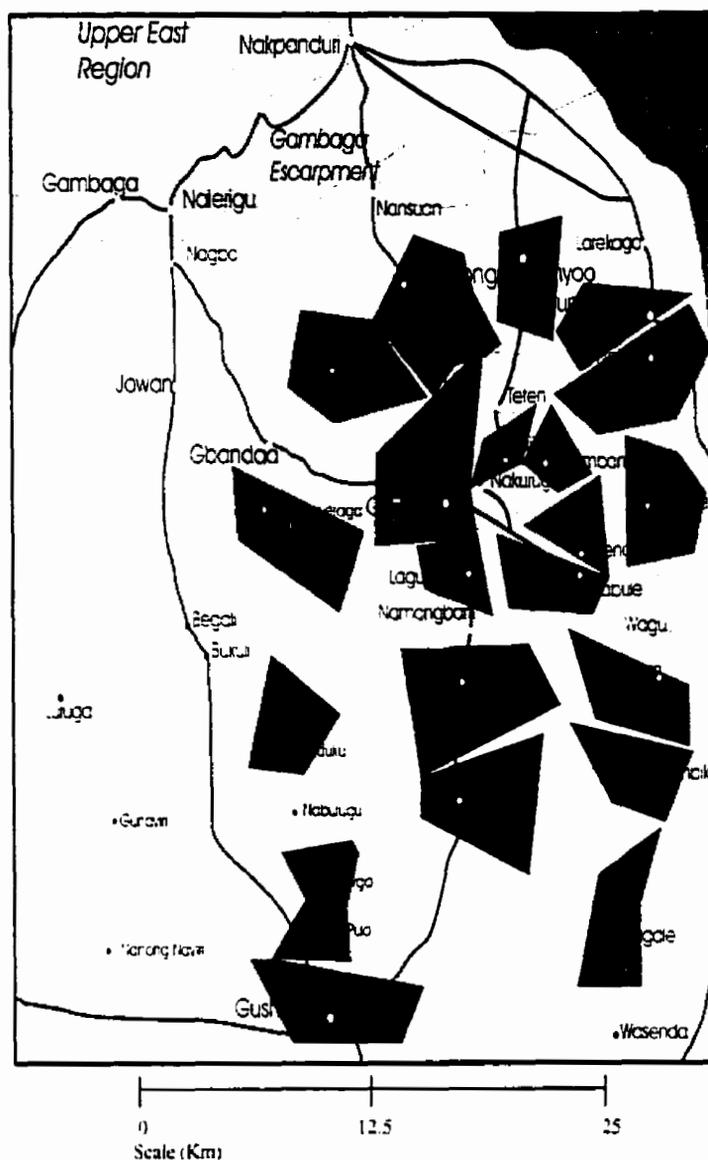


Figure 3.1. Map of East Mamprusi District indicating the distribution of Konkomba sub-tribes and their member clans.

Blue: Sub-Tribe 1: Binyambob, Bijagban, Binnangbam, Bibunleb, Binmoyan, Binamam, Bikumbum, Begejab, Biyikparb, Bisoum, Bukom
Purple: Sub-Tribe 2: Bikpkanab, Binamiin, Bikpawon, Bikpaweb, Bikonob
Green: Sub-Tribe 3: Binanyab, Bijilub
Yellow: Sub-Tribe 4: Binabob, Binasou, Binanyam, Bisoumb

pam to mean "Owner of the Land's People"; however, I was informed on numerous occasions that it is wrong to use terms such as "owner" in reference to the *Otindaa* or *Utindaan*, the senior and eldest member of the earth lineage, the lineage which is understood

to have first established a settlement. This is because, I was told, that no man can “own” the earth, rather, an elder works *for* the earth. The division of ritual roles within the village is a widespread pattern throughout Northern Ghana and indeed throughout the Voltaic region. Among some groups such as the Dagbani, the importance of the paramount chief or regional chief has eclipsed the authority of the earth elder. However, among the Gur and acephalous Mole peoples, the *Tengdaan* or earth elder still holds considerable power within each village (Manoukian 1951: 83). This ‘elder for the earth’ or earth priest oversees all ritual activities involving the earth, including those involving the harvest, burials and building of new huts or compounds. The members of the *Utindaan*’s lineage are the descendants of those who came first and settled the land. The lineage of the *Onekpel* or ‘he who holds the people’ is thought of as the group which aided the earth lineage in attacks from neighboring groups, such as, in the case of the Northern Komba, the Tchakosi, and helped the village to flourish.

Tait notes that every new village has its own shrines and that when a man goes into the bush to establish a new settlement he must consult a diviner to locate the earth shrine in that area. Thus is established, through the discovery of a particular territory’s shrine, an intimate relationship between a group of people and the land (Tait 1958: 173). Yet when a man or a group of individuals move into an area that is already occupied, it is only with the consent of the existing village members who “found” the earth shrine of that land, that the newcomers may begin to farm. What seems to be taking place in Konkombaland is that individuals forced to move into newly established villages are assimilated as “kinsmen” within a second, junior lineage that is subordinate to those that ‘founded’ the settlement.

The distribution of clans across Konkomba territory would seem to indicate that lineages were forced to move through territory in which they possessed no relatives. Figure 3.1 shows the layout and distribution of clans in East Mamprusi District. Each village is occupied by members of one particular clan, which are grouped into sub-tribes or “those that we go with”. Villages composed of members of a non-related clan border every village within this region indicating that there has been a considerable degree of movement over the land by non-related clans. However, every village that I visited claimed that both of the lineages that composed the settlement were agnatically related. What I believe has happened is that after a short time, genealogical differences between the latecomers and landowners are blurred, and both segments lay claim to the same apical ancestor. A possible model for how this distribution may have occurred is Bohannan’s concept of disjunctive migration (Bohannan 1954).

Disjunctive migration is a particular pattern of movement over the land identified by Bohannan (1954) among the Tiv of Northern Nigeria and later extended by Horton (1971). The pattern of Tiv lineage organisation is reflected in the spatial arrangement of unilineal descent groups on the land they occupy. (Bohannan 1958: 40). Each agnatic lineage segment inhabits a continuous bloc of land that forms an *ipaven* and a *tar*. The *tar* embodies political and spatial allegiance to a particular lineage and territory. The *ipaven* refers to the genealogical inhabitants of a particular piece of land. The territory of each minimal segment adjoins that of its closest sibling *ipaven*, a territory or *tar* occupied by two minimal segments also has a discrete territory, and is in turn nested within another level, both genealogically and territorially. Every Tiv is born to a particular *tar* and has full citizenship within by virtue of that *tar*’s association with that individual’s patriline-

age or *ityo* (Bohannan 1958: 40).

The right to cultivate within one's *tar* is acquired by birth and every Tiv male is said to have a right to land to use for himself, this right is a provision of his status as a full member of a particular *tar*. Land is assigned to members of a *tar* by compound heads within the territory of a minimal lineage segment. In areas where land is plentiful and the number of members within the territory is still low enough that the land can support the

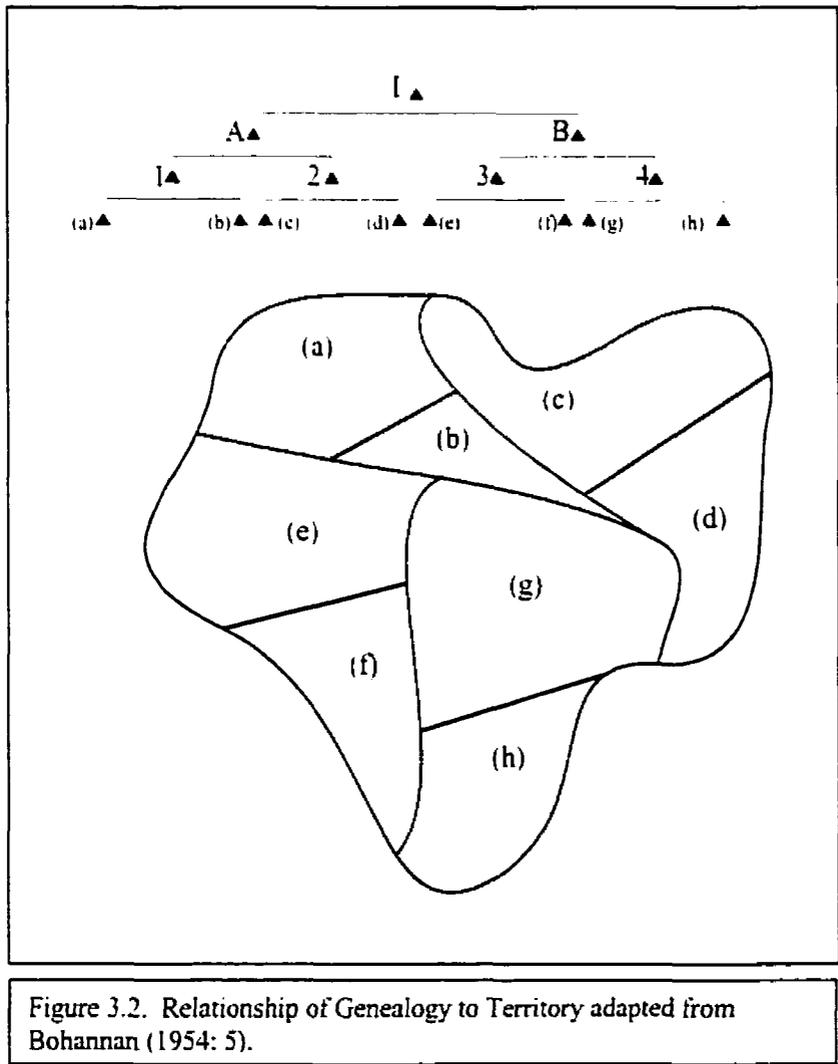


Figure 3.2. Relationship of Genealogy to Territory adapted from Bohannan (1954: 5).

population, this process of assignment of cultivable plots is not a problem. there is no need to expand onto new land. When one expands their farm it is always towards the territorial segment whose land is at the boundary but who is most dis-

tantly related to you (Bohannan 1954: 5). In this way, when a Tiv farmer's distant neighbor objects to expansion, an individual will always carry the full support of the

largest possible group of local kin. In the figure reproduced here from Bohannan we see that if minimal territory (*a*) is expanding and minimal territory (*b*) is also expanding the territory that contains them both, (*I*), is also necessarily expanding. Moreover, we see that the more closely related two lineage segments are, the closer their territorial segments must necessarily be.

Problems arise in this process of territorial expansion when the supply of available land becomes exhausted through over-population and land degradation as it has in southern Tivland. Individual males, blocked from expanding their territory in a direction that would expand the influence of an entire clan, move into territory in which none of the adjacent settlements are of their patrilineage. Blocked segments pass through the land occupied by their closest genealogical relations and find themselves living on land belonging or adjacent to individuals with which they possess no or very distant agnatic relations (Horton 1971: 94). If this process is to continue within a particular area the region slowly begins to resemble a series of settlements aggregated by common interests in cultivating the land and not a neat distribution of related descent groups as shown in Figure 3.2. The need to depend on one's neighbors for aid in the fields during times of crop failure, war or raiding would seem to logically suggest that an individual residing in territory far from the home of his patrilineage would necessarily re-order his patterns of allegiance and begin to reckon solidarity not in terms of genealogical links but in terms of co-residence and proximity.

Horton believes that the *locus classicus* of populations that exhibit this form of migration is the land found between the "headwaters of the Volta up toward the Niger bend" the country inhabited by groups such as the Lowilli and Lodagaa, the Biri for and

Nankanse, and the Konkomba (Horton 1971: 94). In populations that have gone through the processes of disjunctive migration, relations between those present within a particular settlement revolve around the actual or fictive understandings of 'who came first', or who pioneered the land. The 'landowners' or 'first comers' are members of that lineage that established a settlement. If this pattern did indeed take place among the Konkomba it might explain the senior status which the earth lineage or 'first comers' maintain *vis-à-vis* the latecomers, who are not really members of a particular lineage, but simply those who joined a settlement after it has been established. Many Konkomba elders in Komba country explained that one lineage is senior in many villages because they founded the village and discovered the earth shrines of that region and so are the individuals responsible for communication with the earth and the ancestors.

