

**THE MAKING OF POGNAA (WOMAN CHIEF) IN THE WAALA TRADITIONAL
POLITICAL SYSTEM: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY
GOVERNANCE**

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Adams Sabogu¹

asabogu@st.ubids.edu.gh

(Corresponding author, PhD student)

Dennis Puorideme²

puorideme@ubids.edu.gh

Department of Development Studies¹

Department of African and Endogenous Studies²

Faculty of Integrated Development Studies

Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies,
Wa

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the complexities surrounding the position of the *pognaa* (Woman Chief) within Ghana's patrilineal Waala traditional political system. Employing sociocultural discourse study and Foucault's notion of discourse and power, the study investigates situated social practices and power dynamics constructing the identity and position of *pognaa*, in Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas. The study reveals that the construction of *pognaa's* identity and position within the patrilineal society embeds power struggle and resistance, and that the making of *pognaa* or *pognamine* is neither an innovation nor an imposition of Ghana's bureaucratic governance institutions. It is a cultural practice underpinned in patrilineal societies of Ghana's Upper West Region. Also, the criteria for selecting a *pognaa*, unlike the chief, is unclear, ambiguous and fraught with practices of co-existing traditional and bureaucratic power structures, and the *pognaa* or *Pognamine* do not play any strategic role in traditional power structures. The study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities regarding women's leadership roles within patrilineal societies, and contemporary transformations. Highlighting the interplay of power, gender roles, and cultural discourses that shape the *pognaa's* position, the study offers valuable insights into women and leadership in Traditional community governing practices and development.

Keywords: Discourse, Gender power relations, *Pognaa*, Patrilineal societies, Traditional political system

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the identity and position of queen were prominent in the traditional political systems of matrilineal societies especially, in the centralised political system of the Asante ethnic group in Ghana (Nukunya, 2016), where queen is referred to as queen mother (*ohemaa*) and shares traditional political power with the king. Under this system, children of marriage unions belong to their mothers and inheritance is traced through the mother line (matrilineal). Historically, the queen mother is the kingmaker in the Asante traditional political system, which gives the queen mother's identity and position sociopolitical importance in the Asante Kingdom. Recently, there has been heightened interest among diverse ethnic groups and cultures across Ghana regarding women's participation and empowerment in the traditional and bureaucratic political systems which coexist with the conventional democratic system in the contemporary society of Ghana (Puorideme, 2018). Furthermore, the promotion of the role of queen in diverse ethnic groups both matrilineal and patrilineal appears to be a common practice, yet among the patrilineal societies in the North of Ghana, the cultural significance and interpretations of the identity and position of the queen appears to be varied and unclear. This study explores the cultural construction of the identity and position of the *Pognaa* in the traditional political system of the Waala people in the Upper West Region of Ghana. Among the Waala, *pognaa* is translated as 'Woman Chief', that is, queen in the English Language and pragmatically understood as 'Queen Mother', which is adopted from the Asante traditional political system as mentioned above. However, the Waala society is predominantly patrilineal in terms of kinship relations, traditional politics, descent systems and succession practices (M. Bin Salih, 2009).

The term *pognaa* - 'woman chief' or queen or queen mother is a combination of two words (nouns) in the Waala lexicon, *poga* (woman) and *naa* (chief). As indicated already, pragmatically, *pognaa* is an equivalent of queen; however, the literal meaning and pragmatic understanding of the word or concept of *pognaa* is problematic in the patrilineal Waala society where the identity and position of chief is the preserve of men traced to a male ancestor in the royal family of the society. Consequently, the identity and position of *pognaa* in such a patrilineal society challenge the prevailing patriarchal framework that has characterised the traditional political systems of most patrilineal societies in Northern Ghana. Furthermore, the men who are chiefs do not refer to themselves as 'man chief' but 'chief, highlighting the embedded assumption of masculinity within the chieftaincy role. The existence of a distinct term, "*Pognaa*," necessitates a critical interrogation of its function and significance within the Waala political structure. Could there have been a period in Waala history where women held chieftaincy titles that have subsequently faded from memory? How is the identity and position of *pognaa* intelligible in the Waala traditional political system contingent on a patrilineal descent system?

The central argument of this study is that there are competing and conflictual interpretations regarding the identity, position and cultural significance of *pognaa* within the traditional political systems of patrilineal societies in contemporary Ghana. To fully grasp the social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and discursive complexities (Foucault, 1972[1969]) of *pognaa* or *pognamine* position and identities,

this study delves into the competing interpretations surrounding the concept and practice. However, a mere listing of these interpretations is insufficient. A comprehensive understanding requires a nuanced examination that considers Ghana's socio-political, historical, and cultural context.

Employing a discourse theory as guiding framework, this study offers a valuable insight into understanding the position of *pognaa* in the patrilineal Waala society by making visible the ways in which language, communication, and cultural discourse (Shi-xu, 2005), intersect to shape the identities and practices of *pognamine* within patrilineal societies. This study aims to provide insights into power dynamics, gender roles, and cultural discourse, shedding light on the complexities that construct and shape the identity, position and roles of *pognamine* in situated context (Keller, 2018). This study uses a sociocultural discourse approach to analyse data from participant observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and relevant documents in the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional areas. By examining concrete actions and cultural practices within social interactions, this approach allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural discourses shaping the position of queens in a patrilineal traditional political system.

