INTRODUCTION: THE DOMESTICATION OF CHIEFTAINCY: THE IMPOSED AND THE IMAGINED

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and
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The study of chieftaincy in Africa is currently facing something of a loss of paradigm – a crisis in the modernist assumptions of 'traditionality'. Many critics have been unmasking and unravelling the artificiality of 'tradition' in African societies. Many 'traditions' and 'customs' there have been found to be products of codification, petrification and coercion under modernist projects of colonial rule, missionary activity and postcolonial state formation. A body of literature has emerged since the early 1980s which regards all 'tradition' as a specific construction at a specific time for specific purposes. Ever since the pioneering work of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), the mainstream of these 'invention of tradition' studies has been exploring the ways in which such modernist projects imposed certain 'traditions' on African societies. And indeed, quite a number of the studies have brought to light deliberate attempts by colonial rulers to *create* 'African chiefs' and impose them on subjected populations. 'Tradition' and 'custom' in Africa, in other words, have become a culturally specific, historical phenomenon and event. The codification of certain practices as 'authentic traditions' by colonial rulers, missionaries or anthropologists and their writings led to many instances in which local leaders themselves began trying to legitimise their positions along such lines. This appropriation of inventions of tradition often helped them to curb 'internal' rivalry and fluidity in their societies with regard to their disputed claims to power.

Three theoretical positions have emerged out of the invention-of-tradition approach, as scholars have attempted to understand the 'traditionality' or 'primordialness' of

chieftaincy in Africa. The first argues that chieftaincy existed in some cases prior to the arrival of European rulers and missionaries (a well-known example is the Asantehene of Kumasi; see McCaskie 1995). In such cases the arrival of colonial rule had all sorts of ramifications in terms of internal divisions, alliances, bureaucratic arrangements, and above all encapsulation of chiefs into a system of indirect rule. In general terms, colonialism favoured the codification of one line of power in local society, which was then fortified against rival or more fluid forms of power brokering, ultimately creating an artificial 'tradition' of hereditary power. European rulers could pride themselves on creating something that seemed to resonate deeply with locally held cultural perceptions, while strategically placed individuals in society could venture into the new opportunities for salaried positions and upward social mobility that such codification created.

The second approach emphasises that in acephalous societies, colonial rulers did not hesitate to impose an 'African' form of 'traditional' rule. In cases described by Geschiere (1993, 1996) for Cameroon and by Hawkins (1996) for Northern Ghana, colonial administrators randomly selected individuals for the role of communication channel, and gradually started calling them chiefs. In so doing, colonial administrators tended to overlook, or remain unaware of, the significance of other types of non-political officeholders such as earth-shrine priests or warlords. 'Tradition' here, as Ranger maintained in later writings (1993), was truly a colonial and modernist invention.

A third position deriving from the invention-of-tradition approach focuses on those situations in which modernist projects of power were absent and therefore did not impose such invented traditions. Some remote areas remained unaffected by colonial and missionary endeavours, and no externally inspired 'traditions' and 'customs' were created in Western writings and representation. However, as Abbink's contribution (this volume) on Ethiopia shows, it was not just in Western modernising projects that traditions were invented, but this invention took place in other, non-Western hegemonic projects as well (such as the expansion of Islam).

One and a half decades have passed since the invention-of-tradition approach was introduced to the study of African chieftaincy, and counterviews have meanwhile emerged. Obviously the main problem with the invention-of-tradition approach is the question of acceptability and legitimacy. How can something that is imposed ever be acceptable to a local population? Inventing and creating a structure is one thing, but it is entirely something else to give meaning and significance to it and imbue it with respect and awe. Discussing Ndebele chieftainship in Zimbabwe in his 1993 article, Ranger revised his position on the invention of traditions on this issue of acceptability. Referring to Anderson's work *Imagined Communities* (1983), Ranger now preferred to speak of 'imagined traditions' to indicate that there was a desire in local society to share in the construction of new models of authority, and to imagine new vistas that could be opened by appropriating one's own tradition in a new world. As Feierman (1990) has demonstrated in great detail, local intellectuals in Tanzanian peasant societies had been

debating 'tradition' and 'chiefs' all along, producing different imaginations of how interaction with (colonial) state rule had developed in the past and how it might develop in the near future. Ranger writes:

> Some traditions in colonial Africa really were invented, by a single colonial officer for a single occasion. But customary law and ethnicity and religion and language were imagined, by many different people and over a long time. These multiple imaginations were in tension with each other and in constant contestation to define the meaning of what had been imagined – to imagine it further. Traditions imagined by whites were re-imagined by blacks: traditions imagined by particular black interest groups were re-imagined by others. The history of modern tradition has been much more complex than we have supposed (Ranger 1993: 81-82).

Hence, Pels has recently shown for the Waluguru in Tanzania how discourses developed, both on the side of the colonial administration and on that of local political leaders, in which the images of authority, rule and governance to be produced by each 'community' were debated and negotiated (Pels 1996). Interestingly, Pels describes the emergence of a specific 'language' between the superstrate political discourse of the colonial regime and the subaltern political discourse of the Waluguru, a language that both domains could share (a process which Pels denotes as the 'pidginisation of Luguru politics').