Froelich does note that the relationship between the two 'lineages' within a village is generally a fictive one, and that they originate from different regions or parishes (Froelich 1963: 145). These two lineages, which he also understands as first-comers and latecomers respectively, do assume contraposed ritual roles within Komba territory in Togo, and here again, the two roles follow the classic voltaic pattern of elder for the people or *Onekpel* and elder for the earth, the *Utindaan* (Froelich 1963: 145).

The earth or its spirit, a powerful concept in the religious life of most West African peoples is brought to the forefront as group identity is articulated now not only by descent but also through territory and land (Horton 1971: 95). Latecomers are required to transact all activities which require the consent of the earth spirit through the earth lineage or "first comer" group. There is also a degree of implied complementarity to this system. Latecomers require the earth lineage to provide access to the land, and the earth

lineage, although in control of the ritual aspects of the right to use land, does not, for the same reason that the latecomers were forced to leave their home territory, necessarily have the support of neighbors to help it secure and maintain the land against intrusions by neighboring groups. Village founders require the latecomers to provide the necessary manpower needed to maintain the boundaries of a territorial settlement such as a village against other groups that might expand and against other ethnic groups.

A second problem which arises upon inspection of a map of an area in Konkombaland that contains a number of villages appears to be the almost perfect degree of randomness presented when the territorial layout of clans by village is charted. In the map seen in figure 3.1, we can see a distribution of clans that allows for no particular clan to be under-represented in an area. It may be that this checkerboard layout of clans is indicative of some method to the pattern of disjunctive migration, if indeed this form of movement has taken place in Konkombaland. It is conceivable that when members of a particular clan leave to found new villages, they typically move into areas where other clans hold sway to ensure that no one clan can control the best and most fertile land. Tait has offered no historical evidence to prove that disjunctive migration has occurred among the Konkomba. Further, the Konkomba, in discussing their movement over the land through genealogical time are not relating "real" history, but rather the distribution of power, prestige, and property in the present. Genealogy, at an emic level, is an idiom in which structural relationships on the ground are worked out and is not a record of actual history. Konkomba that I spoke to suggested that when they move to start a new village they simply go where the best or most fertile land exists. Indeed, that alone may be rea-

son enough, however, the need to maintain some degree of equality between clans in Konkomba society may play some role in patterns of migration in East Mamprusi District and perhaps elsewhere in Konkombaland.

Disjunctive migration then is a possible mode through which the non-territorially contiguous pattern of Konkomba clan distribution may have arisen. It is purely speculative as to whether this pattern has occurred in Konkombaland, however, the apparent strengthening of the Voltaic pattern of ritual division within Konkomba villages and the distribution of clans previously discussed would seem to indicate that such a pattern may have been in operation. This pattern of clan dispersal across the land has created a society networked by crosscutting linkages based on kin and neighborhood. Villages within a small region, such as that of East Mamprusi District, must then rely upon their neighbours when chiefdoms or raiders, such as the Tchakosi or the invading Dagomba, attack. Thus, as Goody points out, "a continuous intermeshing of social relations develops" (Goody 1954: 27). These networks of crosscutting ties have strengthened Konkomba communities and Konkomba ethnicity by creating a web of alliances that transcend kinship and standard segmentary forms of 'self-help'.

It must also be noted that Tait in his analysis of Konkomba political and kin-based organisation did not note any maintained 'tribal' division between Komba and Bimotiev, and neither did he include, as discussed earlier, the Basari as a Konkomba tribe as they (the Konkomba) understand the term. Tait's understanding of 'tribe' would seem to be a category as fluid as the Konkomba category "those who we go with" which I have described as the "sub-tribe", a grouping which currently has no degree of territorial contiguity, but apparently did during the time of Tait's fieldwork. Solidarity or common-

purpose based on the territorial contiguity of kinship in Konkomba, such as the Tiv-like state where tar and ipaven mirror one another, has been completely disrupted by migration and conflict. The Konkomba look to their neighbours first to aid in battle, kinship notwithstanding. Kinship and organisational categories have been redefined so many times by the necessities of dealing with neighbours who are often much better equipped, militarily speaking, and so must rely on flexible patterns of alliance. Konkomba ethnic identity embodies an ability to disregard kin-based allegiances and come together against a common enemy intent on disrupting Konkomba patterns of authority and their agrarian existence.

Clans within East Mamprusi District are organized into a category that I have termed the sub-tribe, and here is where we run into some confusion over the nomenclature used to describe the Konkomba. Tait has used the term 'tribe' in relation to the small agnatic segments represented in villages, units that I was told were analogous to my understanding of the term 'clan'. He then uses the term 'sub-tribe' to denote what can only be understood as regional divisions of a 'tribe'.

Further, Tait notes that the tribe is the largest unit of common values and loyalty (Tait 1958: 168). Tait's notion of the tribe would seem to fit the category that I have described as sub-tribe and for which the Konkomba that I spoke to had no word other than the same they use for lineage or clan. The Komba in East Mamprusi district are quite certain about who their clan will "go with" in times of battle, who they will "bury the fight" with, as Tait puts it (Tait 1958: 168), however, these groupings are not necessarily based on kin. When asked whether all clans that you "go with" are related I always received a resounding "no".

We go with the clans that have always been with us and who help us against Na-Yiri when we battled with him. Some of us are related but we have clans with us who are not related but they will always fight with us. But now though everyone fights like with the war. But if there is a fight between [among] us, then we always go with these clans. (*Interview with Mr. BN/ Nansuan, 24/9/99*).

Tait's category of sub-tribe, certainly a far more important level of organization as it is currently reckoned by the Konkomba, was a way of dividing clans into regional fighting units. However, Tait did recognize the fluidity with which these forms of grouping change and mutate. He mentions that he himself did not know the names of all of the sub-tribes in southern Bimotiev land, where he did his fieldwork, and was unable to meet

| | Tait (1961) | Froelich (1954) | Dawson (1999) |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| Village | Composed of Members of one clan | Composed of Members of one clan | Composed of Members of one clan |
| Clan | Composed of related agnatic lineages. When Tait speaks of a clan, he implies a "precisely knowable stretch of territory" (1958: 169). Territorially adjacent. | Composed of related agnatic lineages. | Composed of related agnatic lineages. A clan may representatives in non-adjacent villages |
| Sub-Tribe | Tait's category of sub-tribe divided clans into territorially contiguous fighting units | Prominent regional clans. Clans with a presence in a number of villages. Named after the primary clan that members of a sub-tribe will "go with". Similar to Dawson's definition. Includes Bimotiev or Bemwatib | Territorially dispersed fighting units or alliances, not always based on kin. "Those that we go with". |
| Tribe | Territorially contiguous related clans. | Territorially contiguous related clans. | The two primary groups of Konkomba in Ghana: Komba and Bimotiev and the Bas Konkomba or Basari. |

Figure 3.3 Table displaying differences in territorial and kinship terminology of three Konkomba researchers.

a Konkomba who was able to name more than six of them (Tait 1953: 220). This is due, I believe, to the changing quality of the Konkomba ethnic unit. Sub-tribes were and I suspect are still not, fixed and unchanging despite claims by the Konkomba that we "always go with these clans". Froelich also saw the *sous-tribu*, the sub-tribe, as a regional

unit which mobilized local clans for common purpose (Froelich 1954: 110).

Within a number of villages within East Mamprusi district there is a growing trend to do away with the position of 'elder for the people' or *Onekpel* and incorporate both of these positions within the earth lineage. Approximately thirty years ago, around 1969, after the first *Onekpel* to be enstooled as a chief or Mamprusi liaison in Namong died, the earth lineage within this village decided not to send up another person to Nale-rigu to be enstooled by the Na-Yiri and the earth elder gave the clothing and paraphernalia, the *kopanjok* of the liaison chief, to his younger brother to hold as a symbol of the village's desire for peaceful relations with Mamprusi, but would not allow this younger man to be enstooled as he was a man of the earth. This younger man came to be known as *Gbonduan*, loosely translated to mean 'regent', or "the one who holds the *kopanjok*". The junior lineage within the village resisted this abolition of the position of the liaison chief. I was told that members of the junior lineage saw these actions not as a move on the part of the earth lineage to consolidate power within one lineage. However, most individuals, I am told, believed that if removing the taint of Mamprusi leadership within their village could only be accomplished through the elimination of the secondary political role within the village then such an act would be warranted.

Most people look to the Utindaan [Otindaa] for the rituals of the earth. If we are going to pour water or give juju for our ancestors then if we lose the position that Na-Yiri always tries to take then it's O.K. (*Interview with Mr. JN/ Nansuan, 26/9/99*).

However, with the current movement to establish paramount chiefs, for both the Komba and Bimotiev, an office that would, to some extent, introduce a level of authority which would be above the ritual *Utindaan* and mirror the position occupied by Dagbani paramounts, but from within. It might be speculated that the Konkomba paramount

might then reinvigorate or strengthen the position of the liaison chief or *Onekpel* and move authority out of the sacred and into the secular sphere for although the paramount will undoubtedly be chosen from a village earth lineage, his relationship with other villages under his dominion might be negotiated through the elder of the junior lineage. This shift from sacred to a more secular form of power was observed among the Mamprusi after Gambaga and Nalerigu were separated as sacred and secular centers of power for that chiefdom (Drucker-Brown 1975 : 166). The *Gamarana* or Mamprusi earth priest lost considerable power after the Na-Yiri established Nalerigu as his seat of power.

Although both lineages within a village claim to be related through a distant ancestor, the junior or 'People's' lineage would usually be the one which the Mamprusi or Dagomba paramount would attempt to recruit into the bureaucratic hierarchy of the chiefdom. This seems to have led to a great deal of internal antagonism within some villages such as Namong. The people of the earth lineage and I believe most of the village, saw it as a bit of insidious way of assimilating Konkomba society into the administrative sphere of the chiefdom. The individuals who were frequently recruited to act as the Mamprusi liaison in Komba country were apparently always from the junior lineage in the village — the 'late-comers'. There exists in most Komba villages then, a distinct hierarchy between the earth lineage and everyone else. Further, I believe that this kind of internal bickering over the substantive nature of Konkomba political authority — that which contributes considerably to Konkomba solidarity and identity — is not only based on relations with foreign neighbors but also on traditional values about where authority originates.

Another incident that displays the interaction between clans occurred and is, ac-

According to latest information, still taking place, in the present Bimotiev trading town of Saboba. Saboba, a town on the border with Togo, is a town that was established as one of the primary Konkomba settlements after the Bimotiev were driven from Yendi by the Dagomba. According to informant in and around Saboba and Sangur, in the late 1960s Saboba became an important trans-border trading town and was soon bustling with Yoruba traders from Nigeria. The Yoruba, who had always held a important commercial position in Akan country and further south in the markets of Sekondi and Takoradi had begun, during the 1960s, to make inroads in the Northern Region as brokers of ground-nuts (Sudarkasa 1979: 145) and apparently began to demand that the Konkomba provide a more substantial form of judicial authority within the village to arbitrate disputes over contracts and agreements in the primarily Konkomba central market. A market chairman was appointed to deal with legal questions; however, this individual was still subordinate to the Saboba *Utindaan*. As the Saboba market grew in size and in importance, the power of the chairman grew and many non-Konkomba began to see him (the chairman) as the true authority within Saboba. The Bimotiev inhabitants of the village were uncomfortable with overriding the power of the Saboba *Utindaan* and so moved the authority of the earth lineage to nearby village of Sangur. Sangur became the guardian of the Saboba earth shrine and the Bimotiev appointed a regent in Saboba to deal with mercantile and judicial issues. For the Konkomba, authority flows from the earth. The nexus for Konkomba power and leadership is the earth shrine, a focus of ritual activity which also represents the autonomy and boundaries of the most important territorial unit, the village. This is apparent at all levels of Konkomba society, from the smallest northern village to a busy trading town.