GENDER AND TRADITIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

Historically, traditional political systems have played a central role in African governance and decision-making processes (Baldwin & Holzinger, 2019). These systems derive their legitimacy from customary modes of governance and represent a collection of formal and informal rules through which social control is maintained (Puorideme, 2018). However, the diversity of African societies precludes generalisation into a homogeneous traditional political system, as variants exist depending on the society's flow of power and kinship system. Most societies are organised along either matrilineal or patrilineal systems, where power and authority are exercised within the framework of kinship (Amadiume, 1997). In matrilineal descent systems, individuals trace their lineage through the female genealogy, while in patrilineal systems, power flows through the male genealogy (Fortes & Evans-Pritchards, 1940). Under these systems, socially constructed roles for men and women dictate their participation in political structures, with deviations often leading to social labelling (Akurugu, 2020). Understanding these descent systems is essential for comprehending the complexities of gendered roles and leadership within the traditional political systems of Ghana. Interestingly, contemporary studies on women's political participation in Africa have emphasised the importance of gender-inclusive governance structures and policies to ensure equitable representation and decision-making (Bauer, 2016).

Moreover, some African political systems are characterised by a dual-gender ruling system, which allows the existence of both male and female leaders ruling side by side (Adjepong, 2015; Amadiume, 1997; Oyewumi, 1997; Tamale, 2020). In Ghana, these dual-gender ruling systems are organised along matrilineal lines in the south, while societies in the north adhere to patrilineal systems based on male-gender ruling systems (Dawda, 2020; Haruna, 2015; Steegstra, 2009). In matrilineal systems, such as the Asante people of Ghana, power relations flow through matrilineage, with

integral positions like the *ohemaa* (queen mother) playing significant roles in governance (Puorideme, 2019; Stoeltje, 2003). The *ohemaa* draws authority and power from her membership in the royal lineage and holds considerable sway in community affairs, including the nomination of chiefs and involvement in conflict resolution (Stoeltje, 2003). Some chiefs were biological sons of the *ohemaa*. However, the biological son of the chief cannot become a chief by inheriting it from his father. Rather, it is the chief's sister's biological sons who become chiefs in the event of a vacancy of the stool on which the chief sits either by death or destoolment. Thus, in the absence of biological sons of the *ohemaa*, she selects a new chief from her biological sisters' sons and in their absence from her daughters' sons.

Ghana's patrilineal systems are not monolithic in their treatment of female leadership. Notably, several societies have incorporated important positions specifically designated for women, enabling them to exert significant influence within the political structure. The *Wuriche* among the Gonja is the title of authority akin to the queen or queen mother who is selected from among daughters of the male genealogy (Dawda et al., 2022). In the Mamprusi political system, the *Dindani* and *Sagmi* skins are reserved for the daughters of the Nayiri (overlord of Mamprusi) to exercise jurisdiction over some communities (NCCE, 2011). In the Dagomba political system, skins such as Gundogu, Kpatuya, Kugulogu, and a few others are reserved for daughters and granddaughters of the King (Ya-Na) (Mohammed et al., 2022). Current literature highlights the importance of gender mainstreaming and affirmative action policies in Ghana to enhance women's participation and representation in political decision-making processes (Dawda, 2022; Yussif, 2017).

The Waala political system, characterised by its patrilineal descent system, offers a unique case study of women's participation in the patrilineal political framework, exemplifying the interplay between culture, tradition, gender dynamics, and political governance. Like most societies in Ghana, the chieftaincy institution has been an integral part of the cultural heritage and has been the most visible and prominent form of political system among most of the ethnic groups in Ghana (Osman, 2019). In the patrilineal society of the Waala, lineage and inheritance are traced through the male line, which shapes and is shaped by the social relations of knowledge, the politics and relations of power within the society. Traditionally, leadership roles are reserved for men, with the chieftaincy practice passed down through the male lineage. Historically, women in the Waala society have occupied limited leadership positions, with the closest to chieftaincy being the "Wurikye," a role typically held by the most senior princess among the royal family (H. Bin Salih, 2018; M. Bin Salih, 2009). The *Wurikye* takes on social and spiritual responsibilities, particularly overseeing official proceedings and ceremonies during significant events such as the passing away of the *Wa Naa*. Upon the demise of the *Wa-naa*, the *Wurikye* takes charge of the corpse until the arrival of the Landlords (*tendamba*) who are responsible for officially declaring the king dead. She conducts the *tendamba* around the deceased *Wa-naa* (king of Wa) three times before paving way for the necessary rites to be performed (H. Bin Salih, 2018).

The arrival of European powers undoubtedly reshaped traditional structures across Africa. Ghana's colonial and postcolonial periods witnessed initiatives aimed at integrating women into the previously male-dominated spheres of community organization. One such effort involved the establishment of the Makazie position (community women's leader) who was selected from among women folks in the community. The makazie is a leader of women in the community without traditional political authority who was selected from among women married in the community (NCCE, 2011). This position is achieved based on personal attributes and charisma of the woman. The authority of these women leaders was limited to mobilizing and leading fellow women in areas of community development and domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning and fetching water during community events (Atuoye & Odame, 2013).

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF DORIMON AND WECHIAU TRADITIONAL AREAS.

The Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas are integral components of the broader Waala political system, as elucidated by Bin Salih (2008a), Daannaa (1992), and Wilks (1989). Both Dorimon and Wechiau chiefdoms share a common ancestral origin, with Dorimon tracing its lineage to Dagbon in northern Ghana, while the people of Wechiau also trace their roots to Dagbon/Mamprugu in northern Ghana. Despite diverse narratives on their ancestral roots, there is a convergence on a shared lineage tracing back to Naa Gbewaa, the progenitor of the Mole Dagbani ethnic group encompassing Mamprugu and Dagbon (Daannaa, 1992; Wilks, 1989). M. Bin Salih, (2008a) and Ivor Wilks (1989) have spotlighted these diverse perspectives, challenged historical narratives, and reinforced the interconnected traditional political heritage of the Waala and Dagbon/Mamprugu societies in northern Ghana.

