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POLITICIZATION, ELITE MANIPULATION, OR INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES? THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS TO THE DAGBON CHIEFTAINCY DISPUTES IN NORTHERN GHANA

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Abstract

Many explanations exist for the intractable Dagbon chieftaincy succession disputes. The most recent of these disputes in 2002 resulted in the death of the king (the Ya Na) of the kingdom and others. This paper has two sections. The first part takes a historical look at the origin of what have come to be known as the Abudus and the Andanis. The second part analyzes the course of events after the Supreme Court judgment in 1986 on the legal tussle between the Abudus and the Andanis, to March 27, 2002.

The position of this paper is two-fold. First, the failure of the founders of the Dagbon Kingdom to establish a regularized and patterned system of choosing a Ya Na explains the recurring nature of the Dagbon chieftaincy disputes, otherwise called the Yendi Skin Affairs. Secondly, the inability of the PNDC government to enforce the decisions reached and agreed upon, by both parties in the 1987 reconciliation between the Abudus and the Andanis, underlies the 2002 open conflict.

Résumé

Plusieurs raisons ont été avancées pour expliquer les conflits liés à l'insoluble succession des rois de Dagbon. Le plus récent conflit de 2002 a été à l'origine de la mort du roi (le Ya Na) et d'autres membres du royaume. Cette communication aborde le sujet sous deux angles. La première partie présente l'analyse du point de vue historique en tenant compte de l'origine de la division du royaume entre deux factions, à savoir les Abudu et celle des Andani. La deuxième partie fait l'analyse du déroulement des événements jusqu'au 27 mars 2002, après le jugement de la cour suprême en 1986 concernant le conflit entre les Abudu et les Andani. Cet article présente les arguments en deux parties. La première, fait l'analyse de l'échec des fondateurs du Royaume de Dagbon à établir un système régularisé et défini pour choisir le Ya Na. Selon l'analyse c'est cet échec qui explique la nature récurrente du conflit du royaume de Dagbon, autrement appelé « *les problèmes de la Peau de*

Yendi ». Selon la deuxième partie, c'est l'incapacité du gouvernement de PNDC d'appliquer les mutuelles décisions prises par les deux parties lors de réconciliation de 1987 entre les deux factions : les Abudu et les Andani, qui explique le conflit ouvert de 2002.

Introduction

In the Northern parts of Ghana, chiefs and kings sit on skins.¹ These skins are symbols of office which range from cow skins to a lion skin. Only the king of Dagbon (the Ya Na) sits on a lion skin in the Dagbon Traditional Area.

Naam is the office or title represented by a skin, and *Na*, is the office holder.

The term "naam" is used both in singular and plural meaning. Each office-holder is described as "owner of naam" (*naam-dana*), and his "title" (*naam-yuri*) might be viewed as the name (*yuri*) of the portion of *naam* which is acquired directly or indirectly from the king at the installation rituals (Drucker Brown 1975: 31).

Writing about the Mamprusi in Northern Ghana, these rituals in all their forms, Drucker Brown observes, are called "the eating of naam" (*naam-disibu*). According to her, the owner of office (*naam-dana*) cannot be removed from office except by death. And though death may physically remove a person from office, he still remains the "owner" of the office until power is transmitted to and utilized by his successor (Drucker Brown 1975:31).

Skalnik, writing about the Nanumba also in Northern Ghana makes a similar observation, that "each new chief receives his title and *naam* (office, authority) in a ceremony of 'enskinment' (*namleebu*); i.e. putting on a skin" (1983:13). Chiefly office is called "skins" by the Mamprusi (Drucker Brown 1975:101), and by logical extension, the Dagomba. The Dagomba, Mamprusi and the Nanumba trace their origin to a common ancestor (Tohajie) and grandfather (Gbewaa). According to Skalnik (1994) the three *naam* of today's northeastern Ghana, i.e. Mamprugu, Dagbon and Nanun are related because they were founded by three brothers, sons of Naa Gbewaa. The incumbents of these three *naam* call each other my brother, *m'mabia*.

¹These are a pile of skins used by past rulers. Every new ruler adds a new skin to the pile. The skins are considered sacred; past rulers become ancestors, and current occupants, their descendants. Today most chiefs sit on leather pillows placed on these skins.

