

AFRICAN CHIEFS TODAY¹

THE LUGARD MEMORIAL LECTURE FOR 1958

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IT is a familiar fact that European rule in Africa has set in motion a radical change in African society. In some fields this has not been the result of any deliberate intention. In that of economic development, interest has generally been centred in the immediate problems of production, and the effects upon African institutions of the solutions that have been found for these have been neither planned nor even foreseen. But in the field of politics, European governments have been obliged to define their intentions towards the authorities whom they found already in existence, and here, in theory, there was a clear-cut choice from the start. Either the holders of power in the indigenous societies should be recognized, and utilized as part of an administrative structure of larger scale, or they should be disregarded—their authority be perhaps deliberately destroyed—and replaced by what M. Albert Sarraut once called ‘new and rectilinear architectures’. The British chose the first course, and this policy has now become inseparably associated with the name of Lugard. I believe that the forthcoming work by Miss Margery Perham will show that what has been called ‘Lugardism’ in the derogatory sense—I mean the insistence on maintaining traditional authority almost for its own sake—was not Lugard’s own philosophy, but that of the successors who were in command during the period when he was away from Nigeria.

The system of administration of African areas that is known popularly as ‘Indirect Rule’, and more precisely as the Native Authority system, was eventually extended to almost all the British dependencies. The term implies something more than a philosophy of respect for tradition, or a general principle that indigenous authorities should be given administrative responsibilities. The model which was generally copied was the Tanganyika Native Authority Ordinance, a development of Lugard’s theme by Sir Donald Cameron. This included specific provisions which make the Native Authority system something very different from the relationship with indigenous rulers that is commonly associated with a protectorate. Under a protectorate the ruler surrenders his external independence but is left more or less free to manage the internal affairs of his territory. Under Lugard and Cameron’s system, traditional chiefs or other leaders are recognized as local agents of government and given the title of Native Authority. But their right to exercise authority depends upon this recognition, and recognition may be withdrawn; there is no question of their retaining power because it is inherent in their traditional position. A Native Authority need not be a single individual; in appropriate cases a council of elders may be recognized collectively, or a group of chiefs of areas which are too small to be considered viable by themselves.

The functions of a Native Authority are threefold, and in cases where African chiefs are recognized but do not perform these functions, it may be permissible to

¹ The 1958 Lugard Memorial Lecture was delivered by Dr. Mair in Brussels on 9 April 1958, on the occasion of the annual Meeting of the Executive Council of the Institute.

speak of Indirect Rule, but it is not correct to speak of the Native Authority system. A Native Authority has judicial, rule-making and financial powers, and in the exercise of all these powers it is subject to external supervision. The grant of financial powers is what made it possible to lay the foundations of local government, in the sense of the allocation of revenues raised in a locality to the provision of services for the direct benefit of those who pay the taxes; and European officials weigh the merit of African chiefs by the interest that they take in such services. The enlightened ruler, in their eyes, is he who introduces the type of local improvement that the government wishes to spread; or, one could put it with less appearance of cynicism, who is interested in the development in his country of institutions appropriate to the twentieth century. Not very many of those rulers who have retained a large degree of independence have spontaneously shown this kind of interest. When this was realized, two alternatives were possible; either all African rulers could be brought under the strict control implied in the Native Authority system, or some other instrument of local government could be developed. In fact, both these courses of action have been tried, sometimes one after the other in the same territory. At the present moment we can see in different British dependencies examples of every stage in the process.

The South African High Commission Territories provide one. The position of the chiefs in Swaziland, Bechuanaland, and Basutoland was defined by treaties made in the nineteenth century, which left them a considerable degree of autonomy. When complaints were made, in the period before the last war, that the development of these territories had been neglected, one step that was taken was to increase control over local administration by limiting this autonomy on the pattern of the Native Authority system. The chiefs resisted this change as long as they could, and by the time it had been made effective the climate of opinion had changed again, and the Native Authority system itself was under fire. Politicians in Europe and Africa were demanding that hereditary rule should be abolished altogether, and replaced by representative local government. When the Ngwato tribe were divided over the marriage of Seretse Khama, the British Government thought the opportune moment had come to do this and so put an end to rivalry between factions; but though there is still no recognized chief of the Ngwato, the people have not been persuaded to elect a council. In the Gold Coast, however, a similar story had a different end. Here too the British Government tried for a long time to induce the chiefs of the coastal area to submit to control in the interests of efficient administration. They refused right up to 1945, and only agreed when they saw that their position was threatened by discontent among their own people. But for them reform was too late to save them from the radical policies introduced by Kwame Nkrumah. In Northern Nigeria, and in East and Central Africa, we are still trying to democratize the government of chiefs without destroying it.