Both of these events took place after the Konkomba in the Northern Region began selling their agricultural produce in the markets of Ghana's urban centers and could be possibly seen as a movement by the Konkomba towards a more organized form of political authority in the wake of increased material wealth. Horton did note that the form of leadership found in societies that have undergone processes of disjunctive migration contains the germ of state organization but with the mobility and flexibility of segmentary opposition (Horton 1971: 95). I do not, however, believe that this was what was taking place in Namong. I was told by one person in another border town, Bunkpurugu, that "Konkomba like things in their place". This is nowhere more apparent than in the way in which the Konkomba people view where their leaders should come from. For an individual to command any kind of respect within Konkombaland, that individual must possess the approval of and a connection with the earth. For most Konkomba, that means the earth lineage. Despite external intervention and circumstances of economy the man who will ultimately be recognised as holding the final word within a village must always be from the lineage that first discovered the land shrine within the boundaries of that settlement as, as we shall see in the following chapter, the earth holds dominion over all.

CHAPTER 4: EARTH AND ANCESTORS

In the religious life of the Konkomba, as with many other Guinea coast peoples, earth shrines and the cult of the earth play a crucial role. The earth is the essential medium through which the people of West Africa, people to whom the spirits of the ancestors play a supremely important role in quotidian life, commune with the past and those who went before. The earth is a vital symbol of fertility in the home and in the fields and the ancestors, the ultimate source of sanction for social life for the people of the Northern Territories of Ghana (Manoukian 1951: 83).

A cursory examination of the religious complexes of a number of West African peoples is indicative of how widespread the cult of the earth is in this region of the continent, and provides a clue as to why it needs to be emphasised in any analysis of ritual among a Voltaic people such as the Konkomba.

For example, a citizen of the ancient kingdom of Asante, just south of Konkombaland, praise Asase Yaa or 'old mother of the earth', the consort of "Nyame of the sky" in the following fashion:

*Earth, when I am about to die, I lean upon
you. Earth, while I am alive I depend upon
you. Earth that receives dead bodies.* (Busia
1951: 42).

Asase Yaa is creator, a potent deity, and no Asante farmer would begin working the land without her leave (Parrinder 1941: 39). When a grave is to be dug the permission of the earth must also be asked. For the Asante, the earth and the ancestors are inextricably linked. During funerary rites, the earth at the point of burial is requested to give itself up to receive a body. No temple or object is involved as the Asante prefer to speak

of the earth as a power or force felt across the land (Rattray 1923). Indeed, it has been suggested that the cause of much political machination and struggle over political office is the result of lineage attempts to control the shrines and spirits of the earth.

The Kusasi of Ghana's upper east region receive the admonishment from their earth priest or *Tengdaan* that they bury deceased individuals quickly for the sake of the earth. "No one who has many brothers and sons can become rotten before burial" lest they spoil the land (Rattray 1932:391)

Among the Ibo of southern Nigeria, the great earth goddess is the very essence of fertility. Called Ala she is the centre of the Ibo moral universe, the giver of laws. (Talbot 1923: 43) Every Ibo village has a shrine to Ala. This shrine is senior to all others. The shrine is typically placed in the hollow of a tree with iron rods and wooden gongs placed in the formed upper ceiling of the hollow. (Meek 1937: 25). At the time of the yam harvest, fresh palm wine and yams are offered to Ala whether the harvest is bountiful or not as the importance of the earth spirit is crucial in the Ibos' connection with the ancestors and with burial rites.

The Yoruba cult of the earth surrounds the *Orisha* or deity named Oko. Oko has very plain, unadorned temples in which cowrie shells and representations of twins are housed, indicating the *orisha's* association with fertility (Parrinder 1941: 40). The maintenance of similarly named '*Orixas*' in the highly syncretised form of Yoruba religion found in modern Brasil and Cuba would seem to attest to the centrality of the earth cult in the Yoruba religious complex.

In Ghana's northern lands, among both the Mole-Dagbani people and the Gur groups, Manoukian identifies two aspects in which the earth is considered. First, a prac-

tical, owned, proprietary aspect, in which the land is divided up and allotted for people to work. The second being the mystical, living side of the land, responsible for influencing the activities of daily life and as a source of health or benefactor. The Konkomba do not personify the earth as a deity as do the Ibo, Yoruba or Ashanti, however they do sometimes embody the earth as female. (Manoukian 1951: 82). This female embodiment of the earth is known as *Ketik*, she nourishes and cares for the earth through her partner in the sky, *Umbor*, resident in the sun and in the rains (Froelich 1963: 150). *Ketik* is an aspect of *Umbor*, a deity that represents the world and the universe. Through *Ketik*, *Umbor*, exercises influence over the land and the animals which reside upon it (Froelich 1963: 150). It is through the earth shrine, the *Ntengbe*, that the *Utindaan* communes with the earth or with *Ketik*. It seems however, that the animistic aspect of the earth, the 'face' of *Ketik*, is only invoked when the Konkomba wish to contact or appeal for the aid of one of the spirits that inhabit the wild, natural places of Konkombaland. *Les genies* or the spirits of the river, the baobab tree or the crocodile pond are all invoked as representatives of the land and are invoked when the earth adjacent to their shrine is in need of assistance through some aspect of *Umbor*, from the warmth of the sun or through the rains. These spirits do not inhabit a material shrine such as is found among the Ibo or Asante, but rather, are considered to be 'in the ground', the ultimate destination for all Konkomba religious offerings.

I do not believe, as Froelich has suggested (1963: 150), that the Konkomba, like many of the other Voltaic groups make the distinction between the two aspects of the land, between the mystical and the practical. This somewhat materialist approach neglects to be informed by the actions of the elder for the land, the *Utindaan*, in Konkomba

society, an individual who decides issues of physical boundaries or practical aspects of working the land and also presides over the mystical sphere of the earth. There exists no separation between the mystical and the practical as both are embedded within the functions of the earth lineage.

The Konkomba are not unusual in West Africa, for they too have a strong involvement with the land both spiritually and economically, indeed Tait notes that the land shrine, the *Ntengbe* is the *sine qua non* of a district, the earth shrine embodies the essence of that Konkomba lineage which occupies its territory (Tait 1958: 171) What then are the consequences that these ubiquitous forms of religious practice have for ethnicity among the Konkomba? Konkomba political structure is based on the dyadic relationship between the elder for the land and the elder for the people, as was discussed in previous chapters. Each Konkomba village is composed of two contraposed lineages, by this is meant a division of ritual roles between the lineage for the earth and lineage for the people. The apical ancestor of the earth lineage is the individual who established a settlement and the ancestor of the people's lineage is "he who helped the one who first came here" (Tait 1954: 214). Further, the crux of many of the past and existing antagonisms between the Konkomba and their neighbours is rooted in how others have treated and misused the product of Konkomba fields, of Konkomba land. An understanding of land and earth rites and their place in the Konkomba worldview is central to the argument presented here.

The Konkomba attachment to the land has moulded both their interaction with neighbours and the rituals and beliefs that define Konkomba ethnicity. Konkomba earth and ancestor rites are illustrative of this. They are simple and straightforward rituals in-

volving few spoken acts and typically directed solely towards the earth itself.

The earth shrine is the symbolic and ritual centre for each group of related clans and both the Bimotiev and Komba have numerous earth shrines in their territory. Every village is composed of two major agnatic lineages of the same clan, sharing in common only a very distant ancestor and each clan has its own ancestor shrine. Traditionally, both the Komba and the Bimotiev use some natural landmark such as a baobab tree, hill or clearing as their earth shrine, and will often travel over large distances in order to serve these shrines. Rarely do they make use of clay pots, gourds, calabashes or other items of material culture. For the Konkomba, life revolves around the earth and its cultivation. Consequently, Konkomba religious life on the physical plane is focused on the earth to the exclusion of almost all else.

The Konkomba earth shrine at Yendi, a large baobab tree on the town's northern side near a small rise, has not been served since the Konkomba were displaced from Yendi. To serve a shrine, one needs to provide the appropriate sacrifices and "water" – libations – to the shrine that ties a particular lineage's ancestors to the earth. The shrine to which an individual owes allegiance is determined by the location in which the elder of the earth or earth lineage for that village first established a settlement. Bimotiev Konkomba throughout this region maintain that this shrine still belongs to them and that the Dagomba are unable to "do the gods" of Yendi. Indeed, throughout southern Konkomba territory, lineages have been forced to move away from their earth shrine, typically a tree, sacred grove, pond or simply the earth itself in or around the location where the apical ancestor of a major lineage established a settlement. Bimotiev Konkomba, have then, been forced to employ surrogate shrines for the earth and other ritual foci within their

villages. Land rites in Bimotiev villages take place in the family compound or on a patch of cleared land. The Bimotiev now employ pots covered with calabashes that are brought out to the yard or on to the land as replacements for the land shrine that can no longer be served. A closed basket is then brought out with the sacrificial fowl and a pot of sorghum pito beer or bitter spirits is placed next to the pots. A calabash of pito or spirits is poured over the pots as attendants recite a blessing to the produce of the land after which the



Figure 4.0. Sacrifice of a red rooster in Bimotiev country to honour a deceased relative.

white fowl is sacrificed over the pots (Zimon 1992: 115). The use of surrogate shrines or the easy replacement of a red rooster for a white one or a guinea fowl demonstrates the flexibility and dynamic nature of many of the earth shrine rituals of the Voltaic peoples. Frequently an earth priest will improvise a rite, and I myself never saw the same ritual performed the same way twice, indicative that the religious

complex of the Konkomba is very much a cosmology in the making.

Sacrifice – Serving the Shrine.

For the Konkomba, land is intimately connected with fertility, and the number of pots used in a land rite is always greater than two. Two of the pots are always separated and regarded as the shrine of the twin spirit; twins are seen as symbols of fertile land and of a bountiful harvest to come throughout Gur territory.

Among the Bimotiev one often encounters square clay posts, approximately twenty centimetres in width and half a meter high, in the central yard of a family compound or placed in a bush. Upon these posts, calabashes filled with medicine, typically the leaves of germinated seed yams, are placed. These shrines are granted therapeutic and curative powers, they are protective shrines, intended to ensure the well being of village members.

A stone placed among the boughs of a tree located on the right side of a family compound is thought to symbolize the protective earth spirit of a homestead. A red rooster is sacrificed to this shrine whenever the compound head requires the intervention of a bush spirit whether it be for greater prosperity or increased yields from his yam mounds (Zimon 1992: 118)

The Bimotiev do not however, use physical material shrines in association with the veneration of the ancestors. The Bimotiev serve their ancestors by pouring the blood of anywhere from two to six fowl or guinea fowl, and depending on the status of the individual, goats, and also libations of beer on the right side of the door to their hut or simply on the ground itself. The right side of the door, or the exit door symbolizes the interface between the sacred and secular, between this world and the next.

North of Yendi, in the territory inhabited by Komba Konkomba, one rarely encounters a clay pot, a calabash or other ritual paraphernalia in the service of a spirit of the earth. Although the Komba have always paid tribute to the Na-Yiri, they have never been forcefully displaced from the land which they pioneered, and consequently still have access to the majority of their earth shrines. Surveying a Komba compound in and around Gambaga one is confronted with mounds of yams waiting to be transported to one

of the numerous Konkomba yam co-operative markets in the country, shea nuts, and other produce, but rarely does one encounter a focus of material culture that might be described as a shrine.