One standard rule in all three kingdoms is that succession to the *naam* is patrilineal, and only sons of previous kings can contest. Where the surviving sons are many, rules are established to guide the selection. Where these rules are adhered to for a long time, they become customs. However, if the rules are inconsistent as in the case of Dagbon, then such inconsistencies can be the basis for confusion. Thus, the Dagbon chieftaincy dispute, sometimes referred to as the Yendi Skin Affairs, or the Yendi Skin Dispute, is a dispute over the highest skin (political office) in the Dagbon Traditional Area.

One of the biggest challenges facing chieftaincy succession in Ghana today is how to ascertain what constitute the actual and proper enskinment or enstoolment procedures (i.e., installation acts). Most succession disputes pending before the Houses of Chiefs in Ghana,² and those that have not been there but occasionally rear their ugly heads, are not all about the legitimacy of the contestants, but in many cases whether a particular contestant or chief was properly appointed by the appointing authority, and enskinned or enstooled according to the appropriate rules. The appointing authorities (the kingmakers), the enskinning or enstooling procedures, and the acts that constitute the actual installation processes are not properly codified. They are verbally transmitted; normally fluid and thereby open to manipulation and debate, and subsequent politicization. Most enskinment or enstoolment rites are shrouded in secrecy, especially the period within which an appointed candidate is confined for a specific period, for certain traditional ritual and spiritual acts to be performed on him. The elders, called kingmakers, individually have specific secret traditional roles to play. These roles are secret, done in confinement, usually at night, and away from the public eye. Lack of codification leads to many versions of the same custom, rigidly held by the supporters of contestants. The variation in customary procedures in the installation process is a recipe for argument, conflict and violence.

Also, selecting procedures that govern the selection and the installation to chiefship positions in Ghana are guided by time-tested customs. If the selection procedures are not maintained, as in the case of Dagbon, but keep changing, it becomes difficult to establish over time that time-tested custom, which everybody can stick to, and creates multiple versions of customs, further creating room for disputes over succession.

² In Ghana, the Houses of Chiefs are the 193 Traditional Councils, the 10 Regional Houses of Chiefs, and the National House of Chiefs. These Houses of Chiefs are the official courts recognized by the state to resolve chieftaincy disputes.

The protracted Dagbon chieftaincy dispute perhaps is the most widely discussed chieftaincy dispute in Ghana. This paper adds to the existing literature. The argument of this paper is two-fold. The first is that the fundamental cause of the seemingly intractable Dagbon chieftaincy dispute is due to lack of a patterned, or regularized method of choosing a Ya Na, resulting in politicization and elite manipulation. Secondly, that the neglect of the Ghanaian state to fully implement the terms agreed by the Abudus and the Andanis in the 1987 Reconciliation, resulted in the 2002 open conflict.

The Problem: Lack of a Pattern in Selecting a Ya Na

In Dagbon, the elders responsible for the selection of a Ya Na are as controversial as the method itself. According to the 1930 Dagomba Constitution (Duncan Johnstone and Blair 1930:28) "the Gushie Na, the Kuga Na, the Tuguri Nam and the Gomle formed the committee of selection" (also see Tamakloe 1931: 68; Staniland 1975: 231). The problem has been whether the Gushie Na is officially part of the institution that selects the Ya-Na or not.

Since the establishment of the Kingdom in the early 13th century, it had not instituted a well defined and generally accepted system through which a Ya Na could be selected, and to which references could be made in the selection of subsequent Ya Nas. Earlier in its history, it was might which formed the basis of succession, and kings ascended to power through the use of force. A reigning Ya Na could be chased away by a rival claimant, or be killed in open combat.³ Later, a rule was made that the seniormost surviving son (*Zuu*) of the deceased Ya Na must succeed to the *Naam*. Then the soothsaying method was adopted and later abandoned after the selection of Na Gungobili in 1627.⁴ Thus Dagombas swore that they would never resort to

³ Interviews with the chief drummer (Lun Naa Ayuba) and the chief fiddler, February 10, 2004, at Yendi revealed that Na Yakuba, the father of Abudulai and Andani (from whom the Abudu and Andani gates emerged) killed Ya Na Suman Zoli, with the help of his nephew, Yelizoli Lan Lagfu, and ascended the throne of Dagbon. Also see Mahama (1987:3).

