CHAPTER ONE

CHIEFTAINCY IN PERSPECTIVE

There is another and greater distinction for which no truly natural or religious reason can be assigned, and that is, the distinction of men into Kings and Subjects. Male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth enquiring into, and whether they are the means of happiness or of misery to mankind.[1]

1.1 Problem Statement

This thesis is a comparative study of two African chiefs/chiefdoms in the era of democratisation. It is based on fieldwork in the Tshivhase chiefdom of Venda in South Africa and the chiefdom of Bali-Nyonga in the North West Province of Cameroon. Both studies were conducted in 2001, just over a decade after the so-called democratic transition began in South Africa and in Cameroon.

My main finding is that neither chief has played a marginal role in the politics of the democratic era. Instead - although this is not necessarily true of all the chiefs in their respective countries - both have become involved and prominent in regional and national politics. Particularly interesting is the fact that both chiefs have become involved in the side of the two ruling parties - the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM) in Cameroon. Drawing from this parallel, I intend to examine several questions as follows: Why in both cases have these chiefs used their positions as a springboard into national politics? Why have both decided to become involved in the political structures of the ruling parties? What effect have these decisions in this regard had on their relationships with their subjects? What do the answers to these questions tell us

[1] Thomas Paine, (1995) *Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

about the 'democratic transition' in South Africa and Cameroon, and more profoundly about the nature of the South African and Cameroon postcolonial states?

But before I go into the details of the above questions, I wish to draw from an event witnessed towards the end of my fieldwork in Venda, which I presume provides the essence of the issues I will address in this thesis. On the 23rd of August 2001 hundreds of civic members from urban and rural areas in the Thulamela municipality marched on the council premises in Thohoyandou to protest against the council authorities. I found this incident interesting because the new council had been in office for less than a year. The council had taken over from the Transitional Local Councils (TLCs) in December 2000. During the protest march, civic members sang anti-council slogans and passed a vote of no confidence on council authorities. Among their grievances, the civic members emphasised their disappointment with the management style of the council. Civic members from rural areas in particular pointed out that the council should desist from charging a fee from rural dwellers in return for services because most people could not afford to pay. Protesters delivered a memorandum, which spelt out their collective grievances although emphasis was on the immediate concerns of the urban residents. Among other things, the civic demanded that 'the inefficient, selfish, undemocratic and insensitive council should disband and vacate their offices as from August 25, 2001.'[2] They appealed to the Executive Mayor of the Vhembe District Council to oversee a transitional period while a 'new democratic council' was brought into place. They also called for the unconditional scrapping of all outstanding debts with immediate effect, citing the reason that the municipality had falsely issued statements demanding payment for services that had not been rendered.[3]

It should be emphasised that the civic members were not opposed to democratic local government as such, but resented the way in which the council conducted its affairs. Protesters isolated in particular, the mayor and other council officials and accused them of corruption:

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[2] Memorandum of the Civics to the Thulamela Municipal Council, August 23, 2001.

[3] 'Today we have decided enough is enough against the municipality who do not respond to our concerns as community. We, the people of the above-mentioned areas, together with our civic and traditional leaders, have noted that there is sheer inefficiency in the municipality. Letters and submissions dating many months back go unanswered without even acknowledgement of receipts,

> There are clear signs of corruption wherein a few individuals benefit at the expense of the poor. Many of them shamelessly disadvantage some areas unduly, to the benefit of the specific areas where they stay or come from, (Memorandum of Civics, 23rd August 2001).

Municipal authorities were also accused of fixing rates without consultation with the civic members of the different locations and villages. The protesters claimed that the council had arbitrarily raised the rates to 'cover up for the massive financial losses resulting from corruption.' Rural dwellers in particular expressed their support for traditional rulers who were being sidelined by the municipal authorities. In this respect, civic members called on the future council to include chiefs in all processes of decision-making when issues affecting rural areas were under discussion. Finally, they maintained that they were going to boycott the payment of rates and bills until the council had arrived at an amicable settlement with them:

> We also like you to know that our constituencies would not pay any bill from the same municipality until our demands are met. We adhere without reservation to a thinking that due rates should be paid regularly. However, we hold strongly that such rates should be proportional to the services rendered and they should be an outcome of such sufficient consultation as may be expected in democracy. (Memorandum of Civics, 23rd August 2001).

Although this protest march was unprecedented in Venda, it should be pointed out that dissatisfaction with local government started during the period of the TLC. This dissatisfaction was especially serious among rural civic members who felt betrayed by the TLC for charging fees for services that had not been delivered and for its unpopular policy over the allocation of land in rural areas (discussed in chapter three). These developments gave rise to a situation where the rural poor needed protection from market forces and as seen above, the local council could not provide such protection. On the contrary, they were keen on drawing the rural poor closer into its market-driven policy. It was against this background that so-called traditional authorities benefited from and made use of the unpopularity of the municipal council.

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which is a sign of arrogance. This belies the … principles of democracy and transparency.' Memorandum of Civics, August 23, Thohoyandou.

In the area where I worked, the beneficiaries were Chief Tshivhase and the headmen under him.

This can be seen in some of the actions of Chief Tshivhase and his headmen. In this respect, he did not only stand up to the council's attempt to take over land allocation in his chiefdom but he also kept the charges for this service lower than the municipal council. Tshivhase also opened access to land to women and introduced the Tshivhase Development Trust as an alternative arm of development in his chiefdom. The effects of these developments are many. One of them was that civic organisations began to co-operate with the chief and his headmen thereby reducing their hostility towards chiefs, which began during the struggles in the 1980s. This co-operation was mainly in the form of attending meetings hosted by chiefs and restyling these meetings along the line of 'people's forums'.

There is something ironic about these developments as observed during fieldwork. The current amicable relationship between civic organisations in Tshivhase and the chiefs belies the situation in the 1980s. As will be seen in the next chapter, the relationship between chiefs and civic organisations in the 1980s was characterised by ruthless hostility. This antagonism is to a large extent, an issue of the past in Tshivhase. Thus, the question worth posing is: what has brought about these changes? Why in the democratic era, has the chief become a central political figure in the chiefdom? It should be borne in mind that my observations in Tshivhase are not necessarily true in South Africa, or even in Venda. I have evidence that other chiefs in Venda have not been able to rehabilitate themselves as successfully as Chief Tshivhase. I will produce and analyse this evidence in chapters three and six below.

The situation in Bali Nyonga was different from that in Tshivhase. In fact, one can say the reverse of what was happening in Tshivhase was taking place in Bali. That is, unlike in Tshivhase where the chief had become popular for protecting his people against the local council, in Bali the people resented the fact that the chief had joined the ranks of the ruling party, thereby leaving them at the mercy of the predatory state. In other words, people felt betrayed by the fact that instead of providing them with shield against the government, he was perceived to have become a facilitator or a tool in the hands of the government against them. In order to put this view into

perspective, I wish to draw from a particular incident, which I observed during fieldwork. On the 28 January 2002, the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) for Mezam division visited Bali on an official tour. Judging by the massive turn out and the prestige enjoyed by the *fon* during the occasion, one could conclude that he was in perfect harmony with his subjects. During the SDO's visit, normal business was disallowed, which entailed the closure of government offices, shops and schools. Pupils and students from both government and private schools all flocked to the grand stand where the SDO was scheduled to address the people. Members of political parties put aside their differences and came out in their numbers, ostensibly to show how many members they each had. In brief, the SDO's visit vividly captured the totality of local interaction in Bali. All the local actors were present, the chief and his notables, the mayor, political parties and their local leaders, party militants and subjects as well as local government officials. The visit was hailed as a major success and was reported in the local press and the government-controlled *Radio Bamenda*.

Despite this semblance of harmony, the people were displeased that the SDO's visit had been scheduled on the same day as their market day, thereby disrupting a complex trading system that drew its sustenance from inter-chiefdom activities. In the grassfields of Bamenda, each chiefdom devoted a day during the week as its market-day. This day was not fixed, but rotated according to the traditional calendar of the chiefdom. In most cases, the day preceding the market day was considered as the chiefdom's sacred day of rest or what is commonly known as 'country Sunday'. The success of each market day did not only depend on the participation of the local population but to a large extent, on people from other towns and neighbouring chiefdoms who came to sell their articles and buy local products as well.

