CHAPTER SIX

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CHIEFS AND DEMOCRACY IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

'Without systematic comparative studies anthropology will become only historiography and ethnography.'[101]

'Our first democratic elections were held in 1994. Some people are still waiting for the results.' [102]

6.1 Introduction

Generally, most ethnographic studies on chieftainship have focused on single field sites. Except for the recent comparative study of chiefs in Cameroon and Botswana by Nyamnjoh (2002), not much attention has been given to this form of inquiry. Comparison is vital in the social sciences in order to 'explore the varieties of forms of social life as a basis for the theoretical study of human social phenomena' (Radcliffe-Brown 1958:108). In the past, Radcliffe-Brown contends, the comparative method in social anthropology was often used by 'arm-chair anthropologists', but the emergence of field studies gradually marginalized the need for a comparative method. However, an increasing number of social scientists have felt the need to embark on comparative studies principally because 'factual information about one society, of course, will not always tell us whether we are dealing with an unusual case or a very general set of influences' (Giddens 2001:639). In fact, some scholars are of the opinion that the substance of the social sciences remains the comparative method.

In this chapter I will focus on the comparative dimensions of the cases under study– that is, on identifying and accounting for the differences and parallels that have been experienced by Tshivhase and Ganyonga in terms of social and political change. A comparative study of this nature is a contribution to the 'frontier of recent anthropology' (Hannerz 1997:546) that involves 'multi-sited' studies (see Marcus, 1995 on the relevance of multi-sited ethnography). In the course of the comparison, I

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[101] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Huxley Memorial Lecture for 1951.

will also address some of the questions that emerged from my review of literature. The objective here is to show the relevance of my work to on-going discussions on chiefs and democratic transition in both countries. Another section follows which discusses the relevance of my findings to an understanding of the democratic transitions in South Africa and Cameroon and indeed, the nature of the South African and Cameroonian postcolonial states in the contemporary era. I conclude the chapter and thesis with a discussion of the issues I consider as my main contribution to scholarship on chiefs and the democratic transition in both countries.

6.2 Comparisons Between the Chiefs and Chiefdoms of Tshivhase and Bali in the Democratic Era.

I will begin by showing the similarities between Tshivhase and Ganyonga and those between the subjects of the two chiefdoms as a whole. To begin with, the positions and careers of both chiefs are quite similar. Both of them enjoy the prestige of coming from a powerful line of chiefs in their regions. Tshivhase for instance benefited from the prestige associated with his grandfather, Ratsimphi, who as described in chapter two was an icon of the liberation struggle in the 1940s until his death at the hands of the South African state. Ganyonga on the other hand, traces his descent to the legendary leader, Galega I, who was the first chief to accommodate the Germans in the hinterlands. Ganyonga's father also played a leading role in the fight for the independence of the Southern Cameroons and was the architect of the House of Chiefs, which was later abolished. As a whole, both chiefs owe their current prominence partly to the legacy of their forebears.

The second similarity is that both chiefs occupy positions of prominence in national politics in their respective countries. Since 1994 Chief Tshivhase has occupied various portfolios in the ANC, first as a senator in Cape Town and since 1999 as an ANC member in the Limpopo Provincial House of Assembly. Tshivhase's prominence in national politics has reinforced his popularity at the local level, making him the best-known Venda chief in post-apartheid South Africa. *Fon* Ganyonga on the other hand has also risen to national prominence following his co-optation into the

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[102] *Mail & Guardian May* 31-June 6 2000, Blacksash Advertisement

Central Committee of the ruling CPDM party. In addition to this, he has participated in various aspects of provincial and national politics, such as the All Anglophone Conference which took place in Buea in 1993. Ganyonga also made national headlines when he decided to run for the office of mayor in his chiefdom.

Third, both chiefs have claimed legitimacy in the democratic era as *chiefs* and as modern politicians, thus arguing for the compatibility between chiefs and democracy. By combining his position as chief and ANC politician, Tshivhase has provided a shield for his people against the market-driven policies of the local council, which, as discussed in chapter three, are unfavourable to the rural poor. He benefited from the low esteem that his subjects have for the local council by introducing certain changes to customary practice, such as opening access to land to women and reducing the fee for allocating land to all. Unlike other chiefs in the Venda area who did very little to stand up to the local council, Chief Tshivhase decided to back his subjects in refusing to pay for services they were not yet receiving. Ganyonga also made similar claims about his legitimacy as both chief and modern politician. Ganyonga argued his case on the basis of his ability to attract state-driven development to his chiefdom by lobbying for the chiefdom to be elevated to the level of a fully-fledged administrative division. Among other claims, he also argued that he could serve as an entry point for locals to get into the administration – evidenced by the appointment of two Bali subjects into positions of prominence. Although some of his claims have been contested by the people (because they are based on elite interests), he has nonetheless won credibility for his involvement in the Anglophone cause, which is an extremely popular issue among his subjects and others in the North West Province. Thus, both chiefs have made different claims in similar contexts about the legitimacy of their participation in 'inventing' the future of their communities and countries. The point I wish to emphasise here is not whether specific claims were challenged or not, but that the two chiefs have competed for their own space in the democratic era.

The fourth point is that both chiefs could be seen as agents vying for their own interests in contexts of keen competition. I will argue that both chiefs have been involved in safeguarding not only their own interests, but also those of other chiefs, through various lobby groups such as chiefs' organisations. I will begin with the interests of individual chiefs. In this connection, one should take into account the on-

going contest among rival Venda chiefs as discussed in chapter two. Chief Tshivhase has not only emphasised the autonomy of his chiefdom from other rival chiefdoms, but also sought to transform it into a powerful kingdom in which he could be recognised as king – without ostensibly, claiming jurisdiction over other Venda chiefdoms. It was in this light that he followed a process of appeasement with his headmen, instead of replacing them as anticipated by civic associations. He also made use of his personal dynamism by involving himself in the activities of youths in his chiefdom thereby winning their support and loyalty. In particular he was involved in promoting the *tshikona,* which he used as a rallying point for BaVenda resident in the cities. I am told that Chief Tshivhase took a *tshikona* troupe during his trips to Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban to urge the BaVenda, regardless of their particular loyalties to rally behind him in order to promote their 'culture'. Many have interpreted this action as a hidden agenda to claim authority over all the BaVenda.