⁴ According to the Dagomba Constitution (1930: 44-45) the then Ya Na, "Na Zokuli had two sons, the elder of whom was Chief of Galwe, and the younger Chief of Yamalkaraga. Now when Zokuli died...and they went to a soothsayer to learn the will of the oracles...the soothsayers said that Yamalkaraga Na should succeed to Yendi. At this Galwe-Na was angry, and so he and his brother went to another soothsayer near Tamale, who however uttered the same decision. Again they went to Daboya, but it was useless, for the oracle was the same. And they went to soothsayer after soothsayer, but all the oracles gave the same decision. So all the Chiefs were angry, and when the gathering of Dagomba was made for the appointment of Na, Yamalkaraga-Na's appointment was announced, "but" said the chiefs "this was a very left-handed decision of the oracles (*gun-gobili*), so we will never again agree to submit to the choice to soothsayers". And the new Na was known from that day as Na

soothsaying to select their Ya Na. Therefore after the death of Gungobli all was in confusion, for all the princes (*Yaan Nabihi*) of past Dagbon kings wanted to succeed to Yendi and no proper method of reducing the number had been devised to take the place of soothsaying they had discarded. Gushe Na and Kuga Na were powerless to make a satisfactory choice. That was when they all decided to go to the Nayire (king of Mamprusi) at Nalerigu for him to choose the next king. Thus, Gungobli's successor (Na Zangina) was chosen at Mamprugu. Afterwards, the three chiefdoms of Savelugu, Karaga, and Mion were chosen, occupancy of which was a prerequisite to the *naam* of Yendi. This new method took the reign of four subsequent Ya Nas, and covered a period of half a century before the rule was effected. The 1930 Constitution of the Dagomba people was the first attempt by the colonial administration to codify the customary rules of Dagbon. This constitution failed to acknowledge the existence of the two royal gates of Abudu and Andani. Afterwards, the idea of soothsaying resurfaced as a means of choosing the Ya Na. In 1948, the Dagomba Traditional Council formed the Selection Committee incorporating the Dagbon elders of four kingmakers, and the seven most senior divisional chiefs (including th Gushe Na), as a body responsible for selecting a Ya Na. In 1974 and after, military decrees, committees' recommendations and judicial decisions in the country's highest courts determined who became a Ya Na. Of the estimated seven hundred years of its existence, the Dagbon kingdom cannot boast of a single century in which one particular method was used to choose its kings; a simple lack of tradition in the Dagbon traditional institution. Due to the confused nature of these succession patterns, Ferguson and Wilks (1970: 34), declared earlier that they "shall not be concerned to determine the 'real' rules of succession in Dagomba: There are none; but only changing patterns of succession". Five years later Staniland wrote: "...in present circumstances it is virtually impossible to talk about a 'proper' procedure [of selecting a Ya Na], since there are conflicts over several crucial elements of the selection" (1975: 22).

This explains why in most of the committees and commissions of enquiry formed by different governments at different times to enquire into the Dagbon conflicts, the first mandate has always been; *ascertaining the custom and the customary procedures in selecting a Ya Na*. Unfortunately scholars of the Dagbon chieftaincy disputes rather put much emphasis on the politicization and elite manipulations, relegating the institutional weaknesses to the background.

Gungobili. But the soothsayers have never since then been consulted about the appointment of a Na". Also see Reported Appeal Court Judgment, In Re Yendi Skin Affairs; Abdulai V. Yakubu II [1984-86] 2 GLR 189- 225.

Background to the 2002 Open Conflict

Most scholars (Sibidow 1969; Ladouceur 1972; Staniland 1975; and Mahama 1987) tend to trace the chieftaincy struggle between the Abudus and the Andanis to 1948 when the selection committee was formed. However, I think that full knowledge of the animosity between these two gates goes beyond 1948. The period 1948 was only the continuation of an already existing fierce competition for the Yendi Skin.

Na Yakubu I: Father of Abudulai and Andani

Na Yakubu who begot Abudulai and Andani, from whom the Abudu and the Andani gates emerged, reigned from 1829 to 1845. He was believed to have had not less than thirty sons (Staniland 1975). Abudulai (Abudu) was the eldest of the children, next to him was Andani. There is concensus in the literature that in 1845, Abudulai (the first son of Na Yakubu and the originator of the Abudu royal gate), succeeded his father and became Na Abudulai I, and in 1876 Andani succeeded his brother to become Na Andani II in 1899. The death of Na Andani II in 1899 was the beginning of the uncompromising struggle for the monopoly of the Yendi Skin between the descendants of Abudu and Andani, neglecting their younger brothers.

The Beginning of Gate Systems?

Na Allassani (the first son of Na Abudulai) was expected to be the next Ya Na after the death of Na Andani, that is if the rotation system was to commence. However, when Na Andani died, Na Allassani was denied this chance. When members of the Abudu family were deprived of the *naam*, they went to Sansan Mangu and invited the Germans, with whose support the Abudus crushed the Andani family, thereby creating a way for Na Allassani to access the *naam*. This was the first major bitter bloody clash between the Abudus and the Andanis.