Chieftaincy in the Dorimon and Wechiau chiefdoms adhere to a patrilineal framework, with individuals ascending through the gate system (M. Bin Salih, 2009). The Dorimon chiefdom has two primary gates, Gangoyiri and Dakpanyiri, further subdivided into sub-gates; Guse and Maase for Gangoyiri and Dontanga, Guo, Pase, Kong, and Duasi for Dakpanyiri. Succession to the Dorimon kingship alternates between these gates. Similarly, in the Wechiau chiefdom, succession is organised around four principal gates: Kandeu, Meteu, Lassia, and Kyieli, each housing sub-gates and numerous villages. The gate system mirrors the practice in the Dagbon and Mamprugu political systems where the Dorimon and Wechiau societies trace their ancestry as they also practice the gate system (Ahiave, 2013; Mohammed et al., 2022). Beyond the Waala ruling class, a distinct population referred to as "settlers" or non-indigenes, encompassing the Dagaaba and Brifor ethnic groups have significantly contributed to the area's cultural diversity (Sabogu et al., 2020). Despite their prolonged residence, these "settlers" find themselves excluded from traditional power structures, operating within the framework of the Waala Political System, where chiefs and *pognamine* oversee their communities. These dynamics prompt a crucial exploration of power relations, particularly as wielded by women across diverse population categories within these communities.

In the patrilineal descent system, upon marriage, women move from their paternal home to join their husband's family (marital home) resulting in shifting generative

social identities. The woman (now a wife and mother) is expected to contribute towards the advancement of her newly found home comprising herself, her husband, their children and the husband's family, which has become her family by marriage and their community. Notably, in the context of polygyny, prevalent within this society, she takes on the additional designation of *nyentaa* (co-wife). Also, the husband is expected to perform his obligations towards the wife's family as an in law as required by the customs and practices of the patrilineal descent system. However, the woman (wife) is not regarded as a member of the husband's descent system because she does trace her descent to her father's descent system, thus marriage is subordinate to the kinship systems in Ghana (Nukunya, 2016). Nevertheless, in her paternal home, the woman occupies a complex web of roles, simultaneously functioning as a daughter to her parents, a sister to her brothers and sisters, and a paternal aunt (*puree*). Additionally, she may hold a position of authority over the wives of her brothers, often regarded as *serepoga* (female husband), and perform some customary functions required of her.

As in the Asante matrilineal system, the woman's authority in the Waala patrilineal system is limited in the conjugal unit and practices of the Waala ethnic group. Interestingly, neither the woman (wife) nor the man (husband) in the Waala patrilineal society and the Asante matrilineal society respectively is allowed to inherit or own property belonging to the descent systems of their spouses. However, both husbands and wives can draw benefits from those systems through the benevolence of their spouses as long as they are married. These arrangements in the social structure of the Waala makes the identity of the woman (wife) ambiguous, just like the man (husband) in the Asante matrilineage as indicated above¹.

The Dorimon and Wechiau chiefdoms are the two main chiefdoms in the Wa West District in the Upper West Region. Established in 2004 through Legislative Instrument (LI 1751) under the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462), the Wa West District was carved out of the former Wa District, with Wechiau as its capital. The District Assembly is headed by a District Chief Executive, who exercises political, administrative, and overall planning powers in accordance with the modern democratic political system (Local Governance ACT 936, 2016). Alongside the decentralised governance structure are the traditional governance systems headed by the Dorimon-naa and Wechiau-naa, who serve as paramount chiefs in their respective traditional areas complemented by their paramount *pognamine*. Below the Dorimon-naa and Wechiau-naa are several other communities headed by divisional and sub-divisional chiefs, who acknowledge their authority and contribution to local development and cultural norms. Within this intricate power

¹ The identities of wives and husbands in the Waala patrilineal and the Asante matrilineal systems respectively are multiplicative. For instance, in the Waala patrilineal society, a wife is also a *puree* – a paternal aunty – in her family of descent who is required to perform important social functions in the same ways as man. Also, in the Asante matrilineal system, a husband is also a *wofa* in his family of descent tasked with important socialization functions as a father to his sister's children (Puorideme, 2019).

configuration is the position of *pognaa* which is seen as a radical approach towards transformation of the traditional governance system (Atuoye & Odame, 2013).

The concept of *pognaa* was introduced into the Waala society and for that matter most societies of the Upper West Region of Ghana through sustained Civil Society Organisation advocacy and government support as a women's empowerment concept to increase women's participation in governance at both local and national levels (Atuoye & Odame, 2013; Odame, 2014). Aligned with the patrilineal system, daughters from the male genealogy are chosen to become *pognaa* in their paternal homes. The institution exemplifies a complex interplay of culture and gendered power relations as the practice of installing daughters as *pognamine* deepens the ambiguity of the woman's identity – as a wife and a princess - calling into question where she belongs. Culturally, a married woman (wife) cannot be a *pognaa* in her marital home (where she is seen as a wife or mother), however, she ought to relinquish the "wife" identity in her paternal home and assume the traditional roles of a "bipuglee" (daughter), a "puree" (paternal aunty), and a *pognaa* (woman-chief or queen or queen mother).

