FISHING FOR FORUMS

Voluntary vocational associations and the creation of political agency in an artisanal fishing community in coastal Ghana – a topography of power and voice in Elmina

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## Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1
   a. Problem statement................................................................................................. 2
   b. Methodology........................................................................................................... 6
   c. Theoretical background – ethnographic fieldwork after the “processual turn” ........ 8
2. The “dramatic” downfall of Elmina’s Chief fisherman ................................................. 12
   a. Exposition............................................................................................................... 12
   b. Complication.......................................................................................................... 14
   c. Rising action.......................................................................................................... 15
   d. Climax................................................................................................................... 17
   e. Denouement.......................................................................................................... 21
3. Premix and the politicisation of the artisanal fishing sector .......................................... 24
   a. Artisanal fisheries and the livelihood context – a case for premix ......................... 24
   b. Premix politics and the history of a recurring debate ............................................. 27
   c. Premix policy 2009 ............................................................................................... 30
   d. Negotiating premix............................................................................................... 33
4. The Chief fisherman – between encompassing authority and the limitations of a mandate .... 41
   a. The institution of the Chief fisherman – vocational leadership ......................... 42
   b. Mainstream-political leadership .......................................................................... 43
   c. Traditional leadership........................................................................................... 47
   d. Chief fisherman and Paramount chief – an alliance of interest ......................... 49
   e. The limitations of the Chief fisherman’s mandate ............................................... 55
5. Hierarchies of voice and “ownership of the debate” in the Elmina fishing community ........ 59
   a. The canoe as a gendered voice-enhancing asset ................................................. 60
   b. Gender, age and enforced silence ....................................................................... 62
   c. Voice and ownership of the debate in the associational realm ............................. 67
6. Voluntary associations and the mobilisation of political agency in Elmina ...................... 73
   a. Internal organisation............................................................................................. 75
   b. External relations and “forum shopping” ............................................................. 86
7. Conclusion – Fisheries in crisis, a crisis for authority .................................................. 93
8. References .................................................................................................................. 105
Annex.............................................................................................................................. 112
Annex A: Governance institutions in artisanal fisheries management .............................. 112
Annex B: Structure of the traditional state or paramountcy of Elmina ............................. 113
Annex C: Abstracts ......................................................................................................... 114
Acronyms

CBFMC – Community-Based Fisheries Management Committee
FoN – Friends of the Nation (a Takoradi-based Non-Governmental Organisation)
GAWU – General Agricultural Workers Union
GNFCC – Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council
GOIL – Ghana Oil Company Limited
GoG – Government of Ghana
GPRTU – Ghana Private Road Transport Workers Union
ILO – International Labour Organisation
JAAPT – Joint Action Against Pair Trawling
KEEA – Komenda/Edina (Elmina)/Eguafo/Abirem District in the Central Region of Ghana
LBC – Landing Beach Committee
LI – Legal Instrument
MFRD – Marine Fisheries Research Division (of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture)
MMDCE – Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives
MOFA – Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NAFAG – National Fisheries Association of Ghana
NDC – National Democratic Congress, currently ruling party under President Atta Mills
NICFC – National Inland Canoe Fishermen Council
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
NPA – National Petroleum Authority
NPC – National Premix Committee
NPP – New Patriotic Party, between 2000-2008 ruling party under President Kufuor
NPS – National Premix Secretariat
OMC – Oil Marketing Companies
TOR – Tema Oil Refinery
Glossary of recurring Fante terms

Afahye – festival
Akyikudo – akpese/kingmakers of Elmina
Amamfo – councillors
Aman – Fishing and motivational songs
Apofohene – Chief fisherman
Asafo – local military defence organisation, patrilineally organised
Bakatue – yearly festival in Elmina revolving around the ritual “opening of the lagoon”
Besonfo – council of seven elders
Birefi – share of the catch
Bosu – captain of a canoe
Ebusua – matrilineal clan
Ebusuapanyin – lineage head
Edenahene – Paramount chief of Elmina
Edinafo(o) – inhabitant(s) of Elmina
Eto – ritual meal made from egg, yam and palm oil
Gong-gong – drum beaten in the context of announcements made by the traditional council
Konkonhene – Chief fish processor
Ohemma – Queen mother
Okomfo – shrine priest
Omanhene – Paramount chief
Otyeame – linguist
Pata ase – shed
Sonkahyir – customary fee
Supi(fo) – asafo head(s)
Tufohen – head/commander of the different asafo companies
Nana Benya – central deity of Elmina
1. Introduction

When I arrived in Ghana in July 2009 to begin my fieldwork on voice and interest representation in artisanal canoe fishing, fishermen along the country’s coast were in strike against the newly installed government’s plans to reorganise the premix business. Premix, a subsidised fuel intended for outboard motors, is a crucial element of fishermen’s livelihoods strategies. Little did I know, however, how this nationwide debate would impact on the events I intended to observe on the local level in Elmina.

In September 2009, three months into my fieldwork, fisher folks in Elmina rose against their local Chief fisherman over an alleged abuse of the local premix funds. This thesis centres on the resulting conflict of interest between supporters and opponents of Nana Jojo Solomon, latest Chief fisherman of Elmina. In January 2010, towards the end of my fieldwork, the conflict seemed to have come to its long awaited conclusion. After six months of tensions, one could literally hear the relief going through the small coastal town of Elmina when my research assistant Amstel informed me about the installation of Solomon’s successor.

However, on 10 June 2010, approaching the completion of this thesis, news media in Ghana circulated the following story.

“Canoe owners up in arms against Elmina Paramount Chief” (Adom FM, 10.06.2010)

Canoe owners in the Elmina Municipality have promised a showdown with the Paramount Chief of the Elmina Traditional area, Nana Kojo Condunab VI, if he dares step on the landing beach to celebrate this year’s Bakatue festival. The festival is scheduled to come off in a couple of weeks but the canoe owners have threatened to disrupt the festival until Nana Condunab accepts their newly elected chief fisherman. A spokesperson for the canoe owners, Nana Kwabena Bada, a former national best fisherman who issued the threat in an interview on Adom FM’s morning show, Duaso Nsem, said all efforts by the Elmina canoe owners and fishermen to introduce their new chief fisherman to Nana Kojo Condunab have proved futile because he is in league with their deposed chief fisherman, Nana Jojo Solomon, who was deposed for his gross disrespect towards them and financial impropriety. Nana Bada further stated that the canoe owners are reliably informed that Nana Condunab is bent on parading the deposed Jojo Solomon as the Chief fisherman, hence their resistance. “We will oppose this with all our might,” he warned. However, the Paramount Chief of Elmina, Nana Kojo Condunab also in an interview on Duaso Nsem dismissed the threat of the canoe owners and said the Bakatue festival will come off this year no matter what. He said the fishermen erred in the installation of the new Chief Fisherman because they did not follow the laid down procedures in deposing the former chief, Nana Jojo Solomon so he is still the Chief Fisherman he recognises.

This development of the case confronted me with the fact that the temporal frame of fieldwork is highly arbitrary and careful attention has to be paid to the construction of (temporal and spatial) limitations of the events in focus and the definition of the relevant contexts. Social phenomena are fluid not only over time, but they also flow into each other, constantly being referred back to and reinterpreted in interactions and as social realities in the becoming. The articulation of opposing norms and values in the contested destoolment of Nana Jojo Solomon eventually allowed me to trace some of these references to larger contexts, to past events and
eventually towards future developments in the field, for example, as rooted in the actors’ particular (moral) dispositions and chosen pathways.

According to Scheffer (2007: 167f), most ethnographies are carried out „as if it were self-evident where, how long, or with whom one should conduct the fieldwork (...) [and] as if it were self-evident that the ethnographer encountered relevant features of the field in the observed situations, the collected documents, or the recorded interviews”. Latest when confronted with alternative strands of events, the influence of the theoretical framing of the research and the temporal and spatial choices of the “field” become obvious. Consequently, as Scheffer concludes, ethnographic research needs to be “de-naturalised”, that is, instead of following a pre-set programme or a principal analytical frame “the ethnographer is in search for appropriate spatiotemporal frames in correspondence with the occurrences in the field [in an] ongoing dialogue of empirical and theoretical perspectives” (ibid). In this respect, the concepts of “event” and “process” represent potentially misleading sociological models. What really constitutes an event, its beginnings and causes is therefore not as easily explicable as first sight may suggest. The same holds true also for the closely related conceptual pair “action” and “context” and conclusions as to what form of sociality is actually at hand need to be drawn carefully. In the words of Sally Falk Moore (1987: 727), fieldwork as current history inevitably raises questions as to how the present was produced, however the field worker also must ask what the present is producing. When “the identification of change-in-the-making is one of the present objects of analysis (and) the normality of continuity is not assumed” (ibid) larger questions of social processes and dynamics become visible even in the small scale and short term frame that ethnographic fieldwork is usually restricted to.

a. Problem statement

In view of these initial, theoretical considerations and in inspiration of Luning (2009), I want to centre this thesis on the course of events taking place in Elmina between September 2009 and February 2010. Despite the length of this time span, I want to talk about a “diagnostic” or “chopped-off” micro event in which macro structures, that is, relevant political processes and dynamics become visible (Moore, 1987). This is not to suggest that the processes central to my argument can be limited to the events observed during my fieldwork. In contrast, while this thesis is aimed at the interpretation of the contested destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman, an “event” that literally brought the town’s different power holders to the fore, it also provides the detailed analysis of the conflict’s contexts as defined relevant by the actors in the field, including the wider spatial and temporal dimensions.

The events portrayed in this thesis will be deliberately depicted in their chronological order and as they occurred and revealed themselves to the analysis in the field. The case of the destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman then allows for a more concrete research interest, constituted of the following three-dimensional and consecutive elements.

First, this thesis will explore the actions and interactions of multiple governance institutions in artisanal fisheries management in Ghana. Particular emphasis will be drawn to the question of which role, among the various forms of leadership in Elmina, there is to play for voluntary vocational associations of fish workers. What is their potential impact on decision making and how do voluntary associations help fish workers to “make their voice heard”? The concept of
bargaining power applied in the socio-political transactions and interactions within various negotiation arenas of fisheries governance is at the core of this question.

Secondly, and from a more processual standpoint, my aim is to understand how the environment of interest representation developed and develops with the changing interactions between the diverse forms of leadership at play, including alternative forms of leadership of an associational and vocational character.

Finally, these arguments will build up to a more theoretical investigation about the value of micro-events in the analysis of political ethnography. What is there in an event? If macro and micro spheres of social behaviour are inherently intertwined, how do macro political structures relate to micro transactions and vice versa?

In more concrete terms, based on the case study of the contested destoolment of Nana Jojo Solomon, Chief fisherman of Elmina, contemporary political dynamics in Elmina will be clarified. With the help of the “diagnostic event” of Solomon’s destoolment I want to illustrate in great ethnographic detail how divergent social norms and alliances are articulated in the actions and interactions of different stakeholders. Through the interpretation of the numerous viewpoints engaged in the conflict, a highly qualitative understanding of the political relations underlying the contested destoolment will become possible as these interpretations can be used to illustrate characteristic features of socio-political life in Elmina. By contextualizing the processes of contested authority and legitimate rule both in their historical perspective and the various interpretations provided by the people on the ground, a more holistic interpretative framework may be set up in which moral perceptions, strategic affiliations and ritual practices are connected. Based on the principles of processual ethnography, the aim of presenting an encompassing current history of Elmina's political relations can also be expressed in the metaphor of mapping the relevant power relations in the artisanal fishing community of Elmina, however, not in a still picture but in its relevant internal dynamics. Eventually, on the basis of this topography of power more theoretical conclusions will become possible regarding the micro and macro character of social life and the processes of defining the “formal” and the “informal” and their effective interlinking.

Marloes Kraan’s recent dissertation presents an overview over the ideal type governance structure in Ghanaian artisanal fishing communities. While Kraan (2009) concentrates on the officially recognised and regulated power structures (cf. Annex A), commonly referred to as the “formal” sphere of society, I want to incorporate also alternative sources of leadership and illustrate their significant impact on the delegation of representatives and thereby the constitution of forums of decision making in their interrelation with different types of leadership in the artisanal fishing community of Elmina. Besides mainstream political and “traditional” forms of leadership often described in the scientific literature, I especially want to put emphasis on “informal” or vocational voluntary associations, that is, groups of artisanal fish workers that are not recognised, regulated or protected in legal frameworks, as holders of associational bargaining power.

The complex interactions between the different types of leadership at play, that is,
• traditional authorities,
• mainstream political institutions, and not at last
• leadership executed by holders of associational bargaining power in the form of voluntary vocational associations

then allows analysing the relevance of voluntary associations not only in their historical perspective but most importantly in their relation to other factors and factions determining legitimate rule. This is of general interest as recent literature seems to support the hypothesis that voluntary associations have undergone a historical shift from political pressure groups (e.g. Little, 1957; Prah, 1989) to more welfaristic organisations, that is, mere self-help groups (e.g. Tostensen et al, 2001). It remains to be questioned however, whether these observations represent genuine developments on the grounds or simply reflect a shift in academic emphasis.

The voluntary associations presented throughout this thesis are

• the Elmina canoe owners association (and the newly established watchmen association)
• the “Programme” youth association
• the “Dwen wo ho” women’s association
• and the general associations behind the names “Brokos Adoye Kuw”, “Justice”, “Las Palmas”, “Island/Freetown” and “5:1”

My special thanks are due to the ambitious people in these associations who found time to support my data collection besides sacrificing their energy to the welfare of the people of Elmina, the Edinafo.

Structure and demarcation of the argument

The first empirical chapter (Chapter 2) will describe the micro conflict around Nana Jojo Solomon’s contested destoolment. After providing the detailed case for my analysis, the following contexts will be highlighted as they emerged as relevant contexts in the event.

Chapter 3: Premix and the politicisation of the artisanal fishing sector

– “Whenever there is money involved, they [the Government representatives] want to get into the business. If they want to mess with our issues, they can come to sea with us, eight hours every day”, Jojo Solomon, Chief fisherman of Elmina

This chapter portrays the relevance of premix fuel for the livelihood of artisanal canoe fishermen and analyses the ways in which this has over the past allowed for the appropriation of premix by political power holders. The chapter will conclude on the interest of the Elmina canoe owners in the gainful management of the resource especially in view of the recurring politicisation of premix shortages. Interest representation and the contested constitution of negotiation arenas will be analysed with particular attention paid to the various forms of bargaining power inherent in the artisanal fishing industry and the respective involvement and activation of advocates.

1 Despite its various critics, the term “traditional” here will be applied as a commonsense notion and in the absence of a better alternative. It is noteworthy that Ghanaians themselves refer to their chiefs in this manner, that is, as the traditional counterpart to post-independence state authorities.
Chapter 4: Between encompassing leadership and the limitations of a mandate

– “You can’t destool the Chief fisherman”, Nana Kodwo Conduah VI, Paramount chief of Edina Traditional Area

– “We are the majority. And the majority counts the vote”, Elmina canoe owner

The third chapter addresses the multiple forms of authority inherent in the position of the Chief fisherman as based on the office’s broad range of powers and various strategic alliances. The vocational, traditional and mainstream political characteristics of the office will be analysed and the question will be addressed whether the combination of these characteristics accounts for the encompassing authority of the Chief fisherman. Finally, the limitations of legitimacy will be delineated in reference to the actual basis of the Chief fisherman’s mandate, that is, the vote of the canoe owners.

Chapter 5: Hierarchies of voice and ownership of the debate in Elmina’s fishing community

– “Do you see that net over there? I don’t own it. That means, I cannot say anything in this conflict”, Elmina canoe fisherman

This chapter will explain the differences in voice, that is, in the ability to access arenas of decision making in the artisanal fishing community of Elmina and thereby ultimately relates to the analysis of the Chief fisherman’s mandate as granted and withdrawn exclusively by the Elmina canoe owners. It will be illustrated how differences in voice, as determined by age, gender and above all ownership in means of production are reflected in the associational realm and how this shaped the different associations’ level of involvement during the Elmina premix crisis.

Chapter 6: Voluntary associations and the mobilisation of political agency

– “When our elders beat the drum, we follow”, “Justice” member, Elmina

This chapter illustrates how both the hierarchies of voice in the Elmina fishing community and the strategic alliances between the various types of leadership in Elmina are reflected in the associational sphere of voluntary vocational associations. It thereby aims at analyzing voluntary associations as central focal points of the conflict that besides representing the major mobilising points for collective (representative) action also provide the forums and negotiation arenas in which the conflict materialises. The underlying logic and dynamics of the conflict are thus reflected in the associational sphere. The chapter also addresses the internal and external connections and relations of voluntary associations thus laying the foundations to conclude on the significance of their bargaining strategies in the construction of political debates in Elmina.

It is noteworthy that important choices had to be made in terms of the political relations emphasised in this thesis. The chapters in this thesis follow the objective to draw a holistic picture of the socio-spatial relations between power holders in the Elminan society. Unfortunately, it is impossible to depict a complete topography of power relations as every research project is inevitably dependent on the task of selection. While some choices had to be made involuntarily, others were taken deliberately. Especially my perspective as a researcher was
highly influenced by the dynamics in the field, as the subsequent methodological section is going to illustrate. Also, temporal choices have to be seen as inherent in the fieldwork experience. On the other hand, my theoretical framework as presented below has been chosen purposely because it allows analysing the case at hand in its wide-ranging (spatial and temporal) contexts and connections. In turn, the empirical case enables me to interrogate the relevance of “chopped-off”, “diagnostic events” in sociological and anthropological theory. Macro political theories, e.g. on voter alignment use statistics to capture larger societal trends, yet they fail to explain how the observed developments have come into being on the local, empirically observable level. Studies of micro behaviour on the other hand, focusing for example on particular speech acts, may reveal the actors’ dispositions in much greater detail but fall short in depicting their wider societal significance. In view of this dilemma, this thesis chooses to reject the artificial theoretical and methodological divide between micro and macro contexts and eventually calls for a more radical integration of the two conceptual spheres in sociological thinking and practice.

Yet, the most drastic choices had to be made in terms of the perspectives portrayed throughout this thesis. Obviously, many stakeholders could have been introduced in much greater detail. This is particularly true for the political parties that receive marginal attention along the line of the following chapters. At the same time, fishing is also a highly spiritual occupation (for it being connected to numerous risks) and churches in Elmina have been observed as important communal players in the past. It has been especially interesting how the workgroup as a social group often easily transcends the divisions between crew members of different religions and ritual practices on board, however, this is not always the case for partisan affiliations that may create a higher level of exclusivity (e.g. some canoes are painted in the colours of the national parties, carry their flags or only operate due to generous pre-electoral donations²). Yet, while I recognize the importance of these factors for the organisation of the Elminan fishing community, they have been disregarded in the following chapters for various reasons. As has been pointed out initially, I followed the principle of emphasising contexts as they have been identified as relevant by the actors in the field. In addition, spirituality and political relations in Ghana have been studied in other instances. My focus on local level, associational and vocational actors, however, is hopefully going to fill a gap in previous studies of fisheries governance in Ghana.

Selection in this thesis has been based on the specific case of Elmina’s latest chieftaincy conflict and the factors most relevant to it. Although the relations underlying the dispute are doubtlessly relevant in other social situations as well, they cannot be understood in their exclusiveness. Once again, the task of defining the relevant contexts in social situations cannot be fulfilled by the researcher alone and on the basis of his or her etic understanding of the case but should always be informed by local commentary.

b. Methodology

My field research took place between July 2009 and January 2010. Based in the predominantly Fante speaking town of Elmina, my six months of data collection depended largely on two very supportive assistants, Amstel and Emmanuel. Despite the quality of their work, I shied away from putting too much weight on the information obtained via sometimes multiple translations and instead decided to give most priority to the data gathered through direct observation, both in

² Interview, NDC, Cape Coast, 31.08.2009
everyday life and in situations of political explosiveness. My daily presence in the town of Elmina allowed me to witness all major events that led to the development and denouement of the below-described conflict. As Sally Falk Moore suggests, these direct observations (I deliberately made an effort not to participate openly in any of the demonstrations in order to maintain my neutrality in the conflict) were backed up by commentaries of the local population, including both participant and non-involved observers.

Whenever possible, I followed Elwert’s (2003) call for a cross-perspective mode in ethnographic data collection. This methodological choice was based predominantly on the conflictive character of the information gathered and hopefully allowed me in many instances to relativise the biased information obtained during interview sessions. Moreover, I was careful to juxtapose opinions expressed by leaders of the community with opinions of relative minorities. Besides the variation of interview partners, I included various media (among them archival documents, periodic publications, radio broadcasts), different settings and frames (e.g. NGO meetings, discussion among groups of ordinary fishermen, etc.) in both every day and exceptional circumstances along the course of the annual fishing seasons (with two peaks between July-September & December-February). Moreover, documents discovered in supplementary archival and documentary research added important external perspectives to my field data. This exercise of triangulation allowed me to additionally relativise the gathered commentaries in their (historic) development and most importantly to oscillate between norm and reality, which in a conflictive situation is of particular importance for maintaining the view for social cohesion.

My sample included fish workers of all positions in the local hierarchy of voice and ownership of the debate, that is, women, youth, elder and younger canoe owners and later on the institutions on various scales that they deemed relevant for the representation of their interests. Besides the mainstream representative institutions in the political and traditional authorities, I closely followed the activities of five voluntary associations selected from the vast amount of welfaristic membership-based organisations in Elmina. The criteria for selection were their predominantly vocational character and their particular stance in the political developments of their community.

Unfortunately, due to the language barrier, a large part of the 78 interviews conducted were structured from an etic point of view and only about two-thirds of the interviews (mainly the ones in official fisheries governance institutions) were conducted either in English or French thus allowing for a more natural dialogue form. Nonetheless, I incorporated as much dialogue and feedback into the analysis of my data as possible. It is noteworthy that the form of group interviews turned out to be the most suitable procedure, both in terms of creating a comfortable situation for the conversation but also in terms of gathering surprisingly divergent perspectives from within the associations in my sample. Reactions towards my own behaviour in the field, especially triggered by the strict gender dynamics in the fishing work finally added another source of data to my work.

3 “Youth”, here, will be understood as a social category and not a biological classification based on age. One being in the pursuit of acquiring expertise in the fishing profession, means of production and eventually status thus defines “youth” more in the absence of “what one is in the process of becoming”. In general, the categories presented throughout this thesis demarcate analytical classifications rather than try to reify the divisions as expressed by the people of Elmina. Obviously, categories are often overlapping and change throughout a person’s lifetime.
c. Theoretical background – ethnographic fieldwork after the “processual turn”

This thesis is based on a highly empirical case study. Yet, while the foremost priority is to look at the processes and structures underlying a particular conflict, I eventually want to make use of the case to relate to the microsociological debate and its inherent criticism of the artificial micro-macro dichotomy. In line with the arguments presented by Meyer (2009), this then may contribute to the re-emerging discussion about the “crisis of ethnographic representation” and thus potentially allows coming to additional theoretical (and methodological) insights.

After reaching an incontestable peak in the works of the Manchester School of Anthropology, ethnographic methods were largely seen in a “crisis of representation” from the middle of the 1980s onwards (Marcus and Clifford, 1986). As Meyer (2009: 401f) points out, this crisis was rooted not only in the postmodern epistemology that refuted any possibility to reach an absolute truth through interpretation. In his argument, the “crisis of ethnographic representation” also needs to be attributed to the developments inherent in the history of the discipline itself that were increasingly manouevring the field worker into a methodological cul de sac in which the research subject was ever more emphasised at the expense of the analytical attention paid to the situations and conditions in the field. As Meyer goes on, the methodological uncertainty and the essential scepticism regarding the efficiency of qualitative research methods triggered by the “Writing Culture” debate did not only fail to evolve into a renewal of the ethnographic methodological repertoire but faded into an unfortunate “anything goes” attitude that missed to solve the identified problems (ibid). Yet, according to Meyer, the questions identified throughout the “Writing Culture” debate can be gainfully reviewed on the basis of later developments in ethnographic methodology.

Throughout anthropological history, methods have been divided along the lines of the meta-approaches inherent in methodological individualism (e.g. Weber) and methodological collectivism (e.g. Durkheim). Despite the essential differences between the two traditions, both have been exposed to a common criticism as they, according to Knorr-Cetina (1981: 7), fail to clarify how the researcher achieves to make the abstract link between the unit of analysis and the whole of society. Traditional ethnographic fieldwork claims to pursue a holistic understanding of its object of study. Methodologically, however, fieldwork usually emanates from the individual as point of departure as observations capture activities and interviews aim at perspectives from personal points of view. Yet, the observed subjects are usually not perceived in their individuality but as representatives of their culture (Meyer 2009: 407).

On a more nuanced level, methodological collectivism usually attracts criticism on the basis that society can never be observable as a whole. According to Knorr-Cetina, “macro-sociological phenomena are unknown and unknowable unless they can be based upon knowledge derived from micro-sociological situations (1981: 8, original emphasis). Methodological individualism on the other hand implies a problematic dichotomy between the individual and the society. The individual level, that is, the strategic pursuit of one’s own interest, is understood as the basis for action whereas society is understood simply as an external constraint of individual possibilities. The internalisation of society by the individual, however, is largely ignored. Additional criticism points to the general knowledge that social behaviour also has to be explained in relation to the individual’s position and function in society and in view of the rules underlying the social system.
(Watkins, quoted in Knorr-Cetina 1981: 8). Social situations, Knorr-Cetina quotes Goffman, have properties of their own and should therefore be conceived in their reality *sui generis* (ibid). In this light, it becomes questionable whether the individual may be seen as the smallest unit of analysis which is best studied through observation and interviewing techniques, especially since the subjective level of socio-cultural data can hardly be detected reliably in the artificiality of the interview situation as a reconstructive effort.

Clifford Geertz, in view of this dichotomy, has been the first prominent ethnographer to establish an integrative ethnographic approach aimed at the hermeneutic connection between the micro and the macro levels of social life (Meyer 2009: 408). Geertz’ critics however point toward the problematic premise in his approach that the whole would be present in the micro context in all its parts. In addition, Geertz allegedly failed to present his ethnographic data and instead delivers predefined and omniscient interpretations in his famous “thick descriptions”. *Anthropos* however hardly gets to speak in his accounts of the field. A more promising response to the tense relationship between methodological individualism and collectivism can be found in methodological relationalism. This approach focuses on the relations between groups as the constituting elements of social life. However, such relations are not empirically observable and thus cannot function as units of analysis (ibid). Instead, the reduction of scale stipulated by the critics of methodological collectivism needs to be directed towards observable social situations. Methodological situationalism acknowledges the necessity of micro-level data but instead of focusing on the individual actor or the unobservable bonds between social groups chooses situations and the sociality originating from them as the basic unit of analysis. Based on Simmel’s observation that society emerges from the numerous interactions between people, Knorr-Cetina delimits methodological situationalism from the individualist and collectivist traditions as follows:

[Methodological situationalism promoted in micro-sociological research challenges methodological individualism for the simplifying assumption that the locus of social action is the individual human being, and it challenges methodological collectivism for the equally simplifying and presumably related assumption that interview responses, or data in the form of reports and organisational records, constitute direct, valid sources of macroscopic inferences. Methodological situationalism has replaced the model of the individual actor as the ultimate unit of social conduct by a conception which incorporates the reciprocity and the situated character of social action (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 15).

Underlying the move from methodological individualism and collectivism to methodological situationalism, according to Knorr-Cetina, is the abandonment of normative ideas inherent in the sociological traditions in integration and coercion theories of society in favour of more cognitive orders of social thought. “Instead of a society integrated by common values and moral constraints, it is the cognitive order of sense making and describing which emerges from microscopic studies of social life” (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 7, original emphasis). These micro-observations, Knorr-Cetina argues, cannot be equated with a reduction in complexity and the “dichotomy between complexity and uniformity seems of little help in distinguishing between micro- and macro-social phenomena (ibid: 20f). In contrast, methodological situationalism is based on the “ultra-detailed” observation of small-scale situations as the “only valid and reliable evidence” and “prerequisite for any sociologically relevant understanding of social life” (ibid: 7).
According to Meyer, the micro-sociological turn starting with Goffman revolutionised the perception of culture and society as a manmade phenomenon that is created, opposed, modified, organised and expressed in concrete situations (Meyer 2009: 416; cf. also Knorr-Cetina 1981: 6). The theoretical and practical implications of this observation are multiple. To begin with, methodological situationalism puts emphasis on the intersubjective forms and means by which members of society mutually make their acts visible and explicable (ibid). In the course of this dialogical interaction, actors often reveal the contexts that they judge relevant or in the words of Knorr-Cetina, micro-sociologies relate to macro-contexts in the sense that

circumstances of action which transcend the immediate situation are continuously called upon by social actors (...) Participants not only routinely transcend the immediate setting by referring to occasions and phenomena at a different time and place, they also continually employ notions and engage in actions whose mutual intelligibility appears to be based upon their presuppositions and knowledge of broader social institutions (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 11f).

Macro-variables thus are not reduced to constraining external conditions of the interaction but – if identified as actor-relevant – are continuously incorporated and reproduced. Consequently, the direct observation of social situations in their direct dialogical interaction is of particular usefulness for the identification of those contexts that are indeed relevant.

Moreover, interactions through their dynamic character are a suitable focus of analysis for studying emerging social life as they represent the space where neo-constructions, modifications and affirmations of meaning and context as well as negotiations and persuasions of dialogue partners take place. In this light, only the ethnography of events has access to meaning as it is produced in situ (Meyer 2009: 417). This is in line with Sahlins who argues that the meaning of any cultural form is only realised in the presence of events of speech or action, with the event being the empirical form of the system. Social institutions of all kinds thus represent first and foremost behaviour exhibited in social situations. They are common constructs that are sustained by actors to organise their co-existence. Since institutions do not exist in themselves but only through being produced and reproduced in verbal and non-verbal interaction, their impact on social behaviour should not be pre-assumed or reified by the ethnographer.

In practical terms, this implies that macro-sociological ethnographic questions should be translated into the social situations that constitute them. Such interaction rituals not only allow for their scientific observation and registration (rather than reconstruction in the interview) but also offer an analytical basis for explaining social life that already carries its contexts and condition within. Eventually, the study of social situations allows conceptualizing culture and society as a dynamic and potentially infinite process of events as has been generally accepted within the anthropological discipline. Situations then are temporal manifestations of social relations and every event or situation can be analysed in the frame of a sequential structure in which every single action can be interpreted in its relation to other actions (beginning and end of an event thereby are emic categories that need to be identified in the indigenous commentary). In this way, social structure emerges from within the logic of the situation. Methodological situationalism thus helps to address the crisis of representation as it escapes the presumption of social meaning as a transcendental cultural system and instead understands it in its specific social events and in dependency of the dynamics within them.
Drawing from several established ethnographic traditions, the theoretical claims inherent in methodological situationalism can be translated into fieldwork practice. Especially, Gluckman’s *Extended Case Method* not only acknowledges the temporal character and variability of social relations but inherently aims at demonstrating the connection between micro and macro logics of social behaviour. The event in this order of ideas, needs to be observed in its directness, its whole and its unique existence rather than in an interview or other form of reconstruction (Meyer 2009: 425). The strength of methodological situationalism then resides in its richness of detail and the polyphony of sources and informants. Rather than being directed towards the researcher, these speech acts ideally are part of the “social drama” as it develops for the people themselves. This then allows excluding macro data that have not been made explicit by the actors themselves.

Sally Falk Moore on these grounds calls for a focus on what she calls “diagnostic events” (1987: 730), that is, events pertinent to the interest of the study. “Chopped-off events” as “diagnostic events” can be used to write a current or contemporary history of political developments taking place during fieldwork since even events at the least temporally stretched-out periods can be indicators of processes at many levels. However, in order to effectively analyze ongoing local affairs and at the same time connecting them with large-scale historical processes, fieldwork which is generally small scale and short term needs to fully exploit the historical within it (ibid: 727).

Fieldwork as current history then needs to overcome the epistemic obsession to classify everything into simplified bimodal categories of what is new and what is old (Moore 1987: 728). Instead, larger questions of social processes remain at stake. In a Marxist reference, social practice – or history – is not something that simply happens to people but something that they make within the constraints of the system within which they are operating. Sahlin’s in the same order of ideas argues that “an event is not just a happening in the world: it is a relation between a certain happening and a given symbolic system” (1985: 153). As Moore criticises, Sahlin’s paradigm detemporalises existing structures and undervalues the continuous renewal needed by any ongoing system. In view of this, the term “process” may be useful precisely because it implies analytic emphasis on the continuous production of structure without differentiating in this respect between reproduction and change (Moore 1987: 729).

Events then may equally be evidence of the ongoing reproduction of structures or the attempt to create new ones. “Events may show a multiplicity of social contestations and the voicing of competing cultural claims. Events may reveal substantial areas of normative indeterminacy” (ibid). These theoretical observations expressed by Falk Moore entail a strong methodological imperative to observe and participate in events as they unfold naturally (and not solely for the researcher), combined with native commentaries. That is, the researcher is trying to gain insight into how people themselves situate the current history in a wider social and moral context while being aware of her own positioning in the course of events, especially in politically loaded ones. In this way, connections between social arrangements and the rituals in which these arrangements were brought to fore unveil themselves for analysis. In view of these theoretical considerations, the following chapter describes the “chopped off” or “diagnostic” event of the destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman in great ethnographic detail before unfolding the analysis of the contexts and connections judged relevant by local commentary in the subsequent chapters.
2. The “dramatic” downfall of Elmina’s Chief fisherman

Much in line with Falk Moore’s observations about the foundations of methodological situationalism, Victor Turner conceptualises the social world as “a world in becoming, not a world in being” (1974: 24). Social processes, in this light, are observable in the essentially dramatic day to day interactions between people and the consequences these interactions bring about. As Turner notes about his observations among the Ndembu, “when the interests and attitudes of groups and individuals stood in obvious opposition, social dramas did seem to me to constitute isolable and minutely describable units of social process” (ibid: 35). Social dramas, then, are “units of aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations” during which the “metaphors and models in the heads of men involved with one another in the unending flow of social existence” are shaped and altered (ibid: 36f). “In the social drama, however, though choices of means and ends and social affiliation are made, stress is dominantly laid upon loyalty and obligation, as much as interest, and the course of events may then have a tragic quality” (ibid). Social drama analysis therefore is preoccupied with “the relations between persons in their status-role capacity and between groups and subgroups as structural segments. ‘Conflict’ is the other side of the coin of ‘cohesion’ here, with ‘interest’ binding or separating these persons, these men in servitude to structural rights and obligations, imperatives, and loyalties” (ibid: 45f). The following sections present the “social drama” around the contested destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman, Nana Jojo Solomon. The dramatic structure of the conflict will be presented in the order of the events unfolding themselves in the field, that is, from the installation of Nana Jojo Solomon in 2003 to his final destoolment in 2010. When necessary, the (historical) contexts of the events are provided but mostly remain to be scrutinised as selected aspects in the subsequent chapters.

a. Exposition

Hidden to most visitors coming to see the historic forts and the picturesque fishing harbour of Elmina, the small coastal town in Ghana’s Central Region carries an unfortunate reputation of conflict and unrest. In 2009, in the course of the nationwide restructuring of the distribution of subsidised fishing inputs, legitimate rule in the fishing community of Elmina once more faced significant, though in itself not uncontested, opposition. The following sections address the major events leading to the destoolment of Elmina’s Chief fisherman Nana Jojo Solomon between September 2009 and February 2010. At the same time, factors influencing the different bases of legitimate rule in the Elmina fishing community are introduced before being more closely elaborated on in the subsequent chapters.