For all Konkomba, the earth and that which it can produce dominates their exis-

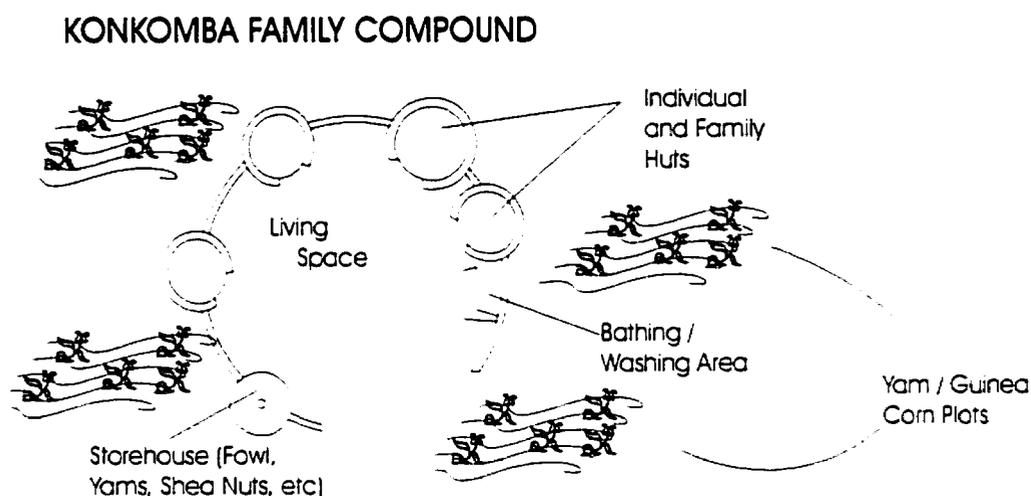


Figure 4.1 Detail of a Konkomba compound. (Young married male with three infants and one teenage son).

tence but nowhere is this more apparent than in Komba land. The Konkomba derive an immense amount sheer pleasure from discussions of the impending harvest or from simply observing their seed yams germinate over the course of the winter. Many times I was told, “we Konkomba are farmers... we farm”, the implication being, I believe, that they don’t waste their time with much else.

The Konkomba terms for the two offices of authority within each village reflect their passion for cultivation, “Elder for the land” and the “Elder for the people”. The semantic contrast of these two terms sums up the Konkomba attitude towards not only chieftancy and authority but also the land itself. As discussed in earlier chapters there ex-

ists no real political office in Konkombaland analogous to chief, as that office has been elaborated among the Dagbani chiefdoms and the Akan. The Konkomba experience with that institution was largely one of tribute and supplication to a Dagbon paramount, whether it is the Na-Yiri, Ya-Naa or Bimbilla Naa. They perceived the Dagbani expression of this institution as an attempt to control the land upon which they made their living and which they held sacred. Consequently, it would appear the Konkomba have resisted the formation of offices which might duplicate what they believe is an illegitimate form of ownership over the earth.

The elder for the earth or *Utindaan* is the oldest male member of the earth lineage "chosen" by the spirit of the earth (Zimon 1992: 115). The *Utindaan*'s primary task is to maintain the health and prosperity of the community by soliciting the goodwill of the earth and of the ancestors and is in charge of the rites performed during the planting season. The breaking of new land or the erection of a new compound requires his presence and he receives part of the libations or sacrifices offered to receive the earth's blessings. The successful establishment of a new compound is a significant event in Konkomba land. It is the unit of expansion and movement across the land, but it is to Konkomba a powerful signal that the earth has permitted them to flourish. I was not present to witness the erection of a new compound, however, during my time in the village of Gbindere, just south of Namong, I watched as an additional round hut was added to the compound of a younger village male from the earth lineage. After a large two-meter hole was created in the wall of the compound, the entire area was swept clean of every last piece of cement and muddy debris; the land was made clean, ready to receive a residence. A white cock was then brought and was killed over the centre of the ground where the hut was to be.

The *Utindaan* then walked away without so much as uttering a word and, upon his departure, adult males to be involved in the construction process poured bitters on the ground and then proceeded to mould mud to form the walls of the hut. The entire ceremony was a very quick and simple one, designed to ensure the permission of the earth and to get on with the building project.

Ceremonies in the village of Namong

The village of Namong is found at the end of long, rock-strewn road southeast of Nakpanduri that falls into a small depression in the region. It is inhabited by members of the Binyambob clan and is composed of 23 homesteads or compounds divided between two major lineages. Each compound is traditionally composed of round huts, covered with thatched grass roofs or occasionally with sheets of corrugated zinc. However, in almost every village I visited there existed at least one home that was built with square brick houses laid out in the same fashion. These homes were invariably the residences of richer members of the earth lineage who had left the village and found their fortunes in the construction or yam export business in Accra. Each hut is connected to the other by a rounded mud wall, one metre high that has been encased in cement. This forms an enclosed structure in the shape of a large circle. Only one exit leads out of the compound into the surrounding fields of yams, maize and sorghum. A network of winding pathways that cuts through the agricultural plots connects each compound to the others. There are no fences or other boundary markers to delimiting neighbouring fields and during the course of a day one encounters every village member traversing the paths to help in each other's fields or to enjoy a bitter calabash of pito beer in a relative's or neighbour's compound courtyard.

I was invited to attend the ancestor rites performed for a recently deceased elder of the earth lineage of Namong. This individual, named Gbeaao was not the *Utindaan* of the village, rather his younger brother. However, he had been a powerful individual within the village and often, when the *Utindaan* was infirmed or unavailable, this man would perform the ritual tasks of his elder brother. Before sacrifices were made to the earth shrine of Namong, a baobab tree located near a small stream, lineage members fired shotgun shells and bottle rocket fireworks into the ground.

We're giving force to the ground, giving it juju from his side, and telling people in the village that we're giving juju to my uncle. *Interview with Mr. GB/Namong, 10/6/1999*

Juju was a term used frequently by the Konkomba to describe any act directed at venerating the earth or ancestors. Rituals that contained acts of sacrifice or aspects of the supernatural were described as "doing my juju".

After almost of an hour of explosions we returned to the family compound of Naabu, the lineage of the deceased individual and began the process of sacrificing a number of animals. A total of 3 hens, 2 guinea fowls, 2 roosters, 1 goat and 1 dog were presented to the earth as a gift to the spirit of departed elder. For each animal it was ensured that some of the blood of the animal was collected and taken to the baobab tree (*lit-tingbaan*) later in the day. As the animals were killed the village *Gbondaan* or regent, brother to the deceased invoked the earth by repeating:

When we go and farm you grant us yams in abundance so we can dig some more, grant us prosperity. Take this blood Naabu. *(Namong, 10/6/1999)*

Later that week I was fortunate enough to witness a small family offering in the compound of one of the younger members of the Naabu lineage as he was beginning to bring in his yam harvest. It was early June, the time when the first yam mounds are har-

vested for produce and a time once again to give thanks. This individual owned one of the smallest compounds in the village and did not have a very large yam plot, however, he was extremely enthusiastic about his crop this year, as weather had been good and prices for yams in Accra had risen sharply.

I helped Bimensia, a man whose name translates to mean “make it nicely for me”, bring in two wheelbarrows worth of yams into his family compound. He then took a small guinea fowl from his storehouse out to his yam field and cut the animal’s throat. While pouring the blood he mumbled something that I was told by my translator to mean:

Today is yam day and it is good for me and not Na-Yiri. I’ve a guinea fowl for you for the spirit. Give me more yams. (*Namong, 13/6/1999*).

Later that evening, in the homestead of Bimensia, we enjoyed the guinea fowl cooked in a spicy stew, heated up by an abundance of piri-piri peppers, served with jollof rice and black beans and of course, boiled yams. The dish was washed down by a bottle of lager, which had just been brought from Nakpanduri, where electricity and consequently refrigeration are present, and so was chilled — a rare treat. This was a special meal and the special occasion warranted chilled beer. An integral part of any yam ceremony, enjoying “fine” food as Bimensia phrased it, expresses happiness over the crops and a hope for continued success in the fields. It was common practice in Konkombaland to eat the animals sacrificed to the earth and to the ancestors. The Konkomba are at heart a most pragmatic people, wasting little that their time in the fields has brought them. The act of prestation to the spirits of the ancestors and of the earth, undoubtedly in the minds of the Konkomba, extremely practical spirits, is that which matters, not the material objects themselves.

Libation

In addition to the sacrifice of fowls and other domesticates, libations of alcohol are also crucial elements in Konkomba land rites. Tait notes that libations are only used during religious ceremonies for the land during harvest, purifactory or expiratory events and during divinatory rites, categories that he notes are not mutually exclusive (Tait 1961: 225). At all of the events described above, in addition to animal sacrifice, poured libations of pito, gin, or bitters was performed by all males present. During a libation, liquid is always poured directly onto ground and never onto concrete or walls. Tait describes a purifactory earth rite in which the *Utindaan* or *Otindaan* as he transcribes the office, serves or performs for a Bimotiev earth shrine through both the words of this individual and the choral responses and libations of participants (Tait 1961: 229). During this event, the *Otindaan* performed the libations and prayers on a patch of ground outside the earth shrine or *Ntengbe*, which I believe was a proxy for an original earth shrine which these Konkomba were no longer permitted to access. This assumption is borne out to some degree by the *Otindaan's* appeal to the *Ntengbe* that it bring back those who went away to those who remain and that if the shrine could hear them from here that it bring rain and food in plenty (Tait 1961: 229).

In addition to pleas to the *Ntengbe* made by the *Utindaan* that fields and the village women be made more fertile, a common petition made by the village through the earth priest is that the troops who defend the village be made more powerful so that they may defend the village against marauders (Froelich 1963: 151). Defence of the village and the fields, as with most things in the Konkomba universe, is intimately connected with the cult of the earth.

Tait suggests that libations mark a transition in ritual condition, that it is through libation that a connection is made with the spiritual beings and principles of Konkomba cosmology. Through libation, a path is forged to the essence of the Konkomba religious system, an essence composed of "a Way, a Path and a Life. It lays down for Konkomba

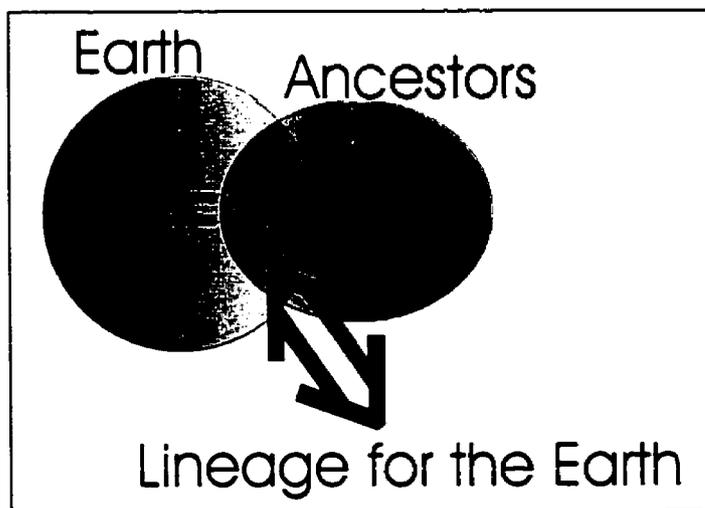


Figure 4.2 Interaction diagram. Ancestors, embedded in both the earth and the lineage.

a pattern of conduct which, if followed, offers rewards and which is neglected, brings punishment" (Tait 1961: 231)

The Force of Religion

The social structure of the Konkomba is thus

clearly reflected in their religious and ritualistic existence in a classic Durheimian sense (Durkheim 1995). The Utindaan is the head of the earth lineage within each village and is the effective head of the biggest ritual unit within Konkomba society, the clan as it is represented within the village. It is the elders for the land that preside over and permit all land and earth rites within Konkombaland and within these rites is embodied the true authority within Konkomba society. Through sacrificed offerings and libations the Konkomba establish and maintain contact with supernatural forces whose existence are believed necessary for the prosperity of quotidian life; the earth and ancestor rituals of the Konkomba are demonstrative of a "collective effervescence", a manifest representation of what it means to be Konkomba.

The flavour of Konkomba political decisions in northern Ghana, decisions which

cause inter-group relations to be aggressive or offensive in nature are better understood in the context of the Konkomba relationship with the earth and are imbued with a force, as Durkheim understood the concept, of religious origin. This relationship with the land has developed out the typical Voltaic pattern of disjunctive migration, in which first comers into new territory — pioneers pushed out onto the periphery of metropolises, established and thereby legitimated their authority over subsequent migrants through the insistence that the originators of a settlement alone are able to commune with the powers of the earth, powers which hold in covenant the spirits of all resident ancestors. During the process of lineage fission a diviner is consulted to determine the location of the land and other shrine within the territory that the migrants propose to occupy. The discovery of the new land shrine brings into existence a new ritual focus for worship of both the earth and the ancestor. The apical ancestor of the earth lineage within the new village sets up a dynasty of sorts, providing what Lancaster has termed the “spine” of a community, a senior group which holds sway over communal earth cults and ancestor cults (Lancaster 1987: 106). No Konkomba member of the earth lineage would ever consider associating themselves with a chiefly let alone royal line, but most elders of the earth do consider themselves senior in all things. Now although the earth may hold the spirits the “roots” or anchors of communication between this world and the next, the ancestors and the living is the lineage itself, the kin group. One can establish one’s roots and right to power by becoming the “founder of a group yet to come” (Kopytoff 1987: 22). The observation that Africans take their ancestors with them when they migrate is well taken. It creates a society which is very easily relocated into frontier areas, local frontiers on which authority is developed upon association with the land (Kopytoff 1987: 22).