Owing to the fact that the SDO had decided to visit the chiefdom on its market day, the Traditional Council, headed by the chief had decided to move the market date a day earlier in order to permit people with the time to welcome the SDO. Although the people complied with this change, they resented the fact that the chief was unable to stand up to the SDO and protect the interests of his people. Apparently, the market day had been poorly attended due to the sudden change. Informants pointed out that the chief should have asked the SDO to visit a day earlier or later in order not to disrupt the people's economic activities. Others blamed the chief for allowing himself

to be manipulated by petty government administrators such as the SDO, in contrast to his late father, the former chief, Galega II who had commanded so much respect and had been visited by the former state president, Ahmadou Ahidjo. Although this incident may appear trivial to the outsider, it should be emphasised that two specific issues were of paramount concern to the people. On the one hand, the chief's inability to control the tide of events in his chiefdom was seen by his people as a weakness on his part and on the other hand, it also confirmed the view that having failed to protect them, they had increasingly become subject to the whims and caprices of the state and its stooges.

Similar to the case in Tshivhase, I also wish to pose a couple of questions drawing from the incident recounted above: what has brought about these changes? Why in the era of democracy has the chief become unpopular? What legitimacy has the chief retained or claimed, who is persuaded and why? At this juncture, it should be observed that unlike the case in Tshivhase, which is more or less unique in Venda, chief Ganyonga's experience represents to a large extent, the predicament faced by other traditional rulers in the Bamenda grassfields in the contemporary era. I shall refer to and analyse some of these cases in chapters five and six below.

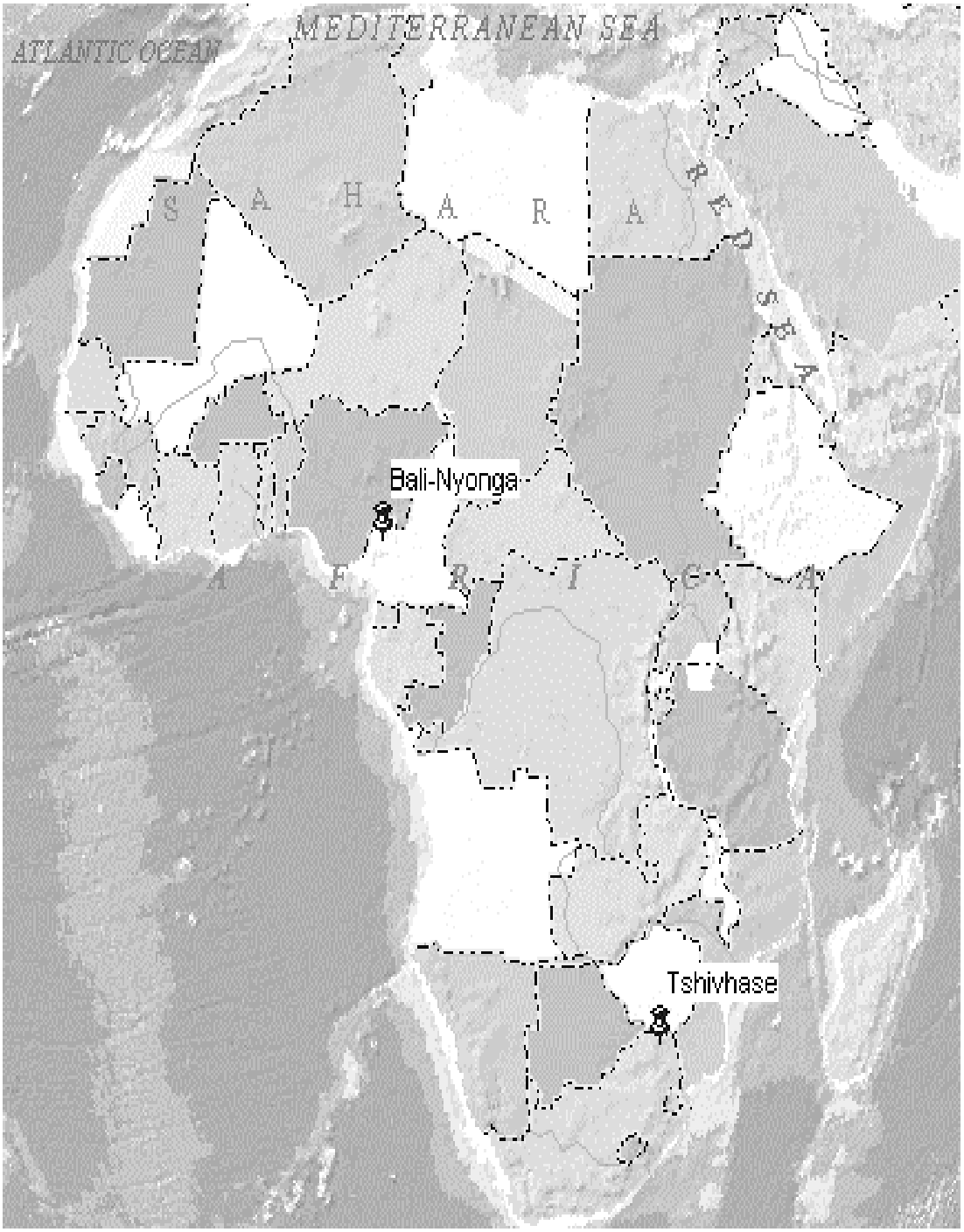
The two cases above provide a basis for comparison, which constitutes a key objective of this thesis. A question worth posing in this regard is whether Cameroon is following the predictions about the incompatibility of chiefs and democracy, whereas South Africa is not? Although it appears so, I wish to suggest that issues are actually much more complex than this, as will become evident in chapters five and six. The comparative part of the thesis shall also focus on the following variables: i) the status of the chiefs in the democratic era, ii) the kinds of legitimacy claimed by the chiefs, iii) and the nature of the democratic transition in both countries. It is intended that this enterprise shall make a case for the importance of comparative work in the social sciences in general and on the question of chiefs and democratic rule in Africa in particular.

1.2 Areas of Study

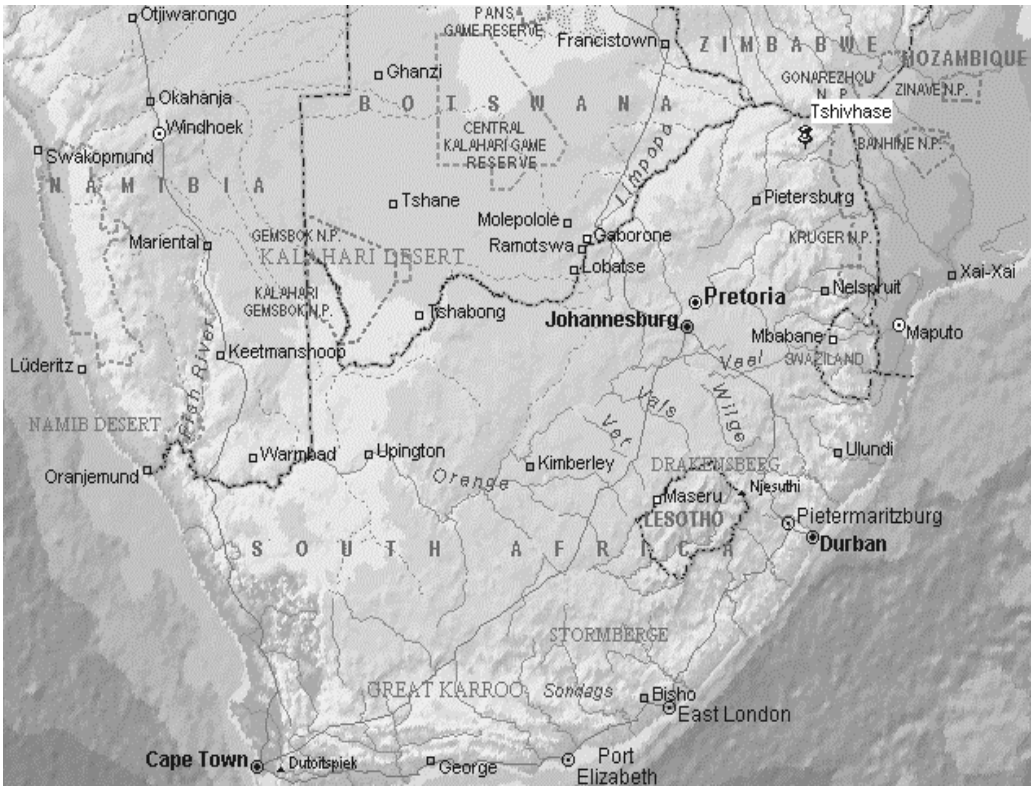
As indicated above, the study was conducted in two African chiefdoms, Tshivhase in South Africa and Bali in Cameroon. Tshivhase is one of the 25 recognised Venda chiefdoms in the Limpopo Province. Venda is one of the nine former black homelands in South Africa, which was known between 1979 and 1994 as the Republic of Venda. It spans the area from longitude 29°40' E. to 30°50' E. and latitude 22°20' S. to 23° 10' S. in Limpopo Province in South Africa (see Maps). The chiefdom of Tshivhase (as will be seen shortly) is the most populated and largest chiefdom in the Limpopo Province.[4]