The crux of the matter, though, is that the act of invention becomes lost to memory. Still the invention itself is then reintegrated into the new vistas of power. From the contemporary, postcolonial perspective to which this book is devoted, African chiefs' imaginations about the colonial experience have become valuable assets in their claims to authority. Usually they construct a narrative which claims that colonial bureaucracies, missionary conversion projects, and their accompanying schooling and education programmes were all directed at creating a past/inferior versus present/superior dichotomy, within which the cultural and political power of the chiefs was assigned to a category of social evil. Missionaries were out to 'save' the younger generation from the clutches of traditional, heathen rituals controlled by chiefs, by providing educational facilities over which chiefs held no sway. Colonial and postcolonial bureaucracies are claimed to have encapsulated chiefly power in systems of customary law, curtailing their decision-making authority and preparing chiefs a place in society that would not go beyond the 'honorary' and the 'ceremonial'.

Although a substantial number of studies are providing evidence to corroborate this narrative of the encapsulation of chiefly tradition by external powers, in today's postcolonial predicament the same narratives fulfil a special transformative function. With the advent of postcolonial state formation, the narrative of the colonial encapsulation of chiefs was transformed into one about the brokerage role that most chiefs in Sub-Saharan societies still find themselves locked into. In particular, recent

contributions to the *Journal of Legal Pluralism,* edited by van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Ray (1996), have explored the continuing narrative of encapsulation in terms of how chiefs visualise themselves between the emerging state and the local population. The postcolonial state has seen itself compelled to enlist chiefly support in order to acquire some measure of legitimacy for implementing its policies and laws; chiefs similarly need the state to defend their position in local government and the legitimacy of their power to act. Postcolonial states are in the business of inventing traditions all the time, as by launching new national festivals that put rigidly selected elements of particular cultural traditions on show while purposely ignoring others. Since local chiefs, for their part, may also flaunt government officials and their regalia, ultimately the question becomes: Who has captured whose imagination of power? Referring to De Boeck's views on the 'uncaptured' kings of Zaire, Werbner writes:

> The point is that the cross-dressing is mutual: for the kings, spectacles like the president's and for the president, the regal leopard bonnet.... On the one side the kings are flown to the presidential palace, invited to party congresses and rallies, and given cars and residences at the capital. People's representatives, party functionaries and high officials of state attend upon the king's shrines, their enthronements and other meetings at court, on the other side (Werbner 1996: 17).

We thus witness a mutually perpetuating invention of traditions whereby post colonial states seek no enlist chiefly support by creating national councils, conferences and consultations. On their turn, chiefs create similar avenues for the enlisting of state support for their position in society.

Nonetheless, in the debate about what position chiefs held under colonial rule, the invention-of-tradition approach to the brokerage of chiefly power in its contemporary context would fall short of understanding its imagined status. The purpose of this book is to determine the overlay of different chiefly power bases (the imposed and the imagined) in present-day society, and how this has been affected by the recurrent experiments at nation-building and by ideologies of democracy, liberalisation, development and the like. Obviously there can be no one answer to such questions. We are well aware of the local specificity of power fields. Not only are the regional differences in Africa substantial, but so is the diversity in colonial and postcolonial governmental histories (or 'governmentality' to invoke Foucault in passing) within which institutions of chieftaincy have evolved. In other words, to understand how chiefs mediate the link between past, present and future, it is important to understand first how their authority relates to differently conceptualised worlds (the state, the local, the west, the secretive, etc), and to what people imaginge about these worlds. Clearly, chiefs mobilize resources from their power in these differently conceptualised worlds (van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1996). It would therefore be a mistake to try to explore the plurality of power formations in postcolonial Africa solely from the point of view of its *imposed* nature, thereby

disregarding what is imagined, desired, sought after and longed for. Chiefs in Sub-Saharan Africa seem to occupy a position as brokers between what is imposed and what is imagined. Useful concepts for exploring the present-day transformative role of chiefs in the interaction between state and society and between the imposed and the imagined respectively are that of 'mediation', used by Bayart (1993), and that of 'mutational work' used by Bourdieu (1977). Although these two terms may seem to refer to similar processes of exchange and transformation between two fields, there is one difference between them which is crucial to the understanding of chieftaincy. Bayart's work and that of others writing about state-society relations in Africa is predicated on a sharp vertical dichotomy between state and society. Hence, Bayart's emphasis on 'politics of the belly' refers to a bottom-up perspective on state power. Civil society and chiefs are seen to occupy a middle level. Von Trotha (1996: 103) perceives a development from what he calls 'administrative chieftaincy' (chiefs incorporated in the state apparatus) towards 'civil chieftaincy', whereby limited independence from the state is accepted, as though chiefly office were turned into a parastatal. As De Boeck (1996: 96) and Werbner (1996) have been arguing, however, this dichotomy between state and society, with traditional authorities residing somewhere in the middle, is highly problematic. For one thing, the state is seldom the *only* source of power and legitimate authority (consider the case of the 'uncaptured kings'), and furthermore the public realm where state control is supposed to operate is often weak, limited and highly vulnerable to exploitation for individual gain. Chiefly and state authority could also stand side by side, and politics from below could be directed in a non-hierarchical sense against both domains.