The essentially territorial nature of group identity in Konkombaland and throughout the Northern Region becomes apparent when one recognizes that when spiritual force, brought forth from the earth, comes to the fore and is vested in the earth lineage, a kin group, then identity, contained and defined by the controlling lineage becomes partially synonymous with the earth. The earth lineage comes to represent the group against outsiders and to preside over ritual acts and ultimately comes to define the identity of the community. The earth lineage gains licence not just over the settlement founding kin group but also over the entire community and it is they who are able to create and shape the image of the community (Horton 1971: 95). Throughout Konkombaland, as described in earlier chapters, influential members of the earth lineage have been responsible for shaping modern Konkomba ethnicity and mobilizing a new Konkomba identity. The multidirectional relationship between the earth lineage and the religious practices outlined here has directed the forces of ethnogenesis that flow from within the boundaries of the group to affect interethnic interactions in the region to be religious as well as social and economic in nature.

In summary, it appears that through the supremely important position that the earth cult occupies in Konkomba society in an agricultural economy which is undoubtedly one of the most productive in the Voltaic region, a society is created whose central thrust is geared towards the preservation and maintenance of a secure cultivable land base. Konkomba ethnicity revolves around that which increases agrarian yield and is often directed against that which might possibly inhibit said, the imposition of tribute.

Malinowski notes that there exists no other aspect of daily life which is as fully and as naturally controlled by magic as tilling and working the soil (Malinowski 1935). I

am certainly not suggesting that every aspect of Konkomba cosmology focuses on increasing the yield of one's yam plot; however, for the Konkomba to do wrong by the land would most certainly invite both mystical and material disaster. The Konkomba connection with the land is deeply apparent in their religious practices, a connection however, which has been disrupted among Bimotiev Konkomba. In the majority of instances that I witnessed in Komba land, every offering made to the ancestors or in any land rite the sacrifice or libation was made directly onto a patch of cleared earth or on the ground of the compound. The Konkomba, like most other West African peoples are linked to the past in a very real way through ancestor veneration, however, the vector of this veneration is always the earth itself. Ancestors are always served through a sacrifice to the earth with the "elder for the land" present. The *Utinduan* of Gbindere village, one of the few elders that spoke fluent English told me the Konkomba are "of the land".

Konkomba society is composed of a widely dispersed network of territorial and kin-based relations, it is a society that does not maintain a traditional form of chieftancy or political authority and is perhaps more readily apprehended as a group which is controlled by an economically based corporate entity that legitimates its power through association and linkage with the land. They are a group in which there are glaring regional differences in religious practices however, I believe that they are also a people which provides us with a glimpse into the innovative and myriad ways in which the African societies construct themselves in the post-colonial world with which they are confronted. The following chapter will deal with the economic underpinnings of this construction, the intricacies of Konkomba agriculture and production.

CHAPTER 5: AGRICULTURE AND MARKETS

The argument presented revolves around my contention that those aspects of everyday life — political authority, religion, and family — which combine to constitute Konkomba ethnicity, are rooted in an attachment to the earth. For the Konkomba, leadership and kinship flow from a village's connection with its local earth shrine, which provides a medium for communication with the ancestors. Relations with neighbouring chiefdoms have become antagonistic as these powers attempt to interrupt the Konkomba connection with the earth. As we have already seen, one side of this link with the land is embodied in the praxis of Konkomba religious traditions. The other half of this connection is played out in the daily interaction that the Konkomba have with the soil. As they work the fields each morning, every Konkomba individual reinforces the basis of Konkomba ritual and economic activity that in turn forges and shapes Konkomba identity.

Within the territory occupied by each Konkomba village there exist a number of different types of farmland known by the crops and the type of agriculture worked on them. A region between two compounds might seasonally be known as yam-land, guinea-corn-land or sorghum-land. The Konkomba allow no land to go uncultivated and village boundaries will extend as far as the closest field of the neighbouring village. Only on the rocky outcroppings that extend into Komba territory from the Gambaga escarpment can one see a break in the land that has been tilled by Konkomba hands.

The economic life of the Konkomba is determined by the cycles imposed upon them by the radical changes that this area of West African guinea savannah goes through during the course of a year. During the months of July, August and September the land

of the Oti River is almost completely flooded. Throughout this season most roads are totally washed away, necessitating travel by off-road vehicles or even small canoes until the water runs off into the Volta. Komba land, to the north of the Oti plain, is not flooded as severely as southern Bimotiev territory, but it too receives a sizeable amount of precipitation during the monsoon time of year. These floods can be hazardous to the fields of the Konkomba, most especially to the vast tracts of land devoted to yam cultivation, a root crop that grows vegetatively.

Tait notes, as I have reiterated here continually, that the land and the crops are the primary interests of the Konkomba. Interestingly though, Tait also mentions that he did not observe the Bimotiev Konkomba farming year round and that during a certain period of the year, many Konkomba would leave the village to hunt and fish or to work on the farms of neighbouring peoples such as the Krachi (Tait 1961: 14). I believe that these secondary activities were in large part a response to inadequacies in the Konkomba diet resulting from payment of agricultural tribute paid to the Dagomba and the need for secondary income from some source, as the Konkomba, at this point in time had no source of monetary income. Tait himself notes that despite an apparent abundance of wild game and fish in the northern territories of the Gold Coast, protein and other dietary deficiencies were frequently reported among the Konkomba. This kind of malnutrition might be explainable among women during the pre-colonial period, as Konkomba females of this era did not consume meat. (I saw no evidence of this prohibition in action during my time among the Konkomba). Tait though, notes that the worst examples of malnutrition he saw were among men (Tait 1961: 14).

Tait writes that during the pre-colonial period cattle were kept in every compound

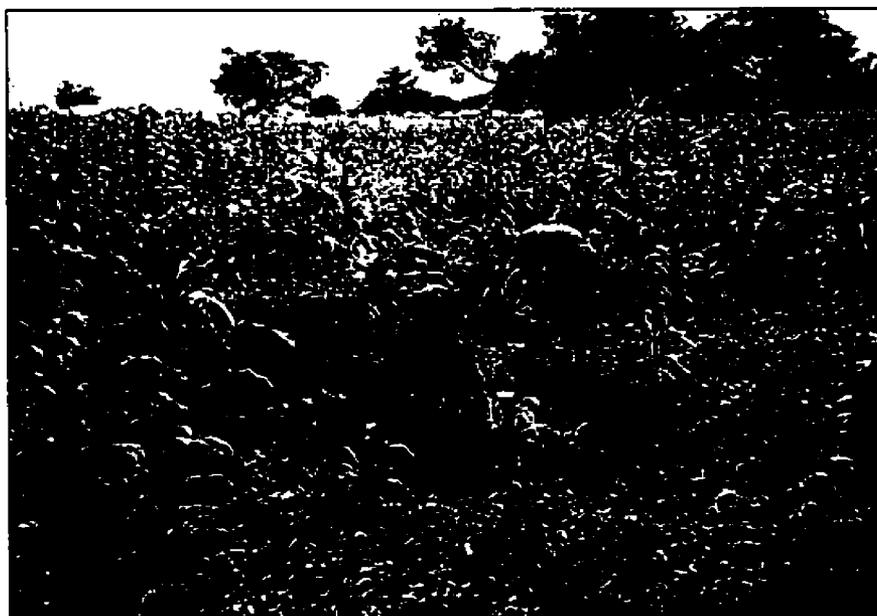


Figure 5.0. Guinea corn plot in the village of Gbindere. East Mamprusi Dist.

and that al-
most every
household
owned at least
one or two
head (Tait
1961: 14). It
struck me as
unusual that
during my

time among the Konkomba I encountered only two compounds that actually possessed cattle and these were used primarily as draught animals. Most Konkomba use donkeys or mules as their primary beasts of burden and now purchase cow-meat from the Bimobas. The most important source of protein for the Konkomba are the innumerable fowls, guinea fowls and ducks kept in every compound. These, along with the large number of goats that are kept both for milk and meat, are the animals most commonly used in sacrifices at the earth shrine and for the ancestors.

The Konkomba farm is the focus of interest for supplication and sacrifices made to the ancestors and to the earth. Most prayers are appeals to the ancestors to provide good rains for the field but not strong winds, which will tear down the crops and destroy compounds.

Bring good rains to the fields but don't let the floods destroy my yams, as they can't grow with too much water. I pour water for my farm so that it will thrive (*Translated by interpreter. Sacrifice made in a yam plot/Sangur, 5/9/99*).

Tait notes that despite being superb farmers the Konkomba know nothing of soil quality or how to assess the variable fertility of one area of land over the other (Tait 1961: 15). Much of the soil in the Oti plain and in the area of the Gambaga escarpment is lateritic and given to considerable heterogeneity with patches of sand, gravel and clay scattered throughout. The Konkomba, he observes, “chose land for farms by the grasses growing on it”, which appears to be “more than adequate” (Tait 1961: 15). I questioned a fair number of Konkomba farmers as to how the Konkomba knew where to plant yams or guinea corn, or if they could grow yams only in a special area. The responses I received may have been indicative of some form of special kind of tradition environmental knowledge or they may not, a topic which in the seemingly unpredictable but at times amazingly productive north would seem to be in need of further investigation. The majority of farmers would simply state that they grew crops according to the demands of the market. If the cost of guinea corn was higher, than they would plant more guinea corn. higher sorghum prices — more sorghum. There appeared to be no intricate system dictating which part of a compound’s agricultural space was good for yams or good for groundnuts, sorghum or other crops. Again I was reminded of the Konkomba adage that was repeated continuously during my time in this region that simply states “Konkomba are farmers. We farm”.

The annual farm cycle in East Mamprusi District begins with the digging of the first yam mounds in January. Konkomba still count time in the village not by years but, as Tait noted, by the number of yam mounds that a farmer has dug since he first established his own compound (Tait 1961: 15). The January mounds yield their crop in June. The second yam plots are usually planted in late May and by mid-May the first light rains

come. This second batch of yams must be harvested before the heavy monsoon rains arrive. Until the late 1970s it appears that the Konkomba would always plant dry rice and sorghum between the yam mounds in case the yams crop failed. This is no longer practiced, as, I was told, the Konkomba now plant so many yams that they always have enough to take to market and feed ourselves even if some plots are washed out. The second yam crop is brought in during September and October and is referred to as the late yam harvest. This was the harvest that was, during the infancy of the Konkomba expansion into Ghana's national markets, transported to the small Konkomba communities outside Accra and Kumasi.

The Konkomba during Tait and Froelich's time did practice a greater degree of crop rotation than is currently implemented in Konkombaland. Fields were apparently rotated every 3 or 4 years and allowed to lie fallow for approximately 4 to 5 years (Froelich 1963: 126). I was unable to find evidence of any field which was currently in a fallow state, indeed, it seemed that every available piece of land was in use for some agricultural purpose.

Gender specific division of labour is practiced in the Konkomba fields. Men assume the tasks of clearing the land prior to the planting season, of preparing the yam mounds and of planting the yams and corn (Froelich 1963: 127). Women and younger children are assigned the task of weeding throughout the growing season and of sowing millet, sorghum and groundnuts (Froelich 1963: 127). I witnessed in Kombaland that the production and maintenance of the yam fields is wholly a male chore. I was informed that the cultivation and harvesting of yams is altogether too arduous a task for women, especially when the rains come. It would seem however, with the importance of yams in the

Konkomba economy that they would enlist all available labour in the maintenance of the yam plots.