Fon Ganyonga also sought to safeguard his personal and political interests in a context of severe competition. The very decision to become involved in the CPDM was in itself a calculated move by the *fon* to protect his interests against the uncertainties of the era. It has been argued already that the reintroduction of multiparty democracy in Cameroon offered new space for old political actors to re-enter the postcolonial political arena. But, at this juncture, chiefs had to compete not only with other government elites but also with the emerging opposition, some of who were their subjects. By choosing to participate in national politics on the side of the ruling party, Ganyonga was investing where he was sure to harvest. Although his determination to protect his interests was interpreted by the people as a betrayal against them, Ganyonga nonetheless tried to hedge his bets by becoming involved in BANDECA activities.

I argued above that Chief Tshivhase and his colleagues in the Limpopo province also engaged in actions intended to protect and enhance the status of chiefs in the post-apartheid era. In this respect, I described the role played by the Congress of Traditional Leaders in South Africa (CONTRALESA) during the late 1980s. Although CONTRALESA was initially a regional formation, it soon became a national association after the ANC was unbanned in 1990. What I found particularly interesting about CONTRALESA was the way in which it appropriated the language

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of liberation by posing as a grassroots association together with civic movements and the United Democratic Front (UDM). Although CONTRALESA is dissatisfied with the current regime for downplaying the importance of chiefs, it has succeeded in securing some of the benefits it had bargained for during the CODESA talks of 1991-1993. It is principally due to CONTRALESA's pressure at the talks that there is a National House of Traditional Leaders and Provincial Houses in post-apartheid South Africa (even if the function of these houses is not clear to anyone involved in them).

Chiefs in the Bamenda grassfields also sought to foster their interests through various associations such as NOWEFCO and NOWEFU. In the past couple of years there has been substantial effort to unite the different associations into a single movement representing the collective interests of all chiefs and chiefdoms. In this respect considerable progress has been attained. This was evident during the official visit of the Prime Minister to the North West Province in April 2001, during which the *fons* awarded him the title of 'Pathfinder'. *Fon* Ganyonga has been particularly active in NOWEFU and has argued in favour of unity between the two associations.

Thus it is important to underscore the extent to which chiefs have successfully exercised agency both as individuals and groups. Most chiefs, especially those who belong to the CPDM and *fons*' associations have made strategic use of their membership to secure advantages for themselves and their chiefdoms, sometimes even against neighbouring chiefdoms. Through these associations, some chiefs have emerged as central actors in the drama of political transformation by penetrating the domain of elite circles, and indeed by becoming part and parcel of the ruling elite. The point must therefore be emphasised that chiefs do not serve the projects of tradition and the modern state only, but more important, that they also indulge in transactions with their own interests in mind.

The last point of similarity I wish to draw attention to is about the political situation of the subjects in the two chiefdoms. In other words, this point is not about the chiefs per se, but about the socio-political conditions provoked by the introduction of democracy. My argument is that the introduction of democracy to both chiefdoms created contradictions that resulted in a renewed need for chiefs. In Tshivhase, this was evidenced in the contradiction of introducing liberal democracy in neo-liberal

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circumstances (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1999(a), 2000). The point is that although South Africa's democratic transition was thoroughgoing, the history of dispossession and the present economic condition of the country exposed rural people to the chill winds of neo-liberalism. This contradiction therefore created a need for protection from these winds, which chiefs were in a position to provide on condition that they had retained enough legitimacy and prestige.

Cameroon's political transition was contradictory in that it introduced the form of democracy but not its substance, leaving the incumbent government in a position to prey on and manipulate the people and the opposition. This contradiction also created space for the re-entry of chiefs to serve as mediators and protectors of their people against the excesses of the government but on condition that such chiefs had retained enough credibility as well. Whether particular chiefs played this role or not is not an issue here. The parallel in both cases is that the contradictions experienced by the subjects created conditions for the re-emergence of chiefs.

Having examined the parallels between both chiefs and chiefdoms, I will proceed to explore and account for the difference in both cases. To this end, I will begin with the chiefs. The first key difference between Tshivhase and Ganyonga is in the way their political choices have affected their relationship with their subjects. In Tshivhase, the chief's involvement in national politics helped to reinforce his popularity at the base rather than undermine it. The mass of rural South Africans want the ANC to run the country because its reputation as liberator still outweighs the shortcomings of its local government system in rural areas. It was in this light that Tshivhase's popularity was enhanced relative to the Mphephu chiefs who were unable to switch camps to the ANC.[103] Tshivhase's involvement in national politics on the side of the ANC was therefore not in conflict with the popular choice of the people. Given his actions at the local level and his high-ranking status in the ANC, the people see Tshivhase as epitomising their hopes and aspirations.

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[103] The present Chief Mphephu belongs to the United Democratic Movement (UDM) led by Bantu Holomisa. This party is relatively insignificant in the Limpopo Province where the ANC is indeed the only game in town.

By contrast, Ganyonga's involvement in national politics on the side of the CPDM helped to undermine his legitimacy in the eyes of his subjects. Unlike the ANC, which still enjoys the status of 'liberator', the CPDM in Cameroon is perceived by most people, particularly in the North West Province as a plague that must be avoided. The party and its officials are blamed for the social, economic and political problems of the country, and the SDF was the most popular party in the North West Province. Although the SDF's fortunes have dwindled over the years, the CPDM still remains anathema in this region. By associating himself with the CPDM, Ganyonga was therefore seen as sleeping with the enemy. One sees that although both chiefs rose to national prominence in the ruling parties in their respective countries, they differed considerably in terms of the credibility each built up with their subjects on account of this strategy.

The second aspect I will contrast is the extent to which both chiefs could act as they liked. In other words, it is possible to contrast the degree of constraint on each chief to engage in specific actions. In this respect, I contend that although the two chiefs were agents and did make use of their ability to indulge in different personal and political actions, it is evident from my research that Tshivhase had more scope for action than Ganyonga. Tshivhase could afford to introduce minor changes, with legal implications without necessarily running into trouble with the local council or the state. In fact, he went as far as backing his people in refusing to pay for services that were not yet delivered. He also stood up successfully to the Demarcation Board's attempt to take control of access to land in rural areas. Tshivhase's scope for action in many respects surpassed that of Ganyonga. The nature of the transition in Cameroon gave little option for chiefs including Ganyonga but to toe the line or see their status undermined by the state or their remuneration suspended. Many chiefs for instance had very little option but to throw in their lot with the CPDM. But even with this constraint, Ganyonga could still participate in certain activities such as the Anglophone conference, which was interpreted by the state as subversive. My argument therefore does not suggest that Ganyonga could not act as he wished, but that the scope for such action was limited when compared to that of Chief Tshivhase. This contrast will be discussed below in the section on democratic transition in both countries.