We see today, then, the same opposition within British Africa that used to be regarded as typical of the contrast between the British and the French; the opposition between those who seek to improve what they find and those who prefer to make all new. The forces of African nationalism are on the side of the latter, and where African nationalism has won its first victories, in Ghana and in the Western Region of Nigeria, the status of chiefs has been most conspicuously reduced. Yet in these very territories we see that the chiefs are still a power to be reckoned with, and

perhaps all the more so because their place in the formal organization of government has been so drastically diminished. And we sometimes see the same people extolling the traditional political system who at other times are most insistent that chiefs must be subordinated to a popularly elected government.

I do not intend to spend time discussing, in the light of hindsight, whether it was or was not a wise policy to extend the Native Authority system through Africa. One could point to the most successful examples of it as an effective way of providing local services at a time when they could have been provided in no other way. On the other hand, one might ask whether, if Native Authorities had not been recognized in the British territories, political energies there might now be directed to problems of greater ultimate importance than the struggle for power between chiefs and representative leaders. Will a struggle of this kind be unnecessary in the French territories, where the status accorded to chiefs in the colonial system has been so much lower?

The interpretation of history that is popular with some young Africans sees the Native Authority system as a colossal mistake for which they are paying today. I have never heard one of them explain what he considers would have been the wiser policy, but I suspect that they dream of an alternative version of the past in which representative institutions would have been introduced much earlier and in consequence the goal of self-government would also have been reached much sooner.

I would suggest that the assumptions which they make are false in essentially the same way that some of the assumptions made by the architects of the Native Authority system were false. In both cases it is assumed that a political system can be modified by external action in just the direction which is desired. Of the two views, the African is the more naïve—the idea that an authority which is widely accepted can be not only destroyed—which is easy—but immediately replaced by something built on quite different principles: the ‘new and rectilinear architectures’ of which M. Sarraut spoke were not, in fact, raised in very many places. Behind the Native Authority system was a belief which is in some sense the converse of the African one: the belief, not that everything could be changed, but that nothing would change except under the direction of the European rulers. They, it was held, would guide the chiefs in the way of enlightenment, would remove abuses from the organizations that they found, control the infliction of cruel punishments, limit the demands that chiefs could make on their subjects. Then, having cleaned and polished their instruments, they would turn them to constructive use.

This vision did not take account of the dynamic nature of social relations. It did not recognize that the traditional relationship of chiefs with their subjects had been the result of a continuous interaction, in which some sort of balance was struck between the claims of the ruler and the expectations of the ruled. There have been a few cases, like that of the Fulani empires, where conquerors had military power strong enough to enforce the submission of conquered peoples. But more often the subjects acquiesced in a rule which they considered to be worth something to them, and the ruler had to approach their ideal of what a chief should be. Certainly this did not prevent him maintaining control over his immediate followers by means of ruthless punishments. Indeed I am not seeking to idealize African tradition, still less to argue that African rulers were in fact democratic, as became fashionable at the

time when the Native Authority system was first under fire, and sometimes appears to be so again in Ghana. And when I speak of balance, I do not mean to convey the picture of some delicately poised construction which must not be touched lest its equilibrium be disturbed. I simply mean that authority was accepted as long as obedience was considered to be worth while, but that when this point was passed there were ways of refusing obedience; individuals could transfer their allegiance, larger groups could secede. Less commonly a ruler could be removed by force and a rival installed in his place. The Akan-speaking peoples of Ghana even had a formal procedure for the removal of chiefs; it is not clear how much force was involved in putting this into action in the days when it was still possible to resort to force. But nobody disputed the principle that people should be ruled by a chief, and that he should come from one particular line of descent.

Within this system, as within all social systems, rulers and subjects, nobles and commoners, pursued their own interests to the best of their ability. As long as the traditional African polities were largely self-contained, the principal way in which a commoner could do this was by pleasing some political superior, and the value of this patronage was one of the most important sources of political power. The populace at large might do no more than acquiesce in the system of rule, or they might regard it as part of a divinely sanctioned order. But the immediate followers of chiefs and their subordinate officials had a clear interest in the maintenance of their power.