Yams are one of the most important staple food crops produced in Ghana. They are especially suited to the climatic and soil conditions found in the Guinea savannah. Yams are consumed in a number of forms in Ghana. In the north it is often boiled or fried and served with guinea fowl or goat meat. In Akan country and in the south, it is turned into yam fufu after being boiled and beaten in a large wooden pestle until it coagulates.

The yams commonly grown in Ghana are of four kinds: red yams, or the familiar sweet potato, Guinea yams, white yams and water yams. Yams grow vegetatively from an original seed yam that is planted in a mound which protrudes from the earth. After the seed yam germinates, the vines that emerge from the soil are trailed along a small stick inserted into the ground or wrapped around trees growing *in situ*. As the yams grow, particular attention is paid to weeding and to ensuring that the yam vines are always properly staked and do not lie on the ground. As far I could observe, and from what I was told in East Mamprusi, the Konkomba rarely use pesticides or herbicides on their yam crops despite the presence of the yam beetle (*Heteroligus meles*) in much of northern Ghana (Wills 1962: 378). Young children are often assigned the task of removing beetles from yam vines by hand and can often be seen kneeling between the mounds collecting the beetles and depositing them in a can filled with kerosene.

I was informed by men in the Konkomba yam market in Accra that the average yam yield in Konkombaland has been increasing steadily for the past ten years. I was told in the yam market that the average yield of most Konkomba villages was approximately 25 tonnes per hectare. Average yields for yams in Northern Ashanti Region in the

early 1960s were around 12-14 tonnes per hectare (Wills 1962: 378). Members of the Konkomba yam cooperative in Hejura, near Kumasi, informed me that many Asante farmers buy Konkomba yams to supplement the yields of their own fields. Villagers in Kokofu, a small Asante village outside of Kumasi also informed me that they bought yams in Hejura from the Konkomba. "The Konkomba are very good farmers" I was told by one woman in Kokofu after I informed her of what I was doing in Ghana. This statement is indicative of a general impression that I believe many Ashanti and southerners have of the Konkomba, a belief that they work on the land and do little else. "Oh, people in the north buy plenty of their food from the Konkomba" I was informed by one man in the Kumasi central market, "because all they do is farm". Froelich reports an average of around 4000 to 5000 yam mounds per hectare in the 1950s (Froelich 1963: 127). I estimate that Froelich's reported average still holds true for Konkombaland, however, I believe that a far greater amount of land is now devoted solely to yam cultivation

Those yams not consumed in the Konkomba household are sold in afore mentioned cooperative yam markets in Accra and outside of Kumasi or in the local markets. These markets operate on a six-day market cycle that is found throughout the Northern Region. On each day of the six-day week there is a market somewhere within the region. Tait writes that in Saboba district the days of the week are named after the market that takes place on that day. This also occurs in East Mamprusi District. The cycle in East Mamprusi of markets is:

1. *Nansuan Market*
2. *Nabule Market*
3. *Yunyoo Market (Mamprusi / Konkomba Village. Market Controlled by the Konkomba. Village headed by Mamprusi Yunyoo Naa)*
4. *Gbindere Market*
5. *Jimbale Market*

6. *Namong market*

The Namong market, although located in an influential Komba village has begun to lose its importance in the region due to the large amount of produce transported to Accra and the rise in importance of the market in Yunyoo, where, I was informed, even the courtiers from the Na-Yiri's palace in Nalerigu often buy produce.

Konkomba markets are not simply economic ventures but are important social events. As much as people visit the market to buy and trade goods they also visit to meet friends from nearby villages, to drink pito beer and generally enjoy the company of fellow Konkomba. Markets are typically held on a cleared patch of land next to the road which runs through the village and in addition to the agricultural produce sold by Konkomba farmers to visiting Tchakosi and Bimobas villagers who also set up butcher stalls for the Konkomba to purchase meat products. Other merchants include clothiers, foam mattress salesmen and general venders of household sundries. Tait notes there are few trade specialists in Konkomba. During his time with the Konkomba, Tait discovered only one weaver, who has learnt her craft from the Dagomba and only one blacksmith.

It was in small markets such as the ones in Nabule and Yunyoo that the Konkomba first started to trade their surplus agricultural produce for craft goods and eventually for monetary recompense. This pattern of trading was, I believe, the beginning of the Konkomba move to break free of the economic stranglehold placed upon their productivity by the tribute exacted which culminated in the transport of Konkomba agricultural produce to the regional capitals. During the 1950s, the markets along the border regions and on major trade routes such as Saboba and Yunyoo began to attract traders from outside the region, usually Yoruba and Hausa traders (Tait 1961: 26).



Figure 5.1. Red yams and guinea yams (foreground) piled in the Konkomba yam market in Accra during mid-July.

Tait recounts the development of the market in Saboba. In 1950, the Yendi market would attract one, maybe two, trucks of Yoruba traders headquartered in Yendi. By 1952, this had increased to almost twenty lorries filled with traders to purchase Konkomba produce. By 1953, Saboba had jumped from being a small Konkomba market to the second largest in Eastern Dagomba District. In the late 1950s, Yoruba traders had, as yet, not settled in Saboba, however, by the mid 1960s Saboba was occupied by almost 35 Yoruba traders (Tait 1961: 26). Through the 1950s, Saboba began to attract a permanent population of Mossi weavers and butchers from Ghana's Upper East Region. Tait reports that there was little or no tension between the Konkomba and the Yoruba visitors but that

there was maintained a fierce rivalry between the Konkomba and the Mossi (Tait 1961: 26). The Konkomba would accuse the Mossi of charging exorbitant prices for their weaved goods and the Konkomba would in return require a market fee higher than that required from the Yoruba. The Mossi, were seen as allies of the Dagomba, allies of those that drove the Konkomba from Yendi 400 years earlier (Tait 1961: 27). The Dagomba themselves have never settled anywhere Saboba.

In Saboba market, as it still is in most Konkomba markets, the goods sold by the Konkomba were solely the produce of local farms. Tait reports that during his time in the early days of Saboba's growth prices charged by Konkomba for their grain rose every season as a result of shortages created by two years of drought. However, with the resumption of regular rainfall in 1953 yam prices did not fall. The Konkomba, Tait notes, continued to charge high prices for their produce as they began to discover that the Yoruba and Hausa were able to mark up the crops that they purchased in Saboba by almost fifty percent in Yendi and Tamale (Tait 1961: 27).

It appears that a similar growth took place in the Komba market at Yunyoo. However, in Yunyoo, Mamprusi elders in the village would often purchase Konkomba produce and sell it to traders from Gambaga and Nalerigu. Apparently, the Mamprusi of Yunyoo had assured Konkomba farmers that they were getting a fair price in the form of manufactured goods for their produce. Apparently when news of the growth of the market in Saboba spread to Komba country the Konkomba began to demand significantly higher prices in the form of cash from the Mamprusi. The Mamprusi in Yunyoo objected to this, however, with their reliance on the Konkomba not only for trade goods but also for food, the Mamprusi were forced to acquiesce to Konkomba demands.

Tait notes that initially the Konkomba hoarded the cash that they earned from their growing markets. He states that this is an ancient custom among the Konkomba. Not a year passes, he writes, that "some pot of long buried cowries" is found buried in the garden plot of a family compound (Tait 1961: 29). The Konkomba still hoard much of their income, and have a reputation in the Northern Region for living an extremely frugal and spartan existence.

The growth of Konkomba markets recorded by Tait urged him to question what the Konkomba's economic and agricultural future would be. He believed that the Konkomba would begin to increase the amount of land devoted to cash crops and increase the amount of yams that were transported to the south. He also predicted that the Konkomba who had moved into Nanumba territory and would to expand cultivation along the banks of the Oti River, closer to Bimbilla and Salaga. (Tait 1961: 31). Tait's prediction has been borne out by recent history.

Throughout the 1960s, the Konkomba did indeed establish themselves as the primary cultivators of yams in the southern Nanumba territory. The Nanumba, it seems, were unaware of the extent of Konkomba migration into this region and when the first census was taken of the Bimbilla region, as reported in Chapter 2, it was discovered that there were more Bimotiev Konkomba settlements in Nanun than there were Nanumba villages.

Tait's prediction that the increased shipments of yams sent to the markets of the south would have important consequences for the nature of Konkomba society could not have been more prophetic. The rise of the Konkomba yam markets in the south, already discussed in Chapter 2, was crucial in bringing into the fore those aspects of Konkomba

identity which had been somewhat suppressed by the Dagbani domination, but which had driven the Konkomba to resist the imposition of territorial leadership from Nalerigu, Yendi and Bimbilla.

After the first shipments of yams started to be trucked to Accra and Kumasi, the Konkomba began, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, to establish cooperative markets in these large urban centres to sell produce from all over Konkombaland. The Konkomba yam market in Accra is approximately 300 hundred square meters in area is located near the area of the capital known as Old Town. During the course of a day in late June, when the first yams are harvested, one can witness a large truck laden with yams pulling into the market almost every fifteen minutes to discharge tonnes of red and guinea yams. The majority of the trucks, which transport the yams from the north, are owned by the Konkomba that have settled in Accra.

The market is filled with négociants that sell yams from all over Konkombaland. Denizens of Accra, Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo merchants visit the market from Nigeria and even produce wholesalers from Europe and North America can be seen striking deals with Konkomba yam brokers for overseas shipments. The market is extremely successful and the pride of every Konkomba farmer in the north. The Accra négociant and the illiterate northern farmer alike would often say to me "we feed Ghana". An exaggeration perhaps, but the impressive amount of produce which is moved through this market on a daily basis during the harvest period is remarkable indeed. During one day in early July, I witnessed 35 five-tonne trucks pull into the market and discharge their load. This however, did not result in an overwhelming surplus in the market, as it would seem that sales during the day almost equalled the amount of produce brought into the market.

The yam market in Accra, in many, ways represents all of the factors that have merged to comprise Konkomba ethnicity and self-identity. Through the income that the market the generates the Konkomba have become a powerful economic force in Ghana's agricultural economy and are no longer kept in near destitution by the tribute imposed upon them in the past by their neighbours. The Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba now regularly rely upon the Konkomba to supplement the produce of their fields, however, the Konkomba now exact a hefty price for the goods they sell to their one time overlords. A group of Mamprusi farmers in Wale Wale told me as I waited for a bus back to Tamale one afternoon in mid-July, that at during this particular time of year, the Konkomba become "very prideful".

They charge too much for their yams all year, but during July and when then late yams come in, the Konkomba get so much money. They [the Konkomba] become very greedy but they don't spend their money on our cloth. They only store all their money away. We've always been friends to the Konkomba, and now we can't sell our yams because everyone in the south thinks that Konkomba yams are best. (*Interview with Mamprusi farmers going to Tamale/ Wale Wale, 19/7/99*).

The Konkomba have not, as of yet, succumbed to the tendency for territorially dispersed groups that have achieved a new degree of power and influence to consolidate and concentrate authority within a hierarchical system. Whether this will happen in the future, remains to be seen, however, even in the market itself the traditional form of authority found in most Konkomba villages is replicated. The market has an earth shrine, a small and somewhat defoliated Baobab tree, located in the residential area of the market. The Accra market has an earth elder or *Utindaan*, who oversees all offerings made to this shrine. He also provides approval to a new trader or broker of they wish to set up a new stall in the market. The market *Utindaan* is the ultimate authority within the market in all matters concerning layout of the market, residential issues, and trader disputes.

The market chairman or *Onekpel* fixes prices in the market and costs paid by farmers for yam transportation. The chairman, assisted by the cooperative board, which is composed of influential and wealthy négociants, sets a standard price for each type of yam according to the supply and demand for particular varieties. The market *Onekpel* also oversees relations with the numerous Dagomba women who work in the market as porters for the Konkomba, acting essentially as a liaison between the Konkomba and the Dagomba who are in the employ of market négociants. The position of liaison in the market however, is much changed from the role occupied by the *Onekpels* co-opted by the Dagbani in times past.