The term 'mutational work' in contrast to 'mediation', is more horizontal in its connotations, referring to the often highly respected activities of certain agents in society, actors who are capable of transferring one form of power from one domain to a different form of power in another domain. For instance, kinship relations may be 'mutated' to enhance someone's chances of finding employment in the job market – being someone's nephew may be turned into an asset in a non-kinship domain, that of paid employment. In the same way, other symbolic capital, such as the custodianship of certain initiation rituals, can be turned into an advantage in regional or even national politics (for an example of such mutational work, see de Jong 1997). Invoking Bourdieu, we can interpret chiefs as 'converters' in African societies today, because they convert the power of the 'past' to that of the present, the power of the secretive into public power, the law of 'tradition' into codified 'customary' law, and the power of ritual into manifest political activity. The question is how the chiefs' mutational work between the imposed and the imagined in the African postcolonial situation actually functions: what is its language, what are its claims and (symbolic) representations. This is the analytical profile of the present collection of contributions to the study of chieftaincy in Africa – an analysis focusing on the various dimensions of such mutational work, which changes the representation of chieftaincy from a static into a dynamic, ever-changing phenomenon. Hence we might coin the verb 'chiefing' to reflect the creative nature of the mutational work chiefs perform in their present-day role of 'converters'.

The most important context of chiefly mutational work today is the interaction of the global with the local in political culture, in law and legal pluralism, and in society as a whole (De Boeck 1996). The democratisation of African political culture was superimposed from the global level by the international community. Here again, the imposed has met the imagined, as massive support for the move to multiparty democracy and parliamentary representation has subsequently emerged from within African societies. The spread of a specific form of nation-state, at once liberal and democratic (at least in its manifest political ideology), has led in many places to extremely complex interactions between that state and local officeholders such as chiefs. Hence, when it comes to democracy and representation, one topic of consideration for chiefs and scholars alike has become the issue of just what the democratic content of chiefly authority is or should be (van Kessel & Oomen in this volume). In other words, to what extent does the imagination of a democratic political culture (if such can ever be fully realised) *produce* the authority of imposed chiefs? Moreover, the presence of international initiative, of international intervention and aid, is now felt more strongly than ever in Sub-Sahara Africa. Postcolonial society in Africa has experienced swift 'encroachment' by a variety of global social and political formations, of which the waxing and waning of the nation-state is only one out of many. It is now engulfed in global processes such as the application of uniform international legislation. Another area for viewing the mutational activities of chieftaincy is the presence of international organisations, such as NGOs, from the national all the way down to the village level. They appear to have turned chiefly office into an arena of brokerage, thus opening new perspectives and avenues for entrepreneurial activity.

A literature has emerged that critically reflects on this state of affairs, focusing on the interplay between chiefs and the postcolonial African nation-state, and especially on the domains of power where chiefs show themselves able to control their mutational work to their own advantage (see, for example, van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1996; Fisiy 1995; Geschiere 1993; 1996; Bekker 1993). In such domains, their nostalgic claims to authentic ritual power are effectuated in terms of real political power in African societies today. In brief, there appear to be two such domains. The first concerns the management of natural resources, and in particular the allocation of land. In most cases chiefs succeed in invoking ritual rights from the 'past', which they then translate into instruments for 'hard' political brokerage. Chiefs negotiate their positions in the context of global discourses on sustainability, environmental awareness and national and international interest in ecological preservation (see Daneel 1996 and Lund & Hesseling in this volume).

The invention or rerouting of historical truths about the political say of the chiefs in land issues, law, and the ritual representation of the political claims of certain ethnic or social groups still offers one of the primary angles from which chieftaincy and its mutational agency can and should be studied.

The second key chiefly domain is that of ritual and symbolism in society as they relate to identity politics. Here chiefs can help foster a sense of primordialness and authenticity. The first domain is addressed by studies on topics such as land tenureship, dispute settlement and their resonance in national politics; the second domain is covered largely by studies on the construction of communal identities, conflict resolution and mediumship.

As dispute settlers and local administrators, chiefs exercise a firm ritual and moral authority over their people, which is enshrined in mystic and sacred attributes and faculties belonging to the cosmological notions of chieftaincy. In terms of imaginary worlds, some chiefs are involved in witchcraft, are considered witches themselves or act as witch-hunters (van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1988). As Geschiere (1996) and others have shown for Cameroon, the increasing rationalisation of bureaucracy, government, the economy and social life in general has by no means resulted in 'disenchantment', reflected in a decline of witchcraft and the occult in Africa. Rather, the encroachment of modernity on African societies appears to produce a greater social and political awareness of the presence and the problem of witchcraft and the occult in their modern manifestations. The advance of modernity has prompted an intensified search for ritual protection, which seems to be offered in some cases by new forms of fundamentalism (see van Dijk & Pels 1996; van Dijk 1998; Meyer 1995); in other cases this has strengthened the position of chiefs. Chieftaincy increasingly usurps the position of the custodians of social order and public discipline by enacting and re-enacting certain rituals and other symbolic practices. There is symbolic capital in social order and public discipline (see van Binsbergen, this volume), a capital which in Africa's current 'weak states' (see Ellis 1996) certainly pays off in hard political currency. Some chiefs even succeed in forging links between the cosmological orders of their own local community and the worlds of modern economy and politics, successfully using the changing social, political and economic structures to become part of a new entrepreneurial elite (von Trotha 1996). Especially when it comes to modern health care, chiefs may offer mediumship between local, cosmological conceptions of illness, affliction and misfortune and the things Western medical organisations may have to offer.