The establishment of alien rule had effects upon this system both direct and indirect. Directly, it tilted the balance of power in favour of authority. Certainly governments were greatly concerned to see that chiefs did not exploit their subjects, and that the revenues they collected were devoted to the public welfare, and not merely to their own enrichment. But they also made those chiefs whom they supported almost immune from any effect of popular dissatisfaction. There have indeed been revolts against chiefs under colonial rule, but if they have succeeded it has been indirectly, by calling the attention of the superior government to malpractices. The dual position of the chiefs, between the European government with its specific expectations, and their subjects with quite other expectations, has been discussed by various writers with reference especially to East Africa, notably in a perceptive work by Dr. Lloyd Fallers. The officials of the superior government also had a dual role, as the supporters of chiefly authority and the defenders of its subjects against the abuse of authority. They too were not always able to play both roles with success.

In the long run, the indirect effects of colonial rule on the position of the chiefs have been the most extensive. The explanation that chiefs who had government support became indifferent to popular opinion, even in so far as it is true, is too simple to account by itself for the hostility which popular leaders have often shown towards them. We must look not only to the direct relationship of ruler to subjects, but to all the consequences of the fact that the drama of Africa is now being played on a wider stage. This one relationship is no longer of supreme importance. The chief has ceased to be the ultimate source of protection to the humble, aid to the needy, and advancement to the ambitious. It is not simply that the superior government has taken his place, but that the new world offers opportunities which depend on the creation of relationships right outside the traditional system. People can attain success in commerce, or eminence in the professions, without being beholden

in any way to their political superiors, and in these fields the chiefs often could not compete with them. In these circumstances, resentment against the rule of chiefs is something more than a protest against injustice, even though it may express itself in that form. It is part of a wider demand: the demand for full participation in the institutions which control the destinies of Africans.

In this situation the chief can be looked at in two ways. He is an individual doing his best to retain the advantages which his status used to bring him, and sometimes coming into conflict with the new leaders in the process, but he is also a symbol, a rallying point for likeminded persons. At different times the chiefs have been found to symbolize different aspects of the complex modern situation. This is the reason why the same chiefs may be objects of hostility at one moment and of vociferous loyalty at the next, and also why the same persons may appear to be successively, or even simultaneously, opponents and supporters of the recognition of hereditary authority.

To some of their subjects, chiefs are the symbol of alien rule simply because they have been entrusted with some responsibilities of government. And when nationalism is militant, they are indeed in a difficult position, since they are part of the machinery for the maintenance of public order, and they have everything to lose if they align themselves with their subjects. It is not surprising that chiefs are usually 'loyal', as it is commonly called; yet it is worth noting that in Nyasaland a few years ago a number of chiefs resigned their office so that they could stand with their people in opposition to the inclusion of their country in a federation with the Rhodesias.

Of course it is an absurd exaggeration to argue as if European supremacy could not have been maintained without the support of the chiefs, and it is also an absurd distortion to identify them with those policies against which the attack on 'colonialism' is commonly directed. These are economic policies, which are implemented through the relations between central governments and the enterprises operating under their protection, outside any field in which the chiefs can act. The only serious criticism that has ever been made of the type of small-scale development that chiefs have been expected to further is that there has been too little of it.

Another way in which the chiefs are made symbols of resentment against foreign rule is in the interpretation that is put on the decisions made by governments when there is a disputed claim to recognition. Since no man advances a claim unless he has some following, some section of the public is bound to be disappointed whoever is recognized; and, as nationalism develops, it comes to be asserted that the official choice is always contrary to the popular will. Sometimes, even in cases where an individual's claim is not challenged, his critics or his enemies may assert that he has been forced upon them by the alien government; but let the government take action against a ruler, however unpopular, and all his subjects will instantly rally to his support.

This phenomenon, which continues to surprise those in authority, can be readily explained. Every hereditary ruler is the supreme symbol of the unity of his people, and therefore, also, of their opposition to outsiders: so an attack on him means much more than the invasion of his personal authority. To the sophisticated among his subjects, whatever their attitude may be towards the person, such an attack is an offence against national sentiment which cannot be tolerated. To the great majority who have little interest in, or comprehension of, the political conflicts of today, their

ruler is a part of the fixed order of the universe, and his removal a disaster comparable to the reversal of the seasons. When the British Government withdrew recognition from the Kabaka of Buganda, for one Muganda who had some idea of the matter in dispute there were a thousand who simply felt that they had suffered an appalling injury.