GENDER AND POWER RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Since the 1980s, gender advocates and practitioners, Feminist political economists and development discourse analysts have drawn attention to the strategic relationship between gender and power in society. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which is touted as the "visionary agenda for the empowerment of women", amplifies the strategic relationship between gender and power as a groundbreaking framework for gender studies in contemporary societies. Gender studies since 1995 have emphasised that gender and power are deeply intertwined concepts, which shape and are shaped by social structures, relationships, opportunities and resources within societies. Some African scholars (Puorideme, 2018), have provided insights into the dynamic and strategic nature of gender and power relations. In Ghana, like many African societies, gender is discursively constructed and shaped by power relations and situated sociocultural practices in both bureaucratic and traditional social domains (Puorideme & Agustín Rolandsen, 2023) amidst resistances and opportunities for negotiations (Fraser, 2013).

However, Makama (2013) emphasises the socioculturally constructed roles for men and women, highlighting men's historical dominance as property owners, decision makers, and heads of households. For Oyewumi (1997) gender is a construct imposed by colonial and modern institutions as institutional discourses and practices continue to shape gender identities, subject positions, social hierarchies and power dynamics, particularly regarding access to resources and authority (also see Amadiume, 1997). Situating gender within a politico-historical context, Tamale (2020) emphasises the enduring impact of colonial legacies on societal norms, particularly within traditional political systems. Whereas it is important to note the differences between men and women, and the opportunities and privileges gendered discourse affords them in contemporary societies, it is equally important to problematise taken-for-granted naturalised gendered hierarchies and power relations (Shi-xu, 2005a) Consequently, an understanding of the situated context is

necessary to appreciate gender dynamics in diverse sociocultural contexts (Oyewumi, 1997).

To summarise, it is evident that the claims of the scholars presented above regarding gender are underpinned by social constructivist epistemology and ontology, which privileges gender as a discursive construction that embeds situated social relations and politics, and forms of knowledge in specific social contexts. Also, previous studies in the region (see Atuoye and Odame, 2013; Odame, 2014), have focused on the role of *pognaa* without analysing the ways in which the identity, position, and roles of *pognaa* in any specific sociocultural context are constructed, negotiated and shaped as presented in this study. This study intervenes in the literature above by filling this gap. Therefore, this research aims to explore social relations of knowledge and power struggles (Keller, 2018), utilizing Foucault's theoretical frameworks to understand how *pognaa* identities and position are shaped by knowledge and power struggles in the sociopolitical and historical contexts in which they exist. Through this approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ways in which social relations of knowledge and power struggles in specific sociocultural contexts construct situated social reality.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Discourse is a concept widely used across many disciplines, but it is much prominent in the fields of social sciences and humanities research. However, it does not lend itself to any universal definition. Whereas others focus on the linguistic usage and understanding of the concept, others focus on sociocultural and political perspectives and interpretation. Thus, discourse scholars may either focus on the micro sociological or macro sociological usage of the concept depending on their research focus. The understanding and use of discourse in this study aligns with Foucault's notion of discourse and its relation to knowledge and power (Foucault, 1980) in contemporary societies. According to Foucault (1972), discourse is social practices, not just linguistic practices, or language use, that form objects and subjects in a specific historical epoch. One must note that these practices are not arbitrary but contingent on anonymous rules specific to a discursive field in the situated context. Also, without totally dismissing the role of language in discursive formations, Foucault emphasises that language is not just for representing, but also for making objects and subjects visible in the discursive field. Later in his genealogical works, Foucault (1972, 1980) noted the central role and relationship of power and discourse, which accounts for the construction of subjects and objects of knowledge in modern societies. In so doing, what is true is just a historical construction without universal essence throughout history. Consequently, the search of historical rules of discourse or statements of discursive fields, and the construction of truths about certain subjects and objects characterise the archaeological and genealogical works of Foucault. Whereas in the archaeological works the researcher is preoccupied with the discursive practices, rules and statements that coexist with discourse and gives rise to subjects and objects of knowledge, the genealogical methods focus on the discursive construction of truths about subjects in each epoch.

The notion of discourse problematises the traditional views of power and knowledge by emphasizing the role of language in constructing and perpetuating social norms, identities, and power dynamics as indicated earlier. The sociocultural, historical and political understanding of Foucault's notion of discourse in line with situated sociopolitical and historical practices and the construction of 'truth' specific to a given discursive field is central to this study. Furthermore, Foucault's (1972, 1980) archaeology and genealogy provide frameworks for investigating the situated social relations of knowledge and practices, the politics of knowing and the construction of subjects and objects of knowledge that are intelligible in the situated context.

METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The methodology of this study is underpinned by constructivist epistemology and ontology in which social practices, gender and power are key devices for understanding the social world and situated discourse and practice using history, culture, language and social interactions. Consequently, situated social practices, forms and social relations of knowledge and knowing, and the politics of knowing and defining social categories are important in interpreting and understanding the identity and position of *pognaa* and its implications for women's participation in the Waala traditional political system. This study employs a sociocultural approach to discourse and the principles of the sociological approach to discourse to analyse the sociocultural repertoires and schemes and practices (Keller, 2018) regarding the making and practices of *pognaa* in the situated context. In so doing, the identity and position of *pognaa* are not to be taken as absolute and essential, but they are sociocultural, historical and politically contingent cultural formations (Foucault, 1972) and discursive constructions in the situated cultural context (Keller, 2018). As indicated in the study context section above, the situated point of departure is the identity, position and making of *pognaa* – the 'Woman Chief' in the Waala traditional political system, focusing on the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas. The sociocultural discourse analytic framework employed in this study privileges the analysis of the cultural-political aspects of the discursive field – the identity, position and making of *Pognaa* – Woman Chief in a typical patrilineal society of Northwestern Ghana.