The most obvious manifestation of the factors that I believe contribute to contemporary Konkomba ethnicity is the abundance of the yield of the earth within the market. As I have stressed throughout the present work, the Konkomba invest almost all of their time into maximizing the effort they put into the land and nowhere is this more apparent than in the Konkomba yam market. I only truly appreciated the amount of time and land that must be devoted to agriculture, when one morning in the yam market, I observed a staggering amount of yams, of every variety found in the Voltaic region, piled in mounds often four metres high. I was astounded by the amount of produce and asked why there was such an abundance of yams on that particular day. I was told that this was the traditional day for the Accra yam market. Although this market operates on every day of the week except Sunday, the market still maintained one day out of every six that was its traditional day for selling yams to other Konkomba who lived in Accra. The maintenance of the customary market cycle in Accra is, I believe, indicative of the reinvigoration that traditional Konkomba economic and ritual patterns have received brought about by the

Konkomba's newfound autonomy.

The Konkomba have expressed their ethnicity through their opposition to the control of the Dagbani, but it is also rooted in their economic, ritual and political connection with the land.

The Accra market embodies the Konkomba's struggle to rid themselves of the control of foreign chiefdoms, but it has also brought into the fore the importance that the Konkomba place on maintaining their linkage with the earth and on the devotion that the Konkomba have for cultivation.

CHAPTER 6: BECOMING KONKOMBA

I have attempted to enumerate the internal and external factors that, I argue, come together to constitute Konkomba identity. I believe that the Konkomba articulate their solidarity, a new found solidarity at that, through a shared devotion to the earth and resistance to those forces that might intervene or interfere with that connection to the land. Prior to the success achieved by Konkomba farmers in selling their produce in larger regional and urban markets, it appears that the Konkomba did not possess any notion of solidarity that transcended regional boundaries. Konkomba villages would of course come together to fight off the incursion of a Dagomba or Mamprusi raiding party, as was discussed in Chapter 2, but these collaborations were temporary and confined to a local area. With the increased wealth accrued by urban Konkomba and the removal of the yoke of Dagbani tribute, Konkomba from throughout the Northern Region began to come together in joint opposition to the Dagomba. The expression of political and ritual authority through the cult of the earth and the pre-eminence of cultivation in Konkomba society, both of which I believe are crucial to understanding ethnicity, took on increased salience as these two forces helped to bring about the Konkomba economic ascension. It was the individual *Utindaans* within northern villages who first began, after witnessing the increased prices that the Dagbani paramounts and the Yoruba traders were getting for Konkomba produce in large northern markets, to facilitate the transportation of yams to Tamale later to Accra. The earth elders, described by the Konkomba as the ultimate authority within their villages, embodied the Konkomba connection with the land, and through the actions of these individuals, and later the younger urban Konkomba, the

Konkomba were able to achieve a new degree of autonomy.

Chapter 4 explored the religious and ritual foundations of the Konkomba attachment to the earth and how this connection is mediated through the ritual activities of the earth lineage within each village. We saw that the entire Konkomba worldview revolves around the embodiment of the spirits of the ancestors within the shrine of the earth. Through the cult of the earth, lineages (descendants of ancestors) become “fixed” to particular places on the earth. The earth shrine is a pivotal component of every Konkomba settlement, and which, for the Konkomba, possesses an objective existence beyond that of the village. The Konkomba must ‘find’ the shrine on any piece of land they propose to inhabit and will look back to a shrine which is now found on land that they have been forced from.

The last chapter explored the practical side of the link to the earth that defines Konkomba identity. Chapter 5 addressed the ways in which the ecology of Konkombaland and the necessities of the market economy, which the Konkomba are now fully integrated into, has impacted Konkomba production.

The factors which have forged modern Konkomba ethnicity are more than an aggregation of the processes of boundary maintenance that take place between ethnic groupings. To be sure, much of the recent history of the Konkomba people is defined by a marked social opposition to their Dagbani neighbours, but in order to apprehend ethnicity within social grouping one must, I believe, pay some attention to the processes operating within the ethnic boundary. Among the Konkomba, I believe that the ritual and political association of authority with the earth and the ancestors and the primacy of cultivation are primary among these internal factors.

With an understanding then that ethnogenesis is more than just a process of boundary maintenance, one can, I believe, safely proceed to analysis of that very topic. The projection and manipulation of a particular ethnic identity or group of perceptions in order to preserve the values or further the goals of particular group form the basis of processes of transaction of ethnicity. Among the Konkomba, there appears to be a concerted effort on the part of the elite within KOYA and the elders of Konkomba society to reinforce in the consciousness of the region and indeed in all of Ghana that the Konkomba are a people whose first passion is farming the earth and reaping the profits that this endeavour brings. They have also however, maintained the image that if a group interferes with this enterprise then they will have visited upon them terrible violence. The Konkomba are considered by a large number of urban Ghanaians to be thugs, or violent marauders, folk devils of the north, who have finally rebelled, in an extremely bloody manner, against centuries of subjugation. They are portrayed in the national press as extremely aggressive a people who are little more than gangsters who have, in the words of one Ghanaian citizen, "lost the sympathy of all peace loving people" (Frimpong 1994: 591).

This perception of the Konkomba as unsophisticated, uneducated thugs is one which is projected time and again in the Ghanaian media. The most recent example of this depiction occurred during the recent conflict in 1994 in which over 2000 individuals were killed and many more were left displaced from their homes.

In late 1993 reports began to emerge from Yendi that the Konkomba living in the Dagomba traditional area were uneasy and seemed to be preparing for action of some

kind. In retrospect, many northerners situated in the Northern Region capital of Tamale told me that they knew a clash between the Konkomba on the one hand and the Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja on the other was inevitable and wish they had evacuated the region sooner as a considerable amount of property damage occurred in Tamale during the period of the "war".

The tensions in 1994 had emerged from petitions made by the Konkomba youth association of Saboba and by the market chief or chairman of Saboba himself for the chief's position to be elevated to one of paramount status. This petition was largely ignored by the Dagomba and dismissed by the Northern Regional Minister as just another incident in the long history of ethnic and chieftancy conflicts in this region.

After almost two decades of economic independence from the Dagbani paramounts many Bimotiev Konkomba in southern Dagomba country were still not permitted to own land. The Dagomba asserted that the right to farm on land claimed by the Dagomba could only be granted if the Konkomba in the region bought the land from the Ya-Na. However, the right to actually own property, a right that the Bimotiev Konkomba in this region had never desired or deemed necessary to farm the land, could only be realised through the appointment of a Konkomba paramount chief in the national house of chiefs. Until such an event took place, the Konkomba would have to resume payment of the tribute they had long since abandoned. This began a movement to enstool the first Konkomba paramount chief, an act which would seem to be almost anathema to the very heart of Konkomba ethnicity. A petition was made to Kumasi and the national house of chiefs to grant paramount status to the Konkomba chief from Saboba. Many Nanumba and Dagomba decried this petition on the part of the Konkomba as a "back-door" ma-

noeuvre towards ownership by outsiders who had migrated into the region and possessed no rights to speak of whatsoever. Now, the Konkomba would no more seem to be recent migrants any more than the Mamprusi or Ashanti, however, this label stuck, and many people throughout Ghana, unaware of the complexities of northern history began to think of the Konkomba as power-hungry invaders.

When the request for paramount status was denied, tensions began to rise. This snub exacerbated an already tense situation and set the stage for the conflict to follow. When fighting eventually did break out, over the killing of a Nanumba farmer, the government was inadequately prepared for what was to follow.

Following the beginning of hostilities the Ghanaian dailies were frequently rife with descriptions of Konkomba assaults upon the Nanumba:

- February 3, 1994. It is reported that “thousands have been made homeless as the Konkomba extend their assault on the Nanumbas across thirty villages between Bimbila and Yendi” (Yeboah-Afari 1994b: 313).
- February 6, 1994. In the Togolese town of Mango it is reported that a truck carrying the bodies of 53 Dagomba women and children entered the town in the early hours of Sunday morning. The driver reports that the truck was stopped by Konkomba warriors who executed the entire truck-full of refugees. (Tettey 1994: 3).
- March 14, 1994. It is reported that a grenade is exploded in Konkomba market, a yam market in the capital Accra. The police netted twenty-three shotguns, 73 boxes of ammunition and 18 ammunition belts. Thirty different suspects were subsequently rounded up, all of whom were Konkomba.” (Yeboah-Afari 1994a: 310)

The Konkomba were condemned nationally during this incident, whereas during their war with the Nanumba in 1981, they had received some support from southerners.

This time, the Dagomba and Nanumba had done a thorough job in categorizing the Konkomba as the transgressors. One Nanumba woman in Tamale remarked during my time in that most frenetic of northern capitals:

The Konkomba don't appreciate what we've got in Ghana because they're not from here. We like to keep the peace in Ghana. You've seen it; Ghanaians are friendly and have the most peaceful country in Africa. Konkomba just start trouble! (*Interview with MA/Tamale, 9/8/99*).

I found this attitude to be prevalent throughout the country even five years after the 1994 conflict. There appears to be the perception that the Konkomba hoard the cash that they make on their now very extensive agricultural operations without investing anything in the economy of the region.

- April 4, 1994. *West Africa Magazine*: "The Northern chief is the poorest in the ranks of Ghanaian chiefs" and "It is a well know fact that most settler Konkomba farmers have assets that dwarf the assets of the local chief on whose land they acquired their fortunes. The question then is who is exploiting whom?" (Frimpong 1994: 591).
- June 6, 1999. *Ghanaian Times*: The Dagbon Youth Association (DAYA) said here at the weekend that Dagombas were peace-loving people committed to peace among all ethnic groups living in the Northern Region. That notwithstanding, it observed that "not even the most innocuous angel can live in peace if his neighbours do not want him to" (Osei Agyeman 1999: 3).

In a publication which is sold in Ghana's national museum in Accra, in the arts centre in Kumasi and in Accra and in school bookshops throughout the country, one Dagomba author proceeds to outline what he terms "The Hidden History of the Konkomba Wars in Northern Ghana" (Martinson 1995). This book, sub-titled and known by many throughout Northern Ghana as "The Red Book" attempts to dissect what the author call the 'Konkomba Logia' or the 'Pathology' of pan-Konkomba nationalism by through an



Figure 6.0 Dagomba porters in the Accra Konkomba yam market

exploration of the inherent “fallacy and weakness” of the work of David Tait (Martinson 1995: 120). Martinson posits that it is “intellectually pathetic” and “historically myopic” for Ghanaians to assume that the Konkomba are still fighting the Dagomba because of the “mythical” assumption that the Dagomba exterminated the ancestors of the Konkomba in Yendi. Martinson then proceeds to employ trigonometry and the Pythagorean theorem to demonstrate the falsity of the Konkomba claim to ritual authority over some of the land of Dagbon. The Konkomba are not, according to

Martinson, “appreciative” of Dagomba hospitality (Martinson 1995: 121). I purchased a copy of this book in Accra before I began my journey into Ghana’s north. Upon my arrival in Tamale, I showed it to a number of Dagomba and Gonja youths. A good 25 out of the 30 or so males that I spoke to above the age of 17 were familiar with the book, informing me that they used it in some of their civics classes. One boy said:

It is a useful book because it is good that we know about our Konkomba brothers. If we learn about them then maybe next time they will listen to us and there won’t be any problems. Our form master [teacher] told us that we must understand why wars take place. (*Interview with teen/ Tamale, 12/6/99*)

In response to questions about the perception that many Ghanaians have of the Konkomba as troublemakers, most Konkomba replied that they were aware what people

in Ghana thought about them but did not care because they were now free to pursue their own destiny, they possessed that which they felt every other group in the Northern Region possessed, some degree of self determination.