Jojo Solomon\(^4\) became the Chief fisherman of Elmina in 2003. Doubtlessly, the apofohene (Chief fisherman) is the single most important power holder in the coastal communities of Ghana. As Odotei (1999: 17) observes, all communities along the Ghanaian coast, irrespective of their ethnic composition possess a fisheries governance structure headed by the institution of the Chief

\(^4\) I am choosing to present this case despite ethical considerations as it concerns first and foremost a public figure rather than a private individual. My fieldwork made it clear in every respect that I was interested in the dynamics of voice and public debates. In view of this, it would feel rather bizarre to silence any informant in their attempts to make their voice heard, even if this concerns only information provided for this study. Generally, the information presented in this thesis already represented common knowledge in Elmina by the time it was revealed to me. I do not intend to reproduce critical opinions on personal grounds but for academic purposes only.
fisherman whose tasks comprise above all conflict settlement and representation to the in- and outside of the community. Depending on the location, some Chief fishermen are installed on a hereditary basis, others - including the Elmina Chief fisherman - are elected freely and on the basis of the candidate’s experience in the fishing work. In these cases, the mandate of the Chief fisherman is limited to the call of the community’s canoe owners.

Prior to Solomon’s enstoolment, the Elmina canoe owners had expressed their dissatisfaction with the predecessor Nana Kobina Essoun who had acted as the leader of the fishing community since 1989. Kobina Essoun was very old at that time which limited him largely whenever his office required him to travel to represent the Elmina fishermen in other communities and governance institutions. In these instances, his assistant Badu would replace the old Chief. Badu who thus was much acquainted with the business of the Chief fisherman was handled as the certain successor of Essoun when the Elmina canoe owners planned a coup against the old man in 2003. Not surprisingly, Badu agreed to support the canoe owners’ attempt that involved him to step down from his post thus leaving Essoun incapacitated and eventually allowed the canoe owners to remove the old leader from his stool. However, as tradition compelled Badu to show respect for the former Chief whom he was accompanying, introducing and speaking for on so many occasions, Badu decided to remain absent from the public stage in the first days following the “coup”. This was when his luck changed.

At the time, Jojo Solomon was the secretary of the canoe owners association in Elmina. As an educated man who had only recently come back from the United States to invest in the fishing industry of his hometown Elmina, Jojo Solomon was highly respected. As a matter of fact, Badu and Solomon used to move together as close friends until the day the canoe owners commonly went to the District Assembly to present their decision to remove their old Chief fisherman from his stool. On the way back from the local District Chief Executive (DCE), where Jojo Solomon had read out the canoe owners’ resolution, a faction of the canoe owners association covered him in powder as a means to show that he was considered to be the most suitable new *apofhene*. This procedure is much in line with Odotei’s description of the rituals and ceremonies a Chief fisherman goes through after being selected. “Varying in elaboration but in consonance with ritual of other traditional offices” these procedures can entail, for example, ritual confinement, swearing of oath, jubilation and at the end the use of white powder to signify victory (Odotei 1999: 26).

According to wide-spread opinion, Jojo Solomon gained the stool of the Elmina Chief fisherman because of his educated background. In earlier years, the sole criterion for the selection of a Chief fisherman lied in his expertise in the fishing business as an inevitable asset for the correct judgment in conflict settlement and mediation. With the increasing politicisation of the fishing industry, however, literacy and education came to play a pivotal role in the selection procedures of the Chief fisherman’s office as the fishermen expected their leader to be able to speak for them in the governance institutions and educate them about the latest developments in the industry. At the same time, Solomon’s supporters also met significant opposition in Elmina, especially as his enstoolment was largely perceived as an act of betrayal against his long term friend Badu. A significant reason why the enstoolment of Jojo Solomon eventually found wider acceptance than opposition was his performance as a strong advocate of the light fishing system, which through the attraction of fish by electric lights assures the fishermen higher catches and
returns, yet often - though not necessarily so - on the expense of the marine ecosystem\(^5\). Disunity persists among Ghana’s fisheries governance institutions, especially within the GNCFC, as to whether the light fishing should be banned due to its potentially harmful effects for the long-term survival of the fishing industry. While some Chief fishermen follow the advice of the Marine Fisheries Research Division in Tema to completely ban the light fishing activities, others deliberately ignore the potential risk and advocate for the measure, thereby significantly underpinning their standing in their communities. Just as the light fishing issue, many more aspects of artisanal canoe fishing are highly politicised, especially the mainstreaming of the distribution of subsidised fishing inputs like the premix fuel but also subsidised outboard motors, follows clearly political dynamics (as will be shown in Chapter 3).

Also, Nana Jojo Solomon’s crisis of authority revolved around the management and accountability of the distribution of premix fuel. Premix is a subsidised mixture of oil and petrol intended for the use in outboard motors. Being heavily sought after, positions in the premix management generally imply high competition and eventually jealousy among community members, which potentially triggers further contestation of leadership and authority. Premix then relates to issues of sovereign rule not only in the sense that it is a source of prestige based on the intensive competition between the different power holders in the community but also in the sense that the bureaucratic procedures underlying the management of the premix distribution offer potential opponents a target zone for criticism and attack. While leadership in artisanal fishing communities is generally based on relatively non-bureaucratic forms of mandate, the rather bureaucratic offices inherent in the premix distribution easily put established power holders to a test. Also in Elmina, the strategic combination of non-bureaucratic arguments concerning the value of the chieftaincy or traditional aspect of Solomon’s rule and the bureaucratic procedures connected to the auditing of the premix accounts eventually caused Nana Jojo Solomon’s “dramatic” removal from the stool of the Elmina apofohene.

b. Complication

Solomon was first removed from his post as a secretary in the premix distribution in 2007, but remained the Chief fisherman of Elmina. In this instance, it was the District Chief Executive (DCE) who came in to contest Solomon’s authority claiming that an amount of the profit had been “wiped away” instead of reaching the account opened to use the money for the benefit of the community as had been agreed to beforehand\(^6\). Indeed, as the Regional Minister of the time, Nana Ato Arthur brought to the public’s attention, a profit of about 250,000,000 Cedis (corresponding to 28,800 US$ in 2003, the current Cedi was redenominated in 2007 and values 1/10,000 of the old currency) accrued from the sale of 78 truckloads of premix could not be correctly accounted for (GNA, 13.02.2007). While some people regarded these allegations as a political power game “not allowing the people to see the real truth”\(^7\), the charges did have a

\(^5\) Interview, Dr Finn-Aggrey, Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, University of Cape Coast, 1.10.2009

\(^6\) The plan was to purchase a stand-by boat for the rescue of distressed fishermen and to provide books and school uniforms to the needy school children in the community. Interestingly, when the account was rendered in October 2009, the canoe owners decided collectively to invest the profit made in the purchase of fishing nets instead of following their initial agreement.

\(^7\) Interview with Dr Finn-Aggrey, Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, University of Cape Coast, 1.10.2009
seriousness that allowed for the removal of Jojo Solomon from his premix post in 2007 and eventually undermined his credibility in the conflict of similar nature in 2009.

While these early allegations were difficult to trace back in the realm of the fieldwork, it is undeniable that they had a serious effect on the authority of Jojo Solomon as the Elmina apofobene. In the last three years of his rule, Jojo Solomon’s legitimacy was constantly challenged. Despite the fact that his experience and knowledge in the fisheries continued to be widely acknowledged, Solomon lost the support of the fishermen by, as people complained, taking too much autonomy in his office. Other sources brought forward an alleged failure to listen to the people’s needs and suggestions. These accusations, in the heat of the debate frequently mixed with rumours about Solomon’s private life, evolved into a large-scale confusion when the protest, initially restricted to the “ordinary fishermen” eventually found the support of the “majority” of canoe owners.

Issues of chieftaincy in the fishing community of Elmina have repeatedly been claimed to be the sovereign domain of the canoe owners and on this basis warnings expressed by the Paramount chief to arrest anyone who “makes a mistake” were largely ignored by the former. Instead, some of the canoe owners went to destroy the apofobene pata ase, that is, the shed close to the Chief fisherman’s palace where fishing-related conflicts are discussed and solved under the mediation of the Chief fisherman and his council (besonfo), to show that they did not respect the presence of the Chief fisherman any longer (GNA, 13.02.2007). In the aftermath of these riots, seven canoe owners were arrested and the sovereignty of the Elmina apofobene restored for some time.

Despite the fact that Jojo Solomon’s authority had been questioned in the last years of his rule, the Chief fisherman of Elmina did not appear to change his agenda in order to regain the full support of his community. With the support of the Paramount chief and since 2009 his ruling party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Solomon not only regained the chair of the local premix committee but also continued his personal fight for the voice of the fishermen, taking every minute of media coverage, forming coalitions with numerous NGOs and constantly lobbying the government for what he perceived to be beneficial for the fishing industry. While this practice doubtlessly increased Solomon’s nation-wide prominence, his standing in Elmina gradually deteriorated due to the repeated absence from his office.

**c. Rising action**

On 5 September 2009, two prominent members of the Elmina premix committee appeared on the local radio station *Abomka FM* (owned by the CPP presidential candidate Paa Kwesi Nduom). One of them, a public figure commonly referred to by his alias Maanoma, had been charged with the diversion of two drums of premix only a week earlier (PeaceFM, 31.08.2009). Claiming that the provision of premix from other landing beaches was a standard procedure, Maanoma refuted any allegations during the interview on air. In contrast, as mutual accusations revealed during the show, the premix funds had been misused as a result of illicit practices in the secret granting of loans and favouritism in the contracting of public building projects for

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8 The dynamics underlying the definition of majorities in the fishing community of Elmina will be explained in close detail in chapter 5.
9 Interview, canoe owners association, Elmina, 17.09.2009
Elmina’s annual festival, the Bakatue afabye\(^{10}\). In the course of the radio programme, the two members of the premix committee managed to direct accusations concerning the state of the premix accounts in Elmina away from themselves to the sole blame of the town’s Chief fisherman Jojo Solomon, eventually culminating in a call for the removal of Solomon from his post.

The position of the Chief fisherman has been given to several people like Anthony Kofi Andoh, Kwaku Awotwe and Kweku Essoun whose dismissal letter was read by Nana Jojo Solomon. The stool is not for one person, you are in it and when the time comes you have to go (Maanoma at Abomka FM, 05.09.2009).

Already in the days preceding Maanoma’s appearance on air, a number of letters had been sent around among the Elmina canoe owners in an attempt to destool Nana Jojo Solomon. With most of the fisher folks being illiterate, these letters were easily disguised as official investigations concerning the adequate amount of premix to be sent to the Elmina landing beach. Not knowing that it was a conspiracy against Jojo Solomon, many of the canoe owners penned their signature under it. Maanoma later admitted that he was the initiator of this paper justifying his move with the standpoint that the fisher folks were not benefitting from their Chief fisherman (Daily Guide, 09.09.2009).

In the immediate aftermath of the debate aired on Abomka FM, a press conference was held by the canoe owners asking Jojo Solomon to vacate his office within two weeks. Charging Solomon of showing grave disrespect to the fishermen and questioning the whereabouts of 35,000 Ghana Cedi (corresponding to 24.150 US$ in 2009) of proceeds from the premix sale, the canoe owners concluded the press conference chanting asafo songs to signify their seriousness. At the same occasion, a six-member committee was presented to head the affairs of the Chief fisherman until replacement would be found (Ghanaian Chronicle, 08.09.2009). Interestingly, the mandate of this committee did not meet the approval of the community. Sitting at the apofaben pata ate, the place where conflicts are generally solved by the Chief fisherman and his council of elders, none of the fishermen gave the committee their trust and support by presenting their cases to be solved by the newly established council.

On 14 September, a delegation of the Elmina association of canoe owners went to present their charges against Jojo Solomon before the District Chief Executive (DCE) of the KEEA District Assembly. Clearly attempting to finalise the destoolment of their leader, the canoe owners presented their newly announced Acting Chief fisherman Duku. The DCE in turn, given the increasing explosiveness of the situation, refused to deal with the issue by referring it to higher authorities. The fact that Nana Conduah VI, Paramount Chief of Elmina publicly declared that a destoolment of a “gazetted” Chief like Solomon would be unconstitutional and strictly prosecuted may have influenced the DCE’s behaviour (Daily Guide, 09.09.2009). In any case, it

\(^{10}\) Yarak (1993) describes the Bakatue as the “culmination of six weeks of activities in honor of Benya, the deity believed to inhabit the lagoon. During the last three weeks Elminians are prohibited from fishing in the lagoon, beating drums, shooting guns, and performing funeral rites. The Benya okomfo ("priest") plays a central role in the Bakatue: he retreats into the Benya shrine house three weeks prior to the festival in order to propitate the deity, emerging on the final Tuesday to lead a procession of Elmina dignitaries through the town to the bank of the lagoon, where he casts a net, ending the fishing ban. The Elmina king (Edeanhen) also plays a prominent role in the procession and in the rituals involved in re-opening the lagoon to fishing”.
did not stop the canoe owners who in their turn publicly contested Conduah, an immense offense towards the authority of their king, claiming that Solomon had never been “gazetted” but was not more than a “captain of a football team who needed to be replaced due to bad performance”\(^\text{11}\).

As a matter of fact, the canoe owners unmistakably expressed their dissatisfaction with the intervention of the Omanhene (Paramount chief) in a “massive demonstration” on 9 September 2009. Carrying placards with messages like “Nana Omanhen stay out of premix issue, we respect you dearly” or “Joojo your kingdom is over and count yourself out as Elmina Chief fisherman”, the canoe owners claimed their capability to solve their own issues (PeaceFM, 11.09.2009). By refuting the Omanhene’s statement that the Chief fisherman of Elmina was gazetted and therefore protected by the constitution, the canoe owners further threatened that the issues of fishermen should not be mixed up with rules expressed by the traditional authorities.

On 17 September 2009, a group of eight Elmina canoe owners paraded through town with white pieces of tissue claiming their victory over Jojo Solomon. Taking the course from the Chief fisherman’s palace to the shed of the “Island” association to the family house of Badu, the former candidate for the stool of the Chief fisherman, they proclaimed that Jojo Solomon would no longer be Chief fisherman of Elmina. Only minutes after the demonstration had started, Maanoma appeared to put an end to the gathering. Although it had already become obvious that he was involved in the attempt to destool Jojo Solomon – if not being the master mind behind it – Maanoma certainly knew that at the time, Solomon still possessed the power to have any of the protestors arrested with the support of the Paramount Chief\(^\text{12}\). The few minutes of cheerful congratulations among the people in the streets and the group of canoe owners nonetheless left a public impression that weakened Jojo Solomon’s standing in the course of the events following this first demonstration of fishermen but also triggered the supporters of Jojo Solomon to voice out their protest in a demonstration of their own.

It is exactly actions like these and the political links articulated in them that are at the core of the argument presented throughout the subsequent chapters. As will be shown, interest representation cannot simply be perceived as the encounter between defined stakeholders, but emerges only in the concrete interplay between the various forms of leadership in artisanal fisheries management and the mobilisation of strategic allies. This perspective once more justifies the processual approach adopted throughout this thesis in the attempt to detect the fluent and dynamic social reality behind contested leadership and interest representation in Elmina’s fishing community.

\textbf{d. Climax}

Whilst the canoe owners of Elmina were the first to express their point collectively, Jojo Solomon’s supporters followed just few days later. As an almost immediate response to the demonstrations of the canoe owners, on 20 September 2009, a large portion of the members of

\(^{11}\) Interview, canoe owners association, Elmina, 17.09.2009

\(^{12}\) Later on, it was revealed that Solomon earlier on attempted to let one of the canoe owners be arrested by the police. The police however did not support the Chief fisherman’s obvious pretext and the man was released thus motivating the canoe owners to celebrate the partial defeat of Solomon, who already earlier on had met the criticism of “being too sure” of his powers (and powerful connections) and taking too much authority in his office.
two Elmina-based voluntary associations followed the drums of their leaders to demonstrate through Elmina and Bantuma\textsuperscript{13} in support of their Chief fisherman. Both “Justice” and “5:1” are associations of mainly, though not exclusively, fishermen who support each other in times of need and especially so during funerals. Beyond the level of individual assistance, both associations take pride in the fact of helping their community in times of crisis, be it during the recurring inundations in Elmina, a canoe facing distress at sea, in view of the increasing illegal activities in the community (e.g. drug dealing, prostitution) or simply by correcting a child’s public misbehaviour. In the course of the Elmina premix crisis, the often stressed ideal and basic motivation to “do the right thing” (\textit{ye adzę ofataa}) took the form of supporting the traditional leaders in the conviction that the allegations brought forward were unjustified and represented a grave deed of disrespect against the elders of the community\textsuperscript{14}.

In this light, the drums of the “Justice” association – given to “Justice” as campaign presents by the local Conventions People’s Party (CPP) during the 2008 national elections – had been taken out and displayed in front of the “Justice” shed already the same day the canoe owners demonstrated right in front of it. Other than the latter, however, “Justice” and “5:1” went to express their point of view only after careful preparations. Thus, in the three days between the public appearance of the canoe owners and the response of Solomon’s supporters, “Justice” and “5:1” managed to connect their initiatives and to mobilise a big proportion of their members to join in the demonstration. On Sunday, 20 September 2009, the crowd walked from the Elmina port to Bantuma, eventually moving towards the Edina Traditional Council where a petition was presented to the Omanhene (Paramount chief).

\textit{Figure 1: Demonstrating for the Chief fisherman}

\begin{figure}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{demonstrating.jpg}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13} The people of Bantuma, on the Western outskirts of Elmina had tried to capitalize from the unstable situation in Elmina to install their own Chief fisherman in order to be better represented. They eventually announced the new leader on 2 November, and presented him to the Central Regional MOFA on 4 November to be “rightfully gazetted”, a procedure that however does not exist for Chief fishermen. This nonetheless shows the importance the people ascribe to their Chief fishermen, wanting him to be installed in a similar manner as a Paramount Chief and in terms that acknowledge the assumed significant political influence of the institution.

\textsuperscript{14} Interview, Paa Kow and „Ways“, Justice association, Elmina, 18.09.2009
The resolution, reading as follows, clearly expressed a call for the stake of the traditional authority in the conflict, as people complained how the handling of the crisis in the public media had presented the elders of the community as failing to handle the issue internally and by their own strength.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We concerned fisher folks of Elmina have observed with grave concern some unhealthy development rearing their ugly faces in our hither to peaceful community involving some disgruntled canoe owners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to note that this sad development if allowed unchecked would not only render our community an unsafe ground but also has the potential to disrupt our social economic life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the current democratic dispensation what we expect from our fellow brethren is the use of laid down rules for settling differences and conflicts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is bound to be difference in any society. Yet when that happens we do not necessarily engage in protracted animosities to the extent that we are prepared to maim and maul down one other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our dear town is fast degenerating into lawlessness and mayhem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is in the light of the foregoing that we concern fisher folks of Elmina have deemed it necessary to prevail upon our leaders, the Omanhen of Edina Traditional Area, the municipal chief executive and all other opinion leaders to listen to our humble call for an immediate resolution to this unfortunate impasse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are therefore counting on your steadfastness and good wisdom to douse the fire within for posterity sake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONG LIVE GHANA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONG LIVE ELMINA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONG LIVE APOFOHEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Omanhen of Edina Traditional Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Regional Minister Cape Coast Metropolis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Municipal Chief Executive, KEEA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What had started off as a strategy involving only the canoe owners of Elmina with the mock letters sent around for collecting signatures, thus inevitably turned into an issue of wider public interest when discussed on the radio and later in a series of demonstrations through the town of Elmina. Possibly, this broadening of audience encouraged the mobilisation against Jojo Solomon to eventually evolve into more formal negotiations, directed towards institutionalised power holders in the traditional and in the mainstream political realm, respectively.
Demonstrating, however, was just the most obvious form of contesting the legitimacy of claims uttered by the various factions involved in the conflict. Also, more hidden processes like the activation of strategic alliances came to play in the construction and deconstruction of sovereign rule thus introducing a variety of forms of bargaining power to the public negotiation arena around Nana Jojo Solomon’s destoolment. These hidden processes will be illustrated as they have been pointed out in the native commentaries throughout the unfolding conflict.

While the traditional leadership of the Edina Traditional Council clearly supported Nana Jojo Solomon in the conflict, it could not prevent the canoe owners from re-appropriating the forum offered by the Paramount chief in an attempt to settle the conflict amicably. As had been requested by the “Justice” and “5:1” resolution, on the morning of 22 September 2009 Nana Conduah VI, Omanhene of Edina Traditional Area, called in a meeting via his linguist (otyeame), that is, his official communicator and announcer, making attendance mandatory for all fishermen and fish processors. The meeting took place at the apofoben pata ase. This time, however, it was the Chief fisherman and his premix secretary who were called to the fore to present their case. Backed by the konkobene (the Chief fisherman’s female counterpart among the fish processors) and the Chief fisherman’s council of elders, Jojo Solomon was encircled by the various sub-chiefs and lineage heads of Elmina, a big assembly of canoe owners on the one side and an equally big group of Solomon’s supporters on the other side - divided only by a group of journalists, obviously repositioned in the course of the event to create a barrier between the two opposing factions. In the middle of the uncountable children and spectators to the event, a number of fishermen and the members of the “Island” association went on with their daily business, mending nets or simply enjoying the free morning but without any particular involvement in the case taking place right in front of them. This performance of ambiguity and indifference by particular groups in Elmina will be explained in the later sections, contrasting the reasons for the involvement of the canoe owners and the “Justice” and “5:1” associations.

Figure 2: The ‘apofoben pata ase’ and the port area of Elmina (view from Fort St Jago)

1-Fish market and port area (with workshop and CBFMC)
2-Chief fisherman’s office and premix secretariat
3-Nana Benya shrine
4-Apofoben pata ase
5-“Island/Freetown”
6-“Justice”
7-“5:1”
The meeting which had been delayed due to the arrival of numerous dignitaries eventually started with the Omanhene entering the ground accompanied by loud singing and dancing of the women supporting Jojo Solomon. The canoe owners, however, who already earlier on had expressed their dissatisfaction with the involvement of the Paramount chief hardly managed to hold back their protest. While at first respecting the Omanhene’s address to the audience, which aimed at assuring the public that the Chief fisherman was recognised by the traditional council and would be included in the continuous development of the area, the canoe owners later on continuously interrupted his speech, a grave sign of disrespect that was only made possible by their collective presence.

In the heat of the protest, despite the mutual agreement that an audit from the premix sale needed to be presented to clarify the situation and to put an end to the quarrels, the canoe owners did not allow the secretary of the premix committee to read out his account. The meeting therefore ended prematurely as the canoe owners requested the account being rendered by a neutral auditor. While this may be an understandable claim, the way in which it was brought forward clearly undermined the authority of the Paramount chief in the event. This became most obvious in the acts of the canoe owners’ spokesperson of that day who at first addressed the Omanhene respectfully by taking of his shoes, but later even interrupted the Paramount chief’s words to express his protest.

From the canoe owners’ point of view, the meeting ended with their association’s elder members walking away in silent protest while the younger members shared pieces of red cloth as a proclamation of pending danger and unrest. While Solomon himself remained silent throughout most parts of the meeting, the Omanhene finally made his point clear that “the period when canoe owners could remove canopies as a symbol of destooling a chief fisherman was long over”. Clearly a reference to the events of the former years, Conduah instead suggested seeking redress at the law court.

e. Denouement

A month later, six canoe owners were called to face Jojo Solomon before the court in Cape Coast, the capital of Ghana’s Central Region. Due to the absence of Solomon and his lawyer (notably, the same lawyer who defended Nana Conduah VI in his trial against the supis, heads of the local asafo companies, cf. Chapter 4), the court did not address the case but postponed it to 15 January 2010. Nonetheless, the date represents another forum for debate for the canoe owners. While acknowledging the court for its legally correct procedures, the canoe owners present at the court house protested that they could not wait as long as until January because they did not have anyone to present their matters to in the meantime.

As one of the younger canoe owners15 in the group warned me, “there will be a demonstration, we have to solve this right now. The court is doing it the right way, but we cannot wait for our properties to be destroyed by this man”. The highly agitated group therefore boarded the buses organised in an associative effort and – after consulting Maanoma in their disagreement about which authority to confront with their concerns – chose to present their situation to the Central

15 Commentary, KBJ, Cape Coast Court, 27.10.2009
Regional Police Commander instead of the Regional Minister who was considered to be closer to the Edina Traditional Council.

At the Regional Police Commanders headquarters, officials at first tried to restrain the canoe owners from presenting their case by artificially delaying the meeting. Yet, with the structural bargaining power\textsuperscript{16} of the Elmina canoe owners in mind, the regional Police Commander eventually agreed to meet the group of about twenty canoe owners who had arrived without any previous notice (a practice that some later referred to as highly questionable as the wrong behaviour in these institutions was assumed to easily lead to severe sanctions, including arrest). Following the traditions, and as a means to control the enraged group, the canoe owners were asked to appoint a linguist to present their case. Interestingly, I noticed, the former candidate for the post of the Chief fisherman Badu took the role of the spokesperson.

The issues presented by Badu revolved around the mandate of the Chief fisherman relying solely on the canoe owners’ decision. As it was expressed, the only group supporting Solomon in the conflict was the “Justice” association [sic]. Being made up of “ordinary” fishermen who do not own any share in the business, the canoe owners claimed, “Justice” should not have any voice in the matter. Pointing towards one of the canoe owners present at the Police Commander’s office, Badu made the group’s point clear that Solomon had no right to stay in his office when the canoe owners had decided otherwise. As a matter of fact, the man referred to used to be the Chief fisherman in the past but vacated his seat peacefully just as any other Chief fisherman of Elmina before Jojo Solomon. The canoe owners ended their plea with asking for permission to install an interim committee to take over the stirring of their affairs.

In this respect, the meeting proved to be a successful form of “forum shopping” (von Benda-Beckmann 1981: 117) as will be explained in the subsequent chapters. Quite matter-of-factly, the Regional Police Commander acknowledged the situation of the canoe owners and initiated the formation of an interim committee taking over the business of the Chief fisherman. This committee was composed by

- two representatives of the KEEA Municipality, among them the Assembly man representing the port area,
- four members of the “Canoe Fisherman Association”, that is, the former premix committee,
- as well as one representative of the Edina Traditional Council.

The committee stirred the affairs of the Chief fisherman’s office, including the premix sale and the solving of fishing related conflicts from 5 November 2009. Notably, the committee’s only experts in the fishing industry were the representatives of the canoe fishermen who consequently, as one Assembly man put it, assured the everyday decision making of the committee\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{16} Elmina is the most important fishing centre along the Central Regional coast and therefore plays an important role in the generation of income and food of the area. In the words of Jojo Solomon in the position of the Elmina Chief fisherman, “the officials better listen to the fishermen. With the decline of the fishing industry providing employment for two million fisher folks in Ghana, there easily emerges a national crisis for security” (interview, 27.07.2009). As a matter of fact, the canoe owners had earlier on expressed warnings that there would be a fight in Elmina if the issue would not be solved immediately.

\textsuperscript{17} Interview, assembly man, Elmina, 06.11.2009
In February 2010, after the postponed court date had once again not been able to bring together Jojo Solomon and the Elmina canoe owners, the court proposed an amicable settlement implying the payment of 20,000 Ghana Cedis (corresponding to 13.800 US$ in 2010) to the benefit of the canoe owners of Elmina. Although the Edina Traditional Council agreed to issue this payment with no delay, the canoe owners in their associational effort eventually finalised the destoolment of Nana Jojo Solomon by placing a complete underdog, notably neither Badu nor Maanoma nor the interim acting Chief fisherman Duku, on the stool of the Elmina apofohene thus, as it seemed, bringing the tensions around the issue to their conclusion.

Maanoma – the initiator of the movement against Jojo Solomon remained in the background of the public scene as the events unfolded. As a very prominent personality in Elmina, Maanoma’s absence from the relevant events and his failure to react to the finalisation of the developments may appear unexpected. However, the crisis of legitimacy triggered by Solomon’s failure to render account for the business of the premix committee also reproduced the divisions inherent in another hidden agenda.

As Sarah Afful wrote for the Daily Guide on 25 September 2009, “Premix divides NDC at Elmina”. Obviously referring to the opposing factions in the conflict associated with either one of the involved NDC members, Jojo Solomon and Maanoma, Afful argues plausibly that the root of the conflict around Solomon’s destoolment actually lied in a personal disagreement between the two men about the benefits gained in post-election distribution of offices in which Maanoma, prominent opponent of the Kufuor administration, was rewarded with a post in the National Premix Committee. Jojo Solomon in contrast, though doubtlessly possessing the higher level of education, “only” got promoted to the office of the Central Regional Chief fisherman in the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNFCC). Throughout the approximately six months of tense atmosphere in Elmina, rumours spread over this potential case of jealousy between the two men that according to both sides in the conflict better should have been solved between the two individuals rather than infuriating the different factions in town and consequently putting peace in Elmina at risk.

Besides providing a detailed description of the case underlying the central argument of this thesis, this first empirical chapter has set the stage for the subsequent analysis of the “diagnostic” or “chopped-off” event. In order to fully understand the dynamics underlying the conflict and the broader significance of the event, I will move on to explore more extensively the extent of ethnographic insights that are inherent in the event.
3. Premix and the politicisation of the artisanal fishing sector

“Whenver there is money involved, they [the District Assembly] want to get into the business.
If they want to mess with our issues, they can come to sea with us, eight hours every day.”

(Chief fisherman, Elmina)

The previous chapter empirically described the social and political dynamics underlying the contested authority of Elmina’s Chief fisherman, Nana Jojo Solomon. Throughout the subsequent chapters, the contexts transcending the “chopped-off” event in time and space will be provided as they have been deemed relevant by commentary of the different involved parties and observers. The present chapter illustrates the case of Ghana’s 2009 nationwide “Premix crisis”, that is, its historic connections and its recent policy responses. It starts off by portraying the relevance of premix for the livelihoods of artisanal canoe fishermen and points to the ways in which this has allowed for a continuous appropriation of the premix issue by various power holders in the Ghanaian fisheries governance system. Besides explaining the interest of the Elmina canoe fishermen in a gainful management of the premix resources, especially in view of the constant politicisation of premix shortages, this chapter also allows drawing conclusions on the multiple societal actors claiming to advocate for the artisanal fishermen and thereby relates to the bargaining power of the latter and the workings of interest representation on the national scale. Thus, at this stage, I will provide the prehistory of the premix conflict’s local-level expression in Elmina and depict the wider spatial and temporal relevance of the crisis on the national scale.

a. Artisanal fisheries and the livelihood context – a case for premix

Livelihoods have in various instances been conceptualised as a multidimensional phenomenon involving strategies of accessing different forms of “capital”, that is, human, natural, physical, financial and social capital (e.g. FAO/Lenselink, 2002; Allison et al, 2001). These resources are not only assets, but also contain meaning, for example, in the form of identity or status. Idealtically, these capitals, while being embedded in social structures and processes translate into different livelihood strategies which produce viable outcomes. In real life, however, livelihoods are limited by the individual’s vulnerability context. Vulnerability implies the different degrees in which a person is exposed to risks inherent in the various environments (natural, socio-cultural, political-economic, etc.) around her. Access to different forms of resources, be they material, relational or symbolic in character may enable a person to act upon these environments in a way that prevents or alleviates the potential consequences of risks and insecurities. In the subsequent chapters, the inherently hierarchical mechanisms of access, especially in terms of interest representation and access to forums of debate will be further scrutinised. At this point, risks and opportunities will be presented as largely determined by the canoe fishermen’s access to material resources, such as the highly subsidised premix fuel.

Fishing work represents an occupation that is inherently bound to multiple risks and insecurities. Risks within fishing are connected to at least the following, mutually interrelated domains:
• the occupation itself (dangers at sea, e.g. climatic conditions, lack of safety measures on board, e.g. life vests or first aid kits)
• the eco-system (mobility and unpredictability of the resource, seasonal variations)
• over-fishing and the depletion of fish stocks (global competition over the resource and the “tragedy of the commons” as a result of competing individual, community-based, national and global interests)
• the market (wide-ranging variations in demand and supply, seasonal price fluctuations, lack of storage facilities, high costs of fishing inputs)
• general living conditions (low incomes, lacking access to loans to cover financial needs, debt burdens, malnutrition, lack of access to social security e.g. health facilities, pensions or even insurances)
• education\textsuperscript{18} (illiteracy and lack of skills or prospect for vocational training, lack of access to information)
• HIV/AIDS as aggravated by the high level of mobility in the profession (cf. Odotei 2006a)
• and generally in terms of informality (e.g. in the form of harassment from public authorities, lack of access to legal protection and the general lack of policy makers’ concern outside periods of electoral campaigning).

In view of the complexity of risks faced by artisanal canoe fishermen, the major difficulty connected to artisanal fishing work lies in the combination of several of these factors. Most importantly, while input costs in the fishing business are very high (including the vessel, the net, the fuel, the maintenance of the crew, etc.) returns are increasingly uncertain and many canoe fishermen complain about piling up debts when going without catch. The added competition over the marine fish stocks by international pair trawling\textsuperscript{19} activities further aggravates this rationale.

Vulnerability as one’s exposure to but also capability to address various risks is largely determined by one’s position in the hierarchy of access as the latter may or may not provide the means to develop specific coping mechanisms. As will be shown in the following chapters, gender, age and the relative absence of ownership in means of production generally delimit a person’s ability to reinterpret the environment in one’s own terms and therefore may become an additional burden.