The chiefdom of Tshivhase is headed by Chief Kennedy Tshivhase who came to the throne in 1970 at the age of eight following the death of his father in a car accident. Owing to his age, an uncle of Kennedy Tshivhase was installed as regent to manage the affairs of the chiefdom. Kennedy Tshivhase regained his office in 1993, a year before the Republic of Venda was reincorporated into South Africa. Kennedy Tshivhase studied at the University of the North near Polokwane (formerly Pietersburg) in the 1980s. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology and rose to prominence in the early 1990s following his appointment to a cabinet post by the Venda military leader, Gabriel Ramushwana. After Venda was re-incorporated into South Africa, Kennedy Tshivhase was appointed to the House of Senate in Cape Town. He was re-deployed in 1997 to the Limpopo Provincial Legislature as an ANC Member, a position he still holds.

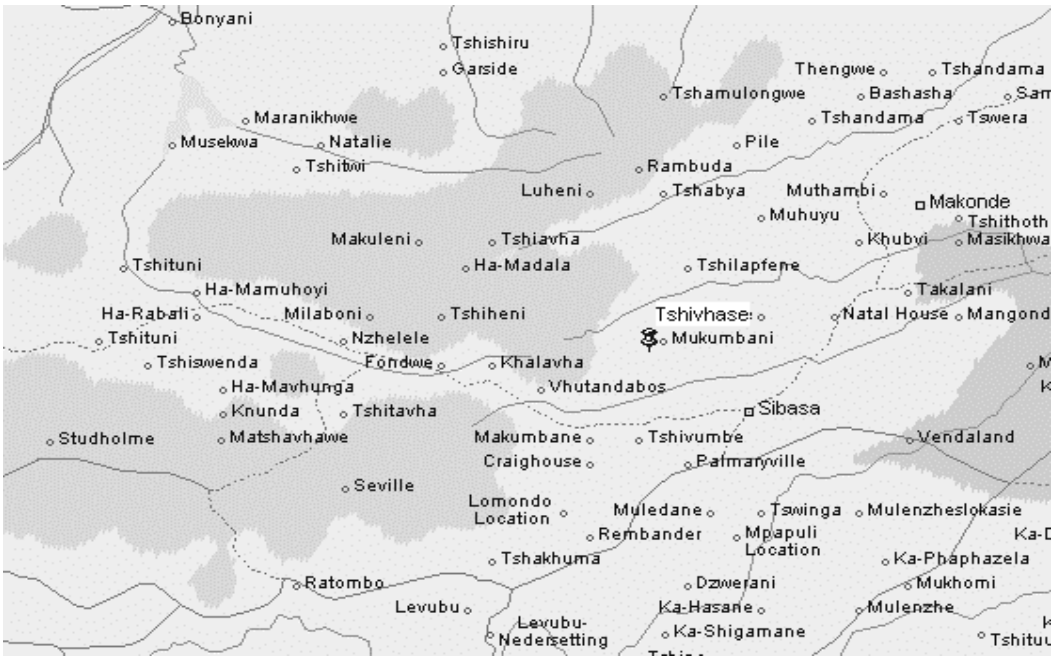
[4] Cf.: http://www.statssa.gov.za, Statistics SA. According to the last population census in 1996, the population of Tshivhase is over a hundred thousand, making it the most populated Venda chiefdom.



Map 1: Map of Africa showing the locations of Tshivhase in South Africa and Bali-Nyonga in Cameroon



Map II: Map of South Africa Showing the location of the Chiefdom of Tshivhase.



Map III: Map of Tshivhase Chiefdom, showing the headquarters at Mukumbani and other villages.

The population of Venda was estimated at 542 000 in 1990 with an unemployment rate of 34.8% - the highest in the 'independent' homelands.[5] Personal monthly income per capita for Venda was R59, which was also the lowest when compared to the rates in the other independent homelands.[6] These statistics reveal not only the socio-economic predicament of the citizens of Venda during its period of 'independence' but also the challenges they faced after Venda's re-integration into the Republic of South Africa. This predicament was not restricted to Venda alone. The Limpopo Province was one of the least developed in the new South Africa. The 1996 census statistics revealed that up to 50% of people over 15 years of age in the province were illiterate. Furthermore, 50% of the economically active population was unemployed.[7]

Although substantial attempts were made to implement development projects for Venda citizens, it is evident from the statistics above and my observations during fieldwork that the bulk of the population lives in poverty. During Venda's 'independence' from South Africa, the Venda Development Corporation (VDC) was established as the principal agent of development. Its main objective was 'to erect, plan, finance, co-ordinate, promote, relocate and continue industrial, commercial, financial, mining and other business enterprises' in the Venda territory (BERCD 1979:68-9). The VDC also built hundreds of houses for the civil servants and the emerging elite in Thohoyandou.

Venda was not (and is still not) highly industrialised due to what some people have described as its 'unfavourable location,' although a few industries were located in Shayandima, an area next to Thohoyandou, where over a thousand people were employed. During the homeland period, Venda was also a labour reserve for the industries and mines principally in Johannesburg and other mining towns. With the demise of the Apartheid State and the consequent influx of migrants to the main metropolitan areas of South Africa – such as in the Gauteng Province, employers prefer to recruit available labourers who are resident in Gauteng. This means that Venda, like the other homelands is no longer perceived as a labour reserve.

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[5] Fast Facts; South African Institute of Race Relations, No. 2/92, March 1992. P.3
[6] ibid. p. 3

[7] Statistics from http://www.statssaa.gov.za, Statistics SA

Furthermore, most of the industries in Shayandima have closed down or relocated to areas outside of Venda territory. This triggered a significant rise in unemployment. It is difficult to gauge which 'tribal authority' was affected most by these transformations as they seem to have had ripple effects throughout the entire Venda territory. However, what is evident is that unemployment in the Tshivhase area was extremely high, particularly when we take into account the fact that people from this area had been discriminated against in the civil service during Mphephu's presidency.[8]

It therefore seems that the re-incorporation of Venda and other homelands into South Africa triggered substantial socio-economic transformation, sometimes leading to increased poverty and economic uncertainty. Most government offices in Thohoyandou closed down after 1994, owing to the fact that Venda was incorporated into the Northern Province (now Limpopo) which has its administrative headquarters at Polokwane. This situation of 'economic crisis' is not unrelated to the emergence and prominence of prosperity gospel churches such as the Universal Church of God based in Thohoyandou (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999 for similarities in the North West province of South Africa, and Matshidze's thesis, 2003, on the Universal Church of God in Thohoyandou). Thus, the above issues are very crucial for a proper understanding of my ethnographic account as will be seen later in the thesis.