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While both chiefs share several similarities but differ on two significant bases, I argue that one can also identify two main differences between the subjects of both chiefdoms. Subjects in both chiefdoms differed significantly in terms of the issues that were of local concern to them. In Tshivhase, the main problem was about subsistence and economic viability while in Bali the question was about the *fon's* failure to provide his subjects with the desired political protection. In other words, people in Tshivhase were preoccupied with economic issues while those in Bali were particularly concerned about political matters. To put this into perspective, it should be emphasised that people in Tshivhase were concerned about issues such as employment, better housing, food, water and electricity. I have already indicated the high levels of unemployment in Tshivhase brought about by many factors such as the closure or relocation of nearby industries and the reduced level of labour migration from the region as a whole. A few informants also blamed the high levels of unemployment on the expulsion of workers by farmers. These factors accounted for the widespread protest against the TLC's attempt to market its services among the rural poor. There was deep disillusionment among the rural population owing to the great expectations that many had about the supposed benefits of freedom and democracy. The reality however, is that the local council is not in a position to create jobs and given the economic circumstances in the country, the government is in little position to do the same. This has been left in the hands of the private sector and Venda seems to be at a disadvantage in attracting such 'developers'. This partly accounts for Chief Tshivhase's promotion of his Tshivhase Development Trust as a private initiative intended to alleviate the lot of the rural poor.

In Bali on the other hand, people were irked by the *fon's* reluctance to provide them with the desired protection from state predation. Although people wanted economic development (which the chief claimed he could deliver via his association with the state), they did not want this at the expense of their newly gained freedom. But, as it became obvious, the freedoms were only nominal, not real. The people did not want the state to manage their resources such as water supply (the reason why they burnt down the SNEC office) but to maintain control over their resources under the auspices of the *fon*. It was against this background that some youths vowed they would fight to the last to see that the government does not take over control of the water system again. As described in chapter five, it was rumoured that the *fon* was conniving with a close aide to

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return the management of the water system to the state. Thus people in Bali were deeply concerned by the *fon's* failure to provide proper protection against intrusion by the state.

Several factors maybe said and account for the above difference. But, at this juncture I will focus on one specific issue. I argue that this difference can be explained in terms of the different levels of economic development that each of the societies has undergone. In Tshivhase the long-term transformation has been from a peasant economy to one based on wage (industrial) labour. This means that the proportion of people relying on subsistence farming today is very small. In Bali, on the other hand, the economy is based on a combination of subsistence agriculture and wage labour. Indeed, the proportion of the population relying on subsistence agriculture is huge and even those employed in the wage economy tend to supplement their income with subsistence farming. Furthermore, although both societies are rural, they can be contrasted by their land tenure systems. While the chief in Tshivhase plays an extremely important role in the allocation and control of land, in Bali the chief's role in this respect is largely limited to ritual. It means that effective control of the land is vested in the subjects rather than the *fon*. In Tshivhase, by contrast, the chief or headman places restrictions on how a subject may put his or her land to use. More often than not, the land allocated to people is so small that even if they desired to engage in gardening, this would be practically impossible. But in Bali, most subjects own land and practice farming as a basic means of survival, even though they experience high levels of unemployment. Thus the different levels of economic development and socio-economic organisation accounts for a key difference between the plight of the subjects in Tshivhase and Bali.

The next point of difference is that chieftaincy has different meanings for the people in Tshivhase and Bali. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson, West and Kloeck-Jensen (1999:484) contend that 'all authority, along with the community over which it is exercised, is "imagined", meaning invented, created, produced and reproduced in the midst of an ever-changing historical context.' They argue further that chieftaincy does not only have different levels of authority, but also different kinds of meaning for the people over whom this authority is exercised (cf. West and Kloeck-Jensen 1999:484). Failure to see these distinctions, they argue, not only muddles the historical debate on 'traditional authority' but also contributes to the 'danger of implementing political

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reforms that produce a "tradition" both unrecognisable and highly destructive to the lives of the local communities.' It is against this background that I have identified a major difference between chieftaincy in Tshivhase and Bali.

Chieftaincy has meaning to the people in Tshivhase insofar as the chief can play the role of protector of the poor, at least in the short run. Although Venda has a long history of chieftaincy and powerful chiefs, the normative distinction between the office and the person became blurred during the apartheid period, especially in the 1980s when civic movements penetrated the political landscape in rural areas. It was at this period that the civic under the auspices of the United Democratic Front called for the abolition of chieftaincy in order to make room for peoples' power. Although calls for the abolition of chieftaincy were premature, as evidenced by the new role of chiefs in Tshivhase, it is however an important aspect of difference between chieftaincy in Tshivhase and that in Bali. Many of the informants I interviewed hardly made reference to chieftaincy as the guardian of their culture or 'tradition' although a few maintained that chiefs represented their past. Ironically, their lives were affected on a daily basis by the authority of the chief and headmen under him. It was to the chief's kraal that they took their disputes, registered customary marriages, applied for land and so on. Their lives were not detached in any small way from the institution of chieftaincy. But as indicated above, most people conceptualised the role of chiefs from a functional perspective. Chieftaincy represented no intrinsic values, nor was there any deep sense of attachment to the institution. For instance, people no longer paid tribute (such as material gifts) to the chiefs although they used to do so during the apartheid period because they were coerced. Some informants observed that if the local council were popular and worked in the favour of the rural poor, they would prefer it to the chiefs because while they could vote the councillors into office, they could not do the same with chiefs.

In Bali, on the contrary, chieftaincy had a deeper significance to the subjects than I observed in Tshivhase. Although chiefs did not exercise the same intrusive authority over subjects in Bali as they did in Tshivhase, people felt that chiefs played a role far more significant to them than the state. This particular point was also advanced as a reason why they loathed the idea of their chief siding with the state. People also made reference to chieftaincy as a sacred institution, embodying their religious beliefs and

customs. For instance, there could be no 'death-celebration' without approval from the palace. The chief also received tribute (firewood and palm wine) from the subjects and was expected to perform his sacred role in ensuring the fertility of the land, of cleansing the chiefdom and transmitting the blessings of the ancestors. Chiefs in the Bamenda grassfields, to borrow from Jean-Pierre Warnier (1993) were perceived as a 'container holding a number of ancestral substances' which he redistributed among his subjects for the well-being of the commonweal. Thus the institution of chief in Bali had deeper ritual implications than in Tshivhase. Chieftaincy, to the people was not only a socio-political organisation but also a sacred institution. Although the chief was blamed for poor conduct, the office of chief was seen as distinct from the office-bearer. Lastly, a survey of the history did not reveal that there had been at any stage, a clamour for the abolition of the institution. Perhaps, this particular observation would be different if the people had other credible alternatives. And this does not imply that things will always be the same given the possibility that an established order of this nature can be questioned. But as Bourdieu (1978) points out, it takes more than just a crisis to produce critical discourse about an institution of this nature, which appears 'self-evident' to the people.