\textsuperscript{18} In the field of maritime anthropology, a widespread opinion persists that fishermen all over the world take pride and deep satisfaction in their work despite the numerous hardships encountered on a daily basis (e.g. Acheson, 1981; McGoodwin, 1990). During my field research, Elmina canoe fishermen revealed however a very different attitude. Most importantly, workers in Elmina’s artisanal fishing sector face a serious lack of perspective that is often met with disillusionment. With the constant exposure to information about climate change (as a matter of fact, two thirds of the earth are covered by water, climate change therefore is said to directly impact on the livelihoods of the world’s fishermen) and environmental degradation paired with the constant presence of international pair trawlers at the fishermen’s eye-sight, none of the fish workers met during my stay in Elmina wanted their children to continue their fishing work. With this change in attitude in the formerly family-centred business, a collective shift in consciousness has occurred in favour of the formal education of the upcoming generations. Meanwhile, attitudes towards education of grown-up fishermen are still ambiguous. As one informant stated, being able to read and write allowed him to advance in the canoe’s hierarchy as he had been made responsible for the accounting, yet at the same time his position was constantly met with ridicule and doubts about his physical performance on the fishing trips (interview, former Elmina canoe fisherman, Anomabo, 05.08.2009).

\textsuperscript{19} According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, “the potential negative impact [of pair trawling activities] may consist in too large bycatch and/or discards (undersize specimens, non target species, etc.) resulting mainly from the use of too small meshes” (http://www.fao.org/fishery/fishtech/ 1002/en, download 14.07.2010).
in times of hardship. This can be illustrated with the every-day example of the fishing expedition. Profits among the crew members are usually shared unequally between the owner of the vessel and the different ranks within the crew. In Elmina, accounts are run continuously whereas canoe owners in other fishing communities, for example, in Anomabo may even pay their crews on an annual basis. Irrespective of these distribution practices, fishermen generally have to content with the arrangement that the canoe owners claim two thirds of the profits and distribute the remaining third among the crew members while at the same time sharing unforeseen risks equally among all workers on the canoe. A period of low catches thus affects the “ordinary” fishermen with much greater impact than an elder crew member or the owners of the fishing equipment.\footnote{Interview, MK, canoe owner, Elmina, 02.08.2009}

Many sources concentrate on issues of the commons (Hardin, 1968) when addressing conflicts and hardships in the artisanal fishing industry (for an overview see e.g. Acheson, 1981). This is much in line with what has been criticised as the “paradigme balentique” in the sense that biological determinants of the fish chain are overemphasised while the social component receives only marginal attention (Chauveau & Jul-Larsen 2000: 16f). In the Ghanaian context, despite the lack of adequate statistics, stakeholders of all backgrounds in one way or another acknowledge the deteriorating state of the marine fish stocks as the central problem of fisheries management in Ghana.\footnote{Interview, Papa Yaa Atobrah, Marine Fisheries Research Division, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Tema, 04.09.2009} With about ten percent of the Ghanaian population depending directly and indirectly on fishing activities for their economic survival, the decline of the fishing industry is often associated not only with rising unemployment but also with increasing incidents of violence, prostitution and drug consumption.\footnote{Interviews, Jojo Solomon, Elmina apofohene, Elmina, 27.07.2009 and George Anti, Central Regional Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Cape Coast, 16.09.2009} The fact that fish represents the most important source of animal protein in the Ghanaian diet adds additional significance to the problem of managing the marine resource in a sustainable manner. Besides considerations of food sovereignty and national security, fish also contributes significantly to the Ghanaian exports (Mensah et al, 2002). Thus, fisheries management in Ghana needs to find the delicate balance between a sustainable exploitation and gainful conservation of the marine resource.

However, problem definitions often claim to be sustainable in perspective and yet are short-sighted in one important respect. From the fishermen’s immediate perspective, measures to safeguard the marine resource only make as much sense as they allow the individual fisherman to feed his family the very same day and not in an uncertain future. In this light, the definitions of, amongst others, standard mesh sizes and illegitimate, that is, considered to be harmful fishing methods as defined in Ghana’s “Fisheries Act” of 2002 and its 2009 revision alone cannot assure sustainable fishing practices. As long as these measures do not lead to an immediate improvement of either the marine fish stocks or for that matter the small-scale fishermen’s livelihood, their implementation is hardly effective, especially in the Ghanaian case where monitoring is severely disadvantaged by the lack of funding in the relevant authorities.

In this light, the “way ahead” in Ghana’s small scale fisheries has been identified in a dual approach, including the implementation of selective subsidies for the artisanal fishing sector besides the strengthening of participative action in the communities on the ground (Mensah et al 2002: 231). Both approaches will come to the fore in the course of this thesis.
From the point of view of the first approach, support measures mainly intend to address the major risk of indebtedness inherent in the industry’s characteristics with high input costs and increasingly insecure returns. More specifically, the Ghanaian government supports the country’s artisanal fishing sector already since the 1960s with the provision of subsidised outboard motors and fishing nets\textsuperscript{23}. Since the 1990s, it also provides a certain amount of a subsidised fuel-oil mix for outboard motors, the so-called premix. In the words of Britwum (2009: 82),

[f]ishing is a capital intensive industry requiring high outlays for the purchase of a dugout canoe, outboard motor and fishing net. Running costs, especially the fuel component, are very high, and the cheaper premix is difficult to access for several reasons and consequently is a highly politicised commodity. Fishermen often have no choice but to rely on the more expensive petrol. (...) Fuel price hikes can severe also female access to fish as mounting costs can wipe out a woman’s capital and her ability to fund fishing expeditions, on the other hand dwindling fish stocks mean low catches and an inability to break even and cover the costs.

Premix, as this quote clarifies, is a highly relevant asset to the entire industry including the owners of the business, small scale fishermen and not at last fish processors. Its subsidisation thus is a highly democratic form of support from which almost all people involved in fishing work benefit largely. In this light, the 2009 premix crisis provides the general case for this thesis not only because of its long-term and large scale character but also because it directly corresponds to the product’s different realms of relevance, from the level of national governance to the lived experiences of artisanal fishermen on the ground. Notably, the premix debate is not only an event in time but constitutes a recurring debate and in itself a force that motivates decisions, such as the outline of electoral campaigns or the life choice of local level opinion leaders.

b. Premix politics and the history of a recurring debate

Premix fuel is a subsidised mixture of oil and petrol intended for use in outboard motors. The subsidy first appeared on the public agenda in 1992 and the distribution of the product was launched in 1994 to address the artisanal fishing industry’s internal challenges of high input costs combined with a decreasing insecurity of generating sufficient returns. According to Nii Abreo Kyerekuanda, head of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNFCC) and therewith head over all Chief fishermen in Ghana, the GNFCC played a decisive role in the policy formulation of the time. “[T]he [canoe] fishermen were going without catching the fish but they were buying the fuel. So, they were piling up debts. At that time we came to see Rawlings to talk to him about it and then premix was introduced\textsuperscript{24}.”

Despite the programme’s significance for the economic well-being of about two million Ghanaian fishermen and fish mongers and its potential for the country’s food sovereignty (Mensah 2002: 217), the premix subsidy was cancelled after only two years in operation. Officially, this was in response to wide-spread diversions from the intended recipients. In fact, on the pilot scale the premix sale was a matter between GOIL, the only oil company that was given the license to supply premix, and selected filling stations. However, as proprietors started to make money out of the premix sale many people felt encouraged to come in and open premix outlets on their own. Eventually, premix ended up in the tanks of taxis and motor cycles thus leaving the

\textsuperscript{23} for example, Public Records and Archives (PRAAD) Cape Coast, File 23/1/3798, “Fishing Industry (1959/60)”

\textsuperscript{24} Interview, Nii Abreo Kyerekuanda, GNFCC, Jamestown, 07.10.2009
canoe fishermen to buy the more expensive super and eventually piling up debts when going without catch\textsuperscript{25}.

Shortly after, as a response to the protest uttered through the GNCFC, the subsidy was introduced again with a yellow-coloured chemical added to prevent its use in engines other than outboard motors (\textit{Over\textipa{a}} 2001: 2). As Kyerekuanda argues, the fishermen themselves had never been involved in the premix sale, it was rather the sellers who were diverting it. Therefore, the GNCFC opposed the government’s plans of “punishing the fishermen for somebody else’s fault” and claimed that the fishermen should at least be allowed to buy the premix, bring it to the beach and sell it themselves. “If they committed any malfeasance or did not handle it well and [it will be cancelled] then it is their own fault”\textsuperscript{26}. Following this argument, the Rawlings administration decided to bring back the premix this time handing it down directly through the Chief fishermen and canoe owners to be sold directly to the canoe owners in the respective areas. More specifically, between 1996 and 2000 premix was brought to the landing beaches through local co-operatives, headed by the respective Chief fishermen. In Elmina, two co-operatives were operating, the “Cooperative Fisherman Service Centre Union” and the “Benya Co-operative Society” of which only the latter is nowadays still active hoping to revitalise its activities under the present NDC government\textsuperscript{27}.

After the transition of power in 2000, the premix sale was once again reorganised and the cooperative system of 1996 abandoned in favour of a private liberal business system that anybody could take up. It is noteworthy, as \textit{Over\textipa{a}} remarked (2001: 2), how the two preceding introductions of the premix subsidy coincided with general elections in Ghana in 1992 and 1996, respectively. Also, during the 2008 elections premix and fishing in general clearly provided a decisive matter for public debate.

Already the 2004 manifesto of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) had stressed the goal that

\begin{quote}
(t)he deteriorated quality of pre-mix fuel will be corrected and improved, and a special price fixed for pre-mix fuel to sustain and improve the industry, the object being to produce enough fish locally to make up the calculated annual fish deficit of 300,000 metric tonnes eventually (NDC Manifesto, 2004).
\end{quote}

Eventually, in 2008 the presidential candidate of the NDC John Evans Atta-Mills promised in the tradition of Rawlings to once again reorganise the premix sale directly through the Chief fishermen and canoe owners (GBC News, 08.08.2009).

The fact that Nana Akufo-Addo’s (NPP) election campaign did not take notice of the premix issue is widely acknowledged as a major factor in the outcome of the 2008 elections\textsuperscript{28}. After two terms in power, the Kufuor administration had lost the support in the traditional swing states along the Ghanaian coast (cf. Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2009) by failing to convince the predominant fishing population of its commitment to offer relief. In fact, improvements in infrastructure that had been promised in the NPP Manifesto were announced only in pre-election

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\textsuperscript{25} Interview, Benya Co-operative Society, Elmina, 15.11.2009
\textsuperscript{26} Interview, Nii Abreo Kyerekuanda, GNCFC, Jamestown Accra, 07.10.2009
\textsuperscript{27} Interview, Benya Co-operative Society, Elmina, 15.11.2009
\textsuperscript{28} Interview NDC, Cape Coast, 31.08.2009 and NPP, Cape Coast, 26.10.2009
November and never materialised (Daily Graphic, 8.11.2008). Apart from these promises, the manifesto hardly offered any direct points of identification for the individual small-scale fishermen.

For the first time in the history of this country, a separate Ministry of Fisheries has been created to improve this important source of protein. The Government is improving infrastructure, enhancing investment and providing support to small-scale fishermen. Aquaculture is being encouraged through the construction of 2 fishing harbours and 12 fish landing sites along the entire coastline at a cost of US$148 million. The locations are spread all along the coastline starting from Keta in the east to Axim in the west. These also include landing sites at Ada, Teshie, Winneba, Senya-Beraku, G Yamani and Dixcove (NPP Manifesto, 2008).

Figures 3 and 4: The pre-election proposal for a new landing site in Moree and the reality in 2009

This allowed for the dynamics that shifted voter alignment in the traditional swing states along the coast, especially the Central and Greater Accra Region, back to NDC in the few weeks between first round and run-off elections in December 2008 (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2009). In the words of Britwum (2009: 85), “[t]he failure of the NPP government to retain power after the 2008 elections has been blamed largely on its dismissal performance in the coastal regions of Ghana. Fishermen cite amongst a list of grievances that motivated them to vote against the NPP, rent seeking and political manipulation of the distribution of premix fuel”.

In the course of events that led the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and its presidential candidate John Evans Atta-Mills to regain power in 2008, fisheries and in particular fisheries in Elmina thus have played a significant role. Despite the town’s historic connections to the Ashanti kingdom, Elmina in general is not subject to Ghana’s predominant pattern of ethnic voter alignment (Kohnert et al, 2010). Indeed, while the traditional leadership in Elmina can be identified with the New Patriotic Party (NPP)29 the community itself forms part of the swing states along the Fante coast and the Greater Accra region that have more than once provided the decisive majorities in the national elections (Electoral Commission of Ghana; Kohnert et al, 2010). Yet, while electoral statistics portray the overall picture of shifting voter alignments, they fail to reflect the dynamics that trigger such shifts on the local level.

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29 For example, when entering the grounds of the 2008 Fete Ajabye, the yearly festival in Cape Coast, with the official greeting of the NPP and walking with the officials of the Kufuor administration instead of the traditional authorities, as would be the norm.
In the case of Elmina, one man’s initiative stands out. Maanoma became famous for his criticism of the NPP at one of former President John Agyekum Kufuor’s “People’s Assemblies” in Sekondi-Takoradi. “Mr Kufuor, do you think the sea is like a lorry park which will need renovation when it is damaged?”, he asked pointing towards the particular needs of the marine resource and blaming Kufuor not to have the welfare of the fishermen at heart (PeaceFM, 31.08.2009). As a widely-known NDC man, Maanoma was later rewarded with a position in the National Premix Committee, a decision that has not remained uncontested given the level of education required for this post. In the course of events unfolding on the Elmina grounds, Maanoma played an important role as an opinion leader and the alleged brain behind the removal of Nana Jojo Solomon from the post of the Elmina Chief fisherman.

c. Premix policy 2009

In May 2009, five months after the Mills administration had come to power, the campaign promises concerning the premix issue were finally addressed by an expert commission made up of representatives from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the National Fisheries Association of Ghana, the Bureau of National Investigations, the Tema Oil Refinery and one independent consultant. In greater detail, the following problems and suggestions for the re-organisation of premix fuel allocation, distribution and sale were agreed upon.

The original idea [of allocating subsidised premix fuel] was to ensure the timely availability of the product to the fishers at affordable price. It was also to empower the fishermen groups to run the premix stations at the landing beaches and the proceeds to be used in developing their communities. By the end of year 2008 [that is, at the end of the Kufuor administration], the original idea had been diluted to the extent that:

- there was a proliferation of outlets owned by individuals rather than fishermen groups (outlets grew from 128 in 2001 to about 900 in 2008)
- there was uncontrollable corruption in the premix administration
- there was rampant diversion of the product from the intended destinations
- there were shortages to the disadvantage of the fishermen
- premix fuel was used to adulterate regular petrol to the detriment of motorists
- there was general dissatisfaction amongst fishers, particularly with the mode of sale of the product.

(...) It was agreed by the committee that (...) there was a need to:

- restructure the premix fuel arrangements
- streamline the monitoring system
- examine the role of Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)

(“Proposals for the re-organisation of Premix fuel allocation, distribution and sale”, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 21.05.2009)
The National Premix Committee

The tone adopted in “The Chronicle”, covering the issue on 15 June 2009, illustrates the emotional handling of the matter in the general public debate and its final solution on 1st July 2009.

In a bid to curb the current financial malfeasance, widespread corruption, proliferation of fishing outlets owned by individuals rather than fishermen, rampant diversion of premix fuel, and adulteration of regular petrol with premix fuel, the government has decided to reconstitute the National Premix Committee (NPC) on 1st July, 2009.

Accordingly, since July 2009 the National Premix Committee is constituted by a representative each of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), which is also responsible of appointing the chairperson of the committee, the Ministry of Energy, the Fisheries Commission, the National Inland Canoe Fishermen Council (NICFC), the National Fisheries Association of Ghana (NAFAG), the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC), the Industry Coordinator of the Oil Marketing Companies as well as two other appointees by MOFA. In order to streamline the distribution of premix among the Ghanaian landing beaches the National Premix Committee has been assigned the following tasks and responsibilities:

- review of all existing premix sale points,
- the set up of procedures for approving for the establishment of new outlets,
- the examination of all licenses given for the purpose of selling fuel,
- the set up of guidelines and modalities for establishing outlets, purchasing procedures, transportation to the stations and sale to beneficiaries
- determination of the minimum and maximum quantities supplied depending on the needs of the fishermen,
- determination of price build up of the commodity with the National Petroleum Authority (NPA) and
- discussion of any other issues relevant to premix fuel.

The National Premix Secretariat

The Operational Secretariat of the NPC, the Accra-based National Premix Secretariat (NPS), is composed of three operational officers representing NAFAG, NICFC and GNCFC. In order to determine the needs of the fishermen regarding the price and required quantity of the product, the Premix Secretariat in consultation with the National Petroleum Authority is responsible for

- the categorisation of the Landing Beach Committees (LBCs) into groups and the estimation of what their liftings should be,
- the reconciliation of fuel supplied and lifted with fuel received,
- the daily technical and administrative activities dealing with premix,
• dealing with complaints and other report from beneficiaries,

• the monitoring and evaluation of all premix liftings from the Tema Oil Refinery (TOR) to ensure their safe arrival at various retailing points,

• serving as the link between the National Premix Committee, OMCs and other stakeholders,

• undertaking all financial transactions of the NPC and reporting to and advising the NPC on all matters concerning premix administration and

• arranging for annual technical and financial audit by an external auditor.


The Landing Beach Committees

On the local level, the creation of Landing Beach Committees (LBCs) was encouraged through the national government and its decentralised representatives in the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies “to ensure a dedicated and committed sale of premix fuel to the fishermen” (MOFA, 21 May 2009). This new institutional framework of streamlining the nation-wide premix distribution excluded private individuals and fuel stations dealing with regular petrol from the premix business as the LBCs were to select one oil marketing company (OMC) of their choice which then loads at the Tema Oil Refinery (TOR) to deliver the premix fuel directly to the respective landing sites. Elmina was among the first landing beaches to receive its premix in that manner after the Deputy Minister in charge of Fisheries Nii Amasah Namoale inaugurated the first eight Landing Beach Committees to oversee the administration of premix on Tuesday, 4 August 2009 (GNA, 05.08.2009), Tuesday being the weekly holiday of fishermen along most parts of the Ghanaian coast. This underlines the importance of Elmina as one of the major artisanal fishing centres in coastal Ghana30.

As the original policy formulation of June-July 2009 intended, the LBC in Elmina initially was installed as a five member committee with the Chief fisherman as the chairman. Interestingly, this involved re-appointing the former chair person Solomon, notably a supporting NDC member, to head the local premix committee despite the fact that the latter had been removed from this post over charges of diverting profits. The other members of the committee were defined to be a representative each of the canoe owners and fish mongers, an “ordinary fisherman” to be nominated by MOFA and one other person appointed by the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives (MMDCE). Besides these executive members, each LBC is required to engage a pump attendant and a secretary who are responsible for selling the premix, regularly gauging the fuel stock, estimating the demand and keeping the storage tanks clean and for initiating and keeping records of orders for supply of premix from the NPC, respectively (MOFA, 21 May 2009). This setup was aimed at allowing the fishermen to run their own premix stations and use the proceeds to develop their communities. As a matter of fact, the Elmina

30 In fact, Elmina attracts numerous migrant fishermen both during its main fishing season and in the rest of the year. This is mainly due to the facilities offered in the fishing harbour and the very conducive local oceanography allowing to safely land the catch and reducing market risks as the demand for fish in a fishing centre is generally assured.
Landing Beach Committee operates according to a rule that sets aside a portion of its profit for the support of school-going children.

d. Negotiating premix

Premix, it has been argued above, is of central importance for the livelihoods of artisanal canoe fishermen and the depending (fish processing) industries. Fish workers consequently have an interest in the gainful management of the resource. At the same time, and closely related to the former observation, premix has in the past constantly been appropriated by political power holders in the pursuit of their political goals. It is a common perception that fishermen all over the world are generally frank and outspoken towards the political developments affecting their environments. In Ghana, this is particularly true as past elections have shown shifting voter alignment in the country’s coastal regions. As a matter of fact, Ghana shows clear tendencies of ethnic voter alignment in the biggest regions, the Ashanti region (NPP) and the Volta region (NDC) (Kohnert et al, 2010). According to the statistics published by the Electoral Commission of Ghana, these regions have never voted against their tradition. However, none of the two regions represent enough voters to claim a majority in parliament. Therefore, party politics continuously try to win the coastal regions, including a high proportion of fishing communities, and fishing-related issues thus often play a central role in election campaigns. This is especially true for premix and other fishing inputs, such as outboard motors, fishing nets or simply in the form of loans made available by Ghana’s Agricultural Development Bank.

This observation suggests that fishermen – despite the numerous hardships and insecurities inherent in their profession – do have a voice and manage to influence decision making arenas in their own terms (be it directly through contesting policy, or indirectly through impacting on the constitution of the arena through the delegation of representatives). Yet, the complexities of mandate and advocacy need to be further scrutinised in order to avoid naïve reductionism in the understanding of interest representation in artisanal canoe fisheries in Ghana.

Arenas, according to Turner (1974: 17) are “the concrete settings in which paradigms become transformed into metaphors and symbols with reference to which political power is mobilised and in which there is a trial of strength between influential paradigm-bearers”. In more concrete terms, Bierschenk and de Sardan (1997: 249ff) define an arena as the social space where the confrontations between “strategic groups” take place. “Strategic groups”, in this order of ideas, are stakeholders in a conflict (and their representative organisations) who engage in a process of dynamic sense-making rather than representing a static interest. This dynamic perspective allows grasping the groups’ strategic adoption of different identities and bargaining strategies according to the issues and the respective negotiation partner at stake. Thus, negotiation arenas alter with their members’ consciousness of the encounter with different stakeholders and with the strategic adaptation to the challenges and opportunities inherent in this encounter.

Negotiation arenas, with their logic of constitution, their particular working mechanisms and the various material and symbolic manipulations within them play a significant role for the “reality in the making”, that is, the definition of parameters and standards through which the world and therefore the very practical claims of individuals are measured and weighed against. Negotiating,

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31 Interview NDC, Cape Coast, 31.08.2009 and NPP, Cape Coast, 26.10.2009
in this light, has to be understood as inherent to any (re-)production of social meaning irrespective of the level of construction it is taking place at (interpersonal, organisational or political).

The construction of negotiation arenas in which fisheries management is established depends both on the institutional frameworks in which decisions are brought about and the actual stakeholders who ultimately constitute the arena. Artisanal canoe fishermen ideally have a stake in these arenas. However, access to these forums of debate is usually restricted and interest representation often takes the form of advocacy, often including unresolved questions of mandate. This is certainly true for the various NGOs, whose lobbying efforts are not intended to be downgraded at this point, but certainly should be looked at in a critical light.

In the Ghanaian premix crisis, nation-wide negotiations took place not only in the obvious governance institutions but also in the public sphere of the media and in more exclusive forums provided by civil society actors, especially NGOs. The stances held by the relevant actors of interest representation, delegated both by mandate of the fishermen and as self-ascribed advocates, revealed themselves as follows.

Only days after their public announcement, that is as early as mid-July 2009, the premix distribution procedures promoted through the Ministry of Food and Agriculture found themselves exposed to heavy, but still relatively unorganised critical voices. Protests culminated in early August 2009 when fishermen along the Ghanaian coast threatened to hit the streets claiming that the supply of the product did not satisfy their needs. Indeed, in the policy formulation phase of the project government officials had stressed more than once how the original idea of the programme was to secure sufficient quantities of premix at an affordable price (e.g. Kwesi Ahwoi, Minister of Agriculture at the inauguration of the NPC on 30 June 2009). Claims that premix fuel supplies were scarce at first only met official refutations to the allegations. Thus, Deputy Minister of Agriculture in charge of Fisheries Nii Amasah Namoa blamed hoarding and panic buying individuals for triggering an “artificial premix shortage” \(^{32}\) (PeaceFM, 28.07.2009a). Later, Namoa rejected any responsibility by once more pointing to the problem of premix diversion, thus blaming the fishermen for their own misery – a recurring theme from 1994. He clarified the position of his ministry by stating that

the government had instituted measures to curb malpractices in the distribution of premix and tasked the communities to be vigilant and report the diversion of the fuel to drivers, or when it is being smuggled, to the police for immediate action. Among the measures, he said, is colouring the fuel blue to make for easier detection when mixed with other fuel products, and warned the fuel was not for the committee members, but for all fishermen (GNA, 05.08.2009).

At the same occasion, and adopting a similar implicit accusation of the fishermen, the head of the National Premix Committee, Mr Kwaku Nicol presented his committee’s official standpoint stating that the government was subsidizing the product heavily and that its diversion would therefore affect the economy which is why it must be discouraged (ibid).

\(^{32}\) At the same instance (the “Kokrokoo” morning show), and in response to Namoa’s defense of the NPS which had already released its lists of beneficiaries to the Tema Oil Refinery, also the latter denied any responsibility in the failure to provide sufficient premix at all landing beaches like Elmina, Cape Coast (Central Region), Jamestown (Greater Accra) or Keta (Volta Region) where fishermen had been without premix for about four months (PeaceFM, 28.07.2009b).
Upset about the ministry’s strategy of shifting the blame to the fishing communities, the initial support of the Chief fishermen, who at first publicly confirmed to well utilise the benefit of the premix sale and ensured that their committees would not incur any losses or engage in any malpractice, quickly vanished and with it the major intermediary between government officials and the increasingly dissatisfied fishing communities. The intensity of the protests further increased and started to transcend community borders, when government officials suggested to completely remove the subsidy in view of the continuing diversions of the premix and its profits. Nationwide reactions provoked by this proposal mainly stressed once more the discrepancies between official calculations and the actual demand on the ground. In some cases, including Elmina and Abandze/Kormantse in the Central Region, premix had not reached the landing beaches for about two months. At other places, like Tema Canoe Beach, the quantities supplied did not allow to distribute more than ten gallons per registered canoe. With every fishing expedition consuming around 60 gallons of fuel, the fishermen were thus left with input costs around 350 Ghana Cedis (in August 2009 this corresponded to around 240 US$) for fuel only, a sum that would easily double in case of the subsidy’s complete removal (GNA, 05.08.2009). Hardly making a good catch, many of the canoe owners had piled up debts and were already facing problems to continue their fishing work. Statements that blamed the fishermen for the premix shortage on the market and finally the announcement to remove the subsidy “to restore sanity into the fishing industry” thus hit a sensitive nerve of the canoe fishermen, especially in view of the approaching main fishing season and the unique chance to incur a “bumper harvest” generating the bulk of the yearly income. Elmina in particular, due to its particular oceanography and the life cycle of herring, attracts numerous migrant fishermen around this time of the year which puts the local premix supplies under additional pressure.

This development shows how the fishermen quickly re-appropriated the debate around the reorganisation of the premix distribution to stress their own issues and viewpoints. Thus, making use of the forum provided by the media attention on the new distribution protocols, Chief fishermen along the Ghanaian coast stood united to correct the media coverage in that not the new modes of distribution but the sheer quantity of the product was at the source of the problem. Interestingly, at the same time, also the general dissatisfaction regarding the government’s perceived inactivity in view of the ongoing pair trawling activities returned to the public agenda after reaching its peak in (pre-election) 2008 (e.g. PeaceFM, 28.07.2009a).

On 7 August 2009, the fishermen and their advocates had finally gotten their message across. Besides introducing its large scale information programme on the establishment of new tracking techniques in the premix distribution (this in fact comprised not only the changed colour of the product but also the equipment of all premix-carrying vessels with satellite tracking-devices and highly visible labelling), the Ministry of Food and Agriculture announced that Tema Oil Refineries (TOR) was to release 50 instead of 25 tankers of premix a week with the intention to increase the quantity once more to about 100 tankers weekly after the successful implementation of the programme’s first phase (GBC News, 08.08.2009).

The surprising acceptance with which the entire Ghanaian population seemed to support this significant increase in government support intended exclusively for the artisanal fisheries sector shows how artisanal fishermen possess a significant degree of bargaining power, in this case in the form of moral bargaining power (Silver 2003: 13). Many factors may have played into this.
Possibly the most important reason lies in the fact that fish represents an important source of animal protein in the Ghanaian diet (Mensah et al 2002: 217). A decrease in catches and consequently rocketing fish prices would therefore affect not only artisanal fishermen but in fact every single household in the country. However, in the course of the negotiations, different parties brought forward different arguments in favour and against the fishermen’s position. This shows how advocacy and bargaining are more complex and cannot be reduced to the simple positioning in a dichotomous conflict.

It has been shown already how the artisanal canoe fishermen themselves and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) in 2009 both stressed their own versions of the premix problem thereby shifting the blame to the respective other. Yet, as the conflict also attracted intensified media coverage on fishing in the broader sense it also provided a platform for many more stakeholders to play on the fishermen’s (and their own) agenda and to put across their own versions of the issue and their promoted solution to it.

Premix has been described as an issue triggering the creation of political conflict arenas. In these arenas, a number important players come together to secure the representation of their and their societal groups’ interests. The most prominent of these players are the political parties, selected NGOs, the country’s Chief fishermen and their umbrella organization, the GNCFC. In the following paragraphs, these players will be described in their particular stances towards the conflict.

The Political Parties

Throughout the nationwide premix crisis, especially the political parties in the government’s opposition tried to capitalise on the basis of the unrest. Shortly after the first reports on premix shortages had been published, the second biggest party in the 2008 elections, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), did not hesitate to blame the personal politics of leading National Democratic Congress (NDC) for the shortage in petroleum products that had allegedly hit the entire country. These accusations of nepotism and mismanagement, with specific reference to the director of the National Petroleum Authority, were confronted by the Ministry of Energy as being “unfortunate, ill-informed and calculated to appeal to partisanship” (Myjoyonline, 28.07.2009). Thus, while the roots of premix and petroleum shortages remained unclear and ambiguous in these accusations, the NPP managed to re-appropriate the crisis in its own terms. Especially, the mechanisms of constitution and of delegation to the central managing premix authorities remained items on the public and some people’s private agendas. This is particularly true for the constitution of the National Premix Committee and the post of the Central Regional Premix Coordinator. In Chapter 2, this practice has been mentioned as one potential root cause for the conflict between Maanoma and the Elmina Chief fisherman as analysed by Sarah Afful (Daily Guide, 25.09.2009).

Months after the destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman was finalised, the Central Regional branches of the opposition parties in Ghana’s parliament formed a coalition in order to publicly denounce the NDC’s premix policy in a common press conference. “The New Patriotic Party (NPP) with support from the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) and the Democratic

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33 It is noteworthy how at least two positions in the NPC have been filled with supporters of the 2008 pair trawling initiative, notably the retired Flt. Lt. M.G. Tackie and Maanoma.
Freedom Party (DFP) has raised alarm bells over rampant corruption bedeviling the sale of premix fuel in the Central Region” (The Daily Searchlight, 11.06.2010). Once again the underlying tone of the accusations revolved around the problem of clientelist relationships which according to the voices accounted for the appointing of some people to the National Premix Committee “who had little ability and were only interested in lining their pockets” thus causing the rocketing of the premix price and the fishermen to be cheated of their benefits (ibid).

Interestingly, fishing in general and therewith the perceived shortcomings in the NPP’s very liberal premix management played a central role in the defeat of the NPP in the national elections of 2008 as it led to widespread disappointment among the coastal populations. The NPP’s involvement in the premix crisis in 2009 then shows how the different political parties make use of the voters’ grievances and desires in the strategic topic of fisheries governance in order to regain future voter alignment in the decisive coastal areas.

The NGOs

On 21 August 2009, more actors tried to enter the debate in the form of a comprehensive stakeholder meeting that eventually turned into an informal press conference. During this directly observed incident, the opposing viewpoints of Chief fishermen, official government representatives and concerned NGOs came together under one roof to discuss “the way forward” in artisanal fisheries management. From the part of the cooperating Chief fishermen and NGOs, the main points of criticism revolved around the question of how far the ministry should be allowed to intervene in the constitution of the NPC and the LBCs. According to their argument, with three appointees in the NPC, MOFA’s influence on the premix allocation clearly outweighed the representatives of the actual beneficiaries of the product. Also, the governmental influence on the composition of the LBCs on the local scale triggered disagreement especially, as the modes of selection for the nominees by MOFA and District Assemblies remained unclear.

NGOs like “Friends of the Nation” (FoN), based in Takoradi, claim to represent the fisher folks’ interests while at the same time fighting for the sustainable use of the Ghanaian coastal environments. Their “Integrated Coastal and Fisheries Governance (ICFG) Initiative”, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), identifies the following aim: “Ghana’s coastal and marine ecosystems are sustainably managed to provide goods and services that generate long term socio-economic benefits to communities while sustaining biodiversity” (ICFG, 2010). Other NGOs put their emphasis on technological advancement (TESCOD), for example, in order to reduce post-harvest losses, or try to alleviate the inherent gender inequalities in the fishing industry (CEWEFIA). It is noteworthy how the programmes planned and implemented by these NGOs are always also inherently adapted to the preferences of international donors34.

34 Interview, CEWEFIA, Elmina, 09.09.2009
The Chief fishermen

During the Takoradi NGO meeting, the most severe opposition stemmed from the attending Chief fishermen who denounced the gradual sidelining of the authority vested in the positions of apofehenfo and konkohenfo, the chief fisherman’s female counterpart among the fish processors. This point was underlined by Kyei Kwado Yamoah, project co-ordinator of Friends of the Nation and organiser of the meeting, who pointed out how the new regulation fell short in balancing the voices of advocates and those being advocated for. With the Chief fishermen not having any legally defined chairing or constituting role in the formation of the National Premix Committee or Landing Beach Committee, Yamoah stated, the regulation failed to represent the source of authority and legitimacy that was closest to the lived experiences of the fishermen on the ground (cf. also Kraan, 2009; Overà, 2000).

In view of this, the claims of being politically sidelined can as well be read as claims of sidelining the entity of artisanal canoe fishermen in Ghana. The Chief fishermen’s protest against recent political developments thus can be understood as the most direct translation of the fishermen’s interests among all the actors present at the meeting and in the abstract negotiation arenas. As has been shown earlier, canoe fishermen possess a significant degree of bargaining power, be it in the moral or even the structural form. Their direct mandate thus has a particular weight, however, only so if recognised by the other participants in the political arena.

Besides criticising to be ever more sidelined and robbed of their authority in view of the recent political developments, fears were expressed that the failure of providing sufficient support for the small-scale fishermen may not only foster negative attitudes but also breed disunity among them. Especially, in terms of the distribution of the premix interest this may entail unrest and conflict in the fishing communities. Ironically, this statement by Nana Solomon (GNA, 05.08.2009) predicted his own fate only about six weeks later.