Outside these 'traditional' political domains of chiefly authority, many others can be distinguished which outline a new social and economic landscape for the mutational work of 'chiefing'. The point is that not only should we stop emphasising the demise of African chieftaincy and its dependence on a politics of nostalgia, but we should no longer hold it to be 'traditional', either, a residual of something authentic. Agreeing with Chabal (1996) we state that the current preoccupation of outside observers with a 're-traditionalisation' of African politics reveals more about Western stereotypes than about actual processes taking place in Africa. Chieftaincy is rapidly turning itself into a perplexing new phenomenon which appears capable of negotiating and modifying modern institutional arrangements to its own ends. Chiefs' claims to authenticity, to being legitimate 'representatives of their people', are balanced and negotiated against

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achievements such as institutional qualities and skills (sometimes even academic ones), links with global networks, and shrewd dealings with the political powers, parties and bureaucracies in their countries.

The social sciences, and legal anthropology in particular, tend to concentrate on the type of chieftaincy that is located, in political terms, at the tops of highly stratified societies. But there are many other forms of 'chiefship' we need to deal with, such as the religious leaders and earth priests who have manifest political power (for example, Abbink in this volume). Furthermore, the rapid rates of urbanisation, the growth of schooling and education, and the rise of modern sectors of non-rural employment have long been deeply affecting the outlook and the application of postcolonial chiefly authority. Though the majority of Africans still live in rural areas, cities in Africa have been growing fast as a result of global processes. This has led to the formation of specific forms of urban chieftaincy, which should be included in our analysis of present-day traditional authority.

Particularly in cities, chiefs are confronted with immigrant populations which did not belong to the chief's social, political and cultural traditions in the past, and never will in the future. Some recognise no chiefs at all and others have chosen rural-urban migration to escape the chiefly order of their village and try to start new lives as more autonomous citizens. In other words, there are limits to the imagined quality of chiefly power as well as to the domains of their mutational work.

It would be a serious mistake, though, to think of urban areas as 'modern', and thus unsuited to 'traditional' chiefly authority, while regarding the village as 'traditional' and as such the playground for that authority. As Mbembe has argued, there is a fractured play of identity politics in the postcolony, in which the urban and the rural are caught up together:

> The postcolony is made up not of one coherent public space, nor is it determined by any single organising principle. It is rather a plurality of 'spheres' and arenas, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain specific contexts: hence the postcolonial 'subject' has had to learn to continuously bargain and improvise. Faced with this, ... the postcolonial 'subject' mobilizes not just a single 'identity', but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly 'revised' in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required (Mbembe 1992: 5).

Although the individual subject in the postcolonial predicament may appear to be a mere *homo economicus* – a transactionalist maximising on choices based on a continual cost-benefit analysis, the essence here is that chieftaincy cannot escape from this entanglement. For certain aspects of social life in both rural and urban areas, subjects imagine themselves as living under chiefly authority. It is, however, a lost paradigm of

hegemony (if such a hegemony ever existed in the first place). The present postcolonial subject seeks 'chiefing' for specific social purposes, specific moments of identification, specific needs. For other facets of life, the current fractured state of African societies and identities provides the subject with a wide array of opportunities to 'opt out' and turn to other models of power brokerage. Looking at present-day chieftaincy from this bottom-up vantage point may, as this collection aims to show, help move research out of the conundrum of viewing state and chiefly power as interlocked forces. In portraying their relations as a zero-sum game, with chiefly power increasing when state power diminishes and vice versa (see van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & Ray 1996: 29), a top-down perspective leaves little room for the play of imagination and individual agency. The different spheres and arenas that Mbembe refers to in the quoted passage reflect a far more open, fluid situation. As the work and criticism of De Boeck (1996) has revealed, the postcolonial African state, aware of the limitations of its power, is mainly active in certain domains, and the same is true of chiefly authority.

What, then, is the future for 'chiefing' in Africa? Clearly the imagination angle has taught us that chieftaincy cannot do without power from below. Chieftaincy has to be desired by the population. Sweeping reforms have been carried out in many 'democratised' African states in recent years. What will be an appropriate role for chiefing when all such constitutional, legal and land reforms have been successfully implemented? In some quarters of African societies today, people feel that a rejuvenation of chieftaincy would be in their interest (see in this volume Konings on the struggle of anglophone Cameroonians for decentralisation; and van Kessel and Oomen on the calls for an election procedure for local chiefs in the new democratic South Africa). Predictably, many African states will be decentralising their power and authority structures and bureaucratic hierarchies in the very near future. They seem to have no other alternative now that Structural Adjustment Programmes have demanded the scaling down of their administrative systems and have imposed an uncompromising ideology of efficiency and accountability. Shorter lines of decision-making, greater effectiveness of local participation, and power-sharing are increasingly desired. This is a context in which chiefing may prove to be of increasing value in the near future. There is one aspect of chiefing for which no shortcuts exist for enhancing efficiency, and no adjustment programmes for enhancing governmentality: the task of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is an area where demands from 'below' and governance from 'above' seem to concur in their appreciation of chiefing (for a recent example of mediation by the Asantehene in a violent ethnic conflict in Northern Ghana seems to confirm this trend; see Skalník 1996).

Intervention by chiefs can and does occur in more situations than only cases of armed violence (séminaire-atelier Niger, 25-26 June 1996). It can also be of strong symbolic and ritual significance in conflicts over cultural heritage, nature conservation, and rights to food, shelter and integrity of human life.