The other chiefdom to be considered is Bali Nyonga. The chiefdom is commonly known as Bali and is one of the five 'first class' chiefdoms[9] in the North West Province of Cameroon located in longitude 10° 4' East and latitude 5° 54' North. Bali is a sub-division in Mezam Division of the North West Province with an estimated population of 50 000. Bali is located 16km south west of Bamenda, the provincial capital. Its neighbours to the south are the chiefdoms of Pinyin, Asong and Guzang

[8] As will be seen in the next chapter, Patrick Mphephu (Venda President from 1979 -1988) favoured people from his own chiefdom in matters of recruitment into the civil service and the award of contracts.

[9] According to the presidential decree of 15 July 1977, which defined the role of chiefs and the status of chiefdoms, five chiefdoms in the North West Province were classified as first degree or first class chiefdoms. A 'first class' chiefdom was located within the territorial limits of an administrative division and consisted of at least, two sub-chiefs. Details about this decree will be discussed in chapter four below.

and to the east are the Baforchu, Alatening and Mbatu. The chiefdom of Bali consists of 54 quarters and five villages including five sub-chiefs.

The *fon*[10] of Bali is Dr Dohsang Galega who was crowned on 6 October 1985 following the 'disappearance'[11] of his father, *fon* Galega II. On his accession to office, he took the name of Ganyonga III. Ganyonga studied in Cameroon and Germany where he earned a doctorate in Sociology shortly before he assumed office. In 1990 Ganyonga and two other prominent *fon*s of the grassfields were appointed into the Central Committee of the ruling party, the CPDM. He has occupied this position since then and has been active in regional and national politics. He is currently a lecturer of Sociology at the *Ecole Normal Superieur,* a school of the University of Yaounde I at Bambili.

There are no available statistics on Bali thus I shall rely on broader statistics on Cameroon and my personal observations in Bali. Like Venda, the North West Province has only a few primary industries with a small percentage of the population employed as civil servants. National unemployment as estimated in 2001 stands at 30% and 70% of the labour force is occupied in the agricultural sector as opposed to 13% in industry and commerce.[12] My estimate is that about 70% of the population in Bali are peasants. Although a small percentage of the people are civil servants, most of them practise subsistence farming and engage in trade amongst themselves and between neighbouring chiefdoms.

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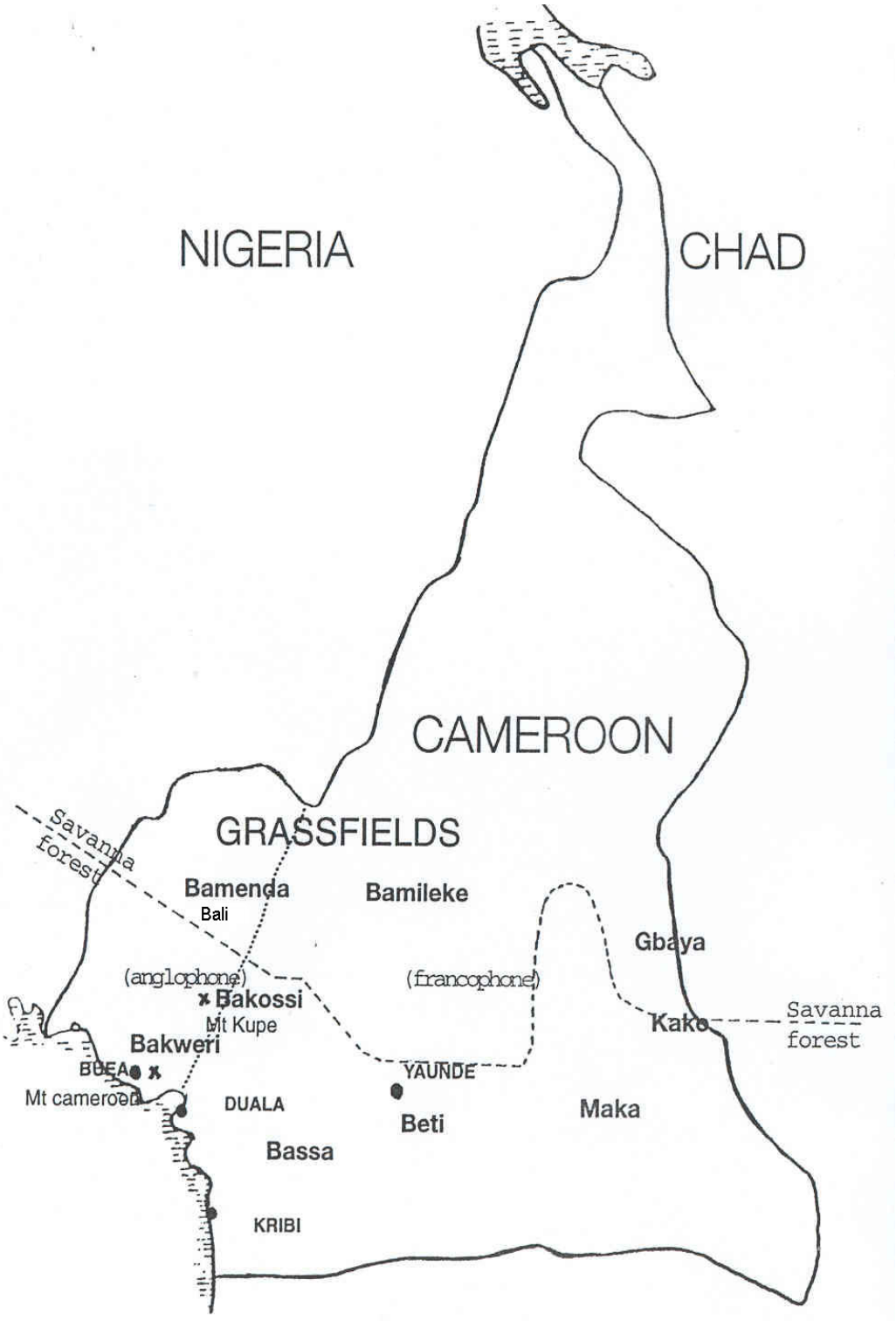
[10] This is the popular grassfields term for chief although there are slight variations from one chiefdom to another. In Kom, it is known as *foyn*, in Bafut as *fo'* and in Nso' as *nfor*.
[11] In the grassfields of Bamenda (Bali included), it is believed that a *fon* never dies. A *fon* is said to have disappeared upon his death. In another context, he is said to be 'lost'.
[12] Source: http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cm.html#intro



Map IV: Map of Cameroon, showing the chiefdom of Bali Nyonga, south of Bamenda. Extracted from Geschiere (1997).

1.3 Theoretical Orientation and the Debate on Chiefs and Democracy

In this section, I examine some of the key works and theoretical approaches that have informed current debate on chieftainship in South Africa and Cameroon. I also aim to show how my work relates to the literature and on-going debate on the status of African chiefs in the era of democracy. At issue here is the prediction about the incompatibility of chiefs and democracy. This view has been articulated quite aptly by Govan Mbeki (1984) in his book *The Peasants Revolt*. He argued in the 1980s that 'if the Africans have had chiefs, it was because all human societies have had them at one stage or another. But when a people have developed to a stage which discards chieftainship, when their social development contradicts the need for such an institution, then to force it on them is not liberation but enslavement' (Mbeki 1984:47). It was in this light that many 'freedom fighters' anticipated the demise of the institution of chief alongside apartheid. Even after 1994, many activists felt that chiefs would be relegated to the background and eventually lose their legitimacy (cf. Maloka 1996). Although this view was not as popular in Cameroon as in South Africa, nevertheless some people felt quite strongly that chiefs and democracy were incompatible. For instance, a commentator in a local newspaper argued that 'by their calling and function, traditional rulers are ultra-conservatives, who misjudge challenges for contempt, consider new ideas as anathema, and are allergic and uptight to liberal changes. Their static mental structure set do not permit any opening to democracy which is a form of modern participatory governance incompatible with their archaic perceptions.'[13]

It is against this background that the debate on chiefs and democracy is located. This debate could be divided into two broad categories. On the one hand some scholars are of the opinion that chieftaincy should be eradicated completely in preference for democratic rule because chieftaincy is not only outmoded, but it has also been corrupted by the process of state formation and apartheid. But other scholars have argued, based on their research that chiefs and democracy are not incompatible. They maintain that chiefs are 'intercalary' categories, located between the state and their rural communities and should be understood in terms of the complexities surrounding the postcolonial state. There is also a category of people who hold essentialist ideas

[13] Cf. *Le Messager* Vol. II Monday September 14 1992 p. 5

about the compatibility of chiefs and democracy. The latter camp maintains that chieftaincy represents a 'true' African form of democracy and should be considered alongside modern forms of liberal democracy.