The data corpus of this study, comprising text and talk were collected between 1st August 2023 to 31st January 2024. The study conducted both focus groups discussions (FGDs) and key informants' interviews (KIIs) in the study area – the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas – to collect relevant data for analysis. Four FGDs were conducted in three communities of the Dorimon traditional area (DTA) comprising Dorimon, Guo, and Guse communities. The FGDs were made up of seven women participants each for Guo and Guse. In the Dorimon community two separate FGDs, were conducted, one for a group of six men, and the other for a group of seven women. Similarly, four FGDs were conducted in Wechiau Traditional Area (WTA) comprising Wechiau, Meteu and Kandeu communities. Also, two separate FGDs for six men only and women seven only participants were conducted in Wechiau as the paramountcy, while one FGD each comprising seven women only was conducted in Meteu and Kandeu. The criteria for selecting men and women participants for the FGDs were, first, the participant should be 18 years and above,

and second, the participants must have lived in the community for not less than two years before the commencement of the data collection year. Furthermore, nineteen key informants comprising Namine – chiefs and *Pognamine* – women chiefs, officials of the Upper West Regional House of Chiefs, the District Assembly, community elders and women leaders in communities – Makazies were purposefully selected and interviewed. Whereas the in-depth interviews with key informants provided perspectives of the participants, the FGDs provided valuable insights to the situated context of the making of *pognaa* in the two traditional areas. Out of the nineteen KIIs conducted, extracts from ten interviews were relevant to the purpose of this study. Incorporating the invaluable knowledge of chiefs/*pognamine*, elders, recognized as repositories of oral history (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Smith, 2021), as well as women leaders, men and women provided insights on the construction and governance of the *pognaa* position. Also, the officials from bureaucratic institutions provided specialised knowledge on the institutional frameworks that shape the position of *pognaa*. Purposive sampling strategy guided the selection of participants for both FGDs and KII to tap on the specialised knowledge and experiences of people whose lives affect or are affected by the *pognaa* institution.

Both English as the official language in Ghana, and Dagaare/Waale – the local languages predominantly spoken in the study area were used to conduct FGDs and KIIs. The local language was used in most situations as majority of participants did speak or write the English Language. The discussions were recorded, transcribed in Waali and then translated into English for analysis. Also, extracts of text from official documents such as the register of Dorimon chiefs occurred between 2011 and 2022. While the use of the English Language to some extent makes communication easier, we acknowledge the limitations of translating English which does not convey complex socio-linguistic and cultural meanings.

THE IDENTITY AND POSITION OF *POGNAA* IN THE DORIMON AND WECHIAU TRADITIONAL AREAS

The analysis in this section traces the genealogy (Keller, 2018) of the identity and position of *pognaa* and *pognamine* in the Dorimon and Wechiau societies. In so doing, it is noted that the identity and position of *pognaa* neither pre-exists as an essential subject or object of knowledge nor a metaphysical object but are constructed in a ‘game of truth’ contingent on discursive struggle or politics of knowing and forms of knowledge. Both bureaucratic and traditional sociocultural and political practices shape the identity and position of *pognaa* in the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas. While specifics regarding the exact year the identity and position of *pognaa* entered the sociopolitical discourse of the two traditional areas are elusive, a Divisional *Pognaa* in Wechiau pointed to 2005 as the year when the concept was initiated in the Wechiau traditional area where she was nominated alongside the *Pognaa* of Wechiau paramountcy. Responding to a question the researcher asked during a key informant interview session, the Wechiau-naa who as of 2023 was the longest serving member of the Upper West Regional House of Chiefs recounted that the concept was introduced as a government policy and adopted in around year 2005 after initial resistance by the traditional authorities. This

resistance, as highlighted by the Wechiau-naa can be understood within the framework of resistance to disruptions (Foucault, 1980), of the established patriarchal order embedded in the patrilineal system. A woman in a focus group noted; “When this concept came, you could hear the men say, ‘who are women to be chiefs’” (58-year-old woman, Guo FGD) whereas the statement may suggest the devaluation of female agency (Steady, 2011), historically, the patrilineal descent system as stock knowledge ordering practices and source of power struggle in the situated contexts provides a scheme for understanding that men are installed chiefs of local communities, but not women.

Excerpt 1 is taken from an interview with a senior divisional chief of the Dorimon traditional area and analysed below:

Excerpt 1.

- 1: *If my memory serves me right. I can't say for sure.*
- 2: *Yes, it is of recent, even the whole north, it is of recent*
- 3: *I cannot say it was an imposition, but it was a sort of*
- 4: *innovation from the Regional House of Chiefs.*

As indicated in the introduction section of this study, the “whole north” (line 2) is predominantly patrilineal, and this descent system shapes sociopolitical relations, identities and practices amidst the resistance (Foucault, 1980) of the *pognaa* identity and position in the two traditional areas. It is interesting to note that despite the resistance, the perspective of some traditional leaders, as exemplified in Excerpt 1 above suggests that the identity and position of the *pognaa* is an “innovation” rather than an “imposition” (lines from 3 and 4) from bureaucratic government structures. However, the fact that “it is of recent” (line 2) suggests that the identity and position of *pognaa* in the situated context is constructed and shaped by the “recent” discursive practices and institutions of bureaucratic government contingent on power/knowledge assemblages (Foucault, 1980) and the politics of knowing (Keller, 2018).