Thus the main variation between the people in Tshivhase and their counterparts in Bali is that they have different meanings for chieftaincy. In other words, the idea of chieftaincy is 'imagined' differently by the subjects in both chiefdoms and these imaginings have been subjected to changing historical contexts. I will like to revisit Barbara Oomen's thesis about 'retraditionalisation' in the light of the foregoing distinction.

Oomen (2000) makes use of the concept of 'retraditionalisation' to explain the unexpected popularity and renewed loyalty towards the chiefs she observed in the field. In her study of social change in the Mamone chiefdom in the Limpopo Province, Oomen (2000) observed that what was going on at the time of her research could be described as retraditionalisation. By this concept, she meant the renewed sense of respect for chieftaincy and the popularity of the chief among the people. Based on a survey, she concluded that up to 73% of her respondents had accepted that they were loyal to their chief. She contrasted this 'renewed' importance of chiefs to the apartheid era when the comrades and the UDF advocated the abolition of chieftaincy. Although she does not conceptualise tradition as a fixed category, her use

of the concept – retraditionalisation, suggests the view that Africans are obsessed with *tradition* regardless of how much 'modernity' they have acquired. In other words, retraditionalisation implies that Africans can be equated with 'tradition' and will invariably return to their so-called 'roots' irrespective of their modern status or achievements. Patrick Chabal argues that Africanists need to exercise caution in their choice of words to 'explain' Africa. He suggests that Africanists should 'search for the concepts and the vocabulary which will make it possible to advance insight into the realities of contemporary Africa' (Chabal 1996:50). Nyamnjoh (2002b:7) contends that 'being African is neither exclusively a matter of tradition and culture, nor exclusively a matter of modernity and citizenship' because 'Africans are simultaneously modernising their traditions and traditionalising their modernities.' Concepts such as retraditionalisation therefore, tend to blur rather than illuminate one's understanding of the issues at stake.

A survey of the classical literature reveals that chiefs have been popular at particular instances and unpopular at another time. To describe the increased respect and popularity of chiefs as retraditionalisation therefore, tells one little about the complex processes going on in the chiefdom. To buttress my argument, I will extend my discussion about the different ways in which chieftaincy was imagined in Bali and Tshivhase.

Chief Tshivhase for example, accepted that although he was a champion of 'cultural revival' in Venda, his popularity was not based exclusively on this. Actually the people's esteem for him was based on his innovative policy on land and his promise of development. This point re-emphasises the economic predicament of the subjects rather than their so-called yearning to go back in search of their roots. What was going on in Mamone was not unique or unprecedented. Parallels have been recorded and analysed even as far back as in the 1940s.

In his 'Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand', Max Gluckman demonstrated that the Zulu king and his *indunas* enjoyed renewed loyalty on account of the fact that much of their powers had been curtailed. Although this situation was ironical, it was apparent that the chiefs had 'little political influence in … fundamental economic aspects of Zululand life' (ibid. 18). Gluckman argued further that 'though

the Regent was not officially recognised as head of the Zulu nation by Government, all Zulu regarded him as supreme over them' (ibid. 24). It was in this respect that 'tension against Government' was expressed through the Regent. What is obvious here is that at this particular era, the Zulu regent became quite popular among his subjects for serving as a means through which dissatisfaction about the colonial government could be channelled. In this connection, it is likely that the people would have questioned his authority if they saw him as siding too closely with the colonial state. The people's renewed respect for the regent was not necessarily out of respect for tradition, or because they had retraced their path in the dark forest of modernity, but because they stood to benefit by showing deference to the traditional leader.

A parallel can be drawn from the above example regarding the contemporary situation in Tshivhase. Similar to the Zulu Regent in the 1940s, Chief Kennedy Tshivhase has also become a channel through which subjects' dissatisfaction with local government is expressed. Although Chief Tshivhase also represents the government of the day his subjects see this as a credit rather than an issue for contention. It means that Chief Tshivhase's role is like a 'double-edged sword', which cuts in both directions. He legitimises the central government in his chiefdom while simultaneously exploiting the shortcomings of the local council to his own advantage. His popularity is due to several factors, the least of them being his role in the revival of Venda culture.

6.3 Implications for Democratic Transition and the State

Having examined the parallels and differences between the chiefs and chiefdoms, I will devote this section to an in-depth analysis of the democratic transitions in both countries. The main objective here is to establish and analyse what the findings above tell us about the democratic transitions in South Africa and Cameroon, and indeed about the South African and Cameroon postcolonial states. Analysis in this section is inspired by a major distinction already discussed above. I noted that one of the key differences between Chief Tshivhase and *fon* Ganyonga was the fact that the former had more scope to make decisions than the latter.

South Africa's democratic transition represents one of the most fundamental political transformations in the late 20th century. This consisted of a radical shift from an

apartheid state to a modern democratic state, built on the principles of equality and racial harmony. Besides having one of the most 'progressive' constitutions in Africa, South Africa possesses 'all the institutions and mechanisms which are normally understood to constitute a fully fledged liberal democracy'[104] (Lodge 1999:68).

While these institutions and mechanisms are necessary, however, they are not sufficient to make democracy work, though they can influence its consolidation significantly. This notwithstanding, some scholars are worried about the workability of the new democratic system 'in which representative politics is overwhelmed by one large party and in which the prospects of any alternation of parties in government are pretty remote' (Lodge 1999:68). Given the historical legacy of racial conflict and oppression in South Africa, it is feared that the black majority will remain 'fairly uncritical, or undemanding' of the ANC, thus leaving 'its leadership scope for plenty of misbehaviour.' (Lodge 1999:68). If such is the case, then this threat is more imminent in the Limpopo Province than anywhere else in South Africa, given the extreme popularity of the ANC in the province. Indeed Maloka (1996:85) has pointed out that in Limpopo Province the ANC is the 'only game in town'.

But if democratisation has brought new hope and benefits to the metropolitan urbanites of South Africa, it has on the other hand, provoked new anxieties and betrayed the hopes of many rural and 'township' citizens such as those in Tshivhase. In this regard, I have already explored the contradictions of 'liberation' under a neo-liberal economic context (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000) and how citizens have reacted and adapted to these new demands.