An important work which has spelt out the different positions of the current debate on chieftainship is West and Kloeck-Jenson's (1999) article on traditional authority and democratic decentralisation in post-war Mozambique. Although their article is limited to Mozambique, it reflects much of the debate that currently prevails in South Africa, and to a limited extent, Cameroon.

The debate surrounding chieftainship in Mozambique, West and Kloeck-Jenson contend, has gained momentum since President Joaquim Chissano's declaration in 1995 that his government desired the existence of traditional authorities. This statement contradicted government's policy that had abolished chieftainship immediately after independence. Despite this new and amicable approach to traditional leadership, current political debate in Mozambique is divided into two opposing camps. On the one hand, there is the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO), which argues that chiefs have been 'compromised' as a result of their association with the colonial state and consequently, have no role or place in the postcolonial and new democratic dispensation. FRELIMO accused the chiefs of having facilitated colonialism (through taxation, labour conscription and policing) and also of having benefited enormously from it and accumulated power for themselves. It was against this background that FRELIMO's victory against the Portuguese was also interpreted as a victory against chiefs (*autoridades gentilicas*). Chiefs were therefore 'systematically excluded from positions of responsibility' in the postcolonial era and replaced with *grupos dinamizadores* (dynamizing groups).

On the other hand, there are those who contend that traditional authority epitomises a 'genuinely African form of local governance.' This position has been championed by two groups in Mozambique. The *Resistência Nacional Moçambicana* (RENAMO) has advocated 'a return to the pre-independence state of affairs in which local chiefs had been respected and obeyed' (West and Kloeck-Jenson 1999:460). Another group, the 'Decentralisation/Traditional Authorities Component' (DTA) of the Ministry of State Administration has increasingly advocated the revival of traditional authority in rural

Mozambique. According to West and Kloeck-Jensen, the DTA research director Iraê Lundin argued in one of her publications that traditional authority or what she calls 'African Local Authority' could be seen as a 'sociocultural affirmation of Africanness' (ibid. 473).

West and Kloeck-Jenson argue however, that 'history powerfully illustrates the fallacy of these over-simplifications' (ibid. 474). They maintain that chieftainship has different meanings for different localities. In the north of Mozambique, for example, 'kin-based systems of authority' have been incorporated into 'larger and larger regimes including … the colonial state,' (ibid. 475) and their functions have changed with the regimes as well. Thus, there is nothing particularly genuine or 'African' about traditional authority as romanticised by the government-sponsored research project. Hence West and Kloeck-Jenson conclude that in Mozambique, 'chiefs at all levels have occupied positions betwixt and between their populations and higher authorities, implicating them all in a history of extraction and violence larger than all concerned' (ibid. 475).

According to them, the important questions to pose in any current study of chieftainship are: who claims 'legitimacy', by what argument, who is persuaded and why? Though these questions address specific issues in Mozambique, they also raise issues relevant to our understanding of chieftainship in Tshivhase and in Bali. For instance, one may also pose the above questions about chiefs in Tshivhase – namely, who claims legitimacy, by what argument and who is persuaded and why?

Following the outline of the debate suggested above, I would like to examine Mamdani's position, drawing from his celebrated book *Citizens and Subjects* (1996). In many respects, the book is much about chieftaincy as it is about democracy and the state in Africa. According to him, what is specifically interesting about chieftainship today is not what some may perceive as the 'continuity of tradition', but precisely what he sees as the 'break in continuity' (Mamdani 1996:43). Hence chieftainship exists today not as a result of its own legitimacy, but because of its co-operation with (and simultaneous corruption by) the colonial and apartheid states.

Mamdani belongs to the camp that strongly advocates the eradication of chieftaincy in the postcolonial state. According to him, contemporary chieftainship is in many respects a category of 'decentralised despotism' (as it was during the colonial state) owing to the withering away of institutionalised mechanisms that served to check the chief against excesses. Prior to colonial rule, the chief was the custodian of land not its proprietor and 'the ultimate popular sanction against a despotic chief was desertion.' But under colonial and apartheid rule, the powers of the chief were systematically strengthened - emphasising the state as the 'determiner of the consensus' (Mamdani 1996:45).

These transformations led to the bifurcation of the state not only into racialised categories, but also into the categories of 'citizen' and 'subject'. On the one hand the lives of subjects were regulated by chiefs under customary law, and on the other hand the lives of citizens were regulated by modern law. And the tragic tale, according to him, is that most postcolonial states in Africa succeeded to deracialise but not to democratise the bifurcated state, thereby maintaining the basic framework of decentralised despotism to the detriment of the rural peasantry.

Mamdani's panacea is to eradicate the institution of chief, which represents and propagates the bifurcated world of citizens and subjects. By introducing democratic reforms which encompass the worlds of both citizens and subjects, the urban and the rural, the central, and the local, African states can be sure of a world entirely of citizens, no longer bifurcated and despotic.

In my opinion, the strength of Mamdani's work lies in his exploration of the historical trends chieftainship has undergone and the extent of the debt contemporary chieftainship owes its colonial and apartheid legacies. However, his theoretical approach not only falls short of explaining the continued role of chiefs in many rural areas of South Africa, but also overlooks the fact that people tend to straddle the dual identities of citizen and subject.

Mamdani is not alone in calling for the eradication of chieftainship in South Africa. In his article, 'Traditional Leaders and the Current Transition' (1995) Maloka argues that chieftainship in contemporary South Africa is in all respects an outmoded institution

in dire need of being replaced by democratic institutions. To him, most of those laying claim to the status of chief are no more than former bantustan petty bourgeois 'hoping to further their own careers in the new dispensation by exploiting "tradition"' (Maloka 1995:35). He sees the post-apartheid state in South Africa as a 'contested terrain not only between forces representing the former white interests and those of the liberation movement, but also between different fractions of the black petty bourgeoisie' (ibid. 173-4)

On account of their innumerable *sins* of commission or omission, Maloka insists, chiefs should be limited to playing an advisory and ceremonial role in elected local government structures. Furthermore, he calls for 'progressive forces' to co-ordinate a 'clear political campaign' that seeks to 'reduce the material basis for the legitimacy of chieftaincy' (1995:39). Maloka sees the demise of chieftainship as part and parcel of the consolidation of democratic structures. It is against this background that he anticipates that it will not be chiefs but rather the newly established local governments in South Africa that will extend 'popular participation to the local level.'

Like Mamdani, Maloka tends to treat chiefs as a uniform category. According to his logic, all chiefs have been implicated in the violence and extraction of the colonial and apartheid era and should therefore be excluded from participating in the new democratic dispensation. Though Maloka's paper illustrates the ability of chiefs to engage in modern politics, his theoretical approach ironically empties chiefs of agency, thereby presenting them as passive and residual entities, ripe for eradication. It is doubtful to what extent his call for 'progressive forces' to historicize and undermine the legitimacy of chiefs will be worthwhile, given that it fails to note that chiefs are aware of these debates, and will not sit back to watch the demise of the institution.