Evidence gathered from the chiefs and elders of both the Abudu and Andani gates in Yendi and Tamale suggests that by 1900 there was no formal agreement between the two gates that future Ya Nas should be selected in an alternating manner.⁵ The

⁵ A gate is a royal house or family with common descendants from which a prince can aspire to the chiefship position in a particular traditional area. According to Tonah (2005:46) "[A] gate is both a social and a geographical category. Members of a particular gate consist of the descendants of a former paramount chief who occupy a particular section of the settlement. Among many ethnic groups in Northern Ghana, the occupant of a 'skin' (i.e. the king or chief) is selected from among royals within a particular gate." Today many centralized states in Northern Ghana have gates.

Andanis cling to this to justify the denial of Na Allassani the *naam* in 1900. But the account of the drum historians of what happened after the death of Na Andani had not been left out. The narration has it that when Na Andani died, Iddi (Yiri) his eldest son who was by then the chief of Tugu wanted to be the chief of Savelugu. He therefore prevailed upon the elders of Dagbon to make Kukra Adjei (Kukaridjie) – the chief of Savelugu – the Ya Na so that he could move to Savelugu. However, it is important to say here that even before his death, Na Andani had told his sons that their cousin (Karaga Na Allassani) should succeed him as Ya Na, and Iddi, his eldest son should move to Karaga. If the succession to the *Naam* of Yendi had already assumed the gate system, there should have been no question of who was to become the next Ya Na because Allassani was alive and was the chief of Karaga. Hence, the elders, whatever method they used either soothsaying or by dancing to the personal whims of Tugu Lana Yiri (Tuguna Yiri), made Kukaridjei (the chief of Savelugu) the Ya Na. Tamakloe sympathizes with the elders of Dagbon when he writes that, "the elders reluctantly did what was asked of them" (1931: 43). In any case Allassani did not accept the choice of the kingmakers and what happened later was rather conflicting. According to Mahama, when Na Andani II died, the Abudulai family failed to come and mourn with the Andani family. And that is why when Allassani presented his burial kit they refused to accept it. This is how he describes the event in his *Ya Na the African King of Power* (Mahama 1987: 7):

[W]hen the funeral of Na Andani II was about to be performed, Na Alhassan (then Karaga Na) assembled the whole family and they contributed some money and a cow for him. He sent the money and the cow to the regent of Na Andani, Tugunanayire, saying you have prevented me from performing the funeral of my father. I cannot refuse to perform the funeral of my father and so take this money together with the cow for the performance of the funeral... The regent, Tugunayire refused and said that they should return the money and the cow to Karaga Na Alhassan saying that if he thought he would become the Ya-Na so that he Tugunayire would be chief of Karaga then he was wrong. He did not like Karaga. He wanted Savelugu.

The weight and the full meaning of Tuguna Yire's action can only be understood if we consider the following from Staniland (1975:23):

The process of selection (i.e. of a Ya Na) was bound up with the cycle of ritual leading to the funeral of the deceased Ya Na. Any gate chief wishing to apply for the Yendi skin was expected to present (to the King's relatives) a set of objects for burial with the corpse.

Presentation of this 'burial kit'... was regarded as a tacit declaration of the donor's wish to be considered as a successor; and rejection of it was regarded as rejection of his claim.

Thus, refusing Na Allassani's burial kit was the direct way of informing him that his automatic succession to the *naam* of Yendi was no more possible even if his predecessor had mentioned it. And true to this, Savelugu Na Dahamani (that is the Kukaridjei) was made the Ya Na. Karaga Na Allassani then sought the assistance of the Germans.

When at the end of the funeral [of Na Andani II] he realized that his forces could not face the Andani family – looking at the strength of their forces – he sent emissaries led by Korli Na Bukari to the Germans at Sanne mangu to invite them to come to their aid. (Mahama 1987: 6)

The Germans responded by crushing the Andani family. In the process, Tugulana Yiri (who was on his way to take up his new appointment of the Savelugu skin), and most of his followers were killed at Sang. The Ya Na, after spending seven weeks on the skin fled even before the Germans arrived at Yendi. Allassani was then made the Ya Na to be called Na Allassani.