Halfway into the Takoradi meeting, Nana Jojo Solomon, then Chief fisherman of Elmina, put a premature end to the discussion of the need for more consultations with the local chiefs. Instead, upon arrival of different media representatives, he quickly made himself available for public statements on the recent state of the premix crisis. The extent to which such actions were intended to support his own agenda was heavily debated in the months following the meeting. Fact is that Nana Solomon on more than one occasion called for just some of the other Chief fishermen in Ghana to step up with him to address the media and thus to create a voice that could have a greater impact. Moreover, he is known and respected for shying away from abusing his media attention for partisan interests, but focusing solely on his lobbying activities in favour of the fishing industry. Obviously, there is not just one way forward in the interest of artisanal fishermen. The case of the light fishing represents one example for the internal divisions among the Chief fishermen in Ghana. Here, a more detailed discourse analysis might shed the necessary light on the means and mechanisms applied in the constructions of discursive realities. At this point, however, I chose to limit myself to the analysis of the interactions between different opinion holders in the conflict.

35 Unfortunately, the meeting did not include any representatives from the fish mongers’ side to confirm this position from their side. Failure to involve the women was mainly justified by organisational and logistic reasons, although their interest in the matter was clearly acknowledged (interview, Jojo Solomon, Takoradi, 21.08.2009).
The GNCFC

At the same time in Jamestown (Accra), Nii Abreko Kyerekuanda advocated for the fishermen and for the extended provision of premix for them from the position of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC). Kyerekuanda, one of the original initiators of the premix agenda in 1992, criticised how recent conflicts about the premix distribution arose mainly from local politicians who claim their share in the profitable premix business. In fact, representatives of the District, Municipal and Metropolitan Chief Executives in Ghana’s decentralised governance structure have been delegated to the local premix committees, the so-called Landing Beach Committees. Already after the restructuring of 2000, Kyerekuanda states, conflicts arose over the politicians “jumping in” to start their own outlets, letting “some young girls selling premix everywhere, that kind of thing”\(^\text{36}\). However, the GNCFC opposed and still opposes the introduction of the National Premix Committee (NPC) for yet another reason. Not surprisingly, the GNCFC as umbrella organisation of all Ghanaian Chief fishermen favoured the cooperative system of the pre-Kufuor era, where every local cooperative was headed by their respective Chief fisherman exclusively and without the involvement of the District Assemblies. With the transition of power in 2008 and given the electoral promises of present-day President Atta-Mills, not only the GNCFC hoped to return to the old form of organising the premix distribution\(^\text{37}\). As Jojo Solomon, Chief fishermen and therefore member of the GNCFC stated, the District Assemblies only came in because there is money involved. If they wanted to get in, they should also go to sea every day for eight hours. Then they could tell their opinion\(^\text{38}\). In the words of Kyerekuanda, the GNCFC favours the past solution on the grounds that it provided the local fishermen with greater agency and autonomy. According to Kyerekuanda the fishermen needed to be taught that they do not have to depend on anyone to run their business for them. “If they start to think for themselves people won’t be able to cheat them any longer”\(^\text{39}\).

In conclusion, this chapter has followed an entire policy cycle from its initial problem definition to its implementation, evaluation and subsequent contestations. Negotiating problem definitions and policy formulations in response to them is part of democratic policy making not only in Ghana (Windhoff-Heritier, 1994). This is not to conceal the conclusions I want to draw from the developments portrayed in the previous paragraphs. Notably, premix has been illustrated to be highly relevant first and foremost to the economic viability of the artisanal fishing sector but also to the political dynamics of Ghana’s broader governance system. Already the previous chapter depicting Jojo Solomon’s case has shown how premix represents both a source of prestige as much as it carries a potential threat for the authority, that is, a means to contest the bureaucratic procedures of leadership. On the national scale, the same is true to the extent that Ghana’s coastal regions exert a decisive power in the decision of general elections. The sympathy of “the fishermen” is thus an important asset for aspiring political leaders and at the same time a threat for established power holders who lost the support of the coastal people on the basis of an alleged failure to address their particular problems. In this respect, artisanal fishermen are equipped with a considerable amount of bargaining power.

\(^{36}\) Interview, Nii Abreko Kyerekuanda, GNCFC, Jamestown Accra, 7.10.2009  
\(^{37}\) Interview, Benya co-operative society, Elmina, 15.11.2009  
\(^{38}\) Interview, Jojo Solomon, Chief fisherman, Takoradi, 21.08.2009  
\(^{39}\) Interview, Nii Abreko Kyerekuanda, GNCFC, Jamestown Accra, 7.10.2009
Notably, the fishermen as stakeholders in the “system to be governed” (Kooiman et al 2005) are themselves very much aware of the potential impact of their collective negotiations on nationwide decision making. In fact, archival evidence proves that this was the case already in the early post-independence era\(^40\).

When asked for their considered decision, the linguist said that the Fisheries Officer met the Chief fisherman and others on the 29\(^{th}\) May and they informed him that they had previously met the Government Agent on the subject and that they were due to meet him again the following Tuesday.

Continuing, he said that on Sunday, the 31\(^{st}\) May a mammoth meeting of about 1,500 fishermen representing the towns of Cape Coast, Anomabu, Winneba, Apam, Moree, Ekon, Biriwa, Abadzi, Koramantine, Egya 1,2 and 3, Elmina and Komenda met at Cape Coast and discussed the issue [of cooperating in the extensive “Herring Catch Survey”] and the consensus opinion was that they should continue to refuse to co-operate with the Fisheries Department as long as the Government did not accede to their request viz., loans to improve their industry and delay in blasting the rocks on the beach of Cape Coast. He said that fishermen from the towns which attended the meeting at Cape Coast had withdrawn their membership from the National Fishermen’s Association because Mr. Dadson of Shama did not account properly for the funds of the Fishermen’s Association. The representative also denied that they were members of the United Ghana Farmer’s Council (PRAAD, Cape Coast, my emphasis).

The bargaining power of artisanal fishermen resides above all in their role for the country’s food sovereignty. However, fishermen hitting the streets also easily leave a strong impression of their potential impact on national security. Thus, the voice of the fishermen resides both in their structural, market-based and not at last moral bargaining power but to a large extent also in the interests of their numerous advocates. In this respect, the relevance of the fisher folks to the dynamics of (fisheries) governance is also a burden as various stakeholders try to come in, claiming to advocate for the artisanal canoe fishermen, yet without a serious mandate. Within this interrelation of various stakeholders, the local Chief fishermen represent the form of leadership that may be closest to the lived experiences of the fisher folks on the ground. This is true not only in the sense that the Chief fisherman has first hand-experience in the business himself and thus represents his community on the basis of what Vieira et al (2008) describe as representation through identification\(^41\). The Chief fisherman is also the first point of reference for fishing-related problems observed by any community member. The centrality of Ghana’s Chief fishermen in the country’s marine policy negotiations, even though they are often restricted to post-implementation contestations, thus largely is justified by the intermediary character of the institution. In the following chapter, the characteristics of the Chief fisherman’s authority will be regarded in greater detail.

\(^40\) For example, Public Records and Archives (PRAAD) Cape Coast, File 23/1/483: Notes of a meeting held at the government agent’s office, Cape Coast on Tuesday 2\(^{nd}\) June, 1959 between the government agent and the representatives of the fishing community in Cape Coast.

\(^41\) Representation, according to Vieira (2008: 66ff), can involve elements of at least three different modes. Taking the form of identification (1), representation of interests occurs when an individual identifies with the actions of another person in a way that gives the individual a stake in the other’s action. In the form of trusteeship (2) and principal-agent relationship (3) however, representation entails the conscious decision to appoint a representative through mandate. On the group level, notions of unanimity and majority become the relevant functions, though their definition in the empirical context may be subject to decisive cultural variations.
4. The Chief fisherman – between encompassing authority and the limitations of a mandate

“You can’t destool the Chief fisherman”
(Nana Kodwo Conduah VI, Omanhen)

“We are the majority. And the majority counts the vote.”
(Elmina canoe owners)

The previous chapter has shown the diversity of governance institutions relevant to the representation of interests in artisanal canoe fishing. Interest representation, it can be argued, evolves out of the various interactions between different kinds of leadership on different scales, each of which provides the challenges and opportunities for the other’s capacity to act. Interest representation, therefore, is closely connected to the concepts of leadership and governance. Governance here has so far been understood as the empirical process of defining, addressing and thereby attempting to solve problems of wider social relevance. This emphasis on practices and interrelations later on allows arguing for a more dynamic and enabling perception of actors and negotiation partners in policy decision making within the context of impermeable power hierarchies and contrasting legal perceptions of right and wrong relating to them (Woodman, 1996).

In this light, the term governance is inclusive towards the complex, diverse and dynamic character of fisheries management at different scales (Kraan 2009: 9). As a matter of fact, fisheries governance represents a particular case as it concerns both the natural and the social world. Kooiman et al (2005) acknowledge this complexity by presenting a framework that distinguishes within the fishery system between “governing system” and “system to be governed”. The “system to be governed” is characterised by the “fish chain” (Thorpe et al 2005: 41ff), that is, the connection between social and natural worlds accessed by fishermen to safeguard their livelihoods. Fisheries management is part of fisheries governance and once again following Kraan (2009: 4) can be defined as “all kinds of activities people purposefully undertake on a collective level to regulate fisheries (by making rules or developing norms based on existing – or new – values)”.

Leadership in artisanal fisheries management is manifold. Mainstream political and so-called “pre-colonial” or “traditional” forms of leadership in Ghana have been described in many instances in the scientific literature (e.g. Odotei 2006b). In the course of this thesis, a third form of leadership which I want to refer to as “vocational” shall be looked at in greater detail and may hopefully fill a gap in the existing research on fisheries governance in Ghana. The concept of vocational leadership has the advantage of allowing to look at forms of leadership that are not particularly specified in the official regulations of fisheries governance or reside in between forms of mainstream-political and traditional authorities for that matter.

The institution of the Chief fisherman represents such a case and is of particular analytical interest as it involves a combination of the different forms of leadership referred to above. The
Chief fisherman is at the same time the most central figure of interest representation as his mandate is based on “election” by artisanal canoe fisherman themselves and therefore is closest to the lived experiences on the ground. The following chapter thus pays closer attention to the broad range of powers inherent in the position of the Chief fisherman and the various strategic alliances formed to underpin this authority. The vocational, traditional and mainstream political characteristics of the office will be pointed out and the question will be addressed as to how the combination of these characteristics relates to the high level of influence of the Chief fisherman. Finally, the limitations of legitimacy will be delineated in reference to the actual basis of the Chief fisherman’s mandate.

a. The institution of the Chief fisherman – vocational leadership

In many fishing communities, the institution of the Chief fisherman is of equal, sometimes even greater relevance than the Omanhene’s (Paramount chief). The community in Abrebiano, approximately 20 km west of Elmina illustrates such an (exceptional) case. As “migrants” originating from the Saltpond area, for the last 125 years or so the people of Abrebiano have been settling on land that is in the possession of the Omanhene of Komenda. Consequently, the people of the fishing community in Abrebiano are responsible to a leader who is not in the possession of a stool. Instead, the local Chief fisherman simultaneously fulfils the tasks of the Chief fisherman and Paramount chief.42

Also in the less particular case of Elmina, where the Chief fisherman has been appointed solely as the leader of the fishing community under the main leadership of the Paramount chief, the position implies a significant degree of influence. This is especially true in regard of the town’s high dependency on the fishing industry. As one Assembly man quoted from the official statistics, the port area of Elmina alone accounts for about 40 percent of the income generated in the entire KEEA district.43 The centrality of the Chief fisherman’s role in the management of the fishing business thus equips him with a powerful position within local politics. In fact, in a fishing town like Elmina, literally no big decision is made without the involvement or at least consultation of the Chief fisherman.

The exact fields of the Chief fisherman’s influence can hardly be listed in their totality. Observation in Elmina revealed the involvement of the Chief fisherman in projects ranging from obvious tasks in the mainstreaming and implementation of the distribution of fishing inputs among the town’s canoe owners, especially the running of the premix business, through the organisation and realisation of the ritual opening of the lagoon during the annual Bakatue festival and even to quite atypical issues like the encouragement of local tourism. Notably, the position of the Chief fisherman involves authority and influence not only in issues related to fishing, that is, in the form of vocational leadership, but also implies a direct stake in the Edina Traditional Council and the mainstream-political leadership of the local and regional governance system. At the same time, the Chief fisherman takes up representational responsibilities and privileges on different scales, from the local level conflict settlement to nation-wide policy negotiations, especially in the canoe fishermen’s umbrella organisation, the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNCFC).

42 Interview, chief fisherman and lesoufe, Abrebiano, 14.11.2009
43 Interview, assembly man, Elmina, 05.09.2009
As a vocational leader, the tasks of the Chief fisherman are above all represented in conflict settlement. While conflicts within a crew are usually mediated by the owner of the vessel, disputes between members of different vessels (artisanal or inshore) or between a crew and their “fish mommy” (cf. following chapter) are in most cases presented to the Chief fisherman and his council (besoofo) to make a fair judgment and solve the issue indisputably. This tasks requires the Chief fisherman to be an expert in the fishing business as the different cases need to be considered with due understanding of the happenings at sea. As a matter of fact, as some marine anthropologists have pointed out, the fact that most of their experiences happen at sea and thus outside of the direct consciousness of the community, interest representation often takes a complicated dynamic for artisanal canoe fisherman (e.g. McGoodwin, 1990). The expertise of the Chief fisherman in the industry thus represents a vital asset complementing other governance institutions in Ghana’s coastal communities. Ultimately, the vocational aspects of the Chief fisherman’s leadership are at the core of the wide respect with which a Chief fisherman is regarded in the fishing community. As will be shown in the subsequent section, this is not to be confused with his particular mandate which can take more complicated forms depending on the specific procedures behind his election and installation.

Besides conflict settlement, the vocational aspect of the Chief fisherman’s authority also relates to the management of fishing inputs subsidised by the government. This, however, follows the logics of political mainstreaming as the delegation of representatives to managing committees is as much a matter of national policy definition as it is subject to local affiliations of interests, for example, partisan ties. With the NDC coming back to power in 2008, for example, after a period of privatisation the position of the Chief fisherman was re-vitalised in the local premix distribution as the head of the newly established Landing Beach Committees.

b. Mainstream-political leadership

In the formally institutionalised realm, marine artisanal fishermen have vocational representative bodies in the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council (GNFC), headed by the country’s Chief fisherman Nii Abreoi Kyerekuanda, and in the industry’s umbrella organisation the National Fisheries Association of Ghana (NAFAG)\(^4\). These institutions connect to the lived experiences of artisanal fishermen on the ground through the institution of the local Chief fisherman. In turn, it is through these large scale interest groups that the Chief fisherman has the most direct access to mainstream political decision making arenas. As the most important mouthpiece of the fishing community, including women, youth, and also semi-industrial fishermen, the Chief fisherman is the first point of contact between various governance institutions and even non-governmental organisations and the fisher folks. In this respect, the duties of the Chief fisherman also comprise representative interactions with formal power holders within and beyond the community boundaries.

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\(^4\) The GNFC, constituted by all Chief fishermen and in a separate division all Chief fish processors in the country, forms part of NAFAG as representative of marine artisanal fishing. Besides the GNFC, other bodies in the umbrella organisation of NAFAG are the National Inland Canoe Fishermen Council as well as several industrial fishing companies. On the national scale every coastal Chief fisherman in Ghana is a member of the GNFC, which in turn takes up negotiations with the government to improve the working conditions of the country’s fish workers and through its regional branches organizes the proportional distribution of subsidised fishing inputs among the country’s various fishing communities.
In Ghana, Kraan (2009: 182ff) argues, formal fisheries governance is structured along dual lines with governing bodies stemming from both pre-colonial indigenous states and (decentralised) government institutions. Mainstream political institutions introduced by the post-colonial state to manage the marine resource nationally and on the decentralised governance levels are largely defined in the 2002 Fisheries Act\(^4\).

The central instrument of fisheries management in the Ghanaian Government as defined in the 2002 Fisheries Act 625 is the Fisheries Commission\(^4\). According to the document, the object of the Commission is to regulate and manage the utilisation of the fishery resources of Ghana and co-ordinate the policies in relation to them. However, with the transition of power in 2008 different stakeholders criticised the long inactivity of the government regarding the reinstallation of the Fisheries Commission under the Mills administration (e.g. FoN stakeholder meeting, 21.08.2009). Notably, Ghana’s fisheries governance system operated without its main executive body throughout the peak months of the 2009 premix crisis, which provides the frame of events for this study of interest representation in fisheries management. On Tuesday, 1 September 2009 nine months after the elections, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) finally inaugurated the commission, charging it
to develop modalities for the management and development of the fishing industry, ensure proper conservation of resources, and collaborate with Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies having fishing communities for the enforcement of its bye-laws (GNA, 01.09.2009).

The Fisheries Commission operates according to inputs from MOFA’s internal Marine Fisheries Research Division (MFRD) situated in Tema and along the guidelines and regulations of international discourses released through the Regional Fishery Bodies (RFB), for example, the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) under the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries may be the most prominent example of post-national intervention in the regulation of the living marine resources\(^4\).

On the regional level, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture\(^4\) is represented with its ministerial offices, in Cape Coast in the case of the Central Region. Archival research supports the

\(^{4}\)The 2002 Fisheries Act has until today not been passed the Ghanaian parliament as a Legal Instrument (LI) involving concrete policy formulations. The legal basis to prosecute those who infringe on the law is therefore severely weakened. In December 2007, Gladys Asmah former Minister of Fisheries announced the Act would soon be put before Parliament. After the transition of power in 2008, claims had been raised that the Act needed revision especially regarding developments since 2002 in the pair trawling issue and the increasing utilization of contested fishing methods such as the light fishing (cf. FAO Country Profile for an extensive overview over the history of fisheries legislation in Ghana).

\(^{4}\)The Fisheries Commission is constituted by a representative each of the Ministry responsible for Transport, the Ministry responsible for Defense, the Ministry responsible for Environment, the Ghana Marine Fishing Officers Association, the Water Research Institute, the Ghana Irrigation Development Authority, the National Fisheries Association of Ghana (one representing \textit{artisanal fishermen} and the other representing industrial fishing vessel owners), and one other person with requisite knowledge of the fishing industry or natural resource renewal management. The chairperson of the Commission is to be nominated by the Ghanaian President (Fisheries Act 625, Part 1 Section 4; \textit{my emphasis}).

\(^{4}\)The actual origin and background of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (FAO 1995) can be found under the following URL http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/v9878e/v9878e00.HTM#BAC.

\(^{4}\)During the last Kufuor administration, fisheries issues were dealt with in a separate Ministry of Fisheries (MOFI) headed by the Minister of Fisheries Gladys Asmah. With the transition of power in 2008, the ministries of Fisheries and Food and Agriculture were joint together again with a Director of Fisheries in charge of the fishing sector.
observation presented by Thampi (2003: 11) that “in the early 70s and 80s, the ministry worked directly with the fishermen and farmers, giving credit in the form of input. However, presently the ministry links fishermen to organisation and financial institutions because it has proven to be too difficult and inefficient to work directly with the fishermen”. Referring mainly to assistance in the form of loans, Thampi however disregards how the Regional ministries do delegate representatives of the Fisheries Directorate to operate workshops for the repair of inshore vessels in a selection of fishing communities. These also serve as institutions for information dissemination (e.g. on safety standards, banned fishing techniques, etc), data collection, registration\(^\text{49}\) and some extent of monitoring.

The actual body charged with the monitoring and surveillance of fishing regulations however has been designed with the so-called Community-Based Fisheries Management Committees (CBFMC). Despite the popularity of the co-management approach, monitoring and surveillance cannot take place on the local level only. In this regard, the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) Division of the Fisheries Commission is responsible for monitoring the compliance and enforcement of the fisheries regulations on the national level. Notably, its patrol vessels are yet to be secured by the government. Thus, in some areas co-operations between the communities and the Ghanaian navy have been realised, allowing the naval vessels to enforce community bye-laws in the respective waters\(^\text{50}\).

The stakes of the Chief fisherman in these governance institutions are diverse. Most importantly, during the period of data collection, the various Chief fishermen of Ghana lobbied for a revitalisation of the local CBFMC with their subsequent integration into wider governance structures in order to increase the committee’s capacity to act. Initially, the CBFMC were introduced in 1997 during the World Bank-funded Fisheries Sub-Sector Capacity Building Project, as a way of directly involving the local fishing communities and thereby addressing the continuing use of illicit fishing methods (dynamite, DDT, unapproved fishing nets among others)\(^\text{51}\). As Jentoft (2000) argues within the discourse surrounding the principle of co-management, the community is the crucial link between government agencies and individual users of the resource. Also, MOFA’s Marine Fisheries Research Division in Tema claims that the human factor cannot be overestimated because “you cannot monitor effectively enough, but once the community understands why a particular fishing net is harmful, the job is done”\(^\text{52}\).

However, the effectiveness of the CBFMCs in Ghana is largely limited by force of inadequate funding and the lack of a clear legal background. Despite the fact that all Ghanaian districts have passed their respective bye-laws, only twelve Assemblies have gazetted them so far. Moreover, as George Anti from Central Regional MOFA states, efforts are only starting to incorporate the CBFMCs into District Based Fisheries Management Committees (DBFMC) and finally Regional and National bodies in order to give them recognition as sub-committees of the District Assemblies and thus provide them with the necessary legal backing, means and resources and


\(^{50}\) Interview, George Anti, Central Regional Director of Fisheries, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Cape Coast, 16.09.2009

\(^{51}\) For a more concrete overview over the decentralised environmental management strategy of the Ministry of Environment in the 1990s, see Porter and Young (1998).

\(^{52}\) Interview, Papa Yaa Atobrah, Marine Fisheries Research Division, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Tema, 04.09.2009
eventually legislative authority to operate effectively. As a matter of fact, since the funding through the KEEA district assembly seized the Elmina CBFMC now needs to be supported financially through the offices of the Chief fisherman and the Paramount chief. This is however not sufficient to operate a fully staffed patrolling unit.

In the case of Elmina, the last Chief fisherman represented a rather exceptional case in the sense that he also took up direct lobbying with the ministries and government. Sometimes backed up by a newly created network of fisheries-related NGOs (“Fisheries Alliance”) Solomon played out his close connections to the NDC government whenever possible, and especially so during the 2009 national premix crisis. Notably, Solomon’s prominence in the nationwide negotiations was largely enabled by his constant presence in the local and national media. Making use of every media platform available to him to get his message across Solomon managed to intensify his lobbying and eventually get enough people on board of the cause to have the policy changed. The fact that the Chief fisherman’s advocacy is backed up by a direct mandate from the affected population accounts for the particular weight of his actions. Nevertheless, mere expertise in the fishing business is not enough to successfully impact on the policy arenas on the regional and national scale. A powerful leader in the fishing community thus also needs to be knowledgeable about the workings of power on the larger governance scales and particularly be well accustomed with the workings of the national media.

As Valsecchi (2008: 139f) identifies, chieftaincy in Ghana is a “necessary” institution and a fundamental aspect of present-day political culture. “More than any other player on the national stage”, Valsecchi states, “they [chiefs] are potentially in a better position to re-shape, manipulate, enlarge or shrink boundaries within the state, beyond the state, and beside the state. (…) The remit of Ghanaian chiefs may well go ‘beyond the state’, but chieftaincy can hardly be defined as a non-state player. It is an integral part of the national life – and of the state as well”, not at last since chief-state relations have been recognised and regulated under the Ghanaian constitution.

Notably, chiefs in Ghana are supposed to retain from partisan politics. This is stated in article 276(1) of the Ghanaian Constitution. Despite the fact that Solomon may not represent a Chief in the constitutional sense, his partisan connections in the realm of mainstream political leadership need to be looked at in a critical light. In fact, Jojo Solomon cannot be judged for publicly abusing the platforms inherent in his responsibilities for party politics, for example, during his frequent appearances in the local and national media. As a matter of fact, Solomon has been a strong opponent of the mixing of partisan politics and fishing issues, stating that if the officials wanted a share of the premix business they should themselves go out to sea eight hours a day and instead of making everything more complicated they should rather leave the business to people who understand it. However, Jojo Solomon is at the same time a rather prominent member of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and rumours have it that he would not have made it back to the top of the premix committee if it was not for his party to have returned to power in the elections of 2008.

53 Interview, George Anti, Central Regional Director of Fisheries, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Cape Coast, 16.09.2009
54 Interview, Commando, Community-Based Fisheries Management Committee, Elmina, 25.09.2009
55 As Solomon claimed in our second interview, President Mills’ first official visit was to Elmina to thank for the support of the town’s NDC members the elections of December 2008 (interview, Takoradi, 21.08.2009).
56 Interview, Jojo Solomon, Elmina Chief fisherman, Takoradi, 21.08.2009
As a matter of fact, with the restructuring of the premix distribution, the NDC-led government rewarded numerous of its supporters with more or less influential positions throughout the policy implementation. The most prominent Edinafe benefiting from the 2009 premix re-organisation doubtlessly is Maanoma who was promoted to the office of the Central Regional Premix Coordinator within the National Premix Committee. Other names recur when comparing the lists of organisers behind protests directed against the former NPP government, especially the large scale “Joint Action Against Pair Trawling” of 2008 (abbreviated “JAAPT”, cf. Chapter 6 for a more detailed description of the demonstration and its organisers), and the recent staff of the National Premix Committee and Secretariat. Also on the local level, party politics clearly influenced the initial composition of the Elmina Landing Beach Committee. While Solomon’s friendship and partisan ties with Maanoma certainly had some impact on his re-installation as the head of the local premix distribution, also other local opinion leaders from JAAPT circles found their way into the committee. The constellation only came to an end when some ill-advised arguments between Maanoma and Solomon became public and eventually resulted in an inter-partisan power struggle that Solomon was not able to endure.

In the end, in the days of his contested authority it was neither the vocational nor the mainstream-political characteristics of his leadership that offered Solomon his most important backing. While rumours spread beyond the confines of the District Assembly that his party clearly had broken with him in favour of his opponent Maanoma and no longer saw him as an “NDC man”, Solomon could only rely on the traditional aspects and connections of his leadership to struggle for the reproduction of his authority especially in view of the disfavour of the local fishermen and canoe owners.

c. Traditional leadership

Vocational “chieftaincy” in Ghana is a very common phenomenon. For example, probably every Ghanaian market possesses a “tomato chief”, a chief of onion sellers, etc. who negotiates on behalf of the other traders in the same segment. Yet, other than these market-based, vocational chiefs, the Chief fisherman is inevitably connected to the traditional authorities of his community, and the value of his “chieftaincy” is clearly expressed in his paraphernalia of power. The Chief fisherman’s traditional leadership derives from historical connections in the norms and beliefs of the coastal people. While nowadays, the roles of *apofahene* and *koutokobene* (the female counterpart of the Chief fisherman among the fish processors) comprise of mainly dispute settlement and representation on the inside and outside of the community, Kyerekuanda recalls how the institution of the Chief fisherman in the past included a bigger variety of responsibilities.

In those days the Chief fishermen were traditional rulers who had stools, traditional stools. And the CF was in particular also always selected from a particular clan. You see, it was not a thing that anybody could be selected into, the office of the Chief fisherman. It [the institution of the Chief fisherman] started from there [Moree, Fanteland]. (...) Then it spread to other parts of the coast land. Now, it was so because a Chief fisherman at that time was also the priest because he always had a shrine. You see, where prayers or libation is poured to the deities to help the fishermen and make them prosperous. So, apart from being a Chief fisherman he was also a priest. (...) At the beach he was the leader at that time. With him were his elders. And with his elders they administered the landing beach. (...) It was the duty of the Chief fisherman at that time to come to the beach and before the fishermen set off to make sure that anybody has left without any
problems. If at the beginning of the expedition there was a problem (...) they would be there to help you to make sure everything is ok. And then in the evening, he would also be there to see that everybody had safely landed. Every canoe owner who came down with fish was under obligation to give the Chief fisherman a certain quantity (...) of fish57.

The ritual responsibilities of the Chief fisherman in Elmina are recently restricted to the annual Bakattu festival, but variations certainly occur among the different fishing communities around Elmina and along the Ghanaian coast. This is not to suggest that the Chief fisherman has no longer any stake in the ritual regulation of the everyday fishing-related environment. In contrast, the alliance and mutual support between the Chief fisherman and the traditional priests of Elmina are a matter of constant debate not at last about the Chief fisherman’s financial assistance to the ritual activities in Elmina from the funds of the premix business.

Moreover, in the case of Elmina, the institutions of the Paramount chief and the Chief fisherman are literally entangled. The first time I met Jojo Solomon, he took part in the preparatory meetings for the biannual Panafest celebration58. As the organisers of the festival presented their problems to the omabene, the Chief fisherman was seated close to Conduah VI, dressed in his traditional cloth and facing the audience from the same respectable distance as the town’s king.

On that day, both chiefs in Elmina performed the traditional aspects of their position with great effort, which became especially visible in dress codes but also in the ways addresses are made to them. Scholars working on the dynamics of power and the rule of law in Africa have identified the various conditions under which traditional authorities (inter-) act. According to van Binsbergen (2003: 29), “it is important to realise that legitimization is essentially a quality of being found to be in accordance with a set of rules and meanings held collectively by a particular set of people”. A chief in Ghana derives his legitimacy from the perspective of the state by being gazetted officially while this procedure does not necessarily affect his legitimacy from the point of view of his subjects. The power base of the chief’s agency, according to van Binsbergen (2003: 36) then “does not derive from recognition by the modern national state but lies in a dexterous display of traditional authority”. As Wartemberg (1950: 95) describes it for the case of Elmina,

[...] the person of the Omanhen is considered sacred by virtue of his office as the paramount head of the state and the power vested in him in the ancient charge. The prefix ‘Nana’ by which he is designated is an official title which commands respect and reverence from his people, while the paraphernalia or emblems of state which consist of the ancient stool, state umbrella, palanquin, sword, staff, bulrush hat, bataker, state jewelry, etc., are the acknowledged symbol of his regal office and dignity. The authority he exercises is made sacred by the reciprocal convenant in the oath of loyalty which is administered to and taken by him at his installation, and the allegiance and homage paid to by the Oman (state) and Amamfo in the name of the community.

57 Interview, Nii Abrelo Kyerekuanda, GNCFC, Jamestown, 07.10.2009
58 “Panafest” is a bi-annual pan-African festival held in Elmina to commemorate the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. During last year’s festival, workshops are held under the motto ‘kasa’ (speak out) in order to promote voice, especially among women. The central event of the festival is the ‘Akwaaba’ or welcoming ceremony during which people from the African diaspora are ritually reunited with their ancestral land. According to the organizers, “Panafest” thus stands for the promotion of unity, Pan-Africanism and the development of Africa. From the side of the hosts in Elmina, interestingly, “Panafest” is above all seen as a source of enhancing local tourism and generating economic influx.
The basis of legitimacy of Ghana’s Paramount chiefs has been described in much detail in the scientific literature (e.g. Odotei, 2006b) and does not require repetition at this point. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the institution of the *apofobene* (Chief fisherman) who together with the *konkobene* (Chief fish processor) operates as the leader and representative of the people engaging in fishing activities. As a matter of fact, Ghana’s Chief fishermen are difficult to grasp as an institution as they base their authority on different logics of eligibility and consequently different forms of mandate. Thus, while some inherit a family stool others are elected freely on the basis of their fishing expertise. In this light, while Conduah VI clearly bases his traditional authority on a principle of descent (though in the exceptional case of Elmina he is not “enstooled” by the queen mother with the stool of the royal lineage) the Chief fisherman performs the traditional aspects of his position in the allusion to a source of legitimacy that is actually not applicable to him. As a matter of fact, the Chief fisherman of Elmina is not in the possession of a family stool. Instead, as will be noted in the last section of this chapter, he depends solely on the vote of the local canoe owners. The Paramount chief and Chief fisherman of Elmina, despite their largely comparable display of insignia of power thus clearly base their legitimacy on different origins. While the performance of traditional norms and values doubtlessly secured Jojo Solomon the support of those people close to the Paramount chief and the traditional council it was not enough to mobilise the support of those who actually decide upon his mandate, that is, the canoe owners of Elmina who besides representative functions in the traditional council first and foremost consider the Chief fisherman to stand up for their interests and their property.

These aspects of leadership inherent in the position of the Chief fisherman represent ideal-types and thus are not mutually exclusive, that is, the different aspects of leadership may as well overlap. While the Chief fisherman is clearly a carrier of “traditional” authority being sworn in by the Traditional Council and holding particular indigenous paraphernalia of authority, he also clearly constitutes a vocationally distinct form of leadership. At the same time, certain vocational tasks may require the reference to traditional norms and values in order to be solved. Eventually, a Chief fisherman may as well be active in party politics, and most likely entertain close relations with the public authorities, not at last in order to insure himself for crises of authority concerning the other aspects of his leadership. Doubtlessly, this integration of different bases of authority in one institution accounts for the Chief fisherman’s extensive influence in artisanal fisheries management and not at last for his success as an intermediary in conflict management on various scales. This almost extensive character of leadership then finds its expression also in the various alliances of power through which the Chief fisherman exerts his influence and control.

d. Chief fisherman and Paramount chief – an alliance of interest

The case of Nana Jojo Solomon’s crisis of authority revealed above all the alliance between the two traditional leaders of Elmina, the Chief fisherman and Paramount chief. As one observer in Elmina shared his analysis of the situation with me

> [i]t all depends on the Paramount chief [sic]. So, if you offend the Chief fisherman that means you have offended the Paramount chief. If maybe there is a protest and the Chief fisherman Jojo
Solomon is overthrown, the Paramount chief would insist that those who made the coup would be arrested\(^\text{59}\).

The grounds for the strategic alliance between Paramount chief and Chief fisherman during the Elmina premix conflict are at least twofold. As has been pointed out already, the Chief fisherman of Elmina is a holder of traditional authority and therefore has a stake in the Edina Traditional Council. However, the support Solomon received from Nana Conduah VI, Paramount chief of Elmina, cannot solely be attributed to Solomon’s relation to the Traditional Council. As will be illustrated in close detail in the subsequent section, Solomon never had any claim to a stool through descent from a “royal” line of Chief fishermen and his stance in the traditional council thus remained limited to a literally compensable office.