The desire from below to involve chieftaincy in such a crucial task can be interpreted as a

conscious, public move towards the *domestication of chieftaincy*. This means that there should be a popular say in what is expected of chiefs, in how their tasks should be 'trimmed' to fit the needs of certain sectors of a population. It also reflects signs that the public has a stricter moral gaze on the achievements and failures of chiefing in today's African societies. The domestication of the state in Africa, which has included the appropriation of its exploitative potential by the political elite, is now being followed by a popular domestication of chieftaincy, with chiefs confronted by a heightened sense of public morality. The basis of such a moral judgment can sometimes be found in history (see Zips's contribution on diasporic chieftaincy among the New World Maroons) or in ritual (van Binsbergen, this volume). Chiefs in Africa have entered a postmodern society and are increasingly becoming nuclei in the development of local popular 'arena's', where the processes of domestication are giving rise to complex figurations of leadership. The contributions to this collection explore the two central elements in our understanding of chieftaincy in Africa – mutation and domestication – in a wide range of social, political and economic contexts. We will now highlight each of these contributions.

Overview

In his article 'Chieftaincy in Africa: Three Facets of a Hybrid Role' *E. Adriaan B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal* argues that the bureaucratic position of chieftaincy in Africa today reflects the hybrid nature of the phenomenon 'chief'. It has never been easy to classify chiefs into different categories, for their political and administrative tasks in bureaucracies cannot readily be distinguished from the political, judicial and socioreligious roles they play in African societies. Not only have colonial regimes and the postcolonial state tended to conflate the bureaucratic tasks of the chiefs with their social positions in society, but chiefs have actively sought this hybridity and have imagined a sociopolitical space created by it. The variety and hybridity of chiefly positions and roles today has made the phenomenon of chieftaincy into a much greater enigma than it ever was in precolonial times. The present-day chief in Africa is a new sociopolitical phenomenon. He, and occasionally she, has become a syncretic leader, forging a synthesis between antagonistic forces issuing from different state models, bureaucracies and world views.

Since the colonial era, the African chief has been subjected to a process of political and administrative enclosure at the hands of the state. Using Togo as an example, van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal shows how chiefs have been given top-down support and legitimisation through the principle of devolution, first introduced by the French colonial government. This operated through a firmly hierarchical organisation of traditional chiefs, which implemented governmental policies and administrative decisions using its own language, directives and rituals. In Togo this also resulted in the implementation of the Territorial Administrative Redivision Act.

Such processes in Togo and elsewhere in Africa led to the development of an 'administrative chieftaincy' (Beck 1989; von Trotha 1996). Although this did include the role of mediation which chiefs would later propagate so strongly during the so-called 'democratisation process', the chiefs were also increasingly coerced into carrying out closely circumscribed administrative duties. In Togo, nevertheless, one of the most important characteristics of chieftaincy, which is now still recognised by the population, has been an active involvement in dispute settlement, even in the face of efforts by both the colonial and postcolonial governments to curtail and marginalise such 'traditional' responsibilities.

On the other hand, popular esteem for the office of chief were seriously and deliberately undermined after independence by a despotic politicisation of the chief's role. Paying respect to the chief became part of the oppressive system of political control in Togo in the years that followed independence. Moreover, the administrative duties the chief was to perform in the name of the state ultimately relegated him to the status of a low-ranking officeholder. Chiefs have become conscious of this process, which has seriously affected their role as a representative of a local order. Some fear a real loss of power – estrangement from the local population and ineffectuality vis-à-vis the state. And chiefs are also wondering whether they are not becoming mere folklore, just one of the attractions travel agencies put on their programmes for Western tourists in Togo. Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal shows that the chiefs are keenly aware of this process, which is undermining the intermediary power position the chiefs acquired in the French colonial era. It is the subject of vehement debate amongst them.

African chieftaincy assumes widely varied forms, both in the nature of chiefly authority and executive power, and in its autonomy of action vis-à-vis the postcolonial state. *Jan Abbink*, in his contribution entitled, The Elusive Chief: Authority and Leadership in Surma Society (Ethiopia)', describes recent developments in a society *without* conventional 'chiefs': the Surma agro-pastoralists of southern Ethiopia. He first links his discussion of a 'chiefless' society to the renewed anthropological attention to local chieftaincy in Africa – its potential role in postcolonial state formation in areas such as local-level democratisation, power-sharing and decision-making. The nature of the authority and legitimacy of Surma leaders is restricted largely to the ritual domain. A consideration of the three major political periods of 20th-century Ethiopia illustrates how the Ethiopian state's grip on local leadership has been steadily strengthening: authority and decision-making have moved decisively away from their local base, and the autonomy of local leaders has diminished. In addition, state-sponsored young leaders with 'non-traditional' qualifications (such as elementary state education, military experience in the national army, or knowledge of the national *lingua franca*) are replacing the 'traditional' ritual leaders and elders, giving the state and its agents more control over local developments.

Although postcolonial states elsewhere in Africa are regarded as increasingly weak, thus creating room for chieftaincy to stimulate greater decentralisation, Ethiopia does not seem to fit the pattern. Obviously Ethiopia has never had a colonial experience, and the inventions of chiefly traditions that occurred elsewhere in Africa were not a factor here. Nevertheless, as Abbink shows in his contribution, forms of leadership did exist that are comparable to the earth priests or territorial mediums of Southern Africa (Daneel 1996). Such leaders have not been the object of indirect colonial rule. Likewise the Ethiopian state never delegated any bureaucratic and administrative tasks to them. Abbink concludes by showing that the modern Ethiopian state is currently in the process of inventing traditions by selecting officials with non-traditional characteristics. It remains to be seen whether this modern invention of tradition will gain legitimacy among local populations.