This notwithstanding, Mamdani and Maloka's approaches have several interesting and worthy claims, such as the observation that colonial and apartheid regimes despoiled and abused the institution of chief (cf. Geschiere 1993 for parallels in East Cameroon). But most of their discussions are based on scholarship that is not grounded in intensive ethnographic inquiry. Their theories tell us little about the relationship between chiefs and the people on the ground today, nor do they

demonstrate that the alternatives they advocate are any better. For example, Maloka's (1995) call for an agenda that aims to erode the legitimacy of chiefs and to replace them with democratic structures fails to ask or reflect on the following: i) how 'democratic' are the new supposedly democratic structures on the ground? ii) What is the relationship between chiefs and these democratic structures? iii) Have so-called democratic structures actually managed or controlled access to strategic resources such as land to the satisfaction of the target population? Later in the thesis, I will throw more light on these issues and show to what extent selected chiefs are grappling with such matters in the democratic era.

Much of the current literature provides evidence for the compatibility of chiefs and democracy. This evidence is based on research and discussions on policy frameworks affecting chiefs, the role of chiefs in rural local government and their involvement in regional and/or national politics. Ntsebeza (1998) for instance has examined the predicament of chiefs in the new South Africa following legislation that has affected the institution since the early 1990s. He points out that the South African Constitution and the Local Government Transition Act of 1993 (as amended), 'do not anticipate any meaningful role for traditional authorities in local government.' According to him, there is an obvious difference in opinion between the older generation and the younger generation with regard to the question of constitutional guarantees for traditional leadership. While the older generation, for instance represented by Nelson Mandela, supports the view that chieftainship should gain more constitutional accommodation, the younger camp, represented by the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), youths and the South African Communist Party (SACP) maintains that chieftainship should be restricted to *custom* and *tradition*, or better still, eradicated completely.

Bank and Southall (1996) also have interesting findings regarding the status of chiefs in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition to exploring the policy framework dealing with chiefs, they argue that traditional leadership does not necessarily contradict democracy. To them, traditional leadership can in fact 'provide the bedrock upon which to construct new and experimental governments, including constitutional democracies.' They also pose a question ignored by Maloka (1995) and Mamdani (1996): what is the relationship between chiefs and new democratic structures on the

ground in the countryside? In answer, they provide ethnographic data from Mpumalanga, which they claim demonstrate that 'chiefly courts and people's courts co-exist at the local level.' But this is not necessarily true of all areas and their investigations in the Eastern Cape reveal a different trend. The Eastern Cape is characterised by continuous struggle between traditional leaders and civic organisations. This bitter struggle has led to kidnappings, politically-motivated assaults and murders (See Lodge 1999 for more on this conflict). What is particularly interesting about Bank and Southall's thesis is that they see no necessary contradiction between chieftaincy and democracy. Mamdani and Maloka, just like the FRELIMO-led government in Mozambique, observe that chiefs have been corrupted by colonial rule and apartheid, and should be excluded from competing with the new elite of the postcolonial state, especially in the democratic era. Bank and Southall argue that chieftaincy as such does not contradict democracy and proceed to show how the institution is capable of collaborating with democratic structures on the ground, thereby contributing to democracy as a whole.

Nkuna's (2002) study is also worth reviewing, particularly because he did his research at the same time as mine although in a different area. His study demonstrates the tensions between the Tzaneen municipal council and the rural citizens following the 'municipalisation' of rural communities without consultation with the masses. He focuses on three villages; Dan, Petanenge and Khujwana, which were incorporated into the Greater Tzaneen municipality in 1997. According to him, the Tzaneen TLC began by demanding payments for services and resources. The council is alleged to have issued water bills to citizens ranging from R60 to R450. This situation was absurd given that many people received bills despite the fact that they did not have water installations in their stands. He also claims that in some of the villages, citizens were requested to pay between R20 and R50 for the municipal cemetery and between R50 to R80 for the maintenance of the road networks (ibid. 65-70).

In a dramatic event, the civic members and headmen of Dan village invited the chief and local government officials to an important meeting to explain the developments to the community. The chief was also accused of having sold a piece of their communal land to the TLC for the construction of pay-points in the villages. Though the government officials failed to attend the meeting, the chief denied the accusations and

instead argued that he had similar grudges as his subjects, against the municipal council. The chief insisted that he had not been consulted before the implementation of the municipal council's policies in his chiefdom. He therefore used the opportunity to urge his subjects not to pay for any services.

Nkuna observes that the chief's intervention resulted in the people's refusal to co-operate with the municipal authorities. In Dan village for example, most people denied access to the municipal construction workers either by locking their gates or by verbally insulting them to back off. In some neighbourhoods of the village where meters had already been installed, the people alleged that the meters had been stolen, thereby incapacitating the municipal council. Eventually the municipal authorities were forced to discontinue their provision of services such as the installation of water. From the viewpoint of the people, the problem was not that they were resisting development but because the municipal authorities had failed to consult them or had any intentions of doing so in future. They also resented the fact that the municipal authorities sought to treat them in the same way as urban dwellers, irrespective of their socio-economic predicament. It should be pointed out that there are striking parallels between Nkuna's study and mine. I shall make use of his findings in chapter three below to substantiate my argument on the tensions between local government and the rural poor and the position of chiefs therein.

Barbara Oomen (2000) has also conducted research along similar lines. Based on her ethnography and quantitative research in the Mamone chiefdom in Limpopo Province, she argues that there is an unprecedented upsurge in discourse about the renewed importance of chieftaincy as an emblem of African 'tradition.' After the collapse of the apartheid state, which sought to despoil and deny the Africans their 'culture', people are now 'going back to their roots', to their history in search of a rebirth or 'renaissance' (to borrow from the current catchphrase). She refers to this upsurge as *retraditionalisation* and complements her thesis with several statistics, one of which is a 73% support for the institution of chief in Mamone. Despite this enormous 'support' for chieftaincy, she contends that there is an ongoing contest over what role the chief should play in rural local government. This, she asserts, is evidence that 'tradition is far from fixed, but constantly redebated at the local level.'

Oomen's observations lead to three main conclusions about the circumstance of chiefs in post-apartheid South Africa: a) that chiefs are highly organised through a central organisation, the Congress of Traditional Leaders in South Africa (CONTRALESA) that represents their interests. b) that chiefs are still perceived as 'vote brokers' in rural areas and c) that alternative institutions - that is, the newly created local councils are often lacking in strength and experience to perform their functions.

Although the above conclusions are valid in the light of my own research (as will be seen later in the thesis), her use of 'retraditionalisation' as an explanatory concept to describe her observations is problematic. In my opinion, this concept sounds very similar to the DTA project director's romanticised notion of chieftaincy as an affirmation of 'Africanness' and indigenous African democracy (cf. West and Kloeck-Jensen 1999). Although her approach does not see tradition as a fixed and immobile category, retraditionalisation conveys the image of recourse to a specific, predefined set of practices known as 'tradition'. In addition, retraditionalisation may also imply that despite the apartheid state's attempt to 'modernise' and transform Africans from their 'backward' cultures to modern and 'progressive' individuals, they have instead opted to go back to their roots, thereby contradicting the modernisation project. Oomen's concept of retraditionalisation is therefore not only ambiguous, but also runs the risk of implying that chieftaincy is synonymous with 'Africanness'.

In Cameroon, particularly in the North West Province, much of the literature on chiefs and democracy has focussed on the coping strategies of chiefs in the current era. But a striking difference from South Africa is that the debate whether chieftaincy should be undermined or eradicated in the democratic era has hardly been raised, or is unpopular in both political and academic circles. On the contrary, a different kind of debate is prevalent. Although there are several positions, I have however identified two principal axes around which the debate is located. On the one hand, a majority of subjects and the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF) advocates that chiefs should be 'neutral' in party politics – that is, they should not publicly express, or identify with, particular kinds of political opinion or choices, because they command a following that incorporates people with diverse and sometimes conflicting political inclinations. On the other hand, particular chiefs and the ruling Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM) have maintained that chiefs, as citizens,

have a constitutional right to support and be active in any party of their choice. It is therefore, around the issue of party politics that debate on chiefs and chieftaincy has been centred, but this does not represent the entire picture.