But an important question that needs to be considered in the light of developments in South Africa is: does the discourse of democratisation as propounded in the African context, provide the most appropriate framework for inventing the future, given the pluralistic composition of African societies? (cf. Fisiy 1995: 49). Of course, the answer is negative. Democratisation in South Africa has had the latent function of producing new exclusions as seen earlier in this chapter. Such exclusions are not only

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[104] These mechanisms and institutions consist of universal suffrage based on proportional representation, national and local or regional legislatures; multiplicity of political parties, an

in terms of the limits to which citizens can exercise their economic rights, but also political – because a significant proportion of 'old political actors' (chiefs) feel sidelined by the politics of the new dispensation. So, what do these findings tell us about the nature of the South African postcolonial state?

A crucial point is that although the postcolonial state in South Africa has deracialised, it is yet to consolidate its democratic achievements (cf. Deegan 1999:156). The state seems to be caught between a rock and a hard place. It is simultaneously obsessed with the discourse of modernisation and nation-building while espousing the virtue of African renaissance and 'ubuntu', although it is unclear what these concepts represent. Nevertheless, there is a growing view especially among the new black elite that tradition and chieftainship are obstacles to the modern projects of the postcolonial state, granting that chieftainship tends to promote 'tribal' consciousness (Maloka 1996:193).

While chiefs insist that the government does not seem to know 'what to do with the indigenous systems'[105] the government proposes that chiefs shall 'complement the role of government in rural areas' (Draft White Paper on Traditional Leadership, 2002:21) in its effort to 'democratise' development.[106] But thus far, national government's discourse about development is yet to become a reality in most rural areas. This does not imply however, that urban areas have benefited more from the new political dispensation than their rural counterparts. It is against this background that one needs to emphasise the legacy of the apartheid state on contemporary socio-economic conditions. And the most vicious of these legacies is the sustained poverty in both rural and urban areas. Indeed, some scholars are of the opinion that the post-apartheid state is characterised by 'a radically widening chasm between rich and poor' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999(a):19) and this can be illustrated by the new black

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autonomous constitutional court, several commissions protecting different kinds of rights etc. (cf. Tom Lodge's *South African Politics Since 1994*, Cape Town: David Philip).

[105] Chief P. Holomisa in the *Mail and Guardian* of 11 February 2000: "*Ubukhosi*, the bedrock of African Democracy."

[106] 'The institution of traditional leadership has an important and integral part to play in the building of our new Constitutional order. Traditional leaders have a particular role to play as custodians of culture and custom, the promotion of unity, the promotion of consensus around development projects and plans and the administration of justice in democratically transformed courts.' ANC Mafikeng Conference resolution on traditional leadership. (1997)

elite's engagement in the conspicuous consumption of prized commodities while the bulk of ordinary South Africans are still trapped in shacks, shantytowns, joblessness, and uncertainty (cf. Nyamnjoh 2000:13). Furthermore, it is apparent that the government has failed in redistributing land as a mode of poverty alleviation.[107] In 1994 the government promised to redistribute 30% of white-owned land within five years but today, only 2% of the 87% of the best land in the country owned by whites has been redistributed (cf. Commey 2002:12-16). The fact that democratisation has not necessarily transformed the economic conditions of the bulk of ordinary South Africans raises more questions than it answers. Thus a 'new' kind of apartheid (economic in nature) has come into force although not sanctioned by law. This kind of apartheid still thrives in many respects and poses the greatest threat to South Africa's new democracy (cf. Ake 2000; Commey 2002).

In many rural areas of South Africa including Tshivhase, chiefs still perform judicial functions based on apartheid legislation. During the apartheid era, chiefs were not allowed to try criminal cases such as murder, abortion, witchcraft, rape and bribery among others, a list of which could be found in the Government Gazette.[108] But today, some chiefs are dealing with criminal cases[109] owing to the 'overburdened' nature of magistrates' courts and the complex procedures that citizens are expected to undergo in order to seek justice. This is an area that needs further investigation. However this ambiguity is reflected not only in the functions performed by chiefs, but also among the people who prefer that a strict distinction should be maintained between tribal areas and urban territories. This trend is directly in response to the subjects' realisation that the capacity to exercise one's citizenship is inevitably tied to a price, which can be achieved only by those who can afford. This has given rise to a situation where people have appropriated not only both statuses of citizen and subject (cf. Nyamnjoh 2002) but also juggle between these categories depending on the

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[107] The November issue of *New African* (No. 412) carried a special cover story on the land issue in South Africa. It insinuated that the land issue in South Africa is a ticking time bomb and that so far, the government has failed in meeting its objectives as stipulated in 1994.
[108] Cf. Government Gazette of 01 October 1991.
[109] In 1998 Chief Netshimbufe (a headman in Tshivhase) was arrested and jailed for a week because he held a court session to discuss a witchcraft-related dispute. The supposed victim of the witchcraft attack was reported to have consulted a diviner who revealed that Mr K. was the wizard responsible for the victim's misfortune. After hearing about the accusation, Mr K promptly reported the chief and his accuser to the police and they were arrested. Even though this incident frightened both chiefs and the subjects in the short run, I was informed that people still report criminal offences to their chiefs.

circumstances. Thus, the contradictions resulting from the political transition in South Africa permitted some traditional authorities to make new claims for legitimacy. This has given rise to a postcolonial state that is a hybrid in many respects - although its official discourse is that of a 'modern' and 'progressive' state (cf. The Constitution 1996:21).

The democratic transition in Cameroon, unlike in South Africa, consisted of a minimal shift from authoritarian or monolithic rule to multiparty democracy leaving the incumbent government in power. Some scholars have described this particular transition not only as a 'passive revolution'[110] but also as democratisation from 'above' or rather, a conservative adaptation to demands for revolutionary reform (cf. Sindjoun 1999:1-5). It seems to me that *fon* Ganyonga and his colleagues in the North West Province, grasped this particular aspect of Cameroon's transition more than their subjects and other political actors. This was apparent when they opted to participate in party politics on the side of the ruling party, granting that they could not risk to sow where they were not sure to reap. Such manoeuvring, according to Nyamnjoh confirms the claim that 'political choices are predicated upon vested interests which are not fixed and which along with these choices are subject to re-negotiation with changing circumstances' (Nyamnjoh 2002:11).