It is necessary to make a distinction between these two events. Writing of the earlier German invasion of Dagbon (Yendi) and Bimbilla Tamakloe (1931:42) writes that,

[A]bout one year or so after the settlement of the Germans in Kratchi, they, in 1896, organized an expedition [which]...was to pass through Bimbila and Yendi. The Nanumba collected large forces...to impede the advancement of the expedition...[but] were mown down with heavy slaughter...The next day the expedition broke camp and resumed its journey to Yendi..

Tamakloe observes that the then Dagbon king, Ya Na Andani II "summoned the war chief and all men who are intrepid" to face the advancing German army. A Dagomba army of 7,000 was routed by a tiny German force of 100, at Adibo (Staniland 1975: 9). However, the first chieftaincy dispute between the two royal houses as explained above came after the death of Na Andani II in 1899, the enskinment of Kukari Adjei, and the refusal of Na Allassani who "was the rightful heir to the Yendi stool" (Tamakloe 1931: 43), to accept that enskinment. According to Tamakloe (1931:44),

Dr. Rigler, the German Resident in Sansanne-Mangu, was informed of the disturbances in Yendi relative to the election of king to the stool. Although the Dagomba Country was a neutral zone at the time, Dr Rigler came down with his infantry and foot soldiers.

After crushing Tugulan Yiri and some of his followers at Sang,

Dr. Rigler interviewed the elders upon the question of electing a king. They all unanimously told him that Alasan of Karaga was the rightful heir. Alasan was therefore sent for to be made king. (Tamakloe 1931: 44; Mahama 1987:6)

When eventually Na Allassani was given the *naam* of Yendi and he was coming to occupy the palace, the Andanis felt that he should not occupy it because that palace was built by Na Andani II, and to them an Abudu chief should not occupy it. So the palace was burnt down. Without a palace to occupy, Na Allassani had to build himself one in 1900. All subsequent Ya Nas had occupied the new palace that he built till it was burnt down on March 27, 2002. The question then is; did the chiefs and elders of Dagbon collectively agree that a gate system should come to stay? Today the descendants of Mahami, the third son of Na Yakubu and a younger brother to Abudu and Andani, who include Kara Na Adam and Sunson Na Shaani Hamidu, do not agree that there was a conscious and collective decision by Dagbon chiefs and elders at any point in time on any gate system. In an interview with the Sunson Na in particular (September 27, 2007, Tamale), he suggested that if the two brothers cannot come to a compromise in the current Dagbon impasse, they (the descendants of Mahami) should be allowed to ascend the Dagbon Skin.

So it came to pass that colonialism came to the Gold Coast and the Africans resisted it as much as they could. The resistance led to political reforms especially in the expansion of the Legislative Assembly to make it as Africanised as possible. For the first time in 1954, the Northern Territories (today's Northern, Upper East and West Regions) was represented in the Legislative Assembly. Political activism in Dagbon before the 1954 General Elections (and after) assumed the Abudu/Andani divide,⁶ and subsequently led to the intervention of the state in Dagbon political affairs with the first generation of Dagbon elites playing the middleman role. It has been so till

⁶Most early Dagbon elites were teachers. For instance Tolon Na Yakubu Tali "was among the first Northerners to be educated at Achimota Training College in Accra" (Ladouceur 1972: 16) and J.H. Allassani "was a teacher in Kumasi for many years" (Ladouceur 1972: 101). See Staniland (1975) on how the early elites of Dagbon politicized the Dagbon conflicts between the middle of the 20th century and the late 1960s. For politicization of the Dagbon conflicts after the 1970s and state interventions, see Mumuni (1975), Mahama (1987), Anamzoya (2004).

today. It has been the inability of the Dagbon Chieftaincy institution to have a common, regularized and generally acceptable mode of selecting a Ya Na that has accounted for the continuous politicization and the various state interventions by different governments in Dagbon political affairs.