Maybe now people will give us some more respect. We work harder than any other tribe in the north. We feed Ghana! And still they call us trouble. Things are changing now. The market [Yam market in Accra] is making plenty. And the Konkomba are now powerful people. (*Interview with BB/Bimbilla, 24/8/99*)

Many Konkomba that I spoke to at the Konkomba yam markets in Accra and Hejura, outside Kumasi, were intent that I take pictures of the Dagomba women who were carrying Konkomba yams to the cars of waiting buyers. The Konkomba at these markets told me that the Dagomba and the Mamprusi wouldn't dare to try and enter the yam market and compete with the Konkomba in Ghana. I was told that ever since the Konkomba stopped providing the Mamprusi and Dagomba with tribute, they had to start growing their own yams. This was confirmed by a number of Mamprusi farmers that I spoke to who said that the Konkomba had been growing yams for far longer period of time than they had. The Konkomba believe though, that the Dagomba are too frightened of Konkomba reprisals to try and compete in the yam market. "We keep them on their toes" indicated the earth Konkomba elder of the Accra yam market, where the lineage system of the north is maintained. This comment was made without any elaboration and after uttered was received with a mild chuckle from comrades. I'm not certain what the "chairman" as he is called was alluding to, but I do believe that there exists in the Northern Region a hovering threat of violence if any group were to interfere with the Konkomba again. Many Dagomba and Nanumba youth in the Northern region seem to be in a constant state of readiness for battle with the Konkomba.

The creation of a strong intermeshing set of political connections between Kon-

komba districts has permitted them to mobilize a notion of 'Konkomba-ness' if you will. The Konkomba have been able to successfully control the image they project of themselves in an attempt to achieve political goals. It is true that most Konkomba farmers do possess considerably more wealth than their Nanumba or Dagomba neighbours. They have carved out a powerful position in Northern society and it is this, which I believe, is in large part responsible for the Konkomba's eagerness to wage war; the Konkomba are not prepared to go back to a state in which they are subservient to the Dagbani and even more unwilling to give up what they have achieved in the economic realm.

As it stands currently, there is peace in the north. But neither the Konkomba nor the Dagbani groups have given much ground. The movement to appoint a paramount chief for the Konkomba has regained momentum in Konkombaland, pushed forward largely by members of KOYA in Accra and in Tamale. The current push is for two paramounts to be named, one for the Komba and one for the Bimotiev. A number of objections have been raised to this proposal however. The Komba desire their paramount to be granted authority over Kombaland with the village of Namong as the seat of power, as this community has long been considered by the Komba to possess the primary earth shrine of Kombaland, as Yendi was once for the Bimotiev. The Mamprusi however, object, since the Komba have never had a real chief in Namong after the earth lineage "stole" the *kopanjok*, the regalia of the Mamprusi appointed chief. The Konkomba of Namong do not have a history of chieftancy, claim the Mamprusi, and so should not be granted a paramount. In Namong, after the *Kopanjok* was taken by the earth lineage to end the reign of the Mamprusi-validated *Onekpel*, the earth lineage declared that Namong

would no longer have an elder for the people. The junior clan lineage within the village proceeded to enstool a new Onekpel without the consent of the *Utinduan* but with the authority of the Mamprusi regional chief in Yunyoo. However, the Mamprusi now claim that since the Onekpel that they approved over twenty years ago, was not approved by the earth lineage, which the Konkomba claim is extremely important, then Namong is undeserving of being the seat of a paramount.

The Dagomba in eastern Dagbon object to the location of the Bimotiev paramount in Sangur. They claim that Saboba is the town in which the Bimotiev should have their paramount. However, the earth shrine of Saboba was moved to Sangur after the town became a prosperous trading town and so the paramount must follow the shrine. These are stall tactics on the part of the Dagbani paramounds and will likely be of no avail, as it seems extremely likely now that the Komba paramount will be enstooled before 2002. They have however, served to further strain relations between the Konkomba and the chiefdoms.

I am sure that it has not escaped the reader's attention that for the Konkomba to possess a paramount chief would go against their long held resistance and disregard for this institution. "A chief is nothing but a thief" is a comment I would repeatedly hear throughout Konkombaland. Members of KOYA in Accra claim that the Konkomba paramount will be different, that he will be a voice for Konkomba farmers against the "corruption and oppression" of the organized chiefdoms of the north. This is, of course, a familiar statement, uttered frequently by politicians and bureaucrats in every society. Will the Konkomba paramount will indeed be different? The history of Konkomba leadership has a tradition of maintaining a popular consensus but it has never operated at the

level of a paramount chief. The mobilization of the Konkomba which resulted in the establishment of trading settlements in urban centres was accomplished largely through mutual cooperation and the direction of a number of influential members of regional earth lineages. Further, the history of most acephalous peoples that have ascended to the power previously denied has been one of transformation into a society ruled by hierarchical chiefs and bureaucracy. Clearly this is a topic for further investigation.

The Konkomba are now actively engaged, I believe, in a process of projecting an ethnic identity that deters their neighbours from attempting to regain economic, political or administrative control over Konkomba communities. This is an identity that is composed of a desire to prevent any future incursions on Konkomba autonomy and to increase the degree of economic clout that the Konkomba currently wield in Ghana's agricultural sector.

Schildkrout suggests that ethnicity is a grouping of conscious and unconscious assumptions about one's identity, derived from membership within a particular group or category. These beliefs in turn affect social behaviour within a number of social fields: political, economic and religious (Schildkrout 1978: 10). This definition would seem to fit the configuration of Konkomba ethnicity presented in this work, as it says nothing about the direction and location of behaviour. Konkomba ethnicity is, as I believe I have demonstrated, a combination of interactive processes within and across the ethnic boundary and is also the product of internal factors whose importance and salience have been altered through inter-ethnic contact. Konkomba ethnicity is expressed through the embeddedness of all Konkomba social institutions in the lineage of the earth and the special

connection that this descent group has with both the ancestors and the spirits of the land. Konkomba ethnicity is the product of centuries of interaction with groups which possess marked differences in political organisation. Konkomba ethnicity is expressed through solidarity brought about by success in the economic sphere. And the Konkomba, I believe, use the projection of a negotiated ethnic identity to ensure the maintenance of their autonomy and to create ethnicity

When the Konkomba make comments such as “We feed Ghana” or “all Konkomba; Komba, Bimotiev and Basari, who also sell their yams in the Accra market are brothers”, statements I often heard in Konkombaland, I believe that they are expressing a new sense of what it means to be Konkomba. These statements both reveal the extent to which Konkomba solidarity is now expressed through a capacity to now cultivate the land solely for the purpose of their own people and the potential to come together in a way which spans all of Konkomba territory against a common foe and not solely in terms of opposition to regional paramounts. Konkomba ethnicity is borne of this solidarity, a solidarity that is largely a product of the Konkomba’s new economic position and sense of achievement in finally ridding themselves of foreign interference and control.

What then, is it, to be Konkomba? The Konkomba are a people who, I believe, do possess a deep and profound attachment to the earth and the life that flows from it. I couch this statement not in a spiritual or new age idiom reminiscent of a significant amount of recent post-modern meandering. The connection that the Konkomba have with the land is grounded in their extremely practical nature. For the Konkomba there is nothing of more importance than farming the land. This has always been the case, to some extent. Now, however, the Konkomba are able to pursue their primary economic

activity without the fetters of foreign tribute and taxation and this has changed the essence of Konkomba ethnicity dramatically.

Returning to Barth, we see that he and his fellow contributors in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* touched on the point made here, a point made repeatedly in the history of the social sciences, by Marx, by Weber, that the way in which a social group earns a living, the economic underpinnings of society, go a long way to shaping the way in which a society expresses itself. The economic and political self-sufficiency that the Konkomba now enjoy has allowed this most proud and industrious people to define themselves as a powerful and influential group who maintain their tie with the earth, a tie which, as I have stressed throughout the present work underlies and forms the foundation for Konkomba society, but which now has been brought into the fore. The Konkomba are now able to demand of their neighbours a degree of respect for their agricultural activities that they have perhaps not received in the past.

The Konkomba have been forced to assert themselves, sometimes through violent means and other times through legitimate economic channels in the ethnic milieu of northern Ghana in order to maintain control over the produce of their land, of their labour. Forced, because to remain silent, to not act, would have meant that the foreign incursion into the Konkomba essence, their means of production and survival, would have affected more than simply the loss of yams or guinea corn. This incursion disrupted and denatured the Konkomba form of traditional authority. A pattern of leadership which, through their ritual and religious complex, expressed both the Konkomba bond with the earth and their solidarity as a people.

Konkomba ethnicity is forged out of this connection that Konkomba society has

with the land but also out of the inter-ethnic processes that have affected or have sought to affect this connection. These processes of interaction have taken the form of a centuries old antagonism between an acephalous people and a chiefdom and through the negotiation and manipulation of certain aspects of Konkomba ethnicity which keeps, now that the Konkomba have gained some level of independence, the chiefdoms of the north at bay.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEWEES

| Name | Age (Approx) | Location | Status | Gender |
|------|--------------|------------|-------------------------------|--------|
| JB | 36 | Accra | KOYA Member | Male |
| GB | 75+ | Namong | Village Elder (Earth Lineage) | Male |
| LN | 44 | Sangur | Farmer | Male |
| DB | 75+ | Saboba | Elder (Earth Lineage) | Male |
| BN | 50s | Nansuan | Farmer | Male |
| JN | 50s | Nansuan | Farmer | Male |
| MA | 37 | Tamale | Nanumba Shopkeeper | Female |
| TT | 60s | Nabule | Market Elder | Male |
| BB | 40s | Bimbilla | Farmer | Male |
| AN | 60 | Yunyoo | Market Elder | Male |
| DE | 32 | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| FR | 23 | Accra | KOYA Member | Male |
| GV | 23 | Accra | KOYA Member | Male |
| HT | 44 | Nansuan | Market Elder | Female |
| SE | 55 | Sangur | Farmer | Male |
| GG | 50s | Benja | Farmer | Female |
| JB | 40s | Tamale | Farmer | Male |
| JB | 30s | Saboba | Farmer | Female |
| BB | 14 | Salaga | Child | Female |
| BB | 12 | Gbindere | Child | Female |
| GN | 22 | Kumasi | KOYA Member | Female |
| HN | 27 | Bunkpurugu | KOYA Member | Female |
| JN | 36 | Namong | Farmer | Male |

| | | | | |
|----|-----|------------|-----------------------|--------|
| IK | 43 | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| UJ | 68 | Tuna | Elder (Earth Lineage) | Male |
| JJ | 77 | Nansuan | Elder (Earth Lineage) | Male |
| AD | 76 | Nakpanduri | Farmer | Male |
| AD | 56 | Nakpanduri | Farmer | Male |
| DC | 66 | Nansuan | Farmer | Male |
| BY | 60s | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| BR | 60s | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| JA | 60s | Namong | Market Elder | Male |
| BG | 60s | Sangur | Market Elder | Male |
| RK | 44 | Sangur | Market Elder | Male |
| RU | 56 | Sangur | Market Elder | Male |
| EG | 58 | Yendi | Market Elder | Female |
| RG | 33 | Yendi | Market Elder | Female |
| CN | 23 | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| FB | 55 | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| BB | 34 | Tuna | Farmer | Female |
| OL | 90s | Benja | Elder | Male |
| PJ | 22 | Benja | Traveller (unknown) | Female |
| FT | 25 | Wale Wale | Traveller (unknown) | Male |
| BK | 14 | Wale Wale | Traveller (unknown) | Male |
| BN | 13 | Wale Wale | Traveller (unknown) | Male |
| BG | 50s | Nakpanduri | Farmer | Male |
| BK | 50s | Nansuan | Farmer | Female |
| BS | 40s | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| VB | 30s | Namong | Farmer | Male |

| | | | | |
|----|-----|----------|--------------|--------|
| CF | 40s | Namong | Farmer | Female |
| BB | 44 | Tuna | Farmer | Male |
| SD | 45 | Saboba | Market Elder | Male |
| WT | 78 | Saboba | Market Elder | Male |
| DH | 22 | Bimbilla | KOYA Member | Female |
| AS | 33 | Bimbilla | KOYA Member | Male |
| JS | 22 | Salaga | KOYA Member | Male |
| KP | 12 | Salaga | KOYA Member | Female |
| BB | 66 | Salaga | Farmer | Female |
| MP | 66 | Sangur | Farmer | Female |
| PS | 14 | Sangur | Child | Male |
| BB | 44 | Sangur | Farmer | Male |
| BH | 50s | Sangur | Farmer | Male |
| BY | 40s | Saboba | Farmer | Male |
| BT | 30s | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| BN | 32 | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| BJ | 40s | Namong | Farmer | Male |
| BU | 40s | Tuna | Farmer | Male |