The most probable reason why Nana Conduah VI arduously fought for Jojo Solomon to remain in power reveals itself in the history behind the two men’s relationship. Notably, Nana Jojo Solomon and Nana Conduah VI had for a long time not been on talking terms as Solomon’s family failed to support the Paramount Chief during Elmina’s heated chieftaincy conflict of 1998 (the following sections will describe this conflict in further detail). As the same informant put it, it is generally believed that even the swearing of the Chief fisherman’s oath with the Traditional Council faced some irregularity in this respect\(^\text{60}\). The reason why the two chiefs recently seemed to share a close bond of friendship lies in the simple fact that Solomon provided part of the premix revenue to the benefit of the Paramount chief’s council, especially for the restoration of the building of the Edina Traditional Council. From that time on, the two chiefs were hardly seen in the absence of the respective other. This is remarkable especially in view of the fact that other “traditional” leaders in Elmina, mainly the shrine priests (\textit{okomfo}), accuse the Chief fishermen of failing to support the traditions in Elmina by refusing to provide part of the premix interest to cater for the priests’ ritual inputs during the annual \textit{Bakatue} festival\(^\text{61}\). Taking into consideration that the \textit{Bakatue} (or the ritual opening of the lagoon) is basically all about securing the abundance of fish in the following fishing season, the Chief fisherman’s refusal to provide higher contributions appears in a rather significant light.

In order to understand the role of Nana Conduah VI and his particular position in the Elminan society, one has to extend the view further into the past. It was not for the first time, when in 1998, in the course of deciding the succession of the \textit{Omanbene’s} stool, disunity arose over the most suitable candidate. As a matter of fact, over the last centuries, Elmina has seen a series of events connected to the contested legitimacy of the \textit{Omanbene} that put the town’s internal peace and stability to a potential threat and eventually impacted on the alliances of power involving the Paramount chief, the Chief fisherman, the local \textit{asafu} companies (former military and defence associations) and not at last the voluntary associations (which will be described in Chapter 6).

\(^{59}\) Interview, AAC, Elmina, 25.08.2009

\(^{60}\) Interview, AAC, Elmina, 25.08.2009

\(^{61}\) Interview, UKA, assistant to the \textit{okomfo}, Elmina, 14.08.2009
According to Wartemberg’s “Sao Jorge de El Mina” (1950: 95), already in the 1940s “there has occurred a departure in the ceremony [to enstool a Paramount chief] which has made irregular the installation and invalidated the same for popular approbation”. Gocking points out that as was typical of other coastal towns during the colonial period, Elmina was divided into political factions that vied with one another over who should be the town’s Omanhen, or paramount chief. Unlike most other towns in the Akan area of the colony’s littoral, Elmina followed patrilineal succession probably inherited from the Guan people who inhabited this area before the coming of the Akans. However, as early as 1915 there had been a movement to abandon patrilineal succession and to bring Elmina into line with other towns on the coast where Akan matrilineal succession obtained. It was not until 1942 that this option emerged again after the destoolment of Anowii. In contrast to the past, on this occasion those in favor of matrilineal succession had a viable candidate, J.E.K. Botsio, who in keeping with the trend in the 1940s was ‘educated’ (2000: 2016).

In view of the historical developments, the Omanhen of Elmina nowadays derives his mandate from the ten akyikudo, leaders of the ten asafo companies, particularly the head of Company No 7 of which the Paramount chief is required to be a member. At the same time, he has to belong to a particular ebusua clan and an elder group referred to as nkonuaba. In general, a man is enstooled as the Omanhen’s successor as his son conceived after enstoolment (other than in the Ashanti context where a Paramount chief’s first born son is privileged). Decision is also made on the basis of his moral conduct and suitability. This procedure of the Elmina Omanhen being installed by the asafo companies instead of the queen mother and the elders that constitute the king makers in other Akan communities explains why the Omanhen of Elmina is enstooled with the sword only and not with the family stool.

These historical developments are, however, only partially accountable for the recent chieftaincy dispute prevailing in Elmina since 1998. As Yarak (1993) points out, “tradition” in Elmina also has an inherently invented quality. In the early 19th century, Yarak claims, the Ntana cult used to be of much higher influence than the recently dominant Benea cult.

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62 As Wartemberg’s account of the entstoolment of Nana Condual IV on 17 December 1949 tells us, whenever a Paramount chief of Elmina dies, an incident referred to as “Asase apae” (literally meaning “a fissure in the earth has occurred”), the news are made public by gong-gong after the ceremonial rights have been concluded and preparations for the funeral completed. The actual time and location of the interment remains secret to the ebusua (patrilineal clan), amamfo (councillors) and members of the royal household (cf. Annex B for a graphic illustration of the following relationships). This is when the amamfo get together for consultation with the Enyampon asafo company as acknowledged electors of the successor. After all possible candidates from the company have been explored, that is, have been studied carefully in their social behaviour and moral conduct, a successor will be nominated and payment of a customary fee (sorkabyin) be made by the ebusua to the asafo company. The candidate will then be put before the tugben and the supfo (the leaders of the asafo companies, locally referred to as akyikudo) for installation to office. After a preparatory confinement over three to thirteen weeks hosted by the amamfo, the installation ceremonies will be executed beginning with a sacred cleaning at the sacred pools in Bantuma (called Nkondumu and Atrakamu). Being dressed in the jewellery and adornment of his office the Omanhen will then have sacred leaves placed around his neck and will be led to the royal household with arm drums. This is where the sacred oath of office is administered before the gathered people and asafo of Elmina. The sword will be placed in the Omanhen’s hand and the installation will be concluded by rites performed by the konfo (fetish priest). Finally, the new Chief will be paraded through the cheering population in the palanquin, escorted by the No 7 asafo company, stopping at every spot associated with a deity to present eggs and eto, that is, mashed yams with palm oil (Wartemberg 1950: 95ff).

63 Interview, inpi, Asafo No 5, Elmina, 13.09.2009
In 1836, in a dramatic conflict which arose over slaves seeking refuge at the Ntora shrine, Dutch soldiers forced their way into the Ntora shrine house, arrested okonfo Kwamena Isa, and seized all those who served him. He was subsequently banned from Elmina. The "invention" of the expressly public Bakatue may have marked Ntora's eclipse by Benya. Similarly, the prominent role of the *Edenaben* in the Bakatue symbolised the new-found prestige of the Elmina kingship (ibid: 2).

As this quotation implies, already in the early 19th century, the position of the Elmina Omanbene was “exceptionally weak” (ibid). One structural explanation for the constant contestation of the Omanbene’s sovereignty may lie in the fact that the king of Elmina fulfills a double-function, being on the one hand king of the town, that is, the representative head of the town as embodied by all asafo companies, and on the other hand, head of the traditional state or paramountcy, that is, leader of the chiefs whose authority is vested in the *ebusua* and the (urban and non-urban) land connected to it (cf. Annex B for a schematic overview of the structure of the Elmina paramountcy). This double function destabilises the authority of the Paramount chief as state and town in Elmina are socio-spatially diverging from each other. Most importantly, however, the institution of the Omanbene is embodied in his relationship with the asafo companies of which he is not the leader. Thus, if the relationship with the asafo companies is bad, the sovereignty of the *Omanbene* is limited. This, according to historic record, left the *Omanbene* to be seen as a man “with who we [the people of Elmina] can do whatever we want to do.”

Thus, the position of the *Omanbene* was inherently and structurally challenged already long before the installation of Nana Conduah VI. Besides this historic creation of different factions relating to the most central traditional power structure in Elmina, also other recent reasons can be identified for the continuous contestation of the *Edenaben*’s rule. Notably, the installation of Nana Conduah VI was preceded by severe difficulties to find a suitable successor who could transcend the deep split in the Elminian society. In the absence of any viable alternative, Conduah thus was installed as a more or less unwanted compromise and until today remains in power only through the support of the *ebusua* chiefs.

At the same time, from the day of his inception, the *akkyiko* (heads of the Elminian asafo companies) doubted Conduah’s qualification for the throne. Relations between the Paramount chief and the asafo companies have been hostile ever since and eventually culminated in an eight year long court case. The consequent boycott of the asafo companies of the yearly Bakatue festival is just one expression of how the chieflyancy dispute continuously impacts on the power dynamics of Elmina. As a matter of fact, many people blame the ongoing dispute for the growing inactivity and diminishing membership base of the Elmina asafo companies. Notably, at least three asafo companies are said to have given up their daily activities in the last years. Another informant stated, however, that in order to revitalise the traditional life in Elmina the *supi* of the opposing asafo companies had recently been replaced. Not only in view of the festivities but also in times of political crisis, people still widely acknowledge the potential role played by the asafo companies. Especially, in terms of mobilising larger groups of people, for

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64 Personal conversation, Dr Doormont, University of Groningen, Groningen, 30.07.2010
65 Instead of the asafo companies, the Paramount chief is lead to the festival ground by a cultural group called “Apatampa”. This group had been initialised by the *konkobo* who together with her family is a fierce supporter of traditional life in Elmina. The name “Apatampa” refers to a Ghanaian dance symbolizing shelter (‘pata’).
67 Interview, Akyin, Elmina, 15.11.2009
example for protests, the asafo songs until today have a strong impact on people as they convey a strong degree of seriousness.

In view of the historicity and the ongoing relativity of the institution of the Edenahene, Nana Conduah VI, recent king of Elmina, represents a player in a complex network of social relations. Despite the constraining factors inherent in these social relations, Conduah VI needs to be recognised as a flexible and highly successful agent in the community structure of Elmina. Thus, despite the doubts brought forward against Nana Conduah VI, the Omanhene managed to secure his authority over many years, mainly through his intelligent choices of forums and alliances. The impressive continuity and resilience of the recent Omanhene’s authority used to be mainly secured through the support of the local youth groups. As a former member of the “Island/Freetown” association, Conduah had direct access to the youth of Elmina whose support he easily mobilised by making promises about taking them abroad after his successful enstoolment. The latter readily guided Conduah during his installation. As one informant recalls, this led to serious fights between the youth and the akyikudo.

“At that day it rained a lot, heavy rain. So, everything scattered. The drums stopped and in fact it was a very, very terrible story. They were fighting, the king makers and the youth”68. In the following years, fights between the kingmakers and the youth continued leading to the destruction of some of the asafo posts by the “Island” youth in 2002. Clearly intended as a mockery of the authority claimed by the supis, the actions were aimed at the statues that symbolise the identity of the company and more specifically at the paraphernalia of power attached to the asafo posts’ statues, that is, the sword of the supi.

Figure 5: reconstruction of the asafo post destroyed by supporters of the Paramount Chief

Realizing that the initial promises never materialised, the support of the youth decreased over the years. In the 2009 crisis of the Chief fisherman, as a holder of traditional authority, the “Island” youth took an ambiguous to even hostile stand towards the alliance between Chief fisherman and Paramount chief of Elmina.

68 Interview, AAC, Elmina, 12.09.2009
In the place of this early and very radical form of “support”, Conduah VI recently relies on the loyalty of a number of people with close ties to the traditional council. One group of people coming to his support are the family members of another traditional leader, more specifically, the *konkobene* or Chief of fish processors. This support entails the replacement of the refraining *asafo* companies during the *Bakattue* festivities and the mobilisation of supporters for his causes. It is interesting how the *konkobene*, already before her installation into this office, decided to form a local dance troupe called “Apatampa” in order to support the Paramount chief in this regard. On the one hand, as the following chapter is going to show, women face particular difficulties to enter the public debate. Dancing and singing then may represent a sensitised mechanism to publicly express their support or opposition for a political development. At the same time, the choice of the dance troupe’s name is very explicit. Situated in the so-called traditional forms of local culture, the widely known “Apatampa” dance not only represents a positive reference to the traditional values but also stands for protection and shelter (*pata* meaning shelter or shed). As a matter of fact, the demonstration for Jojo Solomon on 20 September 2009 involved not only those members of the *konkobene*’s family who themselves hold traditional offices, that is, her brother as the assistant to the *okomfo* and thus may have feared to be themselves affected by the instability of power. In fact, the children of the *konkobene* made use of their positions within the voluntary associations to mobilise for Solomon and ultimately for the integrity of traditional leadership in Elmina.

The *konkobene* bases her authority on the general respect earned previous to her installation but also on the insignia of power handed down from *konkobene* to *konkobene*. In the case of the Elmina Chief fish processor, this is materialised in a bell rung in front of the houses of conflicting parties to call the opponents together for mediation. The application of this bell in the demonstration favouring the Elmina Chief fisherman shows not only the symbolic power of the instrument in conflict resolution but also indicates the close connection between the two power positions of *apofobene* and *konkobene*.

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69 Interview, *konkobene*, Elmina, 08.08.2009
70 As Overà (2001: 51) analyses convincingly, the separate male and female hierarchies in the production process presented earlier can be interpreted as a manifestation of an underlying principle in the Akan authority system. At all levels of the lineage, male (*shere*) and female leaders (*shemma*) reproduce a duality of gender relations. “The power balance between the female and the male hierarchies is, however, often asymmetric: while male leaders usually exercise their authority in society as a whole, the authority of female leaders seldom extends beyond women’s domains” (Overà 2001: 51).
While both chiefs in Elmina had to face their own “social drama” around the contestation of their authority, the dynamics of contestation cannot simply be equated. While Nana Conduah VI continues to successfully refute any question about the basis of his legitimacy and thereby continuously reproduces his sovereignty as the sole sovereign ruler of Elmina, Nana Solomon eventually had to face the limits of his mandate.

e. The limitations of the Chief fisherman’s mandate

As has been mentioned earlier, the institution of the Chief fisherman is difficult to grasp analytically due to the diversity of mandates at play among the hundreds of fishing communities along the Ghanaian coast (irrespective of their predominant ethnicity, all coastal communities possess governance structures headed by a Chief fisherman). Odotei (1999) nonetheless manages to identify the following principles underlying mandates of vocational chieftaincy in artisanal marine fishing in Ghana.

The first and most central of Odotei’s arguments in view of the considerable diversity in the industry concerns “the peculiar blend of conservatism, traditionalism and dynamism and the local variations in the exercise and effectiveness of authority” (ibid: 18). As Odotei goes on, the common denominator in this variability is always the basic qualification for the position of the Chief fisherman is his experience in fishing, including in places where the position is hereditary.

Thirdly, from a gender perspective the Chief fisherman and his council (besanfo, ‘the seven elders’)

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71 Every Chief fisherman is assisted by a council whose members virtually qualify with the same characteristics as their leader. As for the Chief fisherman, selection may be open to all but in some places efforts are made to assure
and inshore vessels, etc.). They thus deal with an industry which is characterised by the indispensable complementarity between male and female labour (cf., Chapter 6). Given the absence of women in the council, its workings as a representative body from a Western perspective easily prompt scepticism. However, authority and mandate in artisanal fishing communities function according to different logics and authority relations in Ghana’s artisanal canoe fishing are diverse, resting on principles like kinship, interdependence or integration (Odotei 1999: 17).

As Odotei puts it, “in Cape Coast, Winneba and among the Ga-Adangme the position is hereditary. The eligible lineages are backed by a historical tradition of being either the first to introduce marine fishing to the locality or acknowledged experts in the community sometime in the past” (ibid: 25). The same has been observed in Moree, which claims to be the starting point of marine fishing in Ghana. The Chief fisherman of Moree, prominent beyond Ghana under the stool name Kogya is elected among a particular asafo company in his community, that is, succeeded patrilineally. In Cape Coast, a group of elder fishermen revealed to me their dissatisfaction with the hereditary system, criticizing it that allowed people to take the stool who had never been on a canoe before. In these situations, the Chief fisherman is most likely to have an associate who is experienced in the fishing work and therefore equipped to give informed judgment in case of conflicts and emergency. As Kyerekuanda mentioned however, the representative position within the GNCFC is reserved for the owner of the stool as a delegate of his community.

Where the position is achieved by expertise and merit, Odotei (ibid: 26) points out, in order to qualify for the stool of the Chief fisherman

a man should be of good standing among fishermen, that is, he should be an owner of a canoe and gear, a man in this class is said to be whole, complete (Odei mu in Fante). Personal attributes as patience, tolerance, boldness, strength, concern and time (adagya) for other people’s welfare and ability to command respect are very essential. In some towns such as Elmina and Komenda all fishermen are eligible. In others such as Anomabo, Dixcove and Moree eligibility is limited to selected groups in town.

In Elmina, despite his various sources of influence the Chief fisherman ultimately is dependent on the mandate of the local canoe owners. In order to make a Chief fisherman, the canoe owners decide secretly on the person best suitable. When this choice is announced and misunderstandings arise – that is, the non-owning fishermen rise up to tell the canoe owners that another man should become the next Chief fisherman – the canoe owners may or may not consider these propositions but will eventually rise their candidate up in the air with drums “to make sense that this man is the new Chief fisherman who can support the fishermen [and] to describe who the person is” therewith bringing the procedure to its conclusion.

As has been stated initially, Jojo Solomon was elected Chief fisherman of Elmina on the basis of his widely acknowledged level of education and his expertise in the fishing business gained as a

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62 Interview, Kogya, Moree, 30.11.2009
63 Group discussion, Cape Coast, 19.08.2009
64 Interview, Nii Ahreo Kyerekuanda, GNCFC, Jamestown, 07.10.2009
65 Interview, AAC, Elmina, 25.08.2009
long-term canoe and boat owner in the small coastal town. Besides his eligibility for the tasks inherent in the position of the Chief fisherman and his respected character, Solomon also gained popular support by favouring the application of the light fishing method.

Light fishing is a very suitable entry-point for explaining the events in the Elmina fishing community from the perspective of the common argument that “healthy marine resources require healthy community structures” (Jentoft, 2003). Among and within Ghana’s fisheries governance institutions, especially within the GNCFC, disagreement and disunity persists as to whether the light fishing should be banned due to its potentially harmful effects for the long-term survival of the fishing industry. While some Chief fishermen follow the advice of the Marine Fisheries Research Division in Tema to completely ban the light fishing activities, others deliberately ignore the potential risk and advocate for the measure thereby significantly underpinning their standing in their communities. Not surprisingly, a technique that yields an immediate improvement in the fishermen’s income situation entails broad support in the community never mind the potential harm caused to the source of the livelihood.

In short, the stool of the Elmina Chief fisherman is neither inherited nor decided by general vote but simply installed by oral proclamation of a group of canoe owners claiming the exclusive right to declare the leader of their vocational community in their own best interest. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that every fisherman has the potential to be enstooled as the next Chief fisherman. Despite this relative democratisation of leadership in artisanal canoe fishing, a Chief fisherman cannot base his actions on any grounded authority without being sworn in by the Omanhene. The role of the Omanhene is however limited to this ritual act although the Paramount chief represents the ultimate resort to find a final and incontestable solution in cases involving divergent interests within the community. This is even truer for conflicts that concern other “traditional” leaders like the Chief fisherman who has a stake in the Omanhene’s Traditional Council.

As my main informant among the mobilised canoe owners tried to convince me, the canoe owners uniformly agreed (only 25 to 30 took part in demos, but they claimed that majority votes had been taken within the association) that the Paramount chief did not have any right to interfere with the business of the canoe owners in installing their Chief fisherman. As a matter of fact, Jojo Solomon was the first Chief fisherman in Elmina who refused to vacate his office in view of the canoe owners’ dissatisfaction. While he himself read out the letter that removed the latter Chief fisherman from his post, Solomon himself reacted to the canoe owners’ initiative against him with the mobilisation of his allies in other influential positions and eventually with the attempted redefinition of the bases of his legitimacy. The strategy of the chiefly alliance claimed that Solomon as a “gazetted” chief could not be removed from his post by simply declaring his mandate to be finished. The canoe owners however could not be fooled by this strategy, knowing that there is no such procedure as the official gazetting of the Elmina Chief fisherman. The Chief fisherman in the accompanying discourses was generally compared to the captain of a football team who, when failing to deliver good results would simply be replaced by his team mates.

“We are the majority” the same canoe owner claimed “and the majority counts the vote”. These dynamics of defining a majority vote represent an interesting ratio especially when considering

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76 Interview, canoe owners association, Elmina, 17.09.2009
the approximately 100 male canoe owners in a fishing town like Elmina counting currently 21,103 inhabitants (KEEA Demographic Characteristics). This is not to suggest that the mode of electing a Chief fisherman is considered undemocratic by the population of Elmina. In fact, decisions brought forward by the canoe owners usually find wide acceptance as people shy away from contradicting the owners of the business that provides for their daily bread. Also, it is important to note how canoe owners often represent the major mouthpiece and intermediary between their crews and official instances which in turn provides them with their crew’s profound trust and credibility. In this light, canoe owners are contested only when other underlying social bonds break. In this light, in the case of the contested authority of the Elmina Chief fisherman, the canoe owners’ initiative faced significant opposition in the population of Elmina mainly because it was perceived as a case of disrespect towards the town’s traditional authorities.

This mechanism of defining majority votes relates to the bargaining power inherent in associations of vocational groups and to the further hierarchies among them. Notably, the canoe owners channel their voice through the body of the canoe owners association, which in turn relates to the associations of other fish workers. By thus creating their own associational bargaining power (Silver 2003: 13), the canoe owners manage to oppose other influential stakeholders in society and to make their voice heard in the relevant arenas of decision making, such as the delegation and removal of individuals to posts and institutions of interest representation.

The installation of a Chief fisherman in Elmina is a highly relevant issue as the previous sections have conveyed. The institution of the Chief fisherman is doubtlessly the single most important figure in the fisheries governance system. This may be, as has been illustrated, due to the combination of traditional, vocational and mainstream-political characteristics of leadership. In this sense, the exclusive right of the canoe owners to nominate a communal leader that indeed has representative functions for all community members, including ordinary fishermen, women and youth is an important access mechanism to influence the issues debated on various political agendas. The following chapters are going to illustrate how the act of collective organising brings a source of bargaining power into existence, that independent from mainstream political and traditional leadership allows the fish workers to create a degree of structural (that is, associational) bargaining power to impact on the political developments in Elmina in their own terms. First, however, the dynamics of voice and enforced silence, respectively, as access mechanisms to important forums of the public debate will be looked at in greater detail.
5. Hierarchies of voice and “ownership of the debate” in the Elmina fishing community

“Do you see that net over there? I don’t own it.
So, I cannot say anything in this conflict.”
(Elmina canoe fisherman)

Voice as the ability to access relevant platforms of decision making is situated in the framework of governance institutions providing both opportunities and challenges for the expression of political agency on the ground but also is inevitably determined by socio-cultural factors. This chapter explains the differences in voice, that is, the ability to access arenas of decision making within the artisanal fishing community of Elmina and in this light aims at providing the background to the Chief fisherman’s mandate as granted and withdrawn exclusively by the Elmina canoe owners. Voice here will be understood as the ability to access relevant platforms of negotiation and decision making. Notably, according to Peluso and Ribot (2003: 153), access is defined as the “ability to benefit from things – including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols”. In the course of this chapter, the theory of access as developed by Peluso and Ribot will be elaborated on and fitted into the local context of the Elmina fishing community. More specifically, the focus will be on voice and the ability to impact on the content and structure of the public debate concerning relevant issues of fisheries management. Voice thus implies the possibility to articulate desires and grievances individually or collectively and to deliver them to the relevant platforms of negotiation and decision making. Empirically, holders of voice potentially exert power in the form of delegating individuals to offices and therefore impact on the constitution of institutions of interest representation and eventually on arenas of negotiating relevant policy. These platforms exist on different scales, and negotiating accepted versions of reality and the definition of problems within it can take place anywhere between the canoe at sea and the ministries in Accra. Thus, “voice” represents as much a means to an end, that is, an access mechanism as it is itself a form of social capital which can be transformed into other assets, especially through representation and participation in political decision making.

Access mechanisms, according to Peluso and Ribot, are the sets of relations “by which people gain, control, and maintain resource access” (ibid: 172f). As the key to platforms of decision making, access mechanisms largely depend on the individual’s position in the social hierarchy. Literature about fishing in Ghana is not scarce and the social organisation of the production relations in artisanal fishing is described in many instances (e.g. Overà, 2001; Odotei, 1999). Unfortunately, as a general observation, many of the existing studies exhibit a strong tendency to homogenise the sector. This is particularly true for Marxist perspectives like adopted by Vercruysse (1983: 182) who is analyzing gender and production relations as “an extension of the natural division of labour imposed by the family”. According to Vercruysse, the long hours spent setting and mending nets leave the fishermen little time for anything else but sleeping thus leaving the processing and marketing of the fish entirely to the women in the community. While such arguments doubtlessly have a heuristic value, their underlying logic is too convenient for the Western understanding as to allow for a more complex view on the socio-cultural dynamics at play in Ghana’s artisanal fishing communities.
The following paragraphs undermine the homogenizing tendencies inherent in the Marxist reductionism by approaching the socio-economic relations in the artisanal fishing community of Elmina through the lens of Peluso and Ribot’s theory of access. The theory of access, as introduced above does not exclude materialistic considerations. However, it looks at human interactions also from the perspective of relational and symbolic access mechanisms and therefore allows a more nuanced description of inequality in terms of the ability to benefit from resources, in this case platforms of debate and decision making. Notably, also “the fishermen” and “the fish smokers” themselves are subjected to various hierarchical differentiations and therefore to important differences in access, especially in terms of voice.

Hierarchies of voice and therefore “ownership of the debate” on relevant issues in the Elmina fishing community coincide directly with the division of labour in the fishing work. Yet, it is a premature conclusion to assume a direct causality between these two aspects. In fact, voice needs to be understood as determined by at least three major factors, each of which potentially levels or reinforces the other two. These relational access mechanisms, it will be shown, are constituted not only of gender but also of age and above all ownership in means of production. This is not to suggest that these factors make up discrete groups but they have to be read as merely analytical categories. As a matter of fact, groups can only be defined in relation to each other, that is, they are inherently interlinked rather than distinct and at least analytically inclusive of each other. Not at last, one’s voice or access to forums of debate shifts over the course of a life time and people may also hold more than one voice-enhancing “capital” at particular moments in time.

**a. The canoe as a gendered voice-enhancing asset**

The most powerful voice-enhancing access mechanism available to Elmina’s artisanal fishermen is ownership in means of production, ideally of a canoe or a fishing net. Canoe owners as the owners of the business are in general obeyed to and widely treated with high respect. On this basis, canoe owners in Elmina often claim a particular influence in the local level political decision making. This is particularly true for the delegation of representatives to relevant forums of resource distribution but also in terms of contesting established authorities, that is, the position of the Chief fisherman. Non-owners are generally excluded from processes of problem definition and decision making as the canoe owners’ claim over the exclusivity of these rights finds general acceptance.

The canoe owners’ collective voice is largely channelled through the “Edina canoe owners association”. Among canoe owners, the association claims, differences in status do not exist. Female members of this body, however, complain to be often regarded with ridicule and to be generally ignored when it comes to the distribution of benefits. The exact dynamics of collective speech within this association, especially regarding the two complementary access mechanisms of age and gender, will be discussed at a later stage when looking in greater detail into Elmina’s different membership-based organisations and amongst them the Elmina canoe owners association. At this point, it is worthwhile to point out why ownership in means of production at first sight seems to be monopolised by elder men.

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77 Interview, female canoe owner, Elmina, 19.10.2009
According to Dzodzie Tsikata, livelihood activities in Africa are shaped by longstanding gender segregations and segmentations. Not only are the burdens of reproductive activities or care work divided unequally, but gender inequalities also persist in the control of land and labour and thus means of production in the broadest sense. In general, economic and social policies and institutions such as markets and households sustain these gender inequalities in livelihood activities and their outcomes (Tsikata 2009: 1ff). In this sense, also female ownership of canoes is generally regarded as the exception and not the rule. As Overà observes, some female fish traders have become canoe owners themselves only to “secure their fish supply by hiring men to fish for them” (2001: 50, *my emphasis*). As a matter of fact, of the 105 canoes originating from Elmina, which hosts about 1000 canoes migrating seasonally from other parts of Ghana and beyond, currently not more than five are owned by women. Most canoes in Elmina are family property and families are generally reluctant to pass on the canoe through their daughters who do not go to sea themselves. Ceasing control over the property to the woman’s husband then equals a complete loss for the extended family, which in the predominantly Fante context of Elmina is basically organised along matrilineal lines of descent.

Matrilineal descent plays into the organisation of the fishing work in yet another way. As a man and his wife are members of different matrilineal clans (*ebuna*) so are their kinship obligations. Virilocality among artisanal fish workers is scarce and husbands are not forcedly expected to support their wives and children with their income. In contrast, the conjugal relationship among artisanal fishermen is often highly commercialised where husbands closely monitor and account for the quantities of fish provided “on commission”, as Vercreijissé puts it (1983: 181). In general, the system of remuneration in artisanal fishing takes the form of the distribution of shares of the catch (*biryiti*, ibid: 184) after expenses for equipments and fuel have been cut. Working fishermen are expected to provide their female relatives with fresh fish for household meals (*edži-nam*) and further processing. Wives are in turn obliged to generate income to maintain the household and provide husbands with capital for investment.

As a matter of fact, women’s labour serves as the main source of family wealth and wealth in the fishing community not at least since processing generates the bulk of the value added in the production chain by transforming fish into its monetary value, distributing and preserving the commodity to ensure its longevity and availability long after the peak season. However, the generated income may not necessarily remain in the hands of the woman as women are expected to account with their husbands for the generated profits while men perceive their role in the household to be limited to provide women with their main source of production input, that is, fresh fish. Thus, while conjugal production relations allow women to access fish on a convenient credit basis, men largely ignore the impact of market losses and household expenses when claiming their share of the generated profit at the end of the peak season. Meanwhile, although female market systems are widely acknowledged as providing avenues for female autonomy they seldom entitle women to consultation or even participation in relevant instances of decision making. In general, women’s paid work may not easily be equated with empowerment (Britwum 2009: 69f) or the enhanced access to forums of interest representation for that matter.

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78 Overà notes a female participation of 25 per cent in the case of Moree (2003: 53). In an interview, Moree women revealed that this difference is due to the fact that limited investment possibilities in Moree, unlike in Elmina, do not permit any further diversification (interview, fish processors, Moree, 14.12.2009).
As has been implied earlier, a tendency persists to consider women in the fisheries to be facing homogeneous experiences especially in terms of subordination to men. Whilst lack of voice is a crude reality for many fish processors, some women of Elmina do however have a way of exerting control through acquiring means of production. As Overá (2003: 59) puts it, “women can compensate for the lack of masculine symbolic capital if they have enough economic capital”. This is particularly true for the so-called “fish mommies”, the intermediate link in the value chain between fishermen and fish processors. A fish mommy caters for a particular canoe and its crew whenever it lands its catch in her home town. That entails mainly the granting of loans for running the business, that is, buying the fuels or paying for necessary repairs but also involves the accommodation and maintenance of the migrant fishermen during their time ashore. In return, the fish mommy secures her exclusive rights to the catch, which after it has been sold is accounted for and calculated against the outstanding debts. This way, men and women in Elmina create a network of cooperation. However, a fish mommy has no means of determining where the catch will be landed and canoe owners can decide to land their catch at the landing beach of either of their different fish mommies\(^79\). Therefore, analysis has to carefully scrutinise whether these relationships can really be interpreted as empowering.

As a matter of fact, with the ongoing commercialisation of the fishing industry, the fish traders’ importance as creditors has become ever more pronounced. However, canoe owners and crews who do not repay their loans with the fish mommy can only be prosecuted through the Chief fisherman and the Legal Courts. Yet both alternatives are very likely to threaten the market relationship between the parties thus leaving the woman without her own production input, that is, the fresh fish to be traded, processed and marketed. In view of this, conclusions as to how far the interdependent, gendered production relations between men and women can be considered in terms of solidarity and complementary cooperation or dependence and capitalist exploitation respectively remain to be solved in a more detailed case study. Clearly, presumptions focusing exclusively on either one perspective commonly found in the literature, for example, Gladwin (1980: 134) or Vercruysse (1983: 190) claiming that the particularities of the division of labour and the preservation of the fish puts women in a position from which the entire process of fish production may be controlled, or Overá stressing the complementarity between fishermen and fish traders in a gendered exchange system “symbolizing men providing semen for women’s wombs” (2001: 51) need to be re-examined or at least refined with greater detail.

b. Gender, age and enforced silence

Beyond the gendered divide in access, women operate in further stratified production relations within fish processing and marketing and depend on the nature of their access to fresh fish\(^80\) for their position in the social hierarchy of access to resources (Britwum 2009: 75). Once again, this illustrates the interrelation between the gendered dynamics of voice, age groups and ownership in means of production, in this case in relation to the control over labour, ovens and raw materials, that is, fresh fish and fire wood. At the top of the hierarchy of voice among the fish processors is the konkobene or konkohembaa, the Chief or Queen of fish processors, who represents all fish

\(^{79}\) Interview, fish mommy, Elmina, 24.11.2009

\(^{80}\) Britwum lists a number of incidents that can lead to a fish processor losing her access to fresh fish, among them the migration of husbands, the frequent loss of fishing equipment through accident or the indebtedness of the fisherman husband to other contract partners. (2009: 76ff).
smokers on the inside and outside of the fishing community. Together with the *apoaboena*, the Chief fishermen, the *konkobene* is part of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council that negotiates for all Ghanaian artisanal fish workers with and within national policy making institutions. The *konkobene* in Elmina is chosen among the most economically successful, socially engaged and thus highly respected fish processors in the community.

Just as the *konkobene*, middle women access fresh fish through their kin relations or loans advanced for the maintenance of the fishing equipment and sell it on the spot. Fish processors in contrast process fresh fish for sale at a later stage, for example, through smoking, drying or salting. Eventually, the marketing of the processed fish involves a lot of travelling to market centres as far away as Accra, Kumasi or Tamale. During these periods of absence, fish processors rely on their assistants to continue the processing activities. These arrangements also take over when a fish processor becomes too old to run her business on her own. Usually, these transactions of apprenticeship and assistance take place in the form of mother-daughter relations. However, every available member of a household, that is, the activation of the labour of young girls, is expected to contribute to the production process without remuneration. Besides such forms of assistance, piece workers and head porters support the work of the fish processor especially during the peak herring season when the work load intensifies considerably (Britwum 2009, Overi 2003).

According to Britwum, “[i]t is the different modes of access to fresh fish that introduce hierarchies among fish processors”, at the same time “it is fishing that gives men control over fresh fish, which in turn gives them power over women” (2009: 81f). Yet, also within the male workgroup further distinct hierarchies of access both to the catch exist which are then translated into differences in voice. Given the fact that many canoe owners do not join their crews at sea, the most respected character, apart from the owner of the canoe is the *bosu* (captain). As one captain in Elmina reported81 the responsibilities of the *bosu* comprise not only the choice of the crew members in accordance with the canoe owner but based on the mutual respect he also becomes the mouthpiece of the workgroup towards the canoe owner and crews of other vessels. The same Elmina *bosu* stated in the interview, “I work with the human institution and every problem that comes up lies on me; therefore should there be a dispute between two members of canoe or between the crew and the boat owner I have to take it upon myself to settle the dispute82”.