Furthermore, there is a simultaneous acknowledgement of women's socio-historical significance within the chieftaincy space which gives an indication of a somewhat historical rooting of the position of *pognaa* as presented and analysed in the utterance of *Pognaa* ATK in excerpt 2 below.

Excerpt 2.

- 1: *Women used to have power in society, not only*
- 2: *at the home level. How is it that we say women*
- 3: *are the home? Why is it that they are the*
- 4: *custodians of the secrets of the community?*
- 5: *Even till date, daughters, especially senior*
- 6: *daughters (bipuglibera) are respected when it*
- 7: *comes to taking certain decisions in the family*
- 8: *and can even veto. You know we didn't have our*
- 9: *people going to school early, because of that*

- 10: *our history is not written. If you go to Dagbon*
 11: *or Mamprugu or among the Gonja, they have women*
 12: *who are chiefs. But we say we brought our*
 13: *chieftaincy from Dagbon*

In excerpt 2 above, the utterances of *Pognaa* ATK, a divisional *pognaa* in Dorimon, suggests senior daughters ("bipuglibera") hold decision-making authority within families and "can even veto" (line 8). *Pognaa* ATK draws on the sociohistorical knowledge and practices to contest the privileged position of men as chiefs in the Waala patrilineal descent system. Consequently, the statements (Foucault, 1972) of the *Pognaa* ATK in the excerpt, suggest the concept of *pognaa*, the identities and positions are not new, but a practice known and traced to the origin of the Waala sociopolitical system. However, the institutionalisation of the practice of constructing the identity and position of the *pognaa* in contemporary Waala patrilineal society and traditional political system faces an unending discursive and gender power struggle. Thus, the authority of the *pognaa* in traditional and local community governance in the situated context is ill defined and unclear.

Furthermore, discursive controversies, uncertainties and gender power relation in the situated context continue to define and shape the identity and position of *pognaa*. For instance, as it is done in the patrilineal societies, the selection and making of *pognaa* is contingent on the patrilineal descent system in patrilineal societies. There are three ways of selecting the *pognaa*. The first is appointment by the chief in consultation with the most senior prince² (Yidaandao/Yidaana) and elders; second, appointment by the most senior prince in consultation with the chief and other elders; and third, entrusting the responsibility to daughters to consult and nominate a candidate from among themselves under the leadership of the most senior daughter of the lineage. In Dorimon, the prevalent mode of selection was appointment by the Yidaana/Yidaandao in consultation with chiefs and elders, although there are instances when chiefs unilaterally selected the *pognaa* without recourse to the Yidaana/Yidaandao and elders. In the Wechiau paramountcy, Wechiau *Pognaa* and Meteu *Pognaa* were chosen by the respective chiefs in consultation with elders. The Kandeu *Pognaa's* case introduces further complexity, while some participants suggest that the power to select was vested in the daughters of the gate, for which reason they did the selection, others suggest the *pognaa* was unilaterally selected by the chief. These conflicting perspectives are fuelled by the fact that the *pognaa* was the direct daughter of the chief. Surprisingly, the multiple modes and practices of selecting and making of *pognaa*, suggest that the identity and position of *pognaa* is constructed in relation to the sociopolitical relations, and forms of knowledge and power assemblages (Keller, 2018).

² In Dorimon and Wechiau, the most senior prince who acts as head of the gate is called yidaana or Yidaandao respectively.

Further complexities in gender power relations are embedded in the making of a *pognaa*; for instance, there are divergent perspectives regarding whether daughters or wives of the communities should be considered for the position.

Excerpt 3.

1: *When this issue came, it was a controversy. Some were in favour*
 2: *of wives; others were in favour of daughters. However, some of*
 3: *the wives are not from the royal lineage, meanwhile, our*
 4: *traditions demand that a chief must come from the royal lineage.*
 5: *If you want to make wives pognamine, that will also go against*
 6: *the customs. Yes! it is possible to have some of the wives who*
 7: *are royals, but not all. But let's look at it this way too, the*
 8: *saying that the woman has no home, it does not apply to your*
 9: *father's home, it doesn't apply to your father's home. If I am*
 10: *made a pognaa at my marital home, and my marriage dissolves,*
 11: *can I continue to be a pognaa there? Or if my husband passes*
 12: *on and nobody marries me, I can't continue to be pognaa there.*
 13: *So that is the import of the saying that the woman has no home.*
 14: *No matter where you marry, you still belong to your father's*
 15: *home. Some women have married in multiple places and have*
 16: *children. If you are a pognaa in your marital home, you could*
 17: *face challenges in your marriage, but the position would tie*
 18: *you down, you can't leave the marriage. If you leave too, you*
 19: *can't send the position to your new home. If you go to your*
 20: *new home, and they do not allow you to be pognaa, that is what*
 21: *I am talking about. I don't think it will marginalise women*
 (Divisional *pognaa* from Dorimon-DPD).

In excerpt 3 above, contrary to the claims that the woman upon marriage belongs to the husband's home (Kpieta & Bonye, 2012; Dawda, 2020), DPD, draws on cultural schemes and practices (Nukunya, 2016), "our tradition" and "customs" (lines 4 and 6) and the politics of knowing in the discursive field (Keller, 2018), in line 1, to construct the identity and asserts the position of *pognaa* in the sociopolitical context. DPD asserts that the daughters (Princesses) of the royal family can legitimately be identified and hold the position of *pognaa* instead of wives. In lines 14 and 15, DPD emphasises that "No matter where you marry, you still belong to your father's home" as marriage is subordinate to descent systems in Ghana (Puorideme & Agustín Rolandsen, 2023). Consequently, the identity and position of *pognaa* has a cultural foundation and is not just a bureaucratic government policy and institutional practices as observed earlier. Furthermore, the cultural foundation of *pognaa* is shaped by the sociocultural practices and institutions such as marriage and descent systems, and rites and rituals such as funerals. Furthermore, the criteria for selecting the *pognaa* is discursively gendered as presented and analysed in excerpt 4 below.