Peter Geschiere has devoted close to three decades of research on the interaction between local communities and the postcolonial state in various parts of Cameroon and, as a result, he has contributed a great deal to the debate on chiefs especially in the post-1990 era. Since 1990, he argues, there is a demand for political actors of a new kind in Cameroon. He therefore asks if these changes (that is, the clamour for the introduction of democratic reforms) will not create conditions for the return of old political actors such as chiefs into the 'national political scene'. He anticipates quite rightly that 'democratisation and elections might …offer new chances to old political actors' such as 'customary authorities', but wonders if they have 'retained sufficient prestige to function as vote banks in the new setting' (Geschiere 193:151).

From his study of chiefs among the Maka of South-East Cameroon and the Bakweri of the South West Province, he concludes that 'the present-day position of chiefs is marked by a strong ambivalence, even in areas where their power does have deeper historical roots' (ibid. 152). This is because they 'seem to represent "tradition", but at the same time the State uses them to further "modern" projects.' Similarly, although their legitimacy seems to stem from what he calls 'local forms of organisation,' in reality, they are largely dependent on the modern state. Geschiere concludes his study by arguing that while democratisation and multiparty politics has created an enabling environment for the return of 'old political actors', it is difficult to perceive them as a 'real alternative to State power' precisely because they seem to have become 'part of the State elite' (ibid. 169). Although he does not tell us whether chiefs have retained enough prestige to serve as 'vote banks' in the democratic era, my own research reveals that chiefs in the Grassfields of Cameroon have been unable to play this role as will be seen later in the thesis.

There seem to be a striking parallel between developments in the North West Province of Cameroon and in Ghana. Boafo-Arthur (2001) contends that the Ghanaian

Constitution clearly prohibits chiefs from participating in 'active' politics[14] but not necessarily in the democratic process. This has led to divisions among chiefs who are torn into two diametrically opposed camps. On the one hand, there are a number of chiefs who argue that the Constitution infringes on their civic and basic right by debarring them from active party politics and on the other hand, a majority of chiefs who maintain that 'a Chief who dabbles in politics is likely to be treated like a politician who could be hooted or booed. This would not only undermine his position but ultimately desecrate the institution of Chieftaincy as a whole.'[15] Boafo-Arthur argues that many prominent chiefs in Ghana are not respected because they are seen as 'allies of the ruling government.' He substantiates his case with the example of the *Osu Declaration*, passed by a number of prominent chiefs but their views were ignored because they were perceived by the people as 'willing tools of the government of the day.'

Jua (1995) arrives at a similar conclusion in his study of chiefs in the North West Province of Cameroon. He argues that the state does not only seek to undermine the institution of chief, but also to 'capture' it. This is evident in the legislation that defines and regulates the role of chiefs in postcolonial Cameroon. According to Jua, the state seeks to 'convert chiefs into clients' leading the relationship between the two to take on a 'semblance of parasitism rather than symbiosis…'(ibid. 43). From his observation of developments in Cameroon since 1990, Jua arrives at the conclusion that 'people could reject the authority of a chief who still commands the government's stamp of legitimacy.' This conclusion has serious implications for my study on chiefs and democracy in the Grassfields of Bamenda particularly with regard to the objective of establishing how the relationship between a chief and his subjects is affected by the political choices the chief makes.

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[14] Article 276 (1) of the Constitution states that 'a chief shall not take part in active politics; and any chief wishing to do so and seeking election to Parliament shall abdicate his stool or skin.' Article 94 (3) c) reinforces this by noting that a person shall not be eligible to be a Member of Parliament if he is a chief. See Boafo-Arthur, 2001.

[15] Other reasons advanced by chiefs in Ghana for abstaining from partisan politics are: chiefs aligning with political parties compromise their roles as the 'fathers of everybody' in their respective communities; chiefs lose their respect when they identify with political parties; although chiefs are by nature politicians, joining political parties may set them against their subjects who may be members of other political parties; a partisan chief is likely to lose respect if the party he openly identifies with loses power; a non-partisan chief becomes the conscience of the nation with sufficient moral authority to call politicians to order when matters appear to be getting out of hand. (cf. Boafo-Arthur 2001:9-10)

In his study of 'Chieftaincy in the Modern State: An Institution at the Crossroads of Democratic Change', Fisiy (1995) raises critical issues that have implications for our understanding of chieftaincy in South Africa as well. He contends, much like Maloka, that the postcolonial terrain is a space contested by different political actors, old and new. According to him, chiefs also want to participate in 'inventing the future' of the postcolony. In order to understand their role properly, he argues, it is important to examine 'the relation between their control over people and over resources' the most important of which is land. For most rural people, he argues 'the control and management of land is at the heart of control over people' (ibid. 50). His research therefore focuses on the ways in which traditional leaders make use of their 'control and management of land' as a resource for power in the postcolonial state. By successfully creating a political space 'within which they can maintain their control over people and resources', chiefs are able to contest the postcolonial terrain and lay claim to local and regional power. Against this background, Fisiy poses an important question often ignored in many studies of chieftaincy and democracy, namely: 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 (ibid. 49)? It seems to me that a study of chiefs and democracy in South Africa and Cameroon should take this question into account as a guide to a deeper analysis of the predicament of chiefs in the current era.

Lastly, Nyamnjoh (2002) argues in his recent study of chiefs and democracy in Cameroon that chiefs are agents whose political choices are contingent on their personal interests. Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in Cameroon, he argues, chiefs have successfully made it to the forefront of national politics, sometimes in competition with other chiefs and chiefdoms. By actively and openly supporting the ruling Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement (CPDM), many chiefs in the grassfields of Cameroon have 'mobilised themselves under various lobbies to demand more recognition and resources from government.' He therefore calls for an approach that recognises the 'agency of chiefs and chiefdoms as individuals and cultural communities seeking 'rights and might' as both 'citizens' and 'subjects' in the modern nation-state' (ibid. 8-14).

Much of debate surrounding chieftainship has focussed on contemporary exigencies such as its interaction with the postcolonial state and, more recently, its predicament in the face of democratic reforms, and it has often failed to appreciate the relevance of the classical anthropological literature on chiefs in Africa. A reading of this literature provides a deeper insight into the past conditions of chieftainship and how it has changed over the ages. I argue in this thesis that a comprehensive analysis of the current situation of chiefs in the democratic era must take the classical literature into account, because it enables one to identify and understand the changes and continuities affecting chieftaincy. Here, I wish to examine very briefly, two of the classical studies by Max Gluckman (1940) and Isaac Schapera (1970).

In his 'Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand' published in 1940, Max Gluckman demonstrated the 'intercalary' position of the Zulu Regent and his *indunas* in the face of increased European domination. The chiefs became part of the 'Governmental system' but still retained their 'traditional background' although they had 'little political influence in … fundamental economic aspects of Zululand life' (ibid. 18). This could be buttressed by the fact that some educated Zulu Christians observed that the institution of chief was outmoded. They also described chiefs as reactionaries who opposed progress (Gluckman 1963). Nevertheless, Gluckman observed that the Zulu frequently compared Zulu officials and European officers and switched their allegiance according to what was to their own advantage. By showing their loyalty to the Zulu Regent for instance, the Zulu used an occasion such as the opening of the bridge to express their dissatisfaction with the colonial government.

Similarly, Schapera (1970) observed in his book *Tribal Innovators,* that Tswana chiefs were fast to adapt to changes brought to their chiefdoms as a result of the colonial encounter. Chiefs introduced innovations such as traffic regulations, taxation of several kinds and active support to the Europeans whom they admitted into their chiefdoms. Chiefs also encouraged their people to buy ploughs and other imported goods and to earn money for 'new wants' by going to work abroad in the mines at Kimberley. He notes further that such adaptation was not unique to Tswana chiefs granting that 'it has been known for over a century that chiefs in other groups of Southern Bantu sometimes also made social changes through legislation and in other ways' (ibid. 9). What we see in the two preceding paragraphs is that many of the

issues affecting chiefs and chieftaincy today are not new. Since colonial times they have been intercalary figures, serving the modern projects of the colonial state as well as the 'traditional' aspects of their chiefdoms. We also see that, sometimes, chiefs were 'innovators' who were keen on 'modernising' their chiefdoms and introducing major changes. Later in the thesis, I will show how this observation is true of Tshivhase in the post-apartheid era as well. The view that chiefs are reactionaries and opposed to change is also in many respects not new. Gluckman shows that, as far back as the 1940s, some educated Zulu expressed this opinion. Thus, there seem to be a gap in much of the literature in the sense that it fails to reflect the continuities that draw from colonial times. I intend to emphasise this particular aspect in my thesis as a way of bringing the past back to the present.