Apart from the captain, a fishing crew consists of up to twenty or so fishermen, depending on the size of the canoe and the fishing technique and type of net applied. The necessary respect from the part of the sailors within this composition derives from the experience the captain has in the job. Generally, the low mechanisation of the fishing work demands early childhood entry into the industry allowing boys to build up the body mass necessary for dragging in the heavy nets (Britwum 2009: 79). As Kyerekuanda, head of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council observed, this trend has been declining since the introduction of the outboard motor in Ghana in the 1950s. Notably, the replacement of the paddle by motors allowed fishermen to operate larger vessels and to exploit fishing grounds in greater distances from the shore and therefore to incur bigger catches. This development however also necessitated larger crew sizes.

81 Interview, *bosu*, Elmina, 06.08.2009
82 Interview, *bosu*, Elmina, 06.08.2009
As a consequence, the highly institutionalised apprenticeship adhered to in the past was abandoned for what Kyerekuanda criticises to be a huge pool of a willing but untrained work force.

When it started, a fisherman before he became a fisherman qualified to go to sea. You would be apprenticed to a head fisherman of the canoe. He would teach all that you needed to know about fishing. How to mend the net, how to hoist the sail, you had to go through all this. How to throw cast nets, you know cast net? You had to learn all this before you would be taken to the high seas. Your father in bringing you to the head fisherman go through some customary rights, you would go with a bottle of rum to signify that he had placed his son with someone else to be trained. Then, after you had completed your apprenticeship some ceremony would be performed to show that you are now a qualified fisherman. (...) Now, after independence or just before independence things started changing. That was the time when they started to bring in some bigger crafts. (...) And that was the time the outboard motor was also introduced. And that made a lot of difference because the fishermen started using bigger canoes and larger nets. Because the dragger of having to paddle was out of the equation it made the things a lot easier for man. And then the issue concerning apprenticeship also was not there because there were so many people to work with. So it was easier for someone to join somebody’s canoe.

Experience in the fishing work is a major asset in a profession in which returns are insecure both in terms of availability and location of the resource and needs to be acquired over years of practice in the profession. In view of this, fishing work is all about imagining and pursuing one’s “way up” and thereby increasing the access to shares one has in the catch, and to the authority with which one speaks. In a sequence of interviews with two young fishermen from Elmina, the following was revealed

**R:** There is a huge difference between young crew members and older ones both in terms of strength and experience. Sometimes a youth may know more than the older person but the fact that he is old nullifies what you may think is right or should be done (...).

**E:** Many people look down on us as youth and do not give us any respect, some even shout at us and even beat us up when we do not easily understand what they teach us at sea. Some older people who have a certain level of understanding speak for us when we complain about the unfair treatment whilst some say that this is the only occupation we have at the moment therefore we should just keep quiet and learn and stop complaining (...)

**R:** Whether or not you will get an equal share with the older members of the crew will depend on the number of years you have served as a crew member. But normally it is not done. It will take you at least eight years to be accepted as an experienced crew member and therefore to receive an equal share of the catch with the older sailors (...)

**R:** Sometimes, when a crew member has served so many years in a canoe, the owner may decide to make you the captain when there is friction between him and the captain. Thus, you may be promoted to the ranks of a captain [even though being young]. If the former captain incurred lots of debts and decided to quit, the canoe owner may sue you. On the contrary, when you the newly

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83 Interview, Nii Ahreo Kyerekuanda, GNCFC, Jamestown Accra, 07.10.2009
84 Usually, but depending on the agreement and the origin of the canoe owner, the catch is split into three parts of which two go to the owners of the business leaving one third to be distributed among the crew members, notably this is after expenses have been cut and paid back to the respective fish mommies.
85 Group interviews, Elmina youth, Elmina, 17.11.2009 and 19.11.2009
appointed captain work hard to clear all debts incurred by either the canoe owner or the former captain, you will forever remain in that position for the rest of your life because you have increased the sense of trust. Better, the canoe owner may even decide to get you your own canoe.

The relevance of age and experience is also noticeable ashore, where watchmen and hustlers make sure the catch is safely landed and the canoe is fully equipped for its next expedition. Interestingly, the compensation of this work is not calculated in parts of the share. Instead, watchmen and hustlers take out parts of the catch for themselves. This happens under the eyes of many observers most importantly the attentive canoe owner and his captain, yet clearly defined conventions as to how much may be taken out of the pans do not exist. In contrast, one’s success in hustling also depends on the ability to quickly make the fish disappear, for example in a bucket behind a rock or in the bottom of a small canoe provided by the hustler to support the watchmen’s work with the transportation of the necessary tools and fuel.

Watchmen do not stand far behind the canoe owners and captains in terms of the authority and respect vested in their position. As a matter of fact, watchmen are responsible for the safety of the canoe and their expertise is therefore highly valued. Every fishing crew depends on the functioning of the fishing equipment. However, spending most of their time at sea the few hours available ashore can often hardly be spared for the necessary repairs on the canoe or the tedious processes needed to go through for the securing of the fuel. The same is true for the holding of representative posts and offices in the management of the fishing industry (cf. McGoodwin, 1995; Smith, 1977). Therefore, watchmen who usually remain ashore have a particularly high incidence in presiding membership-based organisations of fish workers in Elmina but also in more formalised representative bodies like the KEEA District Assembly and take pride in their positions in both work and associational life. The relevance of this observation for issues of representation will be made clear in the further course of this thesis.

Figure 7: The landing of the catch at Elmina fishing port
Once again, the position of a watchman is not easily accessible and requires perseverance in one’s imagined life in the making. Many young boys, having worked in the fishing industry during their teenage years decide to give up the fishing work for hustling as it promises bigger returns with less exhaustive working routines. As a matter of fact, as the interview section quoted above suggests, young fishermen are hardly paid in full shares. In some cases, when working on their father’s canoe youth are not paid at all but need to content with a little “pocket money”\textsuperscript{86}. As hustlers however, youth have the chance to gain access to a number of canoes via the trust earned by a particular watchman. As the Elmina youth stated

I started saving money about two years ago (…). Today with my [small] canoe I keep all the fishes that are given to me by the watchman as his assistant. So, after everything the two of us will share them. I need my canoe for the job because it is required for you to have one, else you will not be taken [as an assistant]. I have written my name on the canoe for everyone to see\textsuperscript{87}.

Despite providing the necessary vessel for the work of the watchmen, many of the youth complain about not being regarded with any form of respect, whether on board of a canoe or as hustlers in the port. This also greatly restricts their access to representative bodies, especially in terms of making claims or giving inputs to fisheries management.

This outline of the heterogeneity of the tasks and positions implied in the fishing work intended to convey a feeling for the differences in authority of voice and therefore the divergent forms of “ownership of the debate”, that is, the absence thereof for the most parts of Elmina’s population. The basic underlying access mechanisms determining voice have been summarised in the mutually inclusive terms of gender, age and ownership in means of production. As purely analytical categories, these terms do not intend to reproduce the differences that have been identified to divide people in terms of access. In contrast, this chapter also illustrated how different access mechanisms are simultaneously at play, thus potentially levelling but often also exacerbating the individual’s ability to develop and act upon its environment.

Thus, as a general observation, women and non-owning youth are more often excluded from public debates whereas canoe owners claim to represent “the majority”. Especially, when it comes to the delegation of political offices, the canoe owners demand the exclusive right to assign the mandate of their Chief fisherman while women and non-owning youth are strictly excluded from the corresponding public debate and consequently the relevant practice of constructing their environments around them.

These hierarchies of voice are reproduced in the associational realm, that is, not only do the different divisions of labour adhere to their own voluntary associations but associations of youth and women usually also refrain from involving themselves in the contestations triggered by the canoe owners. Voice can however also be enhanced with reference to different forms of bargaining power. “Island/Freetown” and “Justice” and “5:1” make use of this in the form of their constructed associational bargaining power and relate to the conflict in accordance to their historic connection to chieftaincy in Elmina. The subsequent section is going to illustrate this dynamic in greater detail.

\textsuperscript{86} Interview, youth group, Abrebiano, 14.11.2009
\textsuperscript{87} Interview, youth group, Elmina, 19.11.2009
c. Voice and ownership of the debate in the associational realm

The division of labour in the artisanal fishing sector is clearly reflected in the fish workers’ adherence to different voluntary associations, that is, associations fish workers adhere to on a deliberate basis in order to gain certain benefits. More specifically, associative action in Elmina and the resulting networks of solidarity follow the same logic of segmentation along the lines of gender and ownership in means of production which are then further divided into segments of different generational and age groups. In the following sections, selected voluntary associations in Elmina will be presented regarding their particular stance in the contested destoolment of their Chief fisherman. In the subsequent chapter, more emphasis will be put on the internal dynamics and external connections of these associations in order to get a feel about who the people within these associations really are.

• The Canoe owners association – opposition and protest

The Elmina canoe owners association is made up of all canoe owners residing in Elmina. Among all voluntary associations in Elmina, the canoe owners association is therefore the most secluded as membership in the association derives automatically and exclusively so from building a canoe in Elmina. In this light, also the degree of voluntarism in the canoe owners association remains to be questioned. As Konings (2009) points out, the voluntary character of civil society organisations is easily overrated and mechanisms of social control and expectations of social behaviour may more often be at play when membership and contributions to the association are determined. Yet, in the case of the Elmina canoe owners, involvement and contribution to the association is usually limited to emergency meetings, for example, when a distress call is received and assistance needs to be organised to rescue a crew lost at sea.

Despite coming together irregularly and in unspecific spaces like the Chief fisherman’s office, the canoe owners can be said to produce sense and identity as an association since they clearly express a notion of distinctness from other groups and claim to remain exclusive in their decision making. This is not to suggest that the association is made up of homogeneous individuals, as a matter of fact there are lines of disagreement also among the canoe owners. The fact that the association nonetheless is able to act as a unified whole speaks for the strength of its organisational sense-making, especially so in differentiation from the community’s non-owners. Beyond that, the canoe owners association has identified a set of tasks and responsibilities for themselves that further contributes to their organisational identity and sense of significance. Most central among these obligations, one Elmina canoe owner explained, is the distribution of government assistance, especially the subsidised outboard motors which for some 50 years now are passed on to the fishermen through the credit schemes of the Agricultural Development Bank and the local Chief fishermen.

88 Interview, canoe owners association, Elmina, 18.09.2009
89 As Kyerukuanda explained the procedure, the GNCF has been seen as an interest group of the canoe owners as it streamlines the negotiation and eventually the distribution of benefits to the artisanal marine fishermen. After accounting for the number of canoes in each of the coastal regions, the GNCF distributes corresponding proportions of the fishing inputs negotiated for. The same procedure is repeated on the scale of the fishing communities within each region. Eventually, the canoe owners come together with their Chief fisherman to decide who may get a new outboard motor and who won’t on the basis of the urgency of the individual case.
Although the canoe owners in Elmina claim not to show any form of internal hierarchies, for example, by the appointment of permanent presidents or boards, differences in voice do exist as the example of the female canoe owners shows. The latter, besides claiming to be sidelined in the distribution of resources and benefits, also express the feeling of being ridiculed in stating their opinions. Thus, while attending the meetings of canoe owners association in the absence of different channels of information dissemination, female canoe owners are less likely to make propositions or to impact on the course of actions taken in a given situation\textsuperscript{90}. Indeed, despite claims that all canoe owners supported the move against Nana Jojo Solomon women were not seen attending the events of public display of protest and opposition. Yet, representatives from both younger and elder fractions of the group did involve themselves.

In this sense, even though the association’s agenda setting is claimed to emerge out of recent and urgent situations it is likely to show a bias towards the interests of male canoe owners. At the same time however, the inequalities experienced by many young people in Elmina are not reproduced among the canoe owners and even owners in their early twenties may be delegated as spokespersons, a duty that is not inherent in a fixed position but rotates according to the situation and issue at play. This is not to suggest that opinion leadership is of no relevance within the association where equal voice is constantly emphasised. As the case of the establishment of Jojo Solomon showed, the position of the secretary may evolve into significant benefits, like the delegation to other posts and offices.

Before the events around the destoolment of the Elmina Chief fishermen completely took off one interviewee explained to me how the canoe owners usually address their complaints. The most prominent forum for debate, according to this statement is offered by the local radio stations. Every Tuesday, the local radio stations in and around Elmina broadcast programmes aimed directly at the artisanal fishermen. Exclusively Fante-speaking, these programmes address the problems faced by the fishermen, inform them about current political developments and also cover the personnel politics in relevant offices of the local fishing communities. Notably, the canoe owners are among the important resource persons for these programmes and may make use of the forum provided this way to make their voice heard, in the most literal sense\textsuperscript{91}. However, during the Elmina premix crisis, the Elmina-based \textit{Abomka} channel decided to cancel its coverage of the conflict due to the explosiveness of the matter and its potential or further unrest and the realistic fear of outbreaks of violence\textsuperscript{92}.

Besides the media, potential forums for suggestions and complaints brought forward by the canoe owners are the KEEA district assembly as well as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) and the Ghanaian parliament. While the local radio stations have the advantage of broadcasting big parts of their programmes explicitly for the fishing communities (taking into consideration the language barrier and illiteracy as well as the particular time schedules of the fishing crews, with peaks of attention on Tuesdays), the canoe owners in Elmina admit that speaking to the relevant persons and institutions on the national level is most of the times difficult and not often rewarded with success. “The fishermen do not know the institutions to

\textsuperscript{90} Interview, female canoe owner, Elmina, 19.10.2009
\textsuperscript{91} Interview, Kosmos, ATL.FM, Cape Coast, 24.11.2009
\textsuperscript{92} Interview, DJ Wayas, Abomka.FM, Elmina, 17.11.2009
turn to”, one of the canoe owners’ spokespersons expressed his frustration. The course of the events around the Elmina premix crisis did however show a different picture and revealed the diverse strategies of forum shopping of the community’s canoe owners as a distinct interest group.

- “Justice” and “5:1” – in support of the tradition

“Justice” is one of the most important voluntary associations in Elmina, not necessarily based on its membership but on its role and engagement towards society. The discourse of “doing what is right” is at the heart of the association and their activism is highly appreciated in the community. Still, “Justice” and “5:1” are not made up of canoe owners and although some of their members may indeed own a vessel they cannot speak with the same authority as the canoe owners association.

This is not to suggest that both “Justice” and “5:1” remain silent towards the developments in their community. As the following chapter may illustrate in greater detail, the identification and adherence with voluntary associations in Elmina is strong. On this basis, voluntary associations manage to create an alternative access mechanism to the debate, that is, their associational form of bargaining power. In addition to that, especially “Justice” also maintains a close connection with the traditional authorities in Elmina which explains its strong involvement in Solomon’s chieftaincy crisis. This became obvious during the Ayisah incident described below but also manifests itself in the leadership of the association which is connected to the “traditional family” of Elmina through the konkobene.

In the conflict around the Chief fisherman’s destoolment, the “Justice” association officially involved itself on the grounds that the procedures of destoolment were not legitimate. The restoration of justice was thus held as the overall goal but one could argue that personal preferences and the loyalty to Jojo Solomon played as much of a role in the contestation of the destoolment.

- “Island/Freetown” and “Las Palmas” – ambiguous solidarity

From the day the canoe owners first demonstrated, confusion persisted as to who could be the mastermind behind the initiative against Jojo Solomon. Despite the generally speculative atmosphere, the generalised observation was made that,

in Elmina, if you want to destool someone [that is, the Chief fisherman] (...) the Paramount chief does not take up any negotiation with the fishermen. You know if in Elmina they want to destool someone, you have to contact these people, Las Palmas and Justice. If Las Palmas or Justice strike, nobody can stop them. And if they want to destool Nana Solomon nobody will talk. They will just send their people to the office and put someone there.

As has been described earlier, the “Justice” association indeed involved itself in the conflict and organised a strong support for Nana Solomon. “Las Palmas”, however, seemed to shy away from the events. While “Justice” soon expressed its conviction concerning the innocence of Solomon,

93 Interview, canoe owners association, Elmina, 18.09.2009
94 Interview, AAC, Elmina, 17.09.2009
the same cannot be said for the “Las Palmas” people. As the unofficial port authority endowed with the acceptance of both the people and the official authorities of Elmina to independently perform (physical) punishments on people that take up illicit activities in the port area, “Las Palmas” just as “Justice” claims to be fighting for “the right thing”, especially when it involves the call of their traditional leaders. In the events concerning the contested authority of Nana Solomon the people of “Las Palmas” did however ignore the alliance between Chief fisherman and Paramount chief. As a matter of fact, many people disagreed with the handling of the conflict which according to widespread opinion not only shed a bad light on the elders of the community but also involved a potential threat to peace and tranquility in Elmina.

In addition, a few years earlier, “Las Palmas” and “Justice” intervened upon the call of the Paramount chief to clear a residential area close to the port, referred to as Ayisah of the frequent illegal activities taken place there. The move against prostitution and drug trafficking (commonly associated with “informal” fishing activities) unfortunately got out of hand and led to several wounded and the destruction of homes by fire. As a consequence, the intervention of the Paramount Chief, supported by the authority of the Chief fisherman and the Community-Based Fisheries Management Committee (CBFMC) was widely regarded with severe criticism which doubtlessly rendered the voluntary associations warier about the calls of their Omanbene.

A second factor that may explain the inactivity of “Las Palmas” is its close connection to the National Democratic Congress. Spotted interacting publicly with Atta-Mills’ bodyguards upon the President’s visit to Cape Coast to pay first hand attention to the fishermen’s issues, the leaders of “Las Palmas” certainly have an interest in avoiding a clear positioning in a conflict between two top officials in their party, with Maanoma being the Central Regional representative of the National Premix Committee and Solomon acting as the Central Regional Chief fisherman of the GNCFC.

The same cannot be said for the “Island/Freetown” association situated – and not coincidentally so – next to Elmina’s most central spiritual location, the Benya shrine. The people of “Island/Freetown” are known to support the causes of the Paramount chief because he himself spent his youth as a member of the association. The relationship between the Omanbene and the “Island” youth deteriorated however as the Paramount chief could not deliver the promises made in order to guarantee the youth’s support in the times of his contested enstoolment.

Promising to take them abroad during his official trips, the present Omanbene mobilised the youth of his former association to move against the supporters of the king makers. This affiliation even took up a violent character and led to the destruction of the asafo posts of those companies that would oppose the installation of the Chief. Notably, the destruction was clearly aimed at the insignia of power of the supis, especially the sword.

The disappointment that Conduah did not deliver his promises certainly accounts for a part of the ambiguous indifference the “Island/Freetown” people displayed most obviously during the meeting called in by the Paramount chief just in front of their shed. The position of the “Island/Freetown” associations nonetheless has to be described as ambiguous as they are inherently bound to the traditional forces in Elmina. As the major care takers of the main shrine in Elmina, the Benya shrine, the people of “Island/Freetown” regularly express their respect to the various leaders and religious authorities associated with the traditional council. This is
noteworthy especially in the light of the reputation the members of “Island/Freetown” have in the big parts of the population in Elmina. Accused of bringing drugs to Elmina, many people even see the members of “Island/Freetown” as radical and disrespectful and thus constantly causing instability and unrest.

• “Dwen Wo Ho”, “Brokos Adoye Kuw” and the “Programme” youth – (enforced) indifference

While both the canoe owners association but also “Justice”, “Las Palmas” and even “Island/Freetown” associate enough members to allow the utterance of a joint standpoint even in disfavour of the established authorities in Elmina, individuals would usually shy away from a concrete positioning in the matter. As one of the members of “Island” revealed in an individual commentary, if you don’t own a net or canoe you are not allowed to talk55. This is particularly true for youth and to some extent also women, which then translates into the relations among the different voluntary associations in Elmina.

The “Programme” association, situated just in between “Justice” and “Island/Freetown” is the most prominent voluntary association of youth in Elmina, if only due to its location. However, contrary to the motto of “Programme”, that is, to have the youth be taken into account in decisions that affect them and despite their significant membership, the people of “Programme” did not take part in the conflict around the stool of the Elmina Chief fisherman.

In contrast, the youth of Elmina seem to involve themselves in social action only when asked to do so. The example of the “Joint Action Against Pair Trawling” is suitable for underpinning this observation. In 2008, some of the opinion leaders in Elmina linked up with nationwide NGOs headed by the “Corporate Social Responsibility Movement” (organised in the transnational network of the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung) and organised buses to Accra for a large-scale demonstration against the government’s perceived inactivity regarding the ongoing pair trawling activities. In this instance, the youth was more than welcome and heavily mobilised to board the buses and support the cause with their numbers. How such dynamics play into the mobilising strategies of voluntary associations, especially in terms of a segmentary opposition of conflict will be discussed in the following chapter. At this point, it is noteworthy to realise how youth in Elmina are well informed about the developments in their community. Nonetheless, their interaction with local affairs is highly contained by social control56.

Just as the youth associations, of which “Programme” may stand as the most prominent example, also the associations made up exclusively by women did show a clear distance to the conflict keeping their community breathless from September onwards. The reasons for the indifference of the women’s association are again at least twofold. As has been stated initially, women are much less likely to possess means of production in the fishing business. The statement referring to the right to speak on the basis of ownership of at least a fishing net or better a canoe is therefore doubtlessly valid for their situation as well.

At the same time, the name of the strongest women’s association in Elmina, both in terms of membership and the quantity of assistance rendered to the bereaved member, suggests yet

55 Interview, “Island”, Elmina, 08.10.2009
56 Interviews, youth group, Elmina, 17.11.2009 and 19.11.2009
another cause for indifference. “Dwen Wo Ho” or “Think about yourself/Mind your own business” follows the logic that one has to care for one’s own family first before taking the liberty and “luxury” to involve oneself politically. The saying that only the women have the “heart of the fisherman” has its origin in the gender dynamic of women catering for the household and man concentrating on the public domain\(^{97}\).

Finally, the perceived indifference towards the conflict can also take the form of neutrality enforced as a matter of principle. The “Brokos Adoye Kuw” or “Brokos Charity Organisation” is a self-help group that follows the Ghanaian state motto “Freedom and Justice” and has fixed in their constitution the condition of remaining neutral in the frequent power struggles in Elmina. Unfortunately for the people of the Brokos neighbourhood, the association is recently falling into inactivity. In the past, support from the befriended “Justice” and “Las Palmas” associations safeguarded the survival of the membership-based organisation. It remains to be seen whether the organisational sense-making within “Brokos Adoye Kuw” will be strong enough to revive the activities of the association.

In conclusion, the voluntary associations of Elmina, despite their predominantly welfaristic character play a significant role in the mobilisation of participants for collective political action inside (and potentially outside) the community. At the same time, these processes of mobilising are inherently structured along the hierarchical lines of voice as they persist on the interpersonal level. Besides the canoe owners, more people may have been convinced of the charges presented against their Chief fisherman. Yet, their readiness to express their opinion has been clearly contained due to the hierarchies of voice in the fishing community. At the same time, reasons to remain silent may also be of an inherently practical character and questions of voice, that is, access to forums of decision making may not be read as the only factor behind involvement or abstention in the conflict around the contested authority of the Elmina Chief fisherman.

In addition, the cases presented in this chapter allow drawing clear dividing lines between the associations. On the one hand, these associations cover the different tasks within the industry, such as the canoe owners association, besides the relatively unknown captain’s association or the newly founded watchmen association. On the other hand, voluntary associations follow also the lines of the more general division of labour in the fishing industry, thus organising both women and youth in their own voluntary associations that offer them those services and representative functions that the bigger, general associations like “Justice”, “5:1” or “Las Palmas” may fail to achieve for them. The question of exclusive membership is a matter of definition especially in the case of the “Programme” youth that defines itself as a youth association yet hosts members of over 40 years in age. When considering the motto of the youth association, which is to offer an alternative “programme” to the strictly exclusive domains of adult decision making in fisheries management, one understands that the association’s concept of youth is much more an ideological one than being based on mere biology. Thus, the dividing lines between the different voluntary associations presented here have to be understood as ideal types and as actively constructed and performed by the members themselves. Women obviously can also be members of “Justice” and the standpoints portrayed here represent the public performance of an associational body rather than a homogeneous sum of individuals. As has been stated earlier, it is

\(^{97}\) Interview, “Dwen wo ho”, Elmina, 06.10.2009 and Elmina fish smoker, Elmina, 04.08.2009 and Elmina fisherman, Anomabo, 05.08.2009
exactly this potential to act as a unified whole, sovereign over potential internal disagreements that represents the strong point of voluntary associations as mobilisers of political agency. In the following chapter, the vocational associations of Elmina will be regarded structurally in their role as spaces for opinion formation, their potential to act as one person, especially during mobilisation for collective action and eventually the creation of alternative means to access platforms of decision making by means of associational bargaining power.

6. Voluntary associations and the mobilisation of political agency in Elmina

“When our elders beat the drum, we follow.” (Justice’, Elmina)

“We call our president ‘ebusua panin’ because he is like our father.” (Justice’, Elmina)

After having shifted my attention to the standpoints of the different voluntary associations in the premix crisis, I will now look at the internal and external relations of these associations in order to eventually round up my analysis of how voluntary associations based on their associational characteristics and strategic interrelations apply their bargaining powers facing the various power holders in Elmina’s fisheries governance system.

The initial assumption in this research project implied that the extent of vulnerability faced by workers in informal employment can at least partly be attributed to the denial of legal recognition and the consequent lack of political representation on their behalf. The identification of a voice deficit in the artisanal fishing sector is however, and fortunately so, complicated by the fact that local fishermen actually do possess means to access platforms of decision making and thus have a potential to “make their voice heard”. This contradiction with the postmodern trend to present the urban poor as essentially subaltern has become particularly visible during Ghana’s 2009 national premix crisis in which the protests of fishermen and their advocates led to relevant policy adaptations. Interest representation in Elmina, however, cannot be compared directly to the high involvement of advocates at the level of national policy negotiations. Although selected opinion leaders tried to capitalise on the conflict by mobilising large factions behind them98 the fishermen were left to organise and apply their bargaining power by themselves.

According to Mensah (2002: 230) and Britwum (2006: 111f), associative actions taken by Ghana’s artisanal canoe fishermen are characterised by a general inactivity and very low levels of identification. These standpoints have to be rejected based on the rather conservative definition of interest groups applied in the two pieces of literature. Indeed, none of my informants in Elmina had ever heard of the National Canoe Fishermen Association described by Britwum et al. Also, within Mensah’s sample only 29 per cent were still member of the largely dormant association, which had been formed “in anticipation of managing external supports that no

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98 Interview, Kimbo (newly installed pastor, watchman and resource person at ATL.FM), Elmina, 25.10.2009
longer exist”. Unfortunately, Mensah does not specify the kind of support the canoe fishermen’s associations were expecting. However, a comparable case is known from Elmina. The “Elmina Canoe Fishermen Association” formerly distributed the premix fuel among the Elmina canoe owners. The association has been dissolved for some years now leaving only the shade of its name printed on the public wash room constructed in its collective effort (the washroom is now operated by the “Justice” association). As has been shown in the previous chapters, the viability of associational forms like the “Elmina Canoe Fishermen Association” is also largely determined by the succession of political parties each favouring different modes of distribution and thereby discouraging the continuity and coherence of policy implementation. Yet, both Britwum and Mensah ignore the relevance of associations established in non-formal terms. That is, even though interest representation in the artisanal fishing community of Elmina does no longer take the form of formally recognised and regulated institutional bodies like the “Elmina Canoe Fishermen Association”, associative action is very vivid and especially so in regard of the numerous hardships experienced by the artisanal fishermen.

From the fish workers’ immediate perspective, it has been stated, risks relate to the generating of sufficient returns and the marketing of the catch but often also take a very existential character. The fact that most voluntary associations in Elmina organise fish workers around the main objective of sickness and funeral assistance speaks its own tragic language. Voluntary associations support their members in kind during the major events in human life, that is, marriage, child birth, disease and death, and thus provide alternative access mechanisms in the form of social networks that allow accessing different means of social support in various situations of life. However, voluntary associations in Elmina cannot be reduced to mere self-help groups.

In contrast, as Chen et al (2007) conceptualise “membership-based organisations of the poor”, the governance structures of voluntary associations respond to the needs and aspirations of their members because they are accountable to them. They thus represent channels for carrying the voice of their members to relevant decision (and policy) makers and in turn help to transmit the benefits of government projects to its members. The authors go on to define membership-based organisations of the poor as those organisations “in which the members elect their leaders and which operate on democratic principles that hold the elected officers accountable to the general membership (...) They have, in common, a commitment to collective action to change the conditions of their poor members” (ibid: 4).

Despite the partially reductionist perspective adopted by Chen et al, the concept of the membership-based organisation may be of use to describe the internal and external dynamics of voluntary associations of Elmina’s fish workers. It is most noteworthy that the Elmina associations are not restricted to an exclusively poor membership. As a matter of fact, the term “poverty” will be rejected here as failing to portray the true character of vulnerability faced by Elmina’s fish workers. The term mainly neglects the dynamic mechanisms of access and the capacity of creative agents to impact proactively on their environments. Nonetheless, Chen et al provide a useful abstraction of the organisational characteristics and conditions for success that will be referred to recurrently in the subsequent sections. The following sections thus are going to show the internal and external mechanisms that account for voluntary associations’ support in

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99 Interview, Kimbo, Elmina, 05.11.2009
terms of voice and interest representation, especially in relation to the contested delegation of leadership in the local premix business.

a. Internal organisation

Voluntary associations in Elmina are as diverse as the social stratification of the small coastal town, sharing little similarity among each other. Nonetheless, some structural similarities of the internal sense-making and decision making dynamics of voluntary associations can be identified. Also, it goes without saying, voluntary associations comprise highly heterogeneous membership bases. In this light, the following sections should be understood as a merely structural analysis rather than a homogenizing categorisation of the occupational, gendered or age-related “essence” behind the associative efforts. Eventually, the aim of this is to illustrate how voluntary associations construct a collective identity on the basis of which they manage to act as an individual and to speak with a unified voice in the context of conflict and opposing interests. Consequently, this then relates also to the creation of associational bargaining power.

- Recruitment of members

As has been stated earlier, voluntary associations in Elmina clearly follow the production-related division of tasks and responsibilities in the fishing work. In this light, voluntary associations differentiate their memberships in terms of profession, age and gender. The most exclusive associations in this respect are the canoe owners association, the newly founded watchmen association (of September 2009) and the relatively unknown captains association. Among these three workgroup-specific associations, the canoe owners in some regards represent an exceptional case. In contrast to the other associations in Elmina, the canoe owners association has never been formed for the purpose of material assistance among each other. Instead, their main goal is to speak with a common voice when matters of their concern need to be decided (e.g. distribution of subsidised fishing inputs).

The canoe owners association then also illustrates the point brought forward by Konings (2009) who questions the degree of voluntarism in voluntary associations. As one of the female canoe owners stated, it has not been her choice to join the association especially in regard of the constant ridicule she is exposed to in the group of predominantly male members. Not joining, however, would have excluded her from any access to the necessary fishing inputs\(^\text{100}\). Voluntarism is also questionable in the case of highly respected community members who often join more than one association, pointing out the increased financial benefits of multiple memberships and the underlying prestige. Yet, this is doubtlessly also a function of social expectation not at last as these members are also more often the most successful mobilisers within the association and among the rest of the community members\(^\text{101}\).

Apart from the afore-mentioned occupation-specific associations, most voluntary associations in Elmina are open to the general public, including non-fishermen. Effectively, in a fishing town like Elmina the majority of the members is likely to be employed in the fishing industry. However, it is noteworthy how other than the canoe owners, none of the associations in Elmina seems to

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\(^\text{100}\) Interview, female canoe owner, Elmina, 19.10.2009  
\(^\text{101}\) Interview, Akyin, 13.11.2009, Elmina
discriminate between autochthonous population of Elmina and migrant workers from other communities around the town. As a matter of fact, some associations even have migrants in their steering boards. This is, however, not to suggest that membership in voluntary associations is not regulated in any form. In contrast, admission into one of the associations, be it “Justice”, “5:1”, “Las Palmas” or any of the numerous support groups in Elmina, is usually preceded by a period of close observation of the candidate, his or her behaviour in public and responsibility towards others. Notably, eligibility here follows very similar characteristics as in the case of the Chief fisherman’s election.

This testing period is usually justified with the observation that no one should be able to join for benefitting without returning contributions to others in need. Despite this measure, membership-based organisations in Elmina are very sought after. In this regard, some associations like the “Dwen Wo Ho” women’s association even restrict their membership to the number of thirty. Other associations define themselves through their extensive membership base and point out with pride to rank among the “strongest” associations in Elmina, this is the case above all for “Justice”, “Las Palmas” and “5:1” all of which rely on their broad membership base for the community services they committed themselves to and not at last for their involvement in local affairs.

From the members’ point of view, different reasons for adherence have been stated throughout the field research. While some emphasised the proximity of the association in their neighbourhood, thus offering them a space for daily interaction and support (e.g. for the keeping of their outboard motors and other fishing equipment), others stressed that their friends were already members in the association which encouraged them to join themselves. Yet others chose their association independently from any spatial consideration and decided on the basis of the contributions paid in case of bereavement. The latter case was especially true for the women in the sample. As a general principle, one could observe the prominence of an association to be the biggest factor of attraction apart from the afore-mentioned individual preferences. The fact of having many members and having members of high respect in the community speaks for the association and the messages conveyed collectively.

Finally, another form of “recruiting” membership is to brake off of an existing association. This has been the case for the “Justice” association who once formed part of a group called “Zion”. Complaining that the elders of “Zion” never considered the association’s youth when it came to distributing benefits, the latter claimed “Justice” by braking off. Today, the “Justice” association clearly outnumbers “Zion” with their more than sixty “Justice Babies”, as they still call themselves years after the secession.

102 Interview, migrant fisherman from Anomabo, Elmina, 07.11.2009
The membership base of voluntary associations is closely connected to the values the different bodies stand for and consequently which points for identification they offer. The next section addresses the means of organisational sense-making (Weick, 1995) that underlie the lines of inclusion and exclusion of the voluntary associations on a deeper organisational level. Understanding how associations define themselves in relation to their environment eventually allows grasping the mode of membership at play and clarifies how voluntary associations come to act as a corporate body even beyond the realms of their membership.

- **Organisational sense-making**

Karl Weick (1995) characterises sense-making in organisations by the elements of identity construction, retrospective and enactive perspectives onto the social environment, continuity, plausibility and a focus on extracted cues. In the following paragraphs, the organisational sense-making of voluntary associations in Elmina will be illustrated in order to contrast their so-called “informal” character with their high level of organisation. Although Weick’s sociological work is aimed at the theoretical framing of formal institutions, parallels can be drawn to the informal, that is, legally unrecognised, unregulated and unprotected, voluntary associations of Elmina.