Where there is no external pressure, the politically sophisticated are free to criticize the individual actions of rulers and the hereditary principle itself. But they always have to reckon with the attitude of their simpler fellows, and that is just what I have described in speaking of Buganda.

It is characteristic of African chiefs in all the territories that we are discussing that the political unit which each one symbolizes is only a small division of the political unit which is now recognized, or about to be recognized, as a self-governing State. This fact has created a number of different problems, which depend to some extent on the size of the unit headed by a chief. Ashanti constituted a major division of the Gold Coast under colonial rule. But if it had been merely a British creation, would it have demanded the autonomy of a State in a federated Ghana? Because they were subjects of the Asantehene, the Ashanti formed a collectivity that was more than a geographical expression, and it is because he is aware of this fact that Dr. Nkrumah has decreed that Ashanti is to consist in future of eight autonomous divisions subject to no common head. This action, it might be noted, exactly parallels that of the British government some sixty years ago.

In Nigeria at this moment a commission is investigating the numerous demands that have been put forward for the creation of separate States within the three large Regions which at present form the units of the Federation. In some cases the demands appear to be of the type that is stimulated by opposition to external rule; for example, the 'Middle Belt' movement, which seeks to obtain a separate State for the non-Muslim part of the Northern Region, primarily expresses the people's fear of Muslim domination. In other cases, claims are being put forward in the name of language groups; this phenomenon is familiar in European history. Objectively, one can see that if such claims are to have any chance of success, they must relate to larger units than were ever subject to a single ruler. But if the submissions are published it will be interesting to see what part is played in the arguments that are put forward by common allegiance to traditional chiefs.

It is time now to consider the symbolic significance of the chiefs from another point of view. If they stand for the past to people who are proud of that past, they stand for it also in the eyes of people who are impatient to move away from the past into a very different future. This desire is shared today by nationalist politicians and by the people in London who formulate policy for the territories that are still dependent; and to persons in both these categories the authority of the chiefs, if not their person, is the symbol of everything that must be left behind when Africa is modernized. Some journalists too, who, no doubt rightly, see history as a one-way street, describe the attempts of chiefs to assert their position as a 'last stand of reaction'. But some of the conflicts that we see in West Africa today arise from the fact that in the eyes of the same persons the chiefs may be symbols of reaction, symbols of group unity, and symbols of pride in national history. That is why there has been no move to eliminate them from the political system altogether. If the new

leaders do not take this step, I think it is not entirely because they are afraid of the strength of the support that the chiefs command. It is also because they themselves see the chiefs—in some aspects—as symbols of national pride; they cannot at the same time repudiate them altogether and assert the value of their own historic tradition. Thus we see in Ghana that when the possibility of establishing a republican form of government is being discussed, it can be asserted that the traditional system in its pristine form was essentially republican.

A place has been found for the chiefs in the new constitutions of Ghana and of the Western Region of Nigeria. In both these countries chiefs are the ceremonial presidents of the elected councils which have replaced the Native Authorities, and up to now they have been allowed to nominate a proportion of the members of these councils, though Dr. Nkrumah has now said that each local council is to include only one representative of the chief of the area. In the Western Region, in addition, the legislature is bicameral, and the chamber with powers of revision is a House of Chiefs.

The Eastern Region has always been thought of as the classic case where fully representative government could be introduced without any need for modification to meet the sentiments of traditionalists, because, it was held, there were no chiefs. Indeed it has been regarded as the home of African democracy, where everyone had a voice in all decisions, so that it should be a mere step from the direct to the representative form.

But what do we see in fact in the Eastern Region? A demand for the recognition of chiefs, or at any rate of some kind of traditional leader. It would be easy to explain this away as mere imitation; to say that the Ibo and their neighbours want to claim an institution that appears to be a matter of prestige in other territories. But this is not the whole story. We find now, what an anthropologist might have expected, that the democratic Eastern Region was never democratic as we conceive the Greek City State, in the sense that the voices of all citizens were equal. It was the units of social structure—the small descent groups, each living in its own quarter in town or village—which were equal. No collective decision was taken unless the senior man of each of these groups consented in the name of its members. Sometimes a group might leave the meeting and thus dissociate itself from the decision. This procedure seems to have been carried over into the new parliamentary institutions, where it is less effective, since in this case absentees are bound by decisions taken in their absence.