Be that as it may, a major contrast between the democratic transitions in South Africa and Cameroon as seen through the predicament of chiefs is that, Chief Tshivhase had more choice and freedom in terms of his political actions than his counterpart in Bali. It means that it was in Ganyonga's interest to be active in the politics of the CPDM rather than in any other party. This view can be buttressed by the fact that not all chiefs in the grassfields have been successful in negotiating their positions in relation to the state. From the vantage point of the postcolonial state, 'a chief who is not the compliant servant of government represents the resistance of local community and its ruling group to the intervention of central government in local affairs' (von Trotha, 1996:83) even when this is not necessarily the case. Several chiefs are known to have been at the mercy of the state especially those without CPDM connections such as the

fon of Fungom who constantly ran into trouble with civil administrators in his chiefdom owing to his SDF-inclination. It is against this background that, in Cameroon one can say, 'the most unpardonable crime is that of disloyalty to the president' and 'political allegiance to the CPDM remains one of the surest guarantees against' government persecution (Nyamnjoh, 1999:106-7).

There is some kind of consensus among scholars that one can say not only that Cameroon's democratic transition has stalled (cf. Bayart 1999; Nyamnjoh 1999, 2002a; Ake 2001; Mbaku 2002) but also that the state in Cameroon seems to be reverting to the authoritarian era (cf. Bratton & Van de Walle 1997:235). [111] The state is still seen as predatory, patrimonial, and symmetrical with the ruling CPDM. In a recent commentary on Cameroon, Nyamnjoh (2002a) contended that to most Cameroonians, democracy is perceived as a cosmetic device 'used to justify excesses of various kinds, especially by those determined to celebrate the status quo.' In another context, he described Cameroon's democratic transition as pseudo and as recycled monolithism. This pseudo transition gave rise to a 'T-shirt-slogan' democracy where the power elite set the agenda for the people, 'use them to serve their ends and at the end of the day, abandon them to the misery and ignorance to which they are accustomed' (Nyamnjoh, 1999:115). Liberalisation in Cameroon has thus not led to the consolidation of democracy.

This is not to insinuate that Cameroon is incapable of sustaining a liberal and democratic society given the extensive socio-political networks 'from below' that advocate democratic change on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the crises affecting many

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[110] Cameroon's transition has been described as a 'passive revolution' for various reasons. It has been argued that although this transition was minimal, it expanded political space for individual and collective action. This led to the proliferation of pressure groups and consequently, more capacity for civil society to engage in different kinds of political action (cf. Sindjoun, 1999:4).
[111] Bratton and Van de Walle (1997) have contended that the success that was achieved in many African countries between 1990 and 1992 has either been reversed or is eroding. According to them, Cameroon's transition efforts could be described as 'survival' intermediately located between a 'reversal to authoritarianism' and 'the difficult process of consolidation' (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997:235).

opposition parties, especially the SDF,[112] begins to cast doubts as to how long the bulk of Cameroonians may have to wait before enjoying the fruits of their struggle. In fact, many recent commentators have observed that there is growing apathy among citizens in Cameroon, which can be contrasted to the early 1990s when there was overwhelming enthusiasm for democratic change (cf. Mbaku 2002).

To illustrate this growing disillusionment, I will take a cursory look at the performance of the SDF and other political parties since 1997. In October 1997 the SDF boycotted the presidential election for reasons that have been explored before - due partly to the lack of an independent electoral body. The incumbent, Paul Biya consequently won about 92% of the votes, which was reminiscent of the one-party era. Although the SDF boycotted the presidential election, it had participated in the parliamentary election that took place earlier in May 1997 and had won 26% of the 180 seats in parliament. Following the recent election that took place on 30 June 2002, the SDF's dwindling fortunes became apparent when it won only 22 seats (with 20 from the North West Province) representing only 12% of the total seats in parliament. On the contrary, the CPDM increased its hold in the house by winning 149 of the 180 seats, representing a landslide victory of about 82%.[113] Although the opposition and other independent observers complained about massive rigging and the oppressive tactics by government administrators to secure a CPDM victory, not much can be done to reverse or amend such irregularities.[114]

What do the findings above tell one about the postcolonial state in Cameroon? I will endeavour to examine this by drawing from the experiences of grassfields chiefs in general and *fon* Ganyonga of Bali in particular. According to Achille Mbembe, 'the postcolony is a particularly revealing (and rather dramatic) stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline' (1992:555). This is

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[112] Following preparations for the legislative and local government elections scheduled for June 23 2002, several key members of the party were reported to have resigned in protest of the dictatorial nature of the party chairman and his allies. Rigging and irregularities were also reported to have marred the SDF primary elections in many parts of the North West Province (*The Herald* No. 1201, 10 May 2002).

[113] Cf. http://www.electionworld.org/election/cameroon.htm accessed on the 28th December 2002.

'intermediated' by co-optation. It is against this background that the state in Cameroon continues to thrive on patron-client networks as a defining mechanism for entry and survival in the postcolony. In a patronage system like Cameroon's, clients are not expected to challenge their masters. Civil servants, bureaucratic elites and chiefs (as auxiliaries of the administration) are all expected to perform their role in order to perpetuate the status quo. Taking the example of chiefs in the grassfields, one sees that most of them are not simply CPDM members out of choice as they would want us to believe, but mainly as a result of the complex dynamics that surround clientelistic politics. The *fon* of Bali for instance repeatedly argued that it was only by actively supporting the CPDM that he could ensure the territorial integrity of his chiefdom against rival neighbours. He was also behind a lobby that advocated the elevation of his chiefdom to a fully-fledged administrative division based on his support for the CDPM. But to a large extent, Ganyonga was particularly keen on protecting his own interests in a context of acute competition. Mbembe sees this sort of relationship as an 'illicit cohabitation', contrary to mainstream classification which tends to emphasise the bipolarity between resistance and collaboration. He argues further that such illicit cohabitation is fraught with familiarity and domesticity whose principal motif is to maintain and propagate the interests of the different political actors implicated in this relationship.

The domesticity of the relationship between chiefs and bureaucratic elites could be seen in the ways that chiefs invented neo-traditional titles to co-opt the latter, which, in turn, granted them access to the corridors of state power. In April 2001 for example, the *fons* of the North West Province collectively awarded the title of 'Pathfinder' to Prime Minister Peter Musonge during his official visit to the province. One could also recall the award of a prestigious title in 2001 by the *fon* of Nso to a government minister, Dr Peter Abety. These kinds of exchange and domesticity constitute what Mbembe refers to as the postcolonial subject's ability to bargain in a conceptual market place.

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[114] Cf. www.crtv.cm of 01/10/2002. In his assessment of the June 30 elections, Tankwa Claude, the online editor of CRTV suggested a number of reasons why the CPDM registered a massive victory. Among the reasons, he noted that some 'senior divisional officers did all in their power to ground the opposition. This was seen at the level of voter registration, the distribution of voter's cards and the management of election results.'