Dirk Beke's contribution examines the differences between rural and urban areas when it comes to accepting invented traditions. In his contribution 'Modern Local Administration and Traditional Authority in Zaire. Duality or Unity? An Inquiry in the Kivu', he approaches this issue from the angle of legal anthropology, highlighting the different administrative strategies that have arisen to cope with the rural-urban differential. Probably the most fundamental characteristic of Belgian colonial administration in the Congo was the formal distinction it made between the 'traditional' or 'indigenous' administration and modern 'Western' administration. The basic premise was that 'traditional' African forms of administration and chieftaincy – sometimes forcefully altered – were suited to the small-scale rural units at the lowest levels of local administration, but that larger units, and especially urban areas, required a modern type of administration.

For postcolonial, independent Congo/Zaire, the author argues that regional and local government was subject to a series of reforms aimed at modernisation, centralisation and domination by Mobutu's party bosses. Notably, however, a popular restoration – or public recognition – of the 'traditional' form of African chieftaincy took place in the early 1980s. It reconfirmed the colonial concept of duality of administration, under which traditional chieftaincy was to be retained only for the small rural entities.

The study examines various reforms of regional and local government in Congo/Zaire in the light of both the formal and the actual place of traditional chieftaincy in the rural areas of Kivu. It shows that the weakening and ultimate demise of central authority in the country, underway since the 1980s, has generated spontaneous, broadly supported forms of local autonomy. In the popular imagination, a revival of 'traditional' forms of administration under the prevailing bleak socioeconomic conditions has been seen as an important element of self-reliance. Another element is the proliferation of NGOs in the area. But Beke's contribution also shows how the revival of 'traditional' powers in the precarious Kivu context has fostered an ethnicisation of public consciousness. Rwandan-speaking residents and refugees struggle for political power, and they compete with

'original' ethnic groups for the control of land. While the role of 'traditional' chieftaincy in these ethnic conflicts is important, Beke also shows that significant forms of 'non-traditional' solidarity, such as the *mutuelles tribalo-regionales,* have also been established in urban areas. In other words, popular support and imagination with regard to local self-organisation are fed not only from rural areas; urbanites contribute to them as well.

Since the distinction between rural and urban in the acceptance of chieftaincy seems to be fading in the present-day context, it is odd that most governmental reforms still adhere to the old divisions: chieftaincy in the villages, 'modern' government in the towns. The penetration of many forms of modernity into rural areas, together with the imagination or awakening of 'traditional' elements in the towns, warrant serious reconsideration of this approach.

The contribution of *Wim van Binsbergen*, 'Nkoya Royal Chiefs and the Kazanga Cultural Association in Western Central Zambia Today - *resilience, decline or folklorisation?*' goes further in examining the oppositions between chiefs and the postcolonial state and the growing appreciation of chiefly roles in rural and urban areas. The main aim of this paper is to examine the thesis of the 'resilient chief' by considering an illuminating case from western Central Zambia. Van Binsbergen first describes the unique position of contemporary African chiefs, who seem to function on a plane different from that of legislation, the political process and the bureaucratic structure of the postcolonial state. He then traces the succession of approaches to African chieftaincy in the course of the 20th century, contrasting the dualistic and the transactionalist models.

This provides a further descriptive framework for chieftaincy in western Central Zambia. The author examines in detail the power base of local chiefs and their room for manoeuvre. That power base is weakening, and the chiefs are desperately experimenting with new strategies of survival; conspicuous among these is a retreat into nostalgic cultural forms. Chiefs are driven into the arms of a variety of new actors on the local scene (including national-level politicians, churches, foreign commercial farmers) against whom they are rather defenceless. One such new actor is an ethnic voluntary association, the Kazanga Cultural Association, founded and controlled by the chiefs' most successful urban subjects (often the chiefs' own kinspeople). This non-governmental organisation was surprisingly successful at first in linking indigenous politics to the state in a process of ethnicisation; gradually, however, the revival of chieftaincy brought about by this NGO has resulted not in resilience but in an impotent folklorisation – if not the very destruction – of chieftaincy. As a consequence, tensions are mounting between chiefs and the ethnic organisation.

In concluding, van Binsbergen examines the implications this episode has for the general Africanist argument about the resilience of chiefs today. In the specific context of rural Zambia, Kazanga has provided a viable alternative to chieftaincy in the task of linking local communities to the national state and the world at large. While chiefs in other parts of Africa are active in forging such links in their dealings with actors such as international NGOs, in Zambia the chiefs' activities appear confined to the ceremonial and ritualistic. Hence, one key to the resilience of chiefs seems to be their success at sparking the imagination of urbanites. Chiefs who are unable to link their symbolic capital – their ceremonial functions – to the experiential worlds of the urbanites, seem limited in their 'mutational' capacities. They find themselves locked into a position of declining significance.

In South Africa, by contrast, democratic procedures may be laying the grounds for mutational work. As *Ineke van Kessel* and *Barbara Oomen* show in "One Chief, One Vote": The Revival of Traditional Authorities in Post-Apartheid South Africa, the post-apartheid situation has created new space for chiefly imaginations.