*Identity construction*

According to Lindell (2010), collective interest and unity are never pre-given but have to be actively constructed. Despite the fact that most associations are not in competition with each other (they even support each other in times of need as will be illustrated in the subsequent sub-chapter) boundaries need to be actively maintained. Identity construction and sense-making of voluntary associations in Elmina then rely largely on the differentiation of the associations among each other, be it on the basis of the members’ predominant occupation or the association’s stance towards the community life.

The most obvious point for differentiation among the associations is inherent in their names, which are often related to a particular shed around the Elmina port area. At these sheds, people come together after work to sit together, share a meal, play a game, watch a football game or
simple get some rest before the next fishing expedition. Sheds however, are also spaces for collective organising and meetings are called in regularly to decide upon the contributions mobilised for a bereaved member.

Figures 9 and 10: The sheds of “Justice” and “Las Palmas” in the port area

Besides their spatial connection to a specific neighbourhood, with their names often visibly inscribed to their collective gathering points, voluntary associations in Elmina also often follow a particular motto that differentiates them from the other groups not at last by conveying their engagement with community life.

The motto of the “Justice” association, the board members told me, resides entirely in the name. The name was initially adopted in view of an injustice perceived during the yearly Bakatue festival\(^{104}\).

PK: During our annual festival there is a competition organised for canoes and boats and when we realised that only one canoe was favoured and was given the first price, we protested against it. That is why we carry the name Justice. Nobody is above the law and if you are found guilty you have to be punished and if you are innocent your case has to be solved and you should be compensated. That is what we stand for.

W: I would say that there is a higher sense of democracy in “Justice” than in the “Palmas” organisation for example. The word Justice is simply ensuring that the right thing is done and the law is upheld. Therefore we ensure that the rules are obeyed in this community.

In the case of the “Las Palmas” association, the meaning of the name was not remembered any more as the founders of the association were no longer alive. What is known is that the association was formerly referred to as “\(kete be ka\)” (“listen and tell”) “because we always want truth to prevail. (...) The task we perform is to fight against lawlessness, rebellion and injustice to ensure that the wellbeing of the Elmina community\(^{105}\). This statement implies important similarities with the self-description of “Justice”. As a matter of fact, most community members in Elmina mention the two associations in the same breath and in the past, both “Justice” and “Las Palmas” have been known to cooperate in fighting crime in Elmina. Also, when asked about the respective other, both groups stress their cordial relationship. However, they are also not shy

\(^{104}\) Interview, Paa Kow and „Ways“, Justice association, Elmina, 18.09.2009
\(^{105}\) Interview, Kweku Mensah, Chairman Las Palmas, Elmina, 10.09.2009
to point out their differences, mainly in terms of membership size and the amount of support paid to a bereaved member. Not at last the case of Solomon’s contested destoolment has shown that both associations may take very different stances in a conflict despite their very similar dispositions.

Other associations like “Brokos Adoye Kuw” make their mottos visible not only in their actions, but also in graphic details on their sheds. The motto “Freedom and Justice”, the Ghanaian state motto, has clearly been incorporated into the artwork of the shed, a representation of the Ghanaian flag.

*Figure 11: The shed of the “Brokos Adoye Kuw” association*

![Image of the shed of the “Brokos Adoye Kuw” association]

“Brokos Adoye Kuw” attempts to live up to this motto by allowing everyone to join the association, irrespective of standpoints or origins, with the only requirement of staying neutral in the various conflicts in Elmina.106

In view of the varying meanings attached to the associations, the sheds represent the most distinguishable points of identification as people always know where another person is connected to, where he or she usually spends a free moment and which debates and collective activities are joined.

*Enactive of social environments*

Voluntary associations in Elmina follow above all the goal to support their members in times of need. In addition to that, they often take it as their responsibility to “do the right thing”, that is, to ensure peace and the rule of the law in the community. The “Las Palmas” association is a very illustrative case for this observation.

In recognition with the local District Assembly, “Las Palmas” prosecutes and punishes any crime-related incident in the area of the fish market next to their association’s shed. It is common

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knowledge in Elmina, that thieves stealing bigger quantities of fish (this does not apply to the hustlers who take fish from the pans they help to unload) or wares from the market are physically punished by the people of “Las Palmas”, which is made up to large parts of physically strong fishermen. Beyond the self-justice executed by the members of “Las Palmas” it also happens that a person who has lost everything will receive a limited sum of money to start a small business.\textsuperscript{107}

The Justice association, in contrast, does not punish people itself but supports the traditional authorities to capture delinquents. During the Ayisah incident, “Justice” and “Las Palmas” and “Island/Freetown” were the main groups to support the Paramount chief’s advance against the prostitution and drug trafficking in Elmina, not knowing about the dramatic development of the event.

In apparent contrast to the two afore-mentioned associations, the people of “5:1” point out that anyone who may be in need of shelter, be it due to prosecution or any other reason will be given protection at their shed. “Of course a member inside the association benefits more than someone outside it. But if someone close to the association is involved in a police case we can assist, but we give the case a closer look before we come in.”\textsuperscript{108}

All associations take it upon themselves to support the affected communities during the regular inundations striking the town of Elmina. For example, they support the affected households with their canoes and help to carry away properties. Also, should there be a canoe distressed at sea solidarity is generally assured to send a canoe to their rescue. It is noteworthy, however, that these decisions are usually also made in the different voluntary associations.

\textit{Continuity}

According to Lindell (2010), informal worker organisations are often informed by historically evolved social relations, cultures and forms of belonging. This historical and cultural embeddedness but also contemporary developments make up for the astonishing continuity of voluntary associations in Elmina.

Although some associations like “Brokos Adoye Kuw” were undergoing current crises of membership during my field research, this was not the end of the association itself. As the secretary of “Brokos” told me, all the association needed was a prominent community member to join the association and to mobilise the registered members to restart paying their monthly contributions.\textsuperscript{109}

As for the other associations, they generally have existed over several generations leaving their exact date of foundation unknown to the present leaders. Thus, in general one can note that the associations do not depend on particular individuals for their continuous existence but rather function through institutionalised positions that are filled upon demand with interchangeable community members. Obviously, this is not to suggest that the positions of leadership within the voluntary associations are easily accessible for anyone. In contrast, as Lindell (2010: 11) further points out, “better-off individuals (in terms of income, education, contacts, etc.) tend to have

\textsuperscript{107} Interview, Kwaku Mensah, Chairman “Las Palmas”, Elmina, 10.09.2009
\textsuperscript{108} Group interview, „5:1“ (various members), Elmina, 02.11.2009
\textsuperscript{109} Interview, Francis Eshien, secretary “Brokos Adoye Kuw”, Elmina, 19.09.2009
easier access to positions of leadership”. In the following section the mechanisms of deciding upon leadership and succession in the voluntary associations will be clarified.

- Leadership and succession

Voluntary associations often refer to formalised organisational forms without their workings being reducible to the mechanisms rooted in the formal realms of state regulation. Instead, indigenous ideas of leadership and majority formation (which will be described in further detail in the subsequent sections) merge with organisational procedures copied from the official realms of state regulation. Or, more drastically put, just because voluntary associations term their institutional characteristics in a Western way does not mean that they really work according to such principles.

Figure 12: The signing bodies of “Justice”

The example of the leader of the association makes this point particularly clear as he is not simply a functional office within the association but is often regarded with the highest possible respect vested in the society’s father figure. The “Justice” association is most explicit about the role of its leader as a father figure to the members of the society. Referring to their president as ebnsnapanyin, that is, the head of the lineage, the “Justice” people do not intend to confuse the multiple kinships among their members but express respect for the authority of their leaders, irrespective of the age of the person in question also commonly referred to as ‘elders”110. As a matter of fact, the leaders of the “Justice” association are relatively young and have been elected by the members of their association on the basis of their experience and moral conduct in society rather than their mere age.

As Janet Carsten points out in “Cultures of Relatedness” (2000), the anthropological study of kinship has long overcome the artificial boundary between the biological and the social and thus undermined particular assumptions about what these terms entail. This eventually impacted more

110 Interview, Akyin, Elmina, 13.11.2009
generally on how idioms of relatedness are considered. This denaturalisation of kinship allows understanding the Ghanaian fish workers and their associations as related not on the basis of consanguine or affine kinship ties but on the basis of sharing substance, that is different forms of capital. According to Carsten, all forms of relatedness whether biologically based or not imply a combination of sentiment, substance and nurturance (Carsten 2000: 214). This is certainly true for the members of voluntary associations who on the basis of a shared group identity support each other materially and ideologically in times of hardship and make use of their emotional bond to mobilise for collective action.

Notably, the father figure plays a role also among the other voluntary associations in Elmina. The normative qualities of a vocational leader become particularly visible during struggles for succession and the mobilisation of participants for collective action. A good leader thus ideally attracts large numbers of followers when, for example, dancing or contributing at a funeral, or for that matter calling for a demonstration or a collective effort to support the community. The position of the association’s leader thus often implies considerable personal sacrifices and exhaustion due to the relatively greater responsibilities of the role model a leader is expected to perform. At the same time, voluntary associations also represent potential stepping stones in a person’s life in the making in the sense that the leading positions in the associations entail important social capital and broader opinion leadership in the community\textsuperscript{111}.

Membership in voluntary associations, it has been stated, in many instances follows the logics of the division of labour inherent in the fishing industry – this is however not to suggest that these divisions are reproduced once more within the voluntary associations themselves. While the voice of the canoe owners clearly translates into the authority of their association, the associations of “ordinary” fishermen have their own internal hierarchies. Thus, as a matter of fact, leaders in voluntary associations of fish workers are predominantly male and employed as so-called watchmen. Watchmen, it has been shown in the subsequent chapter are highly respected in the community and in contrast to the canoe fishermen remain ashore during the day. This means that they have the resources both in time and contacts to effectively lead and represent the members of their associations. In this light, Lindell (2010: 12) once more points to the obvious criticism about “the extent to which women participate in the leadership of and exercise influence within such associations”.

Once again, the canoe owners represent the exception to the here-described rule as they claim not to appoint a leader and adhere to the general principle of equality among their members. This does not apply for the other executive position within Elmina’s voluntary associations. Thus, the canoe owners do appoint a secretary and when making a collective appearance clearly organise their spokesperson beforehand.

The position of the ‘linguist’ is of particular significance in the Ghanaian context. In the context of the Paramount chief’s court, not everyone is allowed to address the Chief directly. This is why the Chief’s linguist “translates”, that is, repeats what has been said for the ears of the Chief. This practice also finds application in other contexts that involve authorities. The Elmina canoe owners appeal at the Cape Coast Regional Police Commander’s headquarters represents such a case. As my main informant among the Elmina canoe owners explained it, the person of the

\textsuperscript{111} Interview, Kimbo, Elmina, 05.11.2009
linguist is always decided beforehand yet not necessarily so on the basis of age or experience but merely depending on the respective situation. The same is true for spokespersons that are appointed to address the media.\textsuperscript{112} Obviously, a group of over one hundred canoe owners needs to organise its collective voice as not everyone can speak at the same time and the introduction of the group’s interest is a central concern in a context where being “heard” by the relevant authorities is a struggle for itself.

- **Procedures of decision making**

The leaders, or “presidents” and “board members” of the associations are not the only institutions that are referred to in formalised terms while their operation is managed in rather unofficially regulated ways. Other formalised terms relate to the democratic structure of the association, that is, its modes of operation and procedures of decision making. In this sense, every association possesses its own constitution, chairman, board and secretary and in many cases even an attendant who secures order and peace during the association’s regular and extra-regular meetings.

*Figure 13: Constitution of the “Brokos Adoye Kuw” association*

Decision making thus is justified with performed democratic procedures whilst the agenda setting often has already been decided upon beforehand.\textsuperscript{113} Usually, it is exclusively upon the call of the association’s board members that all association’s members come together to contribute to a bereaved member and his family or to decide upon collective effort such as the construction of a common shed or the support of a demonstration. In any case however, the board members will have met before the meeting to discuss what should be talked about. Direct input from the “ordinary” members during these meetings is rather the exception and generally restricted to the casting of votes. If debates arise, every association has an appointee securing the general order and even fining individual discussants that fail to argue rationally and get insulting or violent.

\textsuperscript{112} Interview, canoe owners association, Elmina, 18.09.2009
\textsuperscript{113} Interview, Francis Eshien, secretary “Brokos Adoye Kuw”, Elmina, 19.09.2009
Apart from these hierarchical divisions within the associations, votes are usually carried out on a majority basis, that is, free, equal and open. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the associations’ constitutions define the members’ duties rather than their rights in the association. As the following section will illustrate, the main organisational mechanism within voluntary associations remains the respect for the leaders. “When our elders beat the drum, we follow” one canoe fisherman told me. In times of political unrest, I want to suggest, when decisions are taken and reactions are planned within few hours collective action is more likely to be decided by the associations’ leaders and their strategic affiliations among each other rather than by basic democratic decision making.

- **Mobilisation of participants for collective action**

Collective action as in the case of the “Justice” demonstration then is closely connected to the internal power relations of the associations. Before the demonstration, the “Justice” heads explained to me, agreements had been made with the people of “5:1” not far away from their shed. Thus, in the days preceding the demonstration, word had spread that something would be happening. The drums displayed in front of the “Justice” shed clearly represented an additional indicator for these rumours. The actual gathering, however, was called in with drums on a more surprising notice. Walking through the “Brokos” neighbourhood with drums the two associations quickly gathered their followers around them and started their protest drumming and chanting their protest around the places symbolizing their Chief fisherman’s authority such as his “palace”, that is, the chief fisherman’s office and the Edina Traditional Council.

Already Kenneth Little (1957) pointed to the role of music in the collective organising in voluntary associations. As a matter of fact, no public appearance of the voluntary associations observed during my fieldwork happened without reference to singing, dancing or drumming. Especially, during the organisation of a member’s funeral brass band parades are an essential element. But demonstrations are also often accompanied by the singing of asafo or fishing songs to convey a sense of seriousness. The performance of a collective identity with the help of music becomes most obvious when voluntary associations contribute to another association’s funeral. Then, the entire association is expected to gather for a collective donation which is presented to the bereaved family in a dancing procession, headed by the leaders. In some cases, like in the case of “Dwen Wo Ho” this even implies the matching of dresses and the dancing in line to show one’s belonging to a certain group and underpin the value of the donation made, which is usually subject to not only a person’s individual means but also his or her standing in society. Thus, a respected member of the neighbourhood is usually the first to bring about his contribution and is through its public announcement judged in terms of the appropriateness of the amount. Once again the degree of voluntarism becomes questionable in this regard. At this point, it is however important to note that these respected members of society are often stated as the main motivation for others to contribute themselves, following the motto “if our president contributes, we also will go and if our president dances, we will dances to support the funeral we will dance with him”.

Apart from the usual activities of voluntary associations in Elmina in supporting their community’s funerals, music also plays a role in the mobilisation of participants as it shows the seriousness of the actors. During demonstrations, for example, the chanting of asafo songs, that
is, songs from indigenous military and defence organisations will hardly be misunderstood by any bystander. Also, during public gatherings, dancing and singing upon the arrival of the dignitaries represents an important expression of loyalty. It so happened at the public gathering called in by the Paramount chief to solve the crisis between the Elmina Chief fisherman and the canoe owners. The women supporting Jojo Solomon and the traditional rulers of Elmina in general not only danced to their own singing upon the arrival of the Paramount chief but also opposed and drowned the protests of the canoe owners when the meeting came to its premature end.

Besides the respect for their associations’ leaders and the role of music also individual opinion leaders have a stake in the mobilisation of participants for collective action. As one informant, a local pastor and former member in the “5:1” association pointed out, the word needs to spread through the neighbourhood. In his church, people follow what he defines to be a relevant cause. Despite the serious bias in this self-description, it is unquestionably true that effective mobilisation needs multipliers deep within the community. Yet, the elders in the first place base their authority in the associations on their public opinion leadership and thus easily reach beyond the boundaries of their associations and into the communities. Once again, it is noteworthy that ordinary fishermen are usually excluded from such positions of authority due to their frequent absence at sea. Individual opinion leadership on the in- and outside of voluntary associations thus generally rests in the hands of watchmen and few non-fishing community members.

Given their frequent absence at sea, issues of representation and mobilisation are severely complicated in the case of the canoe fishermen. Interestingly, music also reaches out to this work space in a very effective and voice-related manner. Notably, the fishing work is often and especially so in the expectation of a good catch accompanied by a very rhythmic singing and choreography. The so-called *aman* (fishing and motivational songs), consist of inputs from the leader of the work group and the crew’s response, which often takes the form of a simple response, yet also more elaborate story-telling is possible. These *aman* songs are the only means that support the crew in the exhausting task of dragging in the heavy fishing net, both in terms of rendering the work more effective but also as a matter of distraction and entertainment. In this light, the *aman* are the canoe owner’s or captain’s, as not all canoe owners accompany their crews at sea, only means to influence the crew’s performance. However most importantly for the argument presented in this thesis, *aman* fishing songs represent a way to “discuss” everything from local gossip to world politics in a singing form. Thus, besides comments on the location of the fish or the anticipated size of the catch, topics like a crew member’s “male performance” at work and at home or the collective migration experience, mostly in French speaking references to places in Ivory Coast, are just as common as the visit of President Obama to Ghana in July 2009 or the perceptions of the Ghanaian government’s commitment to the problems of the local fishermen.

*Aman* fishing songs thus represent a medium by which fishermen get exposed to and debate on different opinions and viewpoints. The structure of this debate, as has been alluded to, is inherently bound to the hierarchies on board and differences in voice are carefully adhered to. Nonetheless, the canoe offers the fishermen a space of daily interaction in which political discussions and mobilisations become possible in varying degrees of freedom of expression. Once again it is noteworthy that many outsiders have realised the central role of the canoe owner as an opinion leader and effective multiplicator. The political parties for instance knowingly direct
their campaigns at the owners of the vessels who in turn are expected to influence the opinion of up to 20 crew members. As the main information disseminator and highly respected figure, the canoe owner thus has a relevant impact on the mobilisation of agency as happened during the “Joint Action Against Pair Trawling” described below. This is not to suggest that canoe fishermen cannot turn against the cause of their canoe owners.

b. External relations and “forum shopping”

Chen et al (2007) describe how the independence of voluntary associations in terms of their financial and ideological inputs is crucial to their fulfilling of their potential role as mediators between policy makers and the urban “poor”. Autonomy of funding in their argument is the prerequisite for the articulation of genuine interest representation. Despite the indubitable value of this argument from the theoretical perspective, more practical observations have to be made in order to understand the actual mechanisms of “forum shopping” (von Benda-Beckmann, 1981) at play. As a matter of fact, all of the associations presented so far engage in some sort of external relation that operates in their benefit. These strategic affiliations, I want to argue, can however hardly be reduced to a mere rational calculation of costs and benefits but follow at least partly also more ideological or simply historically-grown relationships.

• Traditional leadership

Much has been said already about the affiliation of selected associations with the traditional authorities of Elmina. The reasons for these associations supporting the “traditions” do not have to be repeated here. What is interesting at this point is what motivates some associations in their loyalty towards their community’s traditional leaders while others turn their back at them?

The example of the “Island/Freetown” associations illustrated how the Omanbene of Edina Traditional Council secured the support of voluntary associations, notably the “Island” and “Freetown” youth by making substantial promises. When these promises failed to materialise, the support of the two groups ceased and eventually turned into indifference. What then is the motivation for associations like “Justice” to remain in support of their traditional leaders given the fact that “Justice” also calls it upon itself to fight the irregularities detected during the traditional Bakatue festival?

Most importantly, the heads and members of both “Justice” and “5:1” stress the ideological factor underlying their loyalty. “You have to do the right thing” they repeatedly claim thus implying that the destoolment of traditional leaders and the subsequent unrest in Elmina are of negative impact to the community. Materially, the voluntary associations do not gain immediately from their connection and claim to be called upon the Omanbene’s service without any remuneration or compensation. This is the case, for example, when “Justice” or “5:1” come to rescue families threatened by the recurring inundations in Elmina. Once again, the discursive expression of “doing the right thing” is presented to be the crucial motivation. This is not to conceal that on a deeper organisational level these services may play a beneficial role to the associations, especially in terms of image creation, organisational sense-making and ultimately the recruitment of members, that is, the enhancement of organisational strength in the form of financial means and associational bargaining power.
In short, *apofohene* and *Omanbene* seem to support the voluntary associations only ideologically. Exceptions may occur in times of the yearly *Bakatue* festival where supporters are constantly needed due to the absence of the local *asafio* companies or during very exceptional occasions like the tragically perceived funeral of a young “5:1” member in Elmina in October 2009. Despite the crisis of his authority being at the peak at that time, with his opponents uttering the most serious threats, Jojo Solomon who had not appeared in town over the last weeks as a response to the tense situation “flashed” by the funeral with his unmistakably yellow car to show his respect for the deceased and not at last to underpin his standing with the local youth, his most important supporters. Once again, while these connections between the traditional leaders and the associations remain mainly ideological in nature, the same cannot be said for mainstream political leaders, and especially the political parties who have discovered the voluntary associations as important sources of opinion making.

- **Mainstream political leadership**

The connections between voluntary associations and mainstream political institutions became most obvious in view of the 2008 elections. In almost every association’s shed, my informants pointed to considerable electoral presents. From TV-sets for the daily entertainment to instruments allowing the associations to perform the essential brass bands during funerals all CPP and NDC had left their imprint throughout Elmina’s associational universe, sometimes as obvious as in the case of the “Justice” drums but mostly more hidden to the public.

*Figure 14: The drums of the “Justice” association, electoral campaign gifts from the local CPP under Nduom*

![Image of people carrying drums]

Other than the political parties mentioned above, the strategy of the NPP was not directed at the voluntary associations of fish workers but involved extensive benefits for party members employed in the fishing industry. It is a widely acknowledged fact that many canoe owners in Cape Coast and Elmina received substantial fishing inputs before the elections. As the head of the fishing crew, notably the canoe owners represent direct access to fishing crews of up to twenty people each. In this light, the political parties seem well aware of the important role of the

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114 Interviews, AAC, Elmina, 25.08.2009 and 12.09.2009

87
coastal regions as swing states in Ghana’s national elections (Electoral Commission of Ghana; Kohnert et al 2010).

From the reverse perspective, mainstream political institutions also provide important points of contact and cooperation for the voluntary associations themselves. This is particularly true for the canoe owners who doubtless are the most active lobbyists in Elmina’s formal fisheries management. Throughout the premix crisis in Elmina, the canoe owners attempted to have their voice heard at several institutions among which were the Central Regional Minister and the Central Regional Police Commander. In everyday business, however, cooperation between the Elmina canoe owners and the state is generally restricted to the level of KEEA District Assembly with its District Chief Executive, be it for consultation on fishing related issues or simply through the involvement of few canoe owners in local level politics.

- **Alliances among voluntary associations**

Voluntary associations are very active in connecting and cooperating among each other. These affiliations provide mutual support in various forms. While newly founded associations may receive funding from stronger affiliates to organise their collective space, for example, by constructing a community shed, the smaller association will most likely support the donor association during their funerals, in terms of contributions and participation of their processions. It is noteworthy, how these contributions represent important financial burdens, for example travelling expenses, that easily outweigh the initially received financial support. However, for “humanitarian” reasons, as they put it, the funerals of such important people and associations have to be supported with all strength.

*Figure 15: Exhausted elder of “Brokos Adoye Kuu” after mobilising his association for a funeral of the “Las Palmas” association in Accra, November 2009*

In addition to these community-intern affiliations, voluntary associations also link up with associations in other communities. That is particularly true for the canoe owners association which organises its information exchange in this way. Fishing is an occupation that is highly
dependent on the passing on of knowledge, be it about the location of the fish, price developments or political relations. The same is true to some extent for the ordinary fishermen who also depend on this kind of knowledge for the successful organisation of their fishing expeditions as well as for the mobilising of their collective efforts.

Voluntary associations cooperating with each other not at last create a forum for joint speech that transcends the exclusiveness of the debate in Elmina and brings together all positions within the hierarchical continuum of voice and ownership of the debate. On an everyday basis, this happens in the general associations like “Justice” where both canoe owners and fishermen, women and men, elderly and youth come together to pass their time, discuss and connect with the developments in their hometown.

During extraordinary occasions like the “Joint Action Against Pair Trawling (JAAPT)” in 2008, people of all backgrounds unite in the fight against an enemy beyond the limits of their community. While voluntary associations are usually differentiating amongst each other and even contest each other’s stake in the public debate, cases like the JAAPT represent something like a segmentary opposition of interests in which conflicts on the local scale can be overlooked and alliances be formed in the fight against a greater evil, which is perfectly exemplified by the threat of international pair trawling.

The JAAPT initiative is of greater interest to this argument as it also involved the cooperation between local level associations and large-scale political actors and processes on different scales, including the transnational one.

- **Transnational connections - “Joint Action Against Pair Trawling”**

In summer 2008, a few hundred fishermen from Elmina embarked their collectively organised buses to drive to Accra and join in a massive demonstration of canoe fishermen from all along the Ghanaian coast. As has been alluded earlier, this event termed “Joint Action Against Pair Trawling” is of particular interest as it shows how fish workers can overcome the internal stratifications and divisions that may limit them in terms of access to voice on the local level in order to speak with a united voice when opposing a common enemy.

The “Joint Action Against Pair Trawling” was initiated by an NGO called “Corporate Social Responsibility Movement” (CSRM) and a group of prominent canoe owners in the Central Region, mainly from Elmina. Much can be said about the rather dramatic course of events leading to the fishermen fighting back a police commando sent to hinder them from reaching the goal of their demonstration from Jamestown to the Presidential Office in Christianborg Castle, Accra. Yet, most central to my argument at this point is the observation that the alliance with

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115 Interview, Texas, Elmina, 13.12.2009
116 As the participants of the demonstration later told me, the fishermen were equipped with paddles only, not as weapons but as indicators of their seriousness which was already underlined by their singing their fishing songs. Most of the fishermen from other communities had already been stopped, as the plans had reached the officials beforehand. The six buses of the Elmina fishermen however took a detour after being informed about the police blockade. When stopped by the police just a few hundred meters away from the presidential palace, where the fishermen intended to present their protest against the Kufuor administration’s perceived inactivity against the ongoing pair trawling activities, two opinion leaders from Elmina, among them a former army official de-escalated the situation. Having attracted intensive media coverage, the fishermen believed that their message had come across and indeed, a delegation of the protestors, among them Flt. Tackey and Maanoma, were invited to the office of
CSRNM has allowed the fishermen to penetrate for the first time into the realm of transnational social actors.

CSRNM, it needs to be pointed out, is organised widely not only nationwide in the newly created alliance of fisheries-related NGOs, the “Fisheries Alliance”, but also connects to Western donors and think tanks like the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. As Lindell (2010) points out, this is an expression of a much wider trend of informal economy organisations affiliating beyond their local realms and wide into the transnational governance arenas. With StreetNet being the most prominent and well established example of informal economy workers mobilising transnational agency, the effective link between CSRNM and fishing communities along the entire Ghanaian coast should thus probably be seen not as an exceptional story but as an ongoing and promising trend for interest representation in the periphery of economic activities. Notably, the organisational effort was possible only through the cooperation with the respective Chief fishermen which once more points to the central importance of this single but essentially intermediary institution. However, it is also relevant to see that the financial effort, for example, to organise buses, cannot constantly be carried by few influential individuals like in the JAAPT incidence. While in some instances funds from the premix sale may be mobilised, voluntary associations have in the past shown their impressive potential to organise financial assistance for the benefit of needy individuals (e.g. the watchmen association collectively supporting a deceased member’s wife and children) or the entire community. With the organisational experience in managing funds and the ideological foundations of the voluntary associations on the ground (e.g. participating in funerals for “humanitarian reasons”) the associations are likely to play a greater role in the organisation of large-scale collective agency.

Another transnational connection can be identified in the newly founded “Fisheries Alliance”, that is, a network of fisheries-related NGOs in Ghana. With Technical Services for Community Development (TESCOD) and Friends of the Nation (FoN) as its most prominent members, the “Fisheries Alliance” has found its negotiation allies in Belgium and India (International Collective in Support of Fishworkers – ICSF) and the United States (USAID). Interestingly, the same normative references can be found within these internationally affiliated NGOs and their local counter parts, the voluntary vocational associations. The logo of Friends of the Nation illustrates colourfully how the Fante expression of doing the right thing (ye adza ofataa) can be appropriated in this regard.

Figure 16: Logo and motto of “Friends of the Nation”, a fisheries-centred NGO

President Kufuor where they were assured that the issue would be addressed without delay (interview, Texas, Elmina, 13.12.2009). Notably, the pair trawling issue played a deciding role in the elections that followed only few months after the event. Also, after the transition of power in the 2009 premix crisis did the pair trawling issue come up again.
Beyond the organisational realm, fish workers are also increasingly knowledgeable about the exploitation of foreign news coverage in their interest. Especially, regional fishing centres like Elmina receive considerable media attention. Not only national media generally chose Elmina as the basis for their coverage, for example, during the premix crisis. In the six months of my fieldwork alone, two foreign news teams arrived in Elmina for the production of documentaries about pair trawling and the state of the world’s fish stocks. Obviously, the picturesque façade of the Elmina castle and the sheer number of canoes in the port of Elmina account for the TV crews preferred visual choice. However, some people in Elmina claim to have been in documentaries already over 20 years ago and are still recruited for interviews on a recurring basis through their contacts, expertise and eagerness to tell the world about the dramatic state of their industry¹¹⁷.

- “Forum shopping” and strategic bargaining

This chapter has illustrated how voluntary associations of fish workers organise their members and enter into various external connections. On this basis, I now want to explain how voluntary associations activate their collective agency. Voluntary associations, it can be argued, represent the main carriers and central mobilising points for associational bargaining power in Elmina. The most important, central mobilising points referred to in this thesis are issues of welfare (e.g. the funeral associations offering assistance during major events in life) and the regulation of social space (e.g. the necessity to patrol the port and fish market for delinquents (“Las Palmas”) or the role of voluntary associations to correct public misbehaviour of all kinds).

Centred on these mobilising points, voluntary associations allow for the creation of associational bargaining power in the sense that they enable access to the relevant forums of debate for those who otherwise would be excluded, that is, fish workers who do not own relevant means of production. While an individual may never be able to contradict the opinion leaders in Elmina, speaking as a group provides considerably more freedom of expression. Moreover, voluntary associations generally provide forums for discussion and opinion creation that go far beyond the usual divisions of labour. Thus, while on the one hand reproducing hierarchies of the debate by reflecting the respective divisions along the lines of ownership in means of production, they also transcend these lines by bringing people of different stances together to create a joint speech and thus to build a greater bases for associational action and the mobilisation of political agency.

Voluntary associations, I want to argue, represent an access mechanism in itself as they may enhance voice and representation among those who otherwise lack access to forums of debate by referring to different kinds of bargaining power, especially associational bargaining power (Silver 2003). Among the different forms of bargaining power that workers may possess according to Beverly Silver (2003: 13f), artisanal fish workers in Elmina predominantly exploit the associational form. Thus, other than on the national scale, market-based bargaining power (food security), structural bargaining power (national security) and moral bargaining power did not weigh as much in the negotiation arena around the contested destoolement of Nana Jojo Solomon. As Wright (2000: 962, quoted in Silver 2003: 14) defines it, associational bargaining power consists of “the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective

¹¹⁷ Interview, Kimbo, Elmina, 05.11.2009 and Texas, Elmina, 13.12.2009
organisations of workers. Structural power, in contrast, consists of the power that accrues to workers simply from their location ... in the economic system”.

The internal dynamics of voluntary associations described above relate to the actual negotiation strategies of voluntary associations in the sense that they underpin the associations’ bargaining powers. An association like “Justice” that is always emphasising the common good in their actions therefore easily mobilises its inherent moral bargaining power. Other associations rely on the force of sheer numbers. While voluntary associations have been said to reproduce the divide in voice, they also offer forums for joint speech following the logic of segmentary opposition, in this way they allow for collective action and thus the creation of associational bargaining power. The creation of sameness in view of a greater evil and in this regard the building of common grounds for discussion and collective agency, surmounting deeply engrained social categories of difference is however essentially rooted in particular situations. In this perspective, one probably has to reject the potential of voluntary associations for the more long-term transgression of social boundaries.

This thesis has emphasised the interactions of voluntary associations among themselves and with other types of leadership, namely mainstream political and traditional forms of leadership. As Overa rightly observes, “[j]deally, there should be a power balance between these institutions. Needless to say this balance is always contested and conflicts and negotiations always ongoing” (2003: 51). In these contestations, voluntary associations are to a great extent aware of the different forms of bargaining power at their disposition and align strategically with the negotiation partner best suitable for their cause. Once again, in the words of von Benda-Beckmann, “forum-shopping” (and “shopping forums” for that matter) takes place in the process where “disputants have a choice between different institutions and (...) base their choice on what they hope the outcome of the dispute will be, however vague or ill-founded their expectations may be” (1981: 177). In contrast to Chen et al, this definition is not specific in terms of the kind of benefits or the type of the interrelation to be constructed. Most importantly, it paves the way for a very situational understanding of bargaining power in voluntary associations.

When the conflict reached its peak with Jojo Solomon failing to attend his court date with the Elmina canoe owners, the latter decided to mobilise all their potential bargaining powers and find an ultimate solution to the developments. The canoe owners’ discussion preceding their audition with the Regional Police Commander revealed impressively how choices for strategic interest representation are made. While the first suggestion to address the KEEA District Chief Executive with their complaints was long debated, it eventually was rejected due to an assumed proximity between the DCE and the traditional leaders of Elmina. The Regional Minister, the canoe owners knew, was absent from her office due to a business trip. It was in this light, that the choice of the canoe owners emerged to negotiate for a quick solution in their interest with the Regional Police Commander. It is also noteworthy how this decision had been contested within the canoe owners themselves thus revealing the actual hierarchies of decision making that are usually so carefully denied. While the final decision was brought forward by the formerly prominent candidate for the stool of the chief fisherman, it was only after consultation with Maanoma via the phone that the canoe owners agreed upon their “forum shopping”.

Interestingly, this situation also illustrated the reverse process of “shopping forums” as the canoe owners failed to go through the usual bureaucratic procedures and hierarchies. To their
mischance, the Police Commander of the KEEA district was present when the canoe owners presented their cause. Knowing that his position was overridden in the process, the KEEA police commander could hardly hide his anger. As one informant among the canoe owners stated later, the canoe owners were very lucky that this collective action did not result in a large scale arrest\(^\text{118}\). While there cannot be any counterfactual evidence for this statement, it shows the complexity of the choice of a suitable negotiation partner. Obviously, these decisions are not only made on rational grounds but also relate to historically-grown relationships between different parties. Thus, after the court date, the canoe owners also threatened to attack the *Abomka* radio station in Elmina as they were perceived to cover the issue from a partial stance. It is certainly in such regards that *Abomka* eventually ceased to report about the conflict all together.