When modern representative assemblies are being set up, it is clearly extremely difficult to find a place for the spokesman of every group of this kind, even at the level of local government. Indeed this was tried long ago. In the first days of the introduction of the Native Authority system under Cameron, the principle was followed that the traditional political structure must be utilized *whatever it was*; and for some time assemblies of a hundred or more members were formally responsible for the conduct of business such as the allocation of revenues to local services. But very soon it was found necessary both to reduce the number of councillors and to amalgamate neighbouring units, so as to create economically viable authorities with councils of manageable size. Once this had been done, there was no link with tradition apart from the fact that the council members were reverend elders, and the opinion soon grew up among the officials responsible for the supervision of the

councils that the business of a local authority should be in more competent hands. This led them to study the local councils of Kenya, which from their inception have been based on nomination or election and not on any traditional structure, and, taking Kenya as the example, they substituted wholly elected councils for the Native Authorities. The process was set in motion before a representative African Minister took over responsibility for local government. However, the law which authorized it had been examined in advance by a committee of Africans. At that time there does not seem to have been any general feeling that the dignity of traditional authorities must be respected. Evidently they were not thought of as a serious political force, as were those in the Western Region and in Ghana. In these two countries the respect felt for chiefs appears to be in part derived from religious veneration. Their chiefs used to perform ceremonies on what may be called a national scale; some of them perhaps still do. The head of a kin group, in contrast, is the intermediary only between his own kinsmen and their ancestors. Outside this field he earns the respect generally accorded to age, but no more. It appears, in fine, that the educated persons who were consulted on the original Local Government law did not consider that any account need be taken of traditional leadership.

Yet we now see a reaction. Mr. G. I. Jones, who was invited to investigate the question of the due recognition of traditional authorities, refers in his report to 'a general feeling that the principle of representation by election has been carried too far', and this appears to be closely connected with a feeling that the new local council areas do not correspond with social units conscious of common interests. Again we seem to be seeing the importance of the recognized head as the symbol of unity, and the determination of the group whose unity has its roots in the past not to be submerged in new organizations artificially created.

This situation presents a serious problem for the organization of local government, not only in the Eastern Region but also in Ghana and in other territories. Over and over again we find that some section refuses to be included in a wider council, or insists on breaking away from one, on the ground that they are an autonomous political unit headed by their own chief. Now it is not only anthropologists who have remarked on the importance of community sentiment as a stimulus to the activity of local councils, and of community pride as a factor in willingness to contribute to the cost of common services. But if these feelings unite only populations too small to afford any common services, and are strong enough to divide councils representing larger aggregates, they can only hamper the development of effective local government. In time, no doubt, as communications improve, locality by itself will be a basis for community feeling. Meanwhile we must hope that if community pride is appeased by the appointment to councils of persons clothed with traditional authority, this may lead the general public to take more interest in local developments.

The Union of South Africa, to which I now turn, sometimes appears to outsiders like a looking-glass land in which all the trends which are dominant, and seem to be irresistible, farther north are reversed. The attitude reflected in the Union Bantu Authorities Act is a case in point. To liberal South Africans of yesterday, no less than to progressive journalists of today, Bantu chiefs have symbolized reaction, and South Africans have prided themselves on the elected local councils which had been set up in the native areas of the Cape before the end of the last century. At the same time

the Native Affairs Department has found it convenient to rely on the traditional chiefs as agents of police power and as channels for the communication of official policy. Also, it was found here, as it has been found since in so many other places, that certain chiefs commanded so much respect that it was not practicable to exclude them from the representative councils which were set up among their people. Thus in Pondoland the Paramount Chiefs of the two major divisions of the country had to be given seats on the councils of the districts in which they lived, and they were also authorized to nominate a proportion of the members of all councils.

But with the advent of the Nationalist Party to power, and the adoption of the policy of *apartheid*, the rule of the chiefs over their people has come to acquire a new significance. Now they are symbols of difference; they embody the theory that Bantu culture is the expression of the specific nature of a people who are destined to be for ever separate from South Africans of European descent. Their responsibilities in the field of local government are to be increased, and they are to exercise these along with councils constituted according to tribal tradition. In this case the ruling group have deliberately chosen to recognize only the divisive forces in African social structure and only the rural populations which still cherish their distinctive traditions, and to disregard the great number, probably now the majority, of Africans who live outside their tribal territory, and for whom it is quite meaningless to say, as was said in the debate on the Bantu Authorities Act, that 'the tribe, the headman and the chief are the basis of their social and political structure'.