Although there is much bargaining in the background, many of the political actions of postcolonial subjects could also be conceptualised as 'performance'[115]. The predatory state continues to perceive chiefs as vote-brokers and expects them to play this role. Little wonder that chiefs in the grassfields were implicated in the rigging of past elections, as will be seen shortly. As clients of the system, chiefs consistently endeavoured to perform the 'rituals' of facilitating CPDM victory in their respective chiefdoms, more often than not without success. It is reported that during the parliamentary elections of May 1997 a chief, seeing that the defeat of the CPDM was inevitable, escaped with the ballot box into the inner quarters of his palace where commoners had no access. The Commonwealth Report of 1997 condemned such practices in their report as follows:

> While acknowledging the important role of traditional chiefs and quarter heads in the social context of Cameroon, we consider the location of polling stations inside or near private residence as being prejudicial to progress that was done in a bid to establish a neutral and transparent electoral system[116].

Incidents have been reported of chiefs trying to play the role of 'decentralised despots' ironically in the democratic era. In Tabenken, a small chiefdom in the Donga-Mantung Division, the *fon* expressed his disappointment over the defeat of the CPDM by ordering the arrest of an SDF councillor in his chiefdom. It is reported that the SDF official, Florence Njobe, had refused a bribe of 20 000 CFA Francs from the *fon* intended to convince her to facilitate a CPDM victory. Florence Njobe had refused to collaborate on the grounds that her party did not approve of corruption. She claimed that she 'reminded the *fon* that he too had been in the SDF party and that as SDF councillors, we vowed never to receive bribe.'[117] One can see from the preceding accounts that although chiefs bargain in the 'conceptual market place' of the postcolonial state, they are also performers. In this regard, one cannot afford to forget the postcolonial chief's talent for play and his sense of fun, which makes him '*homo ludens par excellence*' (cf. Mbembe 1992:557), that is, when one considers absurd

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[115] I make use of the concept of performance as elaborated by Goffman (1959). In this context, the observers are expected to believe that the tasks performed by the actor 'are what they appear to be.' However, the actor may or may not be fully taken in by his own act (Goffman 1959:28-29). Also see Sharp and Boonzaier (1994) for an example of ethnic identity as performance in post-apartheid South Africa.

[116] *Cameroon Post* Monday June 16 1997 pg. 11

incidents such as running away with a ballot box into secret chambers or arresting a subject for refusing to accept a bribe. Be that as it may, one sees from the above and previous accounts, that failure to perform the rituals 'that ratify the *commandement's* own institutionalisation' results in a situation of violence.

If one takes into account the view that Cameroon's democratic transition is located between 'survival' and the potential reversal to authoritarianism, it follows that the postcolonial state in Cameroon is trapped within a liminal experience that seems to have no end. This liminality, ironically, suggests more of continuity than what one might normally consider a *rite de passage.* To substantiate this point, I propose to examine three dominant features that continue to give shape to the postcolonial state in Cameroon.

Many scholars have described Cameroon as a classic patrimonial state. This involves a 'highly personal and clientelistic type of rule involving massive redistribution of state resources' (Gabriel 1999:173). Such a system breeds stability and instability simultaneously. This means that elites make heavy use of state resources to meet clientelistic needs, which tends to undermine the very stability it purports to foster. Under Ahidjo, patrimonial rule was coterminous with presidentialism, which meant the total concentration of power in one person and one institution – 'la présidence' (Prouzet 1974:151-86 cited in Gabriel 1999:175). Ahidjo saw himself as the father of the nation and the supreme guide who had the exclusive right to conduct the postcolony towards development. To achieve his goal, he built a large clientelistic network reaching practically every corner of the country, which meant that the emerging elite owed everything to him – jobs, licences, contracts, projects and were expected to show gratitude accordingly (Gabriel 1999). Under Biya, patrimonial rule continued more or less in the same manner despite his claim that he introduced liberal democracy in Cameroon through his New Deal government. But since his coming to power in 1982, Biya has epitomised the postcolony in various forms: he is the *fon* of *fons*, the 'indomitable lion of Cameroon' and the number one sportsman in the country. Biya is thanked for every ministerial or high office appointment, which is usually seen as an act of benevolence. Once appointed, ministers usually go to their

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[117] *Herald* No. 476 Wednesday, June 25-26, 1997 pg. 5

home villages to gather support and give gratitude to the Head of State who is said to have rewarded their allegiance to the CPDM by appointing 'a son or daughter of the soil' as the case may be.

Furthermore, in Cameroon as in most other African countries, power is closely associated with 'the capacity to consume, or the ability 'to eat', as expressed both literally and figuratively in many indigenous languages' (Schatzberg 1993:445). There is an interesting link here between 'redistribution' as seen above and consumption. This, I suppose introduces what Bayart refers to as 'politics of the belly' which incidentally is a concept he borrowed from Cameroon. In Cameroon, frequent reference is made to the 'national cake' as a source for political competition. Every appointment to high office is followed by an emphasis 'on the benefits of the position to the individual concerned, but hardly ever with the responsibilities that go with the office' (Nyamnjoh 1999:106). This has been captured by Bayart (1989) when he refers to appointments and dis-appointments as 'On lui a donné la bouffe' or 'On lui a enlevé la bouffe' ('They have been given something to eat, or They have had the right to eat taken away' (cf. Schatzberg, 1993:447). Even after Cameroon's so called 'passive revolution' not much has changed. While Bayart's description befits the authoritarian era quite rightly, Nyamnjoh's assessment of the situation addresses the post-1990 era. According to him, 'the struggles in the name of democracy seem more like the war of the bellies where the 'eaters' (*les bouffeurs*) are questioned, but seldom the act of 'eating' (*'bouffer'*). Patrons and clients may be questioned, but not patronage or patrimonialism. To many people in or seeking high office, Cameroon is little more than a farm tended by God but harvested by man.' From a reading of the above, it seems that the politics of the belly has been exacerbated in the democratic era. The 'war of bellies' has become so endemic that even opposition parties that wish to replace the ruling party have failed to rise above such practices. Instead they could be seen, as seeking to replace the ruling bellies rather than the welfare of those they claim to represent (cf. Nyamnjoh 1999:114).

From the discussions above, one sees that the democratic transitions in South Africa and Cameroon represent two contrasting trajectories. South Africa's transition can be described as thoroughgoing while Cameroon's can be seen as cosmetic. As argued above, the degree of democratic reform introduced by each of the countries can be

discerned partly in the degree of choice and freedom exercised by the chiefs. My argument therefore, is that Ganyonga had fewer options to manoeuvre than his counterpart in Tshivhase because Cameroon's political transition introduced only the form of democracy without its content.