In the apartheid era, chiefs were denounced as puppets of Bantustan rule. In ANC-related circles it was widely assumed that chieftaincy would not survive in the post-apartheid era. But the institution of traditional leadership has proved highly flexible. Far from being shunted off as relics of premodern times, chiefs are now reasserting themselves in the new South Africa. Contrary to van Binsbergen's observations on the dwindling resilience of chiefs in Zambia, the South African chiefs appear to have survived the post-apartheid changes through a strategy of shifting alliances.

By the end of the 1980s, they were substantially reorienting themselves towards the ANC, correctly perceived by them as the ruling party-in-waiting. Combining their symbolic resources of 'tradition' with a discourse of liberation politics and development, they secured constitutional and other legal guarantees for the position of traditional leaders and for their representation in local, provincial and national government after the ANC's accession to power. In a sense, chiefs invented and imagined their own tradition. For its part, the ANC had an interest in wooing chiefs to its side, in order to forestall a potential conservative alliance in which Bantustan elites would join forces with traditional leaders. The article by van Kessel and Oomen analyses these developments, focusing on the principal topics of debate between the government, the ANC and the chiefs both before and after the democratic changes. Their brief case study of chieftaincy issues in northern Transvaal makes clear once again that urban, educated elites played a central role in the invention of the post-apartheid tradition of chieftaincy.

Access to land, along with democratic power-sharing in the decision-making relating to it, remains a bone of contention. It is the most crucial space where chiefs now vie for political power.

This issue of debate and contestation, often perceived as the 'traditional' area of chiefly power, is also the main focus of *Christian Lund* and *Gerti Hesseling's* contribution on the present-day significance of chieftaincy in French-speaking Africa. In 'Traditional Chiefs and Modern Land Tenure Law in Niger', they review the French-language literature on chieftaincy. The insights of the invention-of-tradition approach have failed to gain the prominence there that they have in English-language research. A strong sense of the realness, the 'non-inventedness' of tradition seems to predominate, both in the actual discourse and practices of chiefs and in academic representations. Clearly the act of invention has become lost to memory in Niger. On the subject of land reform, both planner-administrators and academics engage in a discourse that seems to take Tradition as an undisputed given. The remarkable thing is, this appears to work: land reforms that present tradition as an undisputed, non-invented fact have borne fruit. In a new *Code Rural*, legislators and rural development planners in Niger have succeeded in modernising tenure laws by appealing to tradition.

Local tenure arrangements in Niger have long guaranteed that diverse groups of users could exercise claims, either simultaneously or in sequence, on the available but limited natural resources in a given territory. Many such arrangements were largely implicit, not recorded in any codified form. The local population and the transhumant groups that frequent the area regard these implicit arrangements as tradition, and they firmly believe such a tradition guarantees the survival all groups involved. In the process of codification now underway, chiefs are regarded as the key interpreters of tradition, mutating the implicit into the explicit. But they have discovered that their position is laden with ambiguity, and that land tenure reform under such conditions is therefore not without its contradictions. Lund and Hesseling examine some of these contradictions and explore how they translate into legislative challenges. One important issue is how chiefs are to maintain a level of flexibility and dynamism within the codified, rigidified form that the local tenure arrangements will have once they are made explicit.

The flexibility and dynamism of the implicit local arrangements have clearly served as an effective safety valve in a situation where natural resources vary in quality and quantity each year. Another issue is therefore how a chief is to determine which implicit local customary practice is to have primacy in a codified form, since their parameters are always changing from season to season and year to year. The complexities inherent in the very nature of local resource management seem to defy any modernist state project of inclusion, codification and legalist rigour. At any given point in time, local groups clearly desire and imagine that someone will 'chief' for their interests, but the chiefs find themselves in awkward positions, since they never can be sure whose rights are to be defended or constrained. Although the authors believe the idea of modernising tenure rules on the basis of what is implicitly known to the population is worth pursuing, they feel it is naïve to place undue confidence in the ability of 'custom' and chiefs to steer towards good governance, rule of law and social justice. We again witness a postcolonial invention of tradition in which chiefs play a central role – not so much because they are a

'tradition' now in the process of being invented, but more because they are party to the founding of new (legal) traditions of tenure law.

The extraordinary predicament of chiefs in postcolonial society – acting in the interest of particular groups but thereby becoming involved in inventing new traditions – also features in *Piet Konings'* contribution, 'The 'Anglophone Problem' and Chieftaincy in Anglophone Cameroon'. He draws attention to the remarkable actions of some chiefs on behalf of a specific section of the Cameroonian population in the late 1980s. His study examines the role chieftaincy has played in the current Anglophone struggles for self-determination and autonomy. In the aftermath of political liberalisation in Cameroon in the early 1990s, parts of the Anglophone elite began openly setting up organisations and pressure groups to protest against the alleged subordinated position of the Anglophone minority in the Francophone-dominated state. They demanded either a return to the federal state or outright secession. Both options were to have permitted a return to a nostalgically perceived situation of chiefly autonomy.

Konings observes that most Anglophone chiefs have strongly resisted persistent efforts by the Francophone-dominated state to enlist them in defence of the unitary state. They have instead backed Anglophone calls for federalism or secession. Whereas the French and the British colonial systems differed in the roles they assigned to chiefly authority, the French-style system was extended to the former British sector after independence as a sort of internal colonialism. The current call for decentralisation, a most sensitive issue in present-day Cameroonian politics, has been incorporated into the Anglophone chiefs' imaginations about the position they can occupy to resist the state's hegemonic efforts towards unity. Thus, the language of the former British oppressors now serves as a uniting force in the struggle 'from below' against Francophone control. This leaves the reader wondering how chiefs who happen to live in Francophone territory perceive these struggles. Will they go on supporting the state or will they see opportunities to secure for themselves a new political space in Cameroonian politics in the near future? Konings concludes his contribution with some speculations about their role and position.