Post-colonial Governments and the Dagbon Conflict

Available literature shows that every post-colonial government in this country with the probable exception of the Limann government was forced to intervene in the Dagbon chieftaincy dispute. The intervention of Ghana's first president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, was the formation of the Opoku Afari Commission to look into charges⁷ the Andanis preferred against the then Ya Na (Na Mahamadu Abdulai III) and the subsequent enactment of a Legislative Instrument (L.I 59) of 1959 (Mahama 1987: 67). The regime of the National Liberation Council (which toppled the Nkrumah government) was pressurized by the Abudu family to repeal L.I.59. The NLC formed the Mate Kole Committee in 1968 which recommended the revocation of L.I.59. The Busia Government in 1969 implemented the recommendations of the Mate Kole Committee. Part of the findings of the committee annulled the enskinment of Na Andani III (earlier enskinned in 1968) and the subsequent enskinment of Na Mahamadu Abdulai IV (Government of Ghana 1969a; 1969b). On 13th January 1971 Col. Kutu Acheampong overthrew the Busia government in a military coup. Subsequently, under pressure from the Andani family, the Acheampong government set up the Ollenu Committee in 1974, whose findings overturned that of the Mate Kole Committee, sanctioned the removal of Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai IV, and posthumously recognized the enskinment of Na Andani III, which eventually qualified and brought his son (the late king, Ya Na Yakubu Andani II) to the Skin (Government of Ghana 1974; Mumuni 1975). After this, the Acheampong government passed SMC Decree 299, which denied the Abudu Gate the right to appeal against the findings of the Ollenu Committee. General F.W.K Akuffo, who came to power briefly in 1978, was persuaded by the Abudu gate to sign a decree repealing SMCD 299. This he did, by signing SMC Decree 238 repealing SMCD 299, to enable the Abudu gate to appeal against the findings of the Ollenu Committee. The June Fourth Uprising brought Ft. Lt. J.J. Rawlings to power in 1979 and in that same year, his attention having been drawn to the Dagbon chieftaincy conflict, he signed AFRC 32 repealing SMCD 238. The 1979 Third Republic under the Limann administration passed by unnoticed in Dagbon. However in 1981 Na Mahamadu Abdulai IV filed a motion in the Court of Appeal challenging the validity of AFRC

32 which had repealed SMCD 238. In a unanimous decision the Court of Appeal declared AFRC 32 invalid. By this decision, Na Mahamadu Abdulai VI proceeded with an appeal challenging the findings of the Ollenu Committee.⁸ The Court of Appeal upheld the motion of Na Mahamadu Abdulai VI. Almost immediately, the late king (Na Yakubu Andani II) appealed to the Supreme Court. On the 17th December 1986, the Supreme Court of Ghana in a famous decision overturned the decision of the Court of Appeal and restored the findings of the Ollenu Committee.⁹ By implication, Ya Na Mahamadu Abdulai IV lost the legal battle and thus became the ex-Ya Na, whilst Ya Na Yakubu Andani became the substantive one. In these struggles, the elites of Dagbon were those who engaged in petition writing, meeting government officials and canvassing Dagbon votes for the political parties, and also organizing legal representations for both sides of the Dagbon divide. They initiated, planned and executed all the demands of both the Abudu and the Andani factions, and equally benefited enormously; financially and politically, from the Dagbon conflicts. Early Dagbon elites like the Tolon Na Yakubu Tali, B.A. Yakubu (of the Abudu side) and J.H Allassani, Ibrahim Mahama (of the Andani side) were very instrumental in the bringing the Dagbon conflicts to the doorsteps of post-colonial governments, especially between the periods of the 1950s to the early 1970s, and in the case of Ibrahim Mahama till the death of the Ya Na in 2002.

The 1987 Reconciliation Between the Abudus and Andanis

Despite the fact that Ya Na Yakubu Andani II was recognized as the Ya Na by the state following the Supreme Court ruling, the ex-Ya Na, Na Mahamadu Abdulai IV continued to draw large support from the people, especially the Abudus in Yendi who refused to recognise Ya Na Yakubu Andani II as a Ya Na. This, coupled with the incidents of fighting between the Abudus and Andanis at Lingbunga, Yendi and many other places (Agyekum 2002) did not create harmonious conditions necessary for peaceful existence and cooperative development. An earlier attempt by the Ya Na who called a meeting of chiefs and elders to reconcile the two factions only saw the Andanis attending (Government of Ghana, 1987). The PNDC Government therefore decided in 1987 to set up a reconciliation committee with the aim of addressing some of these issues. The participation of the government was right in this reconciliation process because "if the two factions were left on their own without any executive

⁸ Reported Appeal Court Judgment. In Re Yendi Skin Affairs; Abdulai V. Yakubu II [1984-86] 2 GLR 189-225.

⁹ Reported Supreme Court Judgment. In Re Yendi Skins Affairs; Yakubu II V. Abdulai (No. 2), [1984-86] 2 GLR. 239 -281.