What is meant by the return to tradition appears from a speech that the Secretary for Native Affairs made to a meeting of Zulu chiefs soon after the Act was passed. He claimed to be 'adding to the duties of the tribal authorities the all important one of moving with the times and thereby retaining leadership of the community as a whole', and told them 'to deal with community life in all its ramifications just as in the tribal life of old but on a higher level'. Alas, these exhortations ignore the essential factor in the present situation, that the times have changed, and modern community life is not the tribal life of old. The chief can move with the times only up to a point; to go beyond that point would make his own position meaningless. The support which chiefs retain today, and which, I repeat, is strong enough to make them a significant force in politics, comes from the people who do not want to move with the times.

I have spoken of the chiefs as symbols. In every case they are symbols of the differentiation of sectional groups in a complex society, but only in the last of a differentiation which is forced upon one section against its will. The kind of group loyalty which takes a chief as its symbol is often called 'tribalism'. Outside South Africa this word has a derogatory meaning; inside South Africa it is rather ambiguous; officially it means something which is different without being inferior, and which ought to be perpetuated. But some self-appointed mentors of the new African States condemn 'tribalism' and urge Africans to develop a sense of nationhood. In taking this line they forget that every society has, and must have, its internal divisions. Only two features are peculiar in the African political scene at the moment: that the groups which seek to assert their autonomy are unduly small in the context of modern government, and that their unity is symbolized by the recognition of hereditary rulers.

Something must also be said of the chiefs as persons who are seeking, like everyone else, to do the best for themselves in a fluid situation. I am not attempting to deny that the wide popular support which they command sometimes enables them to pursue their own interests rather than the benefit of society at large, even to the point of refusing to obey the law of the land. I am thinking particularly of the situation in Ghana, where the Akan chiefs in the past have derived considerable revenues from their position as the ultimate authorities over unoccupied land. Of course the mystical identification of a chief with the land of his subjects is not peculiar to the Akan-speaking peoples; it is probably universal. But in Ghana the opportunities of turning this position to account have been unusually great, since the country has a highly profitable cash crop, cocoa, and also valuable mineral and timber resources. The cocoa is produced by peasant farmers, many of whom are 'strangers', to use the West African word, in the chiefdoms where they have taken up farms. There is a steady migration of farmers to the better cocoa lands. For cultivation rights they usually pay something to the chief as well as to the rightholder whom they approach directly. Timber and mineral concessions have been granted directly by the chiefs and not by the central government, since the Gold Coast government never claimed any right to dispose of African lands. All these revenues should have been brought to account in the Native Administration treasuries which were set up in Ashanti in 1936 and in the coastal area in 1945. But when the decision was taken to replace the Native Authorities by elected local councils, it appeared that it was not a simple matter to order the transfer of Native Administration assets to the new bodies. In the eyes of those who still revered the chiefs, their position as land authorities was sacred, and to take from them the revenues which were paid in recognition of this position would have been an outrage. A compromise in legal terms was found in the provision that stool lands, as they are called in Ghana, are the property of the traditional entities, the States ruled by the chiefs, but are to be administered on their behalf by the elected councils. This saves the prestige of the chiefs, but it does not alter the fact that the local councils and the chiefs have very different ideas on the question of the allocation of revenues. The councils want to build dispensaries and water storage tanks; the chiefs want to keep up their traditional state, maintain their courtiers and renew the elaborate paraphernalia with which they appear on ceremonial occasions. Their subjects probably want both the water supplies and the paraphernalia: I recall a case in which one of the smaller chiefs near Cape Coast complained to the council that he could not provide the necessary ritual objects for the appropriate yearly ceremony and his people were blaming him for the bad season. Thus there is room for a good deal of friction between hereditary and elected authorities. It has been common form for elected local councils in their first flush of power to cut down what might be called the chief's civil list. In Ghana repeated instructions have had to be given to councils regarding their duty to maintain chiefs, but it is not likely that there will ever be agreement about the proper cash value of maintenance. Already the central government has had to guarantee a payment to chiefs from its own revenues; this too the chiefs have criticized as inadequate.

This is what happens when the chiefs have handed over their revenues, or where the revenues are in any case not large. Where there is more at stake, the conflict arises earlier. The chiefs do not disclose their sources of revenue, or fail to agree

with the council on the proportion which they should be allowed to retain; or they try to get in ahead of the council's servants and go on collecting the dues which were formerly paid to them. It appears that the recent suspension from his office of Nana Ofori Atta was the government's answer to his refusal to make over his revenues.