6.4 Discussions and Conclusions

> We must ground our political analysis of contemporary events in the deep history of Africa, that is, the history which connects the present with the colonial and precolonial past'[118]

Does it follow from the preceding argument and others already discussed above, that chieftaincy and democracy are compatible in South Africa and not in Cameroon? Having examined the nature of the political transitions in both countries, it would be unfair to equate South Africa's democratic status with Cameroon's. Therefore, an answer to the above question should take into account the fact that both cases are not only complex, but do not also represent the experiences of other chiefs in their regions or countries. I have argued throughout the thesis that the contradictory nature of the political transitions in both countries created conditions for the entry of 'old political actors'. Not all of these old political actors gained credibility with the people or even with the state, thus the extent to which each of the chiefs succeeded depended on other intervening variables. These variables did not in themselves make chieftaincy compatible with democracy, because in principle, liberal democracy has no space for hereditary leadership. But because the praxis of liberal democracy was not limited to the political sphere, it meant that there was room for other actors who derived their authority not on democratic bases. Such was the supposed 'compatibility' between chiefs and democracy in Tshivhase, but not necessarily in South Africa as a whole. On the other hand, although Cameroon's cosmetic transition provided room for the entry of old political actors, they could do so on condition that they threw in their lot with the CPDM government, rather than with the emerging opposition or with the people whom they claimed to represent. It is against this background that chiefs did not argue their case on the basis of compatibility with democracy, but on *survival* in a

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[118] Patrick Chabal, 1996. 'The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation' in Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (eds.) *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. London: Zed Books.

context of uncertainty and keen competition from other actors, especially the new ones who commanded great following among the people.

This thesis therefore makes a case for the importance of comparative research on chiefs in the era of democracy and the predicaments they face therein. The thesis argues that contrary to exhortations about the incompatibility of chiefs and democracy, the reality is that political transition in both countries produced contradictions which created space for chiefs to fill, but on condition that they were able to draw from different kinds of legitimacy and had not been discredited by their past or present involvement with the postcolonial state.

Although both chiefs appeared very similar in terms of their political careers, they differed along several lines. This was evident in the fact that whereas Chief Tshihvase gained popularity owing to his involvement in national politics in the ANC, Ganyonga became quite unpopular among his subjects during the same period. However, the fact that both chiefs have stayed on in national politics for over a decade and have succeeded in various ways to legitimise their positions as chief, interrogates exhortations about the inevitable demise of chieftaincy and its incompatibility with democracy. My study therefore confirms those of other scholars such as Oomen (2000; 2002), Nyamnjoh (2002) and West and Kloeck-Jensen (1999). I will therefore conclude the thesis with the following points.

I agree with other scholars that chiefs today are intercalary figures. However, I will introduce an often-ignored dimension in the on-going discussion. Mainstream scholarship recognises that contemporary chiefs are located between the sphere of custom and the modern projects of the postcolonial state (cf. Geschiere 1993). In this sense, they are both traditional and modern simultaneously or rather, they are neither completely modern nor completely traditional but a product of both influences (cf. Nyamnjoh 2002). In Ghana for example, the state recognises the fact that 'chieftaincy constitutes a major resource that could be officially tapped in reinforcing the modern government structure' (Boafo-Arthur 2001:8). Similarly, the South African Constitution recognises the fundamental role of chiefs in the domain of custom and

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tradition.[119] In Tshivhase as in Bali, the chief represents 'tradition' and the modern state. By transcending the divide between the realm of traditional leadership and that of modern politics, Chief Tshivhase has emerged as a chief placed at the intersection between the state and the traditional community. The same applies to *fon* Ganyonga who is also a modern politician and a traditional leader simultaneously.

But it should be emphasised that many of the discussions tend to treat the intercalary status of contemporary chiefs as a new phenomenon whereas it is not. This reminds one about the need to ground one's analysis in the 'deep history of Africa' as suggested by Chabal (1996:51). In chapter one, I talked of the need to make use of the classical anthropological literature on chiefs especially those written by Gluckman (1940) and Schapera (1970). I have found these works useful for a general understanding of the intercalary status of chiefs since colonial times. In his study of chiefs and social change among the Tswana, Schapera for example observed that in the course of time, the chiefs became 'relatively less important as agents of social change' and by the 1940s many of them had been reduced to the status of subordinate government officers (ibid. 238). This notwithstanding, they still maintained a dominant role in the control of customary issues. Similarly, Gluckman (1940) observed in his article: 'Chief and Native Commissioner in Modern Zululand' that although the chief had become inextricably tied to the colonial government, he nevertheless, continued to play an important role in customary affairs. 'Not only does he lead them [subjects] in their opposition to Government, but he also has for them a value the magistrate cannot have' (Gluckman 1963:173). In fact, this intercalary position seems to have been cemented in the postcolonial era. Today, chiefs tend to mediate local realities and larger spheres of national importance in addition to their role as 'guardians of tradition' irrespective of how elusive such tradition is. Some chiefs also serve as negotiators for their subjects 'to enter the realm of public affairs, … especially … the neo-patrimonial, clientelist network' (von Trotha, 1996:88).[120]

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[119] Chapter 12 of the 1996 Constitution recognises the role of chiefs over customary practices. Though it does not define tradition, it is taken here as a category of practices.

[120] See for example the recent appointment in 2002 of a minister from Nso, on the supposed recommendation by the *Fon* of Nso. Similar claims have been made about Ganyonga's influence in the appointment of Bali elite to positions of prominence in Cameroon.

In addition to serving a double project, chiefs also serve a third category - themselves. In other words, chiefs are calculating agents, whose actions and aspirations seek to perpetrate their personal interests. Besides serving the projects of the modern state, chiefs desire to extend their personal influence, secure more advantages for themselves and consolidate their hegemonic grip over their communities. Chiefs engage constantly in different fields of action with their subjects and the state, which could be interpreted variously as performance, adaptation and improvisation. This thesis is replete with illustrations of the various ways in which chiefs expressed their agentive endowments. It is evident from the case studies that the chiefs and their subjects are undergoing various kinds of transformation – political, economic and cultural, and have appropriated different mechanisms to meet these new challenges. Chiefs in particular have had to make decisions that affect not only their own individual interests, but also those of their subjects.

The experiences of both chiefs however, provide a window through which we can appreciate the course of social and political transformation in their respective countries. Seen through the eyes of their people, both chiefs still have the potential to play a key role in the contradictions resulting from political change. On the whole, it is apparent that chiefs, and the institutions they represent, are not relics of the glorious past, but rather, are 'defined, animated, and in some cases produced by the contemporary politics of the modern nation-state' (Lindstrom and White 1997:13).