⁷He was accused of occupying the skin illegally, was blind in one eye, had six toes instead of the normal five, and was ruling despotically.

assistance, no serious move would be made towards reconciliation", noted Mr. E.G. Tanoh, PNDC Secretary for Chieftaincy Affairs and the chairman of the Reconciliation Committee (Government of Ghana 1987: 4). Two members, Mr E.A. Addo, Principal State Attorney, and Mr. Nantogmah Abudulai, Kpa-Naba, chief of Kparigu in the Mamprusi Traditional Area, assisted him. Mr. A.B. Seidu, a Senior Assistant Secretary of the Northern Regional Administration was made the secretary to the Reconciliation Committee. The Committee had the following as its terms of reference:

- i. To assist the Northern Regional Administration and the Northern Region House of Chiefs and the Dagomba Traditional Council to implement the Supreme Court Judgment on the Yendi skin dispute;
- ii. To ascertain from the Abudu and the Andani factions in the Yendi skin dispute what each side wants to be done to bring about reconciliation and peace in Dagbon;
- iii. Assist the parties to iron out their differences and disagreements regarding their demands and reconcile them;
- iv. Obtain an attestation by both sides to agreements reached out of three (iii) above.
- v. Submit a Report on the reconciliatory measures adopted and any outstanding issues with appropriate recommendations for implementation by the Regional Administration.¹⁰

The committee held separate meetings with representatives of the two factions in the dispute before finally meeting both sides at a sitting. This was to forestall any open confrontation between the two factions, who had just emerged from the legal battle. Each faction was required to nominate, seven representatives to meet with the committee.

¹⁰ Government of Ghana, Report of the Reconciliation on the Yendi Skin Disputes (1987: 5-6).

Table 1: Representatives of the Abudu and the Andani Gates in the 1987 Reconciliation

The Abudu Gate Representatives	The Andani Gate Representatives
Mr B.A. Yakubu (RTD), Inspector General of police, Ex-Gushie Na	Mr Sumani Issah, Kumbun Na chief of Kumbungu.
Mr. Abudulai Allasan, Ex-Gbungbalga-Lana	Mr Abudulai Bukari, Gulkpe Na, Chief of Tamale
Mr Abudulai Bukari, Ex -Bolon lana	Mr. Abudulai Abudu, Wal-Lana
Mr. A.A. Ziblim Ex- Song-Lana	Alhaji Iddrisu Ibrahim, Tidjo-Na
Mr. A.B. Haruna, Ex- Bogin-Dana	Alhaji Mohammed Yakubu, Gunda-Na
Mr Alhassan Alhassan, Wori Bogu Lana	Mr. Abudu Ziblim. Pisigu-Lana
Mr A.A. Bakoh, Yendi	Mr. Andani Yakubu. Bo- Na

Sources: Report of the Reconciliation Committee on the Yendi Skin Dispute (1987)

The committee held its first meeting at the Officers Mess at Kamina Barracks, Tamale, and all other meetings in the hall of the Presidential Lodge inside the Residency in Tamale. From 11th July 1987 to 14th July 1987, the Committee held three separate meetings with the representatives of each faction, and one joint meeting with the representatives of both factions. Then on 11th August 1987 and 14th August same year, two separate meetings were again held with the two factions. In all, nine meetings were held. Finally at 4pm on Friday 14th August 1987, a meeting was held at the conference room of the Regional Administration at Tamale in which members of the Reconciliation Committee, the Ya Na Yakubu Andani II, and representatives of the two sides in the disputes who participated in the reconciliation talks, signed the memorandum of agreement for the reconciliation. The signing ceremony was performed in the presence of members of the Regional Security Committee (REGSEC) and witnessed by the PNDC Regional Secretary for the Northern Region, Alhaji Hudu Yahaya, and the Northern Regional Administration Officer, Mr. S.Y.M. Zanu. The two crucial issues that all representatives of the two factions in the Yendi Skin dispute agreed with the Reconciliation Committee, as a prerequisite for a smooth reconciliation, was that; all must accept the Supreme Court Ruling that the Ya Na Yakubu Andani II was the recognized paramount chief of the Dagomba state and pay homage to him according to Dagbon custom and practice. Since the Supreme Court judgement accorded the Ex-Ya Na, Mahamadu Abudulai full status as a former Ya Na, it implied that his sons could occupy the gate skins of Mion, Karaga and Savelugu as well as the paramount skin of Yendi. "On the death of Ex-Ya Na Mahamadu

Abdulai, he should be accorded the full funeral rites of a Ya Na in the light of the Supreme Court's ruling of 17th December, 1986" (Government of Ghana, 1987: 99). It was expected that strict adherence to the reconciliation document would stitch the torn Dagbon Skin and heal the wounds that emanated from the struggles over this Skin.