It is quite easy to predict that the chiefs will eventually disappear from the scene, whether or not the governments of independent Ghana and Nigeria take forcible steps to bring this about. Although, as I hope I have shown, their position differs in many respects from that of a landed aristocracy in Europe, it is equally vulnerable to the forces of modern economic development. Even supposing that representative government does not flourish in the new States, it is unlikely that leadership will revert to the chiefs; it must remain in the hands of people who can organize their following over wider areas than those to which the chiefs are confined by the nature of their position. It may be that sociologists would regard them as constituting a class in modern African society, but they have not shown much ability to combine in defence of their interests.

However, it is too easy simply to say that because they cannot last for ever, they are negligible now. It has been remarked that anthropologists, who study African societies intensively over short periods, exaggerate temporary conflicts. Historians tell us that with their long view they can see how these conflicts will be resolved; so, it seems to follow, the conflicts themselves do not really matter very much. I am reminded of Lord Keynes's remark that 'in the long run we are all dead'. The conflicts that people are living through are the only ones that matter *to them*, and it is a fact that the position of the chiefs is a subject of acute conflict in Ghana, and a live issue in the Eastern Region of Nigeria, and nobody has ventured to prophesy what may happen in a self-governing Northern Nigeria, where at present there is no power comparable with that of the great Emirs. We may think we see what the end of the story must be, but that does not enable the actors in the drama to sleep through it and wake up just in time for the dénouement. They have to live through the period of conflict, and it is for them to decide whether the end will be reached through a series of compromises or forced in a violent struggle.

Résumé

DES CHEFS AFRICAINS AUJOURD'HUI

AUJOURD'HUI se termine l'époque où l'administration européenne pourrait efficacement gouverner l'Afrique par l'intermédiaire des chefs traditionnels. Il nous serait peut-être utile de considérer la position actuelle de ces chefs et la manière dont elle a été touchée, premièrement par leur incorporation dans le système administratif étranger, et plus tard par le rejet de ce système dans certains des territoires africains. L'idée qu'il serait possible de retenir un système d'autorité héréditaire, modifié dans ses méthodes et ses buts pour satisfaire la conception européenne de gouvernement, présuma que les sociétés africaines étaient statiques. En réalité, elles se sont beaucoup changées ces derniers temps. Mais c'est la *totalité des forces nouvelles touchant à l'Afrique qui ont provoqué sur la position des chefs les modifications les plus fondamentales*; bien plus que l'action des gouvernements européens qui cherchaient à purger des abus l'administration africaine. L'opposition à l'autorité des chefs est devenue une partie intégrale de la demande des Noirs de contrôler eux-mêmes leur gouvernement.

Les chefs, en tant qu'individus, cherchent à retenir une position avantageuse en face des autorités nouvelles désireuses de réduire ou détruire leurs pouvoirs. Ils sont cependant des symboles, et bien que parfois ils représentent l'autorité étrangère rejetée, ils symbolisent souvent les aspirations authentiques de leur peuple. Ceci explique pourquoi à des époques différentes les mêmes individus donnent lieu à des manifestations de sentiments totalement contraires. Aux yeux des Noirs les moins touchés par la 'civilisation' ils constituent encore quelquefois le seul symbole national. De plus, certains petits groupes qui demandent l'autonomie trouvent en eux les points de ralliement, et ceci pose un problème très difficile aux gouvernements d'Afrique Occidentale qui sont en voie d'acquiescer leur indépendance. Les réclamations de reconnaissance des chefs parmi les peuples tels les Ibo, depuis toujours considérés comme 'démocratiques', sont une manifestation de cette attitude.

Dans l'Union d'Afrique du Sud on a fait des chefs un symbole d'un tout autre genre. La tentative de renouveler leur autorité et de les transformer en chefs populaires est l'expression de la philosophie d'*apartheid* — la croyance que, dans la mesure où les Blancs et les Noirs ont des différences inhérentes, le progrès africain ne peut avancer que dans les voies tracées par sa propre culture.

Il est évident que l'autorité héréditaire doit disparaître en Afrique comme partout ailleurs, mais pour ceux qui s'occupent actuellement du gouvernement, cette situation de conflit entre les chefs traditionnels et les chefs élus constitue un des plus gros problèmes à résoudre.

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