7. Conclusion – Fisheries in crisis, a crisis for authority

The aim of this thesis was to interpret the dispute around the contested destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman in its wide-ranging contexts. On this basis, a three-fold research interest was established emphasising the socio-spatial (or synchronic), processual (or diachronic) and finally the broader theoretical insights to be gained from the dispute as a “diagnostic event”.

The actors introduced throughout this thesis cannot be emphasised enough. It is their interests and the relations relevant for achieving these interests that are at the centre of the analysis. Chief fisherman and Paramount chief in Elmina have been presented in the context of their strong personal networks, safeguarding their positions with recourse to traditional signifiers of legitimate rule, yet at the same time grounded in the dynamics of a historical crisis of sovereignty. The fisher folks, in turn, have been described in their capability of applying their own strategic mechanisms aimed at making their divergent stances clearly heard. Especially, the act of collective organising has been portrayed as a powerful amplifier of opposition and protest. Divided along the lines of support and opposition to the latest Chief fisherman in Elmina, the fisher folks collectively aligned following their moral dispositions such as much as their strategic interests in the conflict.

Inspired by Kaag (2001: 9ff), my aim in this case study was to avoid reifying the local as a fixed realm which is there simply to be discovered by the researcher. Instead, my analysis centred on the changing circumstances and inequalities inherent in the social structure and its effects on how social life is perceived, known and acted upon at different times and in different contexts. Thus, it is the real-life interactions that have been studied by putting actors and their actions at the core of the investigation. With this perspective on society, I intended to reject unilateral explanations of social life not only by including past (and potentially future) developments in the picture but also by drawing attention to the very variety of local dynamics and processes. This historicising and processual perspective, referring back to Moore (1987), then shows how structure is continuously produced, re-constructed and re-invented. Social life in this order of ideas is generated over time rather than being artificially divided into past and present. In contrast, events and processes underlying social life have to be understood in their reciprocal influence, be it through inherent connections or mere coincidences. This then represents a more holistic approach of transformations of society in more general terms, focussed on social life as it really

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\(^\text{118}\) Interview, KBJ, Elmina, 27.09.2009
happens instead of overemphasizing the researcher’s spatial, temporal and analytical choices. Before delving into the processual and broader theoretical relevance of my case, I first want to summarise the abstract findings gathered on the socio-spatial relations of power and hierarchies of voice in Elmina.

Mechanisms of voice and interest representation in Elmina’s artisanal canoe fisheries

“Healthy marine resources require healthy community structures”, this thesis has argued with reference to Jentoft (2003). Turning this statement around, one could also claim that governance structures in Ghana’s fisheries are exposed to increasing pressure in view of the deteriorating state of the country’s marine fish stocks. Thus, while many sources argue for the prevalence of an essential voice deficit in the so-called informal economy (e.g. Schiphorst, 2005), of which the artisanal fishing sector is likely one of the most stereotypical representatives, this thesis contests the wide-spread assumption that small scale fishermen are incapable of making their voice heard in relevant institutions of decision making.

On the one hand, this thesis has described the various factors that constrain artisanal canoe fishermen to make their contribution in problem definition and policy implementation in their industry. These constraints are partially rooted in the fishing industry itself as it excludes many of its members, crucial workforce in view of the inherent complementarity of tasks in the occupation, from the public debate. Arenas of policy formation, in addition, are also rarely designed to include direct input from the part of the concerned fishermen and have strict gatekeeping mechanisms. Thus, even the actors advocating for more consultations with artisanal fishermen, especially the fisheries-related NGOs, may from time to time go to the landing beaches in order to listen to people’s perspectives, yet fail to invite them to their stakeholder meetings (often held in English, a language that only few fisher people master sufficiently) to give a direct input in their own terms. In view of this, one may analyse the situation very pessimistically, as it presents itself as if many self-proclaimed advocates simply make use of the fishermen’s decisive bargaining power to advance their own agendas and eventually fail to deliver the fisher folks’ desires and grievances to the relevant decision makers.

This thesis has, however, also painted a different picture. Artisanal canoe fishermen, with their significant degrees of bargaining power, do manage to make their voice heard and thereby to access relevant forums of decision making. A central means to do so has been identified in the associating in voluntary membership-based organisations. Although people mainly join these associations for predominantly practical reasons (that is, to receive substantial assistance in times of personal need) and sometimes due to social expectation (especially, in cases of highly respected community members), one additional major benefit of associating is to transcend the divisions of access to the public debate inherent in the Elmina fishing community.

Voluntary associations have been shown not only to provide a joint forum of speech for canoe owners and ordinary fish workers of all ages and gender (especially, in conflicts that concern the fishermen as a united whole), they also transport and underpin the significant values that are at the core of fish workers’ moral bargaining power. In short, voluntary associations represent central mobilising points for collective action, from the creation and dissemination of opinions to the concrete engagement with decision-relevant governance institutions. Voluntary associations in Elmina, during their regular and extra-curricular meetings thus may provide the space for
collective problem definition and decision making and eventually lead to the decision to engage with relevant policy makers.

Most importantly, voluntary associations manage to create and attract significant audiences for their messages. At times, this implies the addressing of public media or simply in the organisation of large scale demonstrations. In this manner, protest may either be delivered directly to the intended decision makers, or, influence may be exerted through the delegation of representatives into offices of leadership, especially the position of the local Chief fisherman and his respective stirring committees. In view of this, the conflict around Nana Solomon’s contested destoolment represents above all a conflict of interest representation. While Solomon lost the support of the local canoe owners, many fishermen in Elmina continued to believe that he would be the best leader of their fishing community and thereby best represent their interests in Elmina and beyond.

Ideally, intermediaries like the Chief fisherman in turn act as amplifiers of the canoe fishermen’s voice in their interaction with more central actors in negotiation and decision making arenas. As a matter of fact, the latter often manage to represent the fishermen with a relatively strong voice given their mandate emerging directly from landing beaches and processing sites. Although instances have become known where delegates have misused their mandates for personal benefits, the case of Elmina has shown that local fishermen still hold the checks and balances to correct leaders deviating too much from their original missions and responsibilities. As will be argued below, the advent of literacy in the fishing industry has come hand in hand with increased capabilities of forming strategic alliances beyond the traditional realms of the fishing sector. Despite these strategically broadened power bases, the actual mandate and source of legitimate rule still remains with the fisher folks and, in the case of Elmina, more specifically with the canoe owners.

Interest representation, this thesis has shown, is closely connected to issues of leadership, including traditional, mainstream political and the here introduced vocational forms of authority. Vocational leadership constitutes not only an effective intermediary between mainstream-political and traditional forms of leadership but also represents a form of legitimate authority that is often more responsive to the fish workers’ needs and aspirations on the ground, especially in the form of vocational associations. In view of this multiplicity of actors, the most interesting observation then concerns the ways in which these forms of leadership interlink and interact and thus provide the potential for vocational interest groups to influence decision making in their terms. Kraan (2009) identifies the officially recognised and legally regulated relationships between the various governance institutions in Ghana’s artisanal fisheries (cf. Annex A). However, also relationships of a very unofficial character play a role in the negotiation of fisheries-related norms and regulations. This becomes particularly obvious in the case of partisan affiliations of interest, for example, in the course of electoral campaigns or in local level alliances of a sometimes historically grown character like the case of Elmina’s Paramount chief has illustrated.

The point here is not to reproduce the artificial division between formal and informal political relations. In contrast, the political relations that revealed themselves in the interplay between “formal” and “informal” stakeholders in Elmina can be perceived as participation in the common arenas of negotiating interests and thereby defining reality. Arenas have been defined as the social space where the confrontations between “strategic groups” take place. Negotiation arenas thus
alter with their members’ consciousness of the encounter with different stakeholders and with the strategic adaptation to the challenges and opportunities inherent in this encounter (Bierschenk & de Sardan, 1994). In Elmina, artisanal canoe fishermen engage with negotiation arenas along different scales. Notably, information dissemination throughout these scales can be perceived symmetrically, that is, flowing both ways. Despite the fact that negotiation arenas are often closed by gate-keeping mechanisms (e.g. by social expectations and hierarchies of voice), the Elmina canoe fishermen are still enactive of these arenas through their delegation or contestation of their representatives, respectively.

The following “sequence” of negotiation arenas can be derived from the Elminan case.

- The canoe: While the workplace is the first point of contact for many fishermen with information from outside of Elmina (often provided by the owner of the vessel who is generally widely respected in the community, and socially much more mobile), the canoe also offers a relatively safe and secluded place in which, provided one has reached a certain rank in the crew, discussions are possible. Clearly, opinion leadership takes place with younger, inexperienced crew members. The canoe owner in this way may provide an effective link with institutions of fisheries management and is one of the most direct representatives of the fishermen in these institutions. At the same time, interests of owners and non-owners of canoes can diverge substantially, as the case of the contested destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman has shown.

- The associations’ sheds: After a day or night of hard work, canoe fishermen find each other’s company in the numerous collective sheds within the port area. These sheds are often used for a particular association’s collective meetings. More often, however, it represents just a space for common meals, rest and sociality in general. These activities then include friends and neighbours who may in a professional sense stand in a more hierarchical relationship. The dynamics of voice and ownership of the debate are largely divided by the lines of gender and means of production. The voluntary associations’ communal spaces manage to level these differences to some extent and thus allow for a more encompassing articulation of interests involving actors from more diverse social backgrounds.

- The local radio stations: Media play a major role in the dissemination of information, opinions and protests. They represent a negotiation arena in the sense that radio programmes often refer to local conflictual issues and consequently provide forums for discussion for the different parties in the conflict. Jojo Solomon being discredited in the weekly fishing programme on Abomku FM thus reached such a huge amount of people that made it literally impossible to turn around the public opinion. In the Elminan context, the radio stations are of particular influence due to the high level of illiteracy and their multiple audiences within wide ranges beyond the community borders. Radio stations also often have a clear partisan connection and are made use of by the different conflict parties in strategic ways.

- The local authorities: Established authorities obviously have a stake in the negotiation of fisheries management, especially in a fish-dependent town like Elmina. They are thus providing forums for debate that in some but very limited ways are also open towards the input of the local population. The “forum shopping” activities (von Benda-Beckmann, 1981)
undertaken by the opposing parties in Elmina’s latest chieftaincy conflict illustrated how alliances with both the Edina Traditional Council and the decentralised governance institutions on the District level have informed the conflict not only through hearing complaints and allowing the formation of strategic alliances but eventually also in terms of promoting potential solutions.

- The national interest groups: The Ghana National Canoe Fisherman Council (GNFAC) is the most important interest group and forum for debate of fisheries management in the artisanal fishing sector. As a joint forum of all Chief fishermen in Ghana, the GNFC mainly is the only forum that is not selective in terms of age or gender but argues for the interests of all fish workers along the Ghanaian coast. In view of the essential complementarity of fisheries-related tasks, this holistic approach is very sensible. Other nationwide actors can be found in the fisheries-related NGOs which recently formed an alliance in order to increase their voice in the national governance institutions. Both “Fisheries Alliance” and the GNFC are important lobbyists and negotiation partners in the national governance institutions where access for “ordinary” fisherman is hugely restricted.

- The streets of Accra and the (world) public: While the ministries in Accra have proven to be relatively restricted terrains for the artisanal fishermen, the latter know how to create their own forums of discussion through the attraction of large scale public attention. It so happened that the canoe fishermen organised a massive demonstration along one of the central streets of Accra. The media attention attracted this way has been made use of in order to contest the official responses to the pair trawling activities. Fishermen are also media-conscious and practically know how to turn a public debate in their favour. The news coverage accompanying the nationwide premix crisis thus was quickly re-appropriated on their own terms and official voices blaming the fishermen themselves were thus easily silenced.

Negotiation arenas, as presented above, also have to be understood in their mutual interlinking. Linkages can above all be seen in the figures of local opinion leaders, for example, the canoe owners. As owners of the vessel, canoe owners are literally the owners of the business and consequently possess a strong influence on the members of their crews. At the same time, they are often highly respected in the community and thus are also relatively likely to have a dominant stance in the social space ashore. With their exclusive association, canoe owners then represent their own stances in conflicts and make use of forums provided, for example by the local media or decentralised governance institutions, to impact on the public opinion and, ultimately, relevant decision making. Through the institution of the Chief fisherman, an office exclusively filled by their mandate, the canoe owners eventually manage to be represented, quite directly, in the national negotiation arenas, especially by advocates like the GNFC. Ordinary fishermen, in general, have quite similar means of influencing the formation of arenas. Yet, they are more often required to form a collective voice before being heard. This creation of a joint speech happens often in the sheds of the voluntary associations, be it in a discussion over a common game of dame or during deliberately announced public discussions. Speaking with a common voice not only amplifies what is said, but it not at last protects the individual who on his or her own would not be socially allowed to speak out against a hierarchically superior other. In view of the fisher folks’ particular bargaining power, local governance institutions can hardly completely ignore the protests presented to them. The case of the former Fisheries Minister, Gladys Asmah, has been
cited many times as an example of a representative failing to listen to the fisher people’s interests. Despite her repeated visits to the Elmina landing beach, a strategic choice given the importance of Elmina as a regional fishing centre, Asmah failed to materialise the promises made. In the general elections of 2008, the NPP received the fatal feedback for their inactivity in view of the fishermen’s grievances. Current media reports suggest a similar shift in public opinion of the ruling NDC (Adom FM, 10.06.2010).

The sequence of negotiation arenas in Elmina as presented above obviously has been simplified for the sake of abstraction. It nonetheless shows how negotiation arenas are initiated by various actors on various scales and depending on their constitution involve different forms of bargaining power. Arenas then are also manifestations of power relations. One of the aims of this thesis was to show that even small-scale fishermen possess bargaining power, be it directly in the creation of associational representatives or indirectly through the mobilisation and activation of advocates on various scales.

Conceptually, the application of bargaining power opens the way to forums of problem definition and decision making. In other words, bargaining power relates to the issue of interest representation as it is key to the relevant forums of debate and thus assembles into “voice” as an access mechanism to platforms of decision making. Bargaining power itself then takes different forms in different situations and is strategically applied according to the interaction between the different actors involved. Among the forms introduced in Silver (2003), most emphasis has been put on the moral, associational and structural forms of bargaining power. Tactically, one can say, artisanal canoe fishermen often adopt these forms in a rather defensive way, for example, when crying out publicly “what have we done that everybody is punishing us?” (Elmina Chief fisherman, Takoradi, 21.08.2009). The constant referral to the discourse of “doing the right thing” shows how issues of representation and normative ideas of justice are strongly interconnected. Especially, an industry like the fisheries that is at the core of Ghana’s food sovereignty and indirectly employs an estimate of ten percent of the population allows for the effective engagement with relevant decision makers.

In view of these theoretical observations, interests thus are never fixed but exist only in the dynamic processes of negotiating reality. Or, in the words of Lindell (2010: 21), “[o]ne may understand ‘interests’ as constructed and negotiated meanings of injustice, rather than objective, given and fixed or ‘fully determined by people’s structural position in society’”. This is, however, not to suggest that differences in access and power are irrelevant. In contrast, the artisanal fishing sector is characterised by a much higher degree of heterogeneity than previous studies have managed to show. The consequent lines of inclusion and exclusion then cannot be ignored as important factors in the dynamics of interest representation on the ground. The analysis of the mechanisms determining “voice” and “ownership of the debate” in Elmina has shown how entire groups of the population are largely excluded from the public debate about fisheries management unless they secure alternative means of access to the debate (e.g. by purchasing a canoe or fishing net). In this light, interest representation is inherently gendered and generally divided along the lines of the division of labour in the artisanal fishing industry. Although voluntary associations manage to transcend some of these divisions in voice and access to forums of the debate, the underlying gender segregation in the fishing industry is reflected in the
processes of collective organising (especially, the absence of women in leadership positions) and thus makes it difficult for women to make their voice heard collectively.

In view of what has been said so far, interest representation cannot be understood as the achievement of single stakeholders but as materializing in the complex interaction between various types of power holders equipped with different kinds of bargaining power, including vocational leaders and associational bargaining powers. These bargaining powers are activated situationally and strategically but also follow historically grown, morally based affiliations. Interest representation thus clearly cannot be reduced to an encounter between rational stakeholders and consequently, “strategic groups” or “forum shoppers” may not be confused with holders of static interests and fixed moral dispositions. Social behaviour in general needs to be understood as constantly reproduced, adapted and reinterpreted according to changing environments. This is why the dynamics underlying fisheries management in Elmina have been described in their constant interactions between the various stakeholders involved instead of in the widely used top-down, factual manner. However, it is not enough to study the political dimensions of the local, including the informal or officially non-recognised but yet very effective forms of social organisation. Interest representation, as materialising in the complex interactions of various forms of leadership at play is also flexible over time and in different circumstances. In this light, the following paragraphs are going to present the more processual observations made in the Elminan case study.

**Power and voice in time and space**

In light of the theoretical starting points of my thesis, a more dynamic set of conclusions has to be brought forward in addition to the relatively abstract, structural observations presented to this point. Thus, the metaphor of a topography of power chosen to conceptualise the power relations underlying the conflict at the centre of this thesis may not be taken literally. In contrast, these relations are never stable or fixed in time but are highly fluid in view of historical developments and of situationally opening pathways. This then relates to my second research question interrogating how the environment of interest representation developed and develops with the changing interactions between the diverse forms of leadership at play.

The case of the strategic affiliations of artisanal fishermen engaging in “forum shopping” illustrates impressively how people have certain predispositions to choose their negotiation partners. Yet, “forum shopping” in Elmina, as inherent in the title of this thesis, takes place not only according to one’s structural disposition in the hierarchy of voice. “Forum shopping”, as defined by von Benda-Beckmann, is a strategy of entering the negotiation arenas deemed most likely to result in purposeful interest representation. Arenas in Elmina have already been summarised in the previous section. As this thesis has shown, their concrete constitution then depends not only on the engagement of individuals but also on broader political trends. The importance of partisanship in Ghana has been touched on only marginally, yet I hope the basic message has been put across that delegation to offices is often reserved for prominent members of the ruling party. These procedures result in particular constellations of power that in turn influence the strategic choices of societal groups trying to deliver their protest to suitable negotiation partners. In the case of the Elmina canoe owners, for example, choice of the relevant forum for protest was deliberately made on the basis of the closeness of the respective institution to the Elmina Paramount chief, and therefore the alliance of power for the Chief fisherman. With
the geographical proximity of Elmina to its regional capital, Cape Coast, the canoe owners were in the fortunate situation of being able to deliver their protest to a power holder (the regional Police Commander) who was at that point relatively uninvolved in the dispute and therefore more suitable for their cause.

In this light, Elmina canoe fishermen are very conscious of their (political) environments and perfectly able to interpret and act upon them in their own terms, especially so by affiliating in highly strategic ways. Obviously, it is real people who are at the core of the anthropological discipline. Preferences, norms and values then are as much at the centre of the analytical interest as are the challenges and opportunities determined by the actors’ diverse environments. As agents with access to various resources, people interpret their environments, explore the limitations inherent in these environments and create solutions for themselves, maybe closing potential pathways in the same instance. At this point, it may be argued that it is exactly the relative absence of official state regulation in fishing-related labour issues that allows artisanal canoe fishermen their high degree of flexibility. A later discussion intends to show, however, how these dichotomous arguments from the start fall short of their empirical foundations. Flexibility in Elminan power relation may actually represent a necessity in order to secure the ongoing fishing activities as an “everyday business”. Characterised by a particularly high degree of insecurity and therefore a constant need for adaptation, fishing communities and their leaders are likely to rely on a “culture of negotiation” in which conflicts are solved situationally rather than based on a fixed framework of rules and regulations. It then becomes questionable, however, how flexible this form of sociality really is. In order to secure any form of social cohesion, norms need to be shared, especially those relating to leadership and rule. The failed attempt of Nana Jojo Solomon to alter the bases of legitimacy underlying his office shows how these issues possess a more transcendent quality, exempt from purely rational considerations and procedures but subject to more deeply agreed social consensus.

At the same time, these relations can also not be perceived as fixed in time and space. Theoretically, the unit of analysis in this thesis was demarcated to observe social life in a concrete situation, including its broader temporal and spatial contexts. This was not to suggest that an extensive snapshot of society would be possible. In contrast, social life is in constant movement and static observations thus are of limited use for the description of it. Instead of explaining social developments from the point of view of an assumed formal-informal divide, I want to suggest that there are issues of a longue durée character repeatedly referenced in the latest chieftaincy conflict in Elmina. While some actors called for a reproduction of norms and values derived from the past, one could also observe the reinterpretation of these common sets of references. In practical terms, the position of the Chief fisherman used to be subject to the exclusive vote of the Elminan canoe owners. For the first time, as the case of Nana Jojo Solomon revealed, a Chief fisherman of Elmina contested this procedure and in order to oppose his de-installation, referred to bureaucratic forms of decision making for his remainder in power. These ideological changes which have mainly been observed regarding the basis of mandate, authority and legitimacy of rule should be summarised out in greater detail before rounding up my conclusions with the implications of my argument for a more general academic debate.

The most important underlying process revealed in my case study is the shifting basis of authority in the vocational realm of leadership. While the Chief fisherman’s authority used to be grounded
in the sacred nature of his office, accessed only through inheritance or extraordinary experience in the fishing work, it has over the last decades lost its charismatic character in favour of more rationalistic considerations. Because the position of the Chief fisherman nowadays implies more and more bureaucratic functions, literacy has shifted to the core of his qualifications. At the same time, this has made the Chief fisherman more vulnerable in terms of opposition to his decisions, for example through the public request of high-standard accountability.

Interestingly, it is the crisis of the marine resource that has made canoe fishermen aware of the importance of education. While children were in the past discouraged to go to school in order to learn the fishing business (that is, build up the necessary muscles from an early age onwards) and later provide for their families, nowadays, ever more families decide to send their children to school in the view of the lack of good future perspectives in the fishing work. This growth in literacy has doubtlessly increased the importance of accountability for legitimate rule. While the sovereignty of the chief fisherman has been clearly undermined in this development, it leaves room for discussion whether the destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman should be seem as a crisis of authority or rather the democratisation of the constantly contested fisheries management in Ghana.

The former point should not be judged in terms of an implied notion of the deviation from “tradition” in favour of the coming of “modernity”. In contrast, the position of the Chief fisherman makes very clear that these simple dichotomies fall short of portraying the empirical reality. The Chief fisherman is clearly a figure of authority who bases large parts of his legitimacy on the performance of historically grown insignia of power. At the same time, these performances are directed at inherently “modern” processes like the engagement with government officials or the mainstreaming and promotion of technological advances. A simple divide between issues of tradition and modernity is therefore clearly misplaced. Rather, one has to consider the broader dynamics impacting on legitimate rule in Elmina, where “tradition” is at the same time safeguarding the legitimacy of institutions while it is itself characterised by a century-long, internal structural disequilibrium.

Moreover, changes have been detected in terms of the scales interest representation is addressing. While negotiations used to be limited to conflicts between different vessels, in the extreme case involving crews from different fishing communities along the Ghanaian coast, interest groups are increasingly linking up to the transnational scale in order to make their voice heard. Global processes of transnational governance and technological advances thus have had their impact on interest representation in the often very remotely perceived artisanal fishing communities of Ghana.

The changing political environment throughout Ghana’s history constitutes a further processual perspective on societal relations. While the NPP-led government clearly favoured the liberal organisation of the fishing business, the past and recent NDC supports a greater involvement of the state in the crucial distribution of fishing inputs. These organisational changes impact clearly on the local positions of authority. A brief archival visit into the “archaeology” of interest representation throughout colonial and early post-colonial times has shown that bodies of interest representation have continuously been adapted in relation to the changing political regimes. Also, the recent institutional collapse of the National Canoe Fishermen Association can likely be regarded in this light.
These observations show how local level events relate to much bigger temporal and spatial frames that are continuously called upon by the actors as relevant contexts. This calls into question the validity of the theoretical divide between the “micro” and the “macro” as constructed throughout the history of sociological theory (Knorr-Cetina, 1981).

**Representation and the micro-macro link**

Once again, I draw upon the case of the Chief fisherman to illustrate that spheres of a formally recognised (macro) character are inherently intertwined with officially unrecognised, often local level (or micro) social institutions. In this sense, the institution of the Chief fisherman and other instances of interest representation are perfect intermediaries between these two conceptual spheres. On the one hand, the Chief fisherman derives his mandate directly from the landing beaches where policy is supposed to impact on people’s lives and experiences. This direct quality of his mandate then can be understood as an important source of legitimacy among the various centralised and decentralised governance institutions, and non-state actors, such as local and nation-wide NGOs. On the other hand, the Chief fisherman, through his political connections, not only acts out his mandate in the relevant arenas of decision making, but also gets exposed to the discursive rules and realities of these arenas which in turn influences on his problem definition on the ground.

The present case study has shown how micro and macro transactions and events are inherently interwoven as both contexts are mutually reflected in each other. The relatedness of both micro and macro events and processes is however not sufficient to argue against the inherent constructivism of the micro-macro divide in the explanation of social behaviour. Integration and aggregation are only two of the possible empirical and theoretical connections between micro and macro spheres of society. Munch and Smelser (1987: 376ff) identify the logics of aggregation, combination, externalisation, reproduction and conformity with the macro either setting limits to the micro experience or being completely internalised in the latter. Also, Knorr-Cetina (1981: 25ff) stresses the variety of possible theoretical connections between micro and macro and points out that macro frames do not have to relate exclusively to “that which visibly or knowingly happens in micro-situations” (aggregation hypothesis) but may also emerge from the unintended consequences of micro-events. In contrast to these approaches, the representation hypothesis introduced by Cicourel conceives of the macro as “actively construed and pursued within micro-social action” (ibid: 40). Irrespective of the particular approach, Knorr-Cetina makes clear that “we would have to recognise that micro-transactions always in principle transcend the immediate situation or, more radically speaking, we would have to concede that many micro-situations appear only to exist in virtue if such other situations” (ibid: 31, original emphasis). This last statement is true both in the temporal and in the spatial sense. In Elmina’s conflict situation, earlier disputes and historically grown, morally based social affiliations are constantly referred back to, consensus found earlier is re-appropriated and even much larger developments may impact on the constitution of negotiation arenas and therefore the definition of reality.

In general, one thus has to abolish the idea of seeing society in sets of opposing conceptual pairs. This is doubtlessly also true for the concept of informality as opposed to “formal” state regulation. The informality debate relates to the problem of the essential micro-macro link in the sense that the informal is often associated with the unregulated and unrecognized “micro” whilst the regulated and recognized forms of sociality are expected to take place in the realms of large
scale state organisation, that is, on the “macro” scale of society. The topography of power relations drawn in this thesis clearly contradicts this assumption and refutes it as an empirical fallacy. Not at last, this thesis has shown the high level of regulation, not to mention organisation in the artisanal fishing community of Elmina. Be it the sanctioning of delinquents, the procedures of succession in leadership or simply the everyday organisation of social life, the so-called absence of the state cannot be equated with irregularity or worse illegality.

Thus, although literally everything in the artisanal fishing sector qualifies as “informal” in the conservative definition of the word, that is, the industry is to a large extent unrecognised, unregulated and unprotected in legal frameworks, the general assumption of a lack of regulation in the so-called informal economy requires important re-examination. While employment contracts are of limited use in a context of widespread illiteracy and the general mobilisation of family labour, also instances of state regulation, for example, taxation, formal training or social security measures face severe difficulties in reaching far into the artisanal fishing sector. This is however not to suggest that artisanal canoe fishermen operate their businesses in complete chaos or in the absence of effective regulation and resource management. In contrast, historically grown institutions of fisheries management, vested both in bodies like the localChief fishermen or moral codes like the weekly fishing ban assure the ordered interaction between the different actors in the industry. As a matter of fact, also in the relative absence of the state, people adhere to institutions of various kinds and do so in coherent and highly effective ways. The internal hierarchy of tasks in the fishing business has to be recognised in this regard, but also institution of a religious character or forms of social belonging like the local *asafo* companies impact decisively on the regulation of work and social life in Elmina.

The empirical fallacy of the informality debate then expresses itself mainly in the connotation of the absence of regulation in informal economies. Particularly in the artisanal fisheries, this thesis has shown, strict norms and values regulate people’s access to productive resources and not at last the public debate. At the same time, also state institutions are never “definitely formed but are in a constant process of formation. This implies a certain fluidity in the character of groups defending shared interests. They may form or disintegrate in the course of struggle and can be seen undergoing both constant reproduction and transformation” and legitimate authority needs to be vindicated through a vast array of political processes (Lund 2008: 86). “[A]s public authority is exercised by competing and more or less transient institutions, the ideas of the solidity of the state are contrasted with the actual incoherence and incapacity of the multiple parallel structures and alternative sites of authority” (ibid: 6). Not only are multiple branches and layers of government institutions competing in the arena that generates rule, but also customary institutions vie for recognition and authority. Also, associations that do not appear political at first sight exercise power and may as well wield legitimate public compliance.

In this light, the frontiers between what is considered to be formal and informal are more than questionable, not at last since both “formal” and “informal” means of leadership necessarily interact to achieve effective governance. Thus, introduced over thirty years ago in the work of Keith Hart (1973), the concept of informality is today more debated than ever. Accused of concealing multiple meanings and of denying the remarkable heterogeneity of livelihoods derived from irregular employment and thus reifying a uniform labour identity, the notion of “the informal” has to be carefully contextualised, if not entirely rejected due to its rising essentialist
connotation. Especially, as Coquery-Vidrovitch points out, speaking of informality carries a high risk of ethnocentrism. “It was not the Africans who were strangers to the city; it was the coloniser, and later the developers (…) What they did not understand, they referred to as 'informal': that is to say, not subjugated, not controlled, not identified, and not quantifiable according to Western norms. (…) These judgments all show the same reasoning and designate who in the city does conform or assimilate to Western norms” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2005: 21).

Or, as Guha-Khasnobis et al (2007) argue for the contemporary usage of the term, the contrast between formal and informal should above all be seen as an artificial construction of Western development discourse. This apparently inevitable point of reference in Western norms of official state regulation is particularly questionable in the Ghanaian context where about 75 per cent of the urban population derive their livelihoods from activities in the so-called “informal economy”.

In short, what is formal or macro and what is informal or micro is mainly a question of a constructed opposite. With Ferguson, one of the most prominent opponents of an assumed “verticality of power” rejects such notions of “levels” as “intensively managed fiction” (2007: 396). Instead, the researcher should explore the ways in which local conceptions of micro and macro come to being and restrain from simply reproducing ideologically shaped categories of analysis (ibid: 383). With hindsight to the observations made above, the case of Elmina can make important contributions to the broader academic debate on perceptions and misperceptions of the micro-macro division.

This thesis has called for a stronger engagement with microsociological perspectives as the latter generally help to avoid empirical fallacies like the artificial divides inherent in the many contrasting pairs running through the social sciences. This thesis has raised awareness above all for the inherent connections in the conceptual pairs of event and process, formal and informal realms of sociality and not at last micro and macro social behaviour. Microsociology thus allows for a more meaningful analysis of problems like the contested destoolment of Nana Jojo Solomon in Elmina as it is sensitive of their empirical realities (as defined by actors and agents) rather than looking for the confirmation of presumed theoretical concepts and correlations, which are too often imported – without any form of sensitisation (Blumer, 1954) - from the alien contexts of other studies.

The study of “social dramas” like the contestations around Jojo Solomon’s destoolment then contributes to the microsociological debate as it allows understanding the production of meaningful social behaviour as an interactive process between social norm and its actors (rather than a result of Marxian coercion or Durkheimian integration). As has been shown, a single “chopped-off” event offers innumerable references transcending the temporal frame (as constructed by the researcher) of the event itself. Societal relations in general are neither reduced to the micro or macro scales of society nor are they assumed to remain constant and fixed over time. In contrast, in the processual exploration of (conflictual) social transactions, opposing moral and normative values are expressed in constant reference to each other and in relation to their articulation in other contexts. In the complex situation of Elmina’s pluralism of rule and regulation and the multiplicity of social actors involved, allowing for any potential outcome, agency on the ground still reproduced the logics of the community’s deeply engrained historical instability of leadership, the structural demands of the fishing work and the flexibility of Elmina’s people in these regards.
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Annex A: Governance institutions in artisanal fisheries management

Kraan (2009: 179): “Governance structure of an ideal type coastal village in Ghana”
Annex B: Structure of the traditional state or paramountcy of Elmina

Edina Traditional Council

- Ahenfo / sub-chiefs from different quarters in town, villages and hamlets
- Besonfo / councillors (amamfo) and linguists

Edinafo / Population of Elmina

Ebusua / matrilineal clans
1. Efinafo
2. Abradze
3. Nsona
4. Anona
5. Twidan
6. Abrutu
7. Akona
8. Adwenadze
9. Ebiradze
10. Ntwea

Ebusua mpanyinfo / lineage heads

Ohemma / Queen mother

Omanhene / Paramount chief

Asafo No 7

Tufohene

“Akyikudo”

Supifo / heads of asafo comp.

Aposohene and konkohene / leaders of the fishing community

Asafo / patrilineal (defence) organisations
1. Ankobea
2. Akyemfo
3. Nkodwo
4. Wombir
5. Abese
6. Alatamanfo
7. Enyampa
8. Brofomba
9. Mawore
10. Akrampefo

(source: author)
Annex C: Abstracts

Abstract

This thesis analyses the hierarchies of power and voice across the (artificial) formal-informal divide in the artisanal fishing community of Elmina, Ghana. It begins by presenting the “diagnostic event” of the contested destoolment of Elmina’s latest Chief fisherman. Based on the processual analysis of the interactions between the various actors involved in the dispute, a more general topography of power and voice in Elmina is sketched thus identifying the relevant connections between holders of power and authority in artisanal fisheries governance. Interest representation in this regard is identified in the interaction and interrelation of traditional, mainstream-political and vocational forms of leadership. By following the development of the conflict empirically, rather than in a pre-assumed top-down manner, the role of voluntary vocational associations in the interplay of these power holders is emphasised throughout the construction of public negotiation arenas on various scales. This then allows contesting the assumption of a general “voice deficit” in the artisanal fishing industry. The thesis eventually arrives at a theoretical contestation of the sociological dichotomies of micro-macro social behaviour and formal-informal transactions.

Zusammenfassung