Test of True Reconciliation: The Death and the Burial of Na Mahamadu Abudulai IV

The Ex-Ya Na, Na Mahamadu Abudulai IV died on 15th or 16th October 1988. Some of the interviewees said he died on Friday 15th October 1988 and his death was made known on Saturday 16th October. The Abudus prepared to bury him at the Gbewaa Palace on Saturday night, after a message had been sent to the Ya Na about his death. The bases which the Abudus invoked to bury the Na at the Katin Duu (the sacred room in the Gbewaa Palace where former kings are buried) were from the Supreme Court ruling in 1986 which was supported by the Reconciliation Committee Report of 1987. Interviews with the Abudu elders revealed that the Ya Na replied to the Abudus that he was not aware of the existence of any other Ya Na. As far as he was concerned, he was the only Ya Na and he was still alive. The Abudus reminded him about the Supreme Court Ruling which recognized Mahamadu Abudulai as a Ya Na, a recognition which was agreed to by all parties to the Reconciliation Committee, to which the Ya Na himself was a signatory. The Na would not budge. The Abudus prepared for war. The burial of the late Ya Na in the Gbewaa Palace meant a lot to them, and it took them three days, and with the intervention of the PNDC Government to have the Na buried on the midnight of Monday 18th October 1988, with a curfew in place. After the burial of the Na, it became almost impossible to approach Na Yakubu Andani on the funeral of Na Mahamadu. To make matters worse, Ya Na Yakubu Andani forbade the state drummers to mention or recite the name of Na Mahamadu Abudulai as a Ya Na during the customary recital of the names of past Ya Nas.

The reason why the Abudus wanted (and still want) to perform the funeral was to pave way for his first son (Bolin Lana, who would automatically be the regent during the funeral) to be appointed to any of the gate skins of Dagbon, by way of satisfying the second condition of the Supreme Court ruling in 1986 and the Reconciliation Report of 1987. The Bolin Lana can only succeed to any of the gate skins if the funeral of his father is performed as a former Ya Na, because according to Dagbon custom, the gate skins should be occupied by only sons of former Ya Nas, and one key condition of being considered the son of former Ya Na is to have your father's funeral performed as that of a Ya Na, in the Gbewaa Palace. The non-performance of the funeral of Na Mahamadu Abudulai is the remote cause of the March 2002 conflict.

The 1992 General Elections and the Funeral of Na Mahamadu Abudulai IV

Ghana returned to democratic rule in 1992 after almost two decades of military rule. Before the 1992 General Elections, certain political promises were made by both the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic party (NPP). The NDC was the ruling party and promised the Abudus the performance of this funeral if they were voted in. The NDC presidential candidate in 1992, Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, on his campaign tours in the Dagomba Traditional Area visited Korle, a village about fifty-six miles from Yendi. The Korle Na Mahama reportedly made three demands to the presidential aspirant. These demands according to one of his sons were:

- a. The performance of the funeral of Na Mahamadu Abudulai
- b. The release of those prisoners from Yendi who were awaiting execution after being found guilty of murder and arson following clashes between the Abudus and Andanis in 1987. These clashes resulted from the Supreme Court Ruling in 1986 on the Yendi Chieftaincy conflict, and
- c. a car.

The presidential aspirant was said to have promised Korle Na Mahama that all these demands would be met if he was voted into power. Korle Na Mahama was reported not only to have voted for the NDC party, but also brought a stool and sat very close to the polling booth to ensure that his people really voted for the NDC. The present special secretary to the Boli Lana, who was an active member of the Verandah Boys Club of the NDC in Yendi, went from house to house campaigning for the NDC. Tolon Na Sulemana Alhassan himself, father of Major Sulemana Abubakari (then in exile by that very government) became an active NDC supporter after Abudu elders and chiefs were promised that the funeral of Na Mahamadu Abudulai would be performed. In addition, the Na was promised his son in exile would be allowed to come home. When the Tolon Na joined the NDC, many people could not believe it. Some thought he was playing his own politics with the NDC. Therefore on the voting day when the Na voted, he displayed his ballot paper to the public to clear the minds of the skeptics. He then warned that those who would not vote for NDC would be found out through soothsaying and oracles consultation and would be severely dealt with.¹¹ The Abudu elders became NDC activists working day and night to ensure the victory of the party, just to perform this outstanding funeral.

The victory of the NDC in the 1992 general election saw the fulfilment of some of the three major promises Korle Na Mahama extracted from the NDC flag bearer.

¹¹ Interview with one of his brothers, (Naa bapira) Alhassan Sulemana, February 15, 2004, Tamale.