Excerpt 4.

1: *To be qualified as a chief, you must be a royal from the rightful*
 2: *gate, you should be a man-when I say a man, I mean you must be*
 3: *married and also have patience, you must not have any*
 4: *questionable character, and above all you must not have any*
 5: *physical or mental deformity. So, to be qualified as pognaa, you*
 6: *must also be a woman- married and meet the above mentioned*
criteria
 (Key informant)

In excerpt 4 above, the making of *pognaa* in the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas is discursively gendered and power laden. The position of *pognaa* aside having a cultural foundation that is contingent on social relations and practices, it is also tied to traditional politics as the position is limited to women from a royal lineage (line 1). Similarly, to be identified a *pognaa*, the woman must be married (line 6), thus a *pognaa* must not be an unmarried woman. Furthermore, Wechiau *pognaa*'s accounts in excerpt 5 below suggest that formal education— a non-cultural or non-traditional qualification—is included in the criteria for selecting *pognaa*,

Excerpt 5.

1: *We those who have not been to school, anytime we attend*
 2: *meetings, English language is spoken throughout, and it is*
 3: *always like you have accompanied people there. The unfortunate*
 4: *thing is my paramount chief too did not go to school.*
 (Wechiau Pognaa)

As, “English language is spoken throughout” (line 2) at meetings, the attainment of formal education is a prerequisite for being selected as a *pognaa*. However, this additional criterion from bureaucratic government institutions further compounds the complexities of discursive controversies regarding the making of a *pognaa*. Unlike the identity and position of chiefs in the sociocultural discourses of the situated context, which appears to have clearly defined selection criteria and functions for chiefs, it appears the identity, position and role of the *pognamine* in the situated context (Keller, 2018) is unclear. The inclusion of bureaucratic criteria such as the attainment of formal education further compounds the complexity of the identity, position and role of *pognamine* in the traditional political system of the situated context. In so doing, the inclusion-exclusion schemes or criteria for selecting and qualifying women for the position of *pognaa* are practices of power (Foucault, 1980) in the sociopolitical context. The next section examines the accounts of *pognamine* in the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas regarding their role in the development of the traditional areas.

THE ROLE OF POGNAMINE IN DORIMON AND WECHIAU TRADITIONAL AREA

As noted earlier, women have been an integral part of the pre-colonial traditional governance systems of the two societies, though memories of a formal position remain elusive. The construction of the identity and position of *pognaa* and *pognamine* and their role in the Dorimon and Wechiau traditional areas appears to be an expansion of the traditional political system of patrilineal societies to include

and involve women in the traditional power structure as observed in the analysis above. This study reveals that since the inception of the *pognaa* concept, women through the *pognamine* are gradually being integrated into the traditional governance system. Also, some *pognamine* are consulted by the paramount chief on matters ranging from the installation of sub-chiefs to dispute resolution and development initiatives (Interview with the Paramount *Pognaa* of Dorimon, November 8, 2023).

Despite the construction of the *pognaa* position by the Regional House of Chiefs, the role of *pognamine* in the traditional political system appears to be ambiguous and uncertain. The accounts of a *pognaa*, for instance, “we didn’t have anything concrete, so everybody was to decide what your *pognaa* would be doing” is evidence of the uncertainty of the position of *pognamine* in the traditional power structure. The accounts and perspectives of two *pognamine* in the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas are presented in excerpts 6 and 7 and analysed below. The *pognamine* were responding to a question the researcher asked about the roles *pognamine* are expected to play in the traditional political system.

Excerpt 6.

- 1: *We actually do not have specific customary roles.*
 - 2: *But during occasions like this, the primary roles of women*
 - 3: *is to be in charge of food. During installation of*
 - 4: *chiefs, the primary role of women was to be in charge of*
 - 5: *food for guests. We were not always involved. We were not in*
 - 6: *existence, but now that we are in existence, may be a role*
 - 7: *will be given to us. I think our role now is ceremonial,*
 - 8: *we do not have the power to sanction anything.*
 - 9: *We don’t even have anything like that*
- (A divisional *pognaa* of Dorimon).

As indicated in the analysis of excerpt 6 above, the role of *pognaa* appears to be constrained by the sociocultural discourse of the situated context (Keller, 2018; Shixu, 2005) where traditional power structures are contingent on the patrilineal discourse (Foucault, 1972, 1980). In so doing, *pognamine* “do not have specific customary roles during the installation of chiefs (line 1, 3 and 4), except being “in charge of food” (lines 4 and 5). The situated sociocultural and political schemes, practices (Keller, 2018), and forms of knowledge do not provide *pognamine* “the power to sanction anything” (Line 8). Consequently, *pognamine* do not play any strategic role in the traditional political system necessary for balancing gendered power relations, and the political empowerment of *pognamine* for sustainable community development. In fact, the assertion is evident in the accounts of a divisional *pognaa* in Wechiau as presented in excerpt 7 and analysed below.

Excerpt 7.