The final contribution to this volume, by *Werner Zips,* gives us rare insights into a historical process of domestication of chieftaincy in transatlantic milieux. In his 'Obscured by Colonial Stories. An Alternative Historical Outline of Akan-related Chieftaincy in Jamaican Maroon Societies' he describes how the diasporic Maroon communities once appropriated chieftaincy to turn it against British indirect rule, and then successfully developed it in relative harmony with the colonial rulers who had tried to impose it in the first place. The first black freedom fighters in the African diaspora drew on their historical experiences in their motherland to reorganise themselves socially and politically. Chieftaincy was already a firmly ingrained system of governance in West African societies when Maroon social entities emerged in Jamaica, Surinam and elsewhere in the New World. At the turn of the 17th century, powerful African kingdoms such as Asante were on the rise, and they waged armed struggle against competing West

African nations on the Gold Coast such as the Denkyira and the Fante. When the Europeans began conducting a massive slave trade with these kingdoms, they exported into the diaspora these same skills of militancy, organisation, and social and political structuring that were to sustain the Maroons' military action.

In 1738, after 85 years of guerrilla warfare, the British colonial regime finally had to admit that Africans who had organised themselves in the mountainous inland regions of Jamaica had indeed created systems of self-government. It signed a peace treaty with the Maroons, guaranteeing them political and territorial autonomy, administration of justice, economic endeavour, various privileges and the right to govern themselves through their chiefs. The treaty further specified a line of succession to Captain Cudjoe, the most powerful Maroon commander in the rebellion. Historical records have revealed that the British were hoping to establish a system of 'traditional authority' based on West African models. But the indirect rule they envisaged failed to come about. The Maroons domesticated chieftaincy, severed all its ties with indirect rule, and managed to keep their political autonomy intact for the next 250 years. Still today the Maroons protect their chieftaincy system against state interference, and control the selection of their leaders, even receiving assistance from the Jamaican state electoral committee.

Zips argues that chieftaincy is a dynamic system which, after its reintroduction in Jamaican Maroon societies, was able to undergo many changes because it was free from British colonial control. The author examines the creation of this so-called 'traditional authority' in processual terms, linking the way the Maroon societies imagined West African chieftaincy to the British attempts to impose indirect rule. In an interesting comparative perspective, Zips takes the experiential West African sources of governance into consideration, and he also compares the Jamaican organisational forms with their Surinamese Maroon counterparts. What comes to light is that one important factor in the appropriation and subsequent imagination of chieftaincy is the primus-inter-pares ideological discourse of chiefly authority. In all three cases, the discourse and practice of traditional authority appear to have been characterised by a rhetoric of democratic rule, in the form of consensus-oriented political and legal decision-making. The primus-inter-pares ideal of chieftainship is still frequently cited by the Maroons in support of the egalitarian communicative standards of their political processes.

In conclusion it is important to note that while all contributions stress the significance of chieftaincy for understanding social and political processes in Africa today, there is more to chieftaincy than that. As the Zips contribution shows, chieftaincy is, and probably always has been, important in 'Africa outside Africa'. Chiefs can be found holding office in places throughout the new diaspora, in Germany, England and the USA, where many African communities have arisen in recent decades as a result of global labour migration and intercontinental travel. Further inquiry is needed into how African chieftaincy interacts with external forces, such as international organisations and diasporic African communities. Alongside the powerful process of domestication of chieftaincy highlighted

here, there is also a forceful trend towards globalisation of its meaning, significance and modes of operation. The relationship between chieftaincy and one global phenomenon – democratisation – is explored here within the confines of the African continent; the globalisation of the chiefly office itself, however, is a subject for further investigation. We hope this volume will help establish a new agenda for research on this unique social and political development.

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CHIEFTAINCY IN AFRICA: THREE FACETS OF A HYBRID ROLE[1]

E. Adriaan B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal

Introduction

In this article I want to draw attention to a number of general principles that govern in many African States the interplay between chiefs and governments. In addition to these principles African chiefship reflects the hybrid nature of the phenomenon "chief". It is never easy to assign chiefs to different categories or to clearly define their political and administrative tasks as distinct from the socio-religious and judicial roles they play in African society. Moreover, the intermediary role chiefs have by definition played since colonial oppression also resists classification. This variety of positions and roles has made the phenomenon of chieftaincy into a bigger enigma than it had ever been in pre-colonial times. The present-day chief in Africa has become a syncretic leader. By this I mean that he is a socio-political phenomenon which forces a synthesis between antagonistic forces stemming from different state models, bureaucracies and world views. We often characterize these, for the sake of convenience, as "modern" and "traditional", but the value of such concepts is very limited, as von Benda-Beckmann concluded years ago (1979). A key future of syncretism is constant change, which forces the chief to use two different languages belonging to two radically different worlds (see Pels 1996) in which he has been received since colonial oppression. This situation also creates a certain duality in the chief's behaviour.

The following example will illustrate this:

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[1]   This article is partly based upon the author's States and Chiefs: are chiefs mere puppets? In: van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Ray 1996