- 1: *we are expected to take part in decision-making to support*
- 2: *the chief in the community. Yes, that is if the chief*
- 3: *involves you and is supposed to involve you.*

4: We also basically, anytime we go to meetings, we are told
 5: that our role is to go into marital issues and settle
 6: disputes among married couples. We are also supposed to
 7: mobilise women into groups, farming groups, VSLAs, etc.
 (Divisional *pognaa* of Wechiau)

Whether *pognamine* take part in decision making or not is contingent on the discretion of the chief as evidenced in the accounts of *pognaa* in excerpt 7 (lines, 1,2 and 3). In so doing the power imbalances between *pognamine* and the chiefs are entrenched and the strategic role of *pognamine* is limited or reduced to practical and reproductive roles in the traditional area. Therefore, the sociocultural practices, forms of knowledge and politics construct the identity, position and roles for *pognamine* in the traditional area as a patrilineal society.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are presented and discussed in relation to studies outlined in the literature section. The study revealed four key findings worth discussing. First, the discursive construction of the identity and position of *pognaa* or *pognamine* faces a persistent discursive and gender power struggle in the Waala patrilineal society; second, the identity and position of *pognaa* or *pognamine* is neither an innovation nor an imposition of bureaucratic governance institutions, it has a cultural foundation embedded in the patrilineal societies of Northwestern Ghana; third, the criteria for selecting a *pognaa*, unlike the chief, is unclear, ambiguous, and fraught with practices of co-existing traditional and bureaucratic domains of power. Fourth, there are no clearly defined roles for the *pognaa* or *pognamine* in the traditional power structures.

First, interestingly, the discursive construction of the identity and position of *pognaa* or *pognamine* met resistances in the Waala patrilineal society where the identity, position and authority of a chief and the chieftaincy discourse privileged the men. In a recent study, (Puorideme & Agustín Rolandsen, 2023) found that sociocultural practices in both bureaucratic and traditional domains shape gender identities and power relationships in Ghana. Also, their study noted resistance to constructing gendered identities, positions, and roles in political discourse, opening opportunities for gendered identity negotiations in the context of Ghana. Similarly, this study found that the discursive construction of identity and position of *pognamine* in the patrilineal societies of Dorimon and Wechiau traditional areas was faced with resistance yet providing openings for negotiating women involvement in traditional politics and local community governance.

Furthermore, whereas scholars emphasise the persistence of male dominance and the imposition of gender concept as a colonial category (Makama, 2013; Oyewumi, 1997) that shapes gender identities and power relations in society, this study demonstrates that the identity and position of *pognaa* or *pognamine* is neither an innovation nor an imposition of bureaucratic governance institutions' practices, rather, the practice has a sociocultural and historical foundation embedded in the practices of patrilineal societies of Northwestern Ghana. However, surprisingly, this

study found that standard criteria or a cultural scheme (Keller, 2018) for selecting *pognaa* or *pognamine* does not exist thereby making the selection process of *pognaa* in the situated context ambiguous and faced with unending gender power struggles that limits women's involvement in local community governance.

For Fraser (2013), intervening in gender power relations calls for the problematisation of taken-for-granted naturalised gendered hierarchies, identities and subject positions. However, this study revealed that *pognaa* or *pognamine* do not have clearly defined roles in the traditional political system and power structures of the Dorimon and Wechiau Traditional Areas. Whether a *pognaa* or *pognamine* get involved in decision-making, and how, are at the discretion of the chief, but not a negotiated outcome (Puorideme & Agustín Rolandsen, 2023). A chief may decide to involve or not to involve a *pognaa* or *pognamine* in decision-making. In so doing, a *pognaa* or *pognamine* are limited to performing practical and reproductive roles such as counselling, resolving marital disputes and mobilising women for self-help and community development in the traditional area.

CONCLUSION

As indicated in the introduction section above, this study questions the cultural relevance/appropriateness of *pognaa* or *pognamine* (woman chiefs) in patrilineal societies such as the Waala society and aims to provide insights into the power dynamics, gender roles, and cultural discourse that shed light on the discursive complexities, rules and practices that construct and shape the identity, position and roles of *pognamine*. The study employs discourse theory and draws on methodological and analytical insights from sociocultural discourse approaches to investigate the situated practices constructing the identity and position of *pognaa* or *pognamine* in the sociocultural and political context. Discourse theory and methods provide an opportunity to analyse social practices in the context in which they occur and make clear the power relations and forms of knowledge constructing and perpetuating taken-for-granted identities and positions. In so doing, the study found the following: the discursive construction of the identity and position of *pognaa* or *pognamine* met resistance in the patrilineal society, the identity and position of *pognaa* or *pognamine* is neither an innovation nor an imposition of bureaucratic governance institutions, but it has a cultural foundation embedded in patrilineal societies of Northwestern Ghana; the criteria for selecting a *pognaa*, unlike the chief are unclear, ambiguous and fraught with practices of co-existing traditional and bureaucratic domains of power; and a *pognaa* or the *pognamine* do not play any strategic role to put women at the forefront of decision making in traditional power structures.

The discursive constitution of *pognaa* or *pognamine* provides an opportunity to intervene in strategic gender power relations towards women's involvement in decision-making in the traditional political system of typical patrilineal societies, but it has made minimal gains. Consequently, the active involvement of women in traditional politics and local community governance is still limited. The identity, position and role of *pognaa* or *pognamine* in the patrilineal societies of the Dorimon and Wechiau traditional areas are fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity, thus,

much effort is needed for greater success. However, the findings and claims made are based on the specific context, thus, it is impossible to generalise them. Studies in the larger context of Ghana in the future could also further strengthen and shed light on the findings of this study as presented above.

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