Granting the foregoing, I will proceed to state the central propositions of my thesis. I argue that exhortations to abolish chieftaincy in South Africa are clearly premature. Chiefs have not become outmoded by the introduction of democracy granting that they have yet again taken on a new role under the contradictory circumstances of neo-liberal democracy. The fact that the role is new is shown by the reality that not all chiefs of the previous era can participate with equal success. Chief Tshivhase is an example of how the new game is played successfully, at least in the short term. I also argue in the case of *fon* Ganyonga that although his association with the ruling party in the democratic era tended to undermine his popularity at the local level, his relationship with the people was not completely ruined. This was because the contradictory nature of the democratic transition in Cameroon provided him the scope to articulate particular issues to the government on behalf of his people. Thus although Ganyonga's claim to legitimacy as a modern politician was contested by his subjects, he legitimised his status as *chief* in the democratic era by leading the fight for the 'Anglophone cause' among traditional rulers. These propositions are guided by several approaches, some of which have already been highlighted in earlier paragraphs of this chapter. Nevertheless, I wish to suggest that my thesis draws on and extends the works of Bank and Southall (1996), Oomen (2000) and Nyamnjoh (2002).

I will also make substantial use of the theory of agency. Theories of agency tend to emphasise not only the structural constraints of actors, (Barett 1996:99) but also, the

ability of social actors to negotiate, bargain and manoeuvre within their social settings. This approach does not see chiefs as imprisoned in 'a tête-à-tête with a mythical tradition' (Bayart 1989:29), but as agents involved in situations, which they can manipulate for their personal gains. Against this background, I will conceptualise chiefs and chiefdoms as individuals and cultural communities seeking both 'rights and might' and as 'citizens' and 'subjects' in the modern nation-state (cf. Nyamnjoh 2002:8-14). This also serves as a basis for my comparative framework wherein I attempt to understand the status of chiefs in both countries and the nature of their democratic transitions based on the ability of the chiefs to act as the circumstances demand.

Be that as it may, it should be emphasised that more often than not, studies of agency tend to over-emphasise the primacy of the individual in social action, regardless of his interconnectedness to other individuals and groups. Wyn and White (2000) for example contend that modern society is undergoing 'an intense process of individuation associated with the social fragmentation and atomization accompanying neo-liberal economic policies and social policies' (2000:172). This process, they contend is a corollary of neo-liberalism, which emphasises 'individualism rather than social solidarity and community connection…' because 'agency is construed in terms of rational choice involving incentives and disincentives' (Wyn and White 2000:173-4). I will argue in this thesis that agency should be extended to groups and individuals alike instead of glorifying the 'rights-bearing individual' without due consideration to his or her relationships with others. This view borrows from Nyamnjoh's work on agency in the grassfields of Bamenda in which he argues that discussions about agency must go 'beyond the empowerment of the individual … to show how the quest for individual fulfilment negotiates conviviality with collective interests which may include but are not limited to their cultural dimensions' (Nyamnjoh 2002(a):111). It is against this background that I will examine the role and activities of chiefs' associations in the democratic era as an expression of chiefs' collective agency. It follows that agency should not be construed in terms of individual actions only, but also in the light of group and collective interaction.

1.4 Research Method

This thesis is the outcome of a study that was conducted between May 2001 and March 2002 starting with research in the Tshivhase area of Venda, and culminating with fieldwork in Bali, Cameroon. A period of three months was devoted to each field site. I made use of qualitative methods involving unstructured interviews and extensive observation.

Research in Venda started in May 2001 following an earlier trip in April to establish the relevant networks and familiarise myself with the social and geographic setting. My time schedule involved attending meetings at the chief's *khoro* and the Territorial Council at Mukumbani, and visiting civic organisations in several satellite villages under paramount Chief Tshivhase. Initially, informants had difficulty in believing that I was not a MuVenda even though it soon became obvious that I could hardly understand or speak Tshivenda, and that my accent in English was demonstrably not South African. My identity as a young black African researching chieftainship posed initial questions, but with time, people accepted the fact that I was a harmless outsider, trying to make sense of social change in their area.

One thing I found interesting about researching chieftainship in Venda was the reflexivity of the entire process. Most of the informants always turned the questions back to me - seeking to know if I had chiefs in my country and what their role was. They wanted to know if chiefs in my country were respected, married many wives and had magical powers. They also frequently asked if we had female chiefs in our villages, and how individuals acceded to chieftainship. Doing research in Venda obliged me continuously to adopt a comparative perspective in understanding chieftainship. I had interviews with chiefs and other members of the royal families, commoners, members of the civics as well as the mayor and municipal councillors, and many of the youths as well as adults. Because the villages under Tshivhase are numerous, I limited myself to four districts: Mukumbani, Vhufuli, Tshilapfene and Ngudza. At the end of my research, I returned to Pretoria in order to prepare for my journey to Cameroon. However, I maintained communication with several informants by regular phone conversations through which I could catch up on recent gossip and developments. I also followed news about Venda via a website devoted to news coverage of the Limpopo province. In May 2002, I paid a three-day visit to Tshivhase to observe recent changes, and collect data that I overlooked during previous trips.

In Bali, entry into the field was made possible by the indirect assistance of an important title-holder of the chiefdom, who is incidentally my mother's uncle. Through him, I gained access to other elders and notables of the chiefdom, especially the vice-president of the Bali Traditional Council, who had been charged with leadership functions in the absence of the chief. The advantage I had in Bali was my ability to understand and speak *Mungaka* (the language of the Bali Nyonga people) and *Pidgin* (the lingua franca in Cameroon). As in Venda, I made use of unstructured interviews, observation, and newspaper articles about developments in the chiefdom. My informants consisted of men and women, municipal councillors, notables (title-holders), traditional councillors, civil administrators and youths. I also visited local gatherings (Ndakum), which were held on Sundays, and picked up on local gossip.

In the end, a total of 84 interviews were recorded in Venda and Bali together. Unless indicated otherwise, the names of my informants have been changed for purposes of confidentiality. While I tended to record my interviews in Venda, I did so less often in Bali because there was no language barrier. In Venda, it was necessary to capture every word, which I transcribed later with the aid of my research assistant. Last, I also devoted some time to archival research. Since 1990 there has been a tremendous pool of newspaper articles devoted to discussions on chiefs and democratisation. Archival data on the grassfields have been used to complement my primary findings, as will be seen later.

1.5 Summary and Organisation of Thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters linked by several themes that unite the work as a whole. Two chapters are devoted to the Tshivhase chiefdom in South Africa and two to Bali in Cameroon. A last chapter compares the trends and differences in both chiefdoms and the implications they have for our understanding of democracy and the postcolonial state in both countries.

Chapter one introduces the general theme of discussion. It examines the different positions that have characterised the debate on chiefs and democracy in South Africa and Cameroon. It traces two broad positions; on the one hand, several scholars are of

the opinion that chiefs have been corrupted by successive colonial and apartheid regimes and should therefore be excluded from local and national politics in the democratic era. On the other hand, some scholars argue that chiefs are ambivalent figures, located between the state and their local communities. They maintain that chiefs do not necessarily contradict democracy nor do they enhance it, although they have the potential to serve as a bedrock on which democratic regimes can be built. The chapter argues that much of the contemporary debate on chiefs and democracy has ignored the classical literature, which this thesis intends to take into account. The chapter also outlines the central proposition of the thesis and suggests the theoretical approach that will inform analysis and interpretation. It concludes with a brief section on method and a general organisation of the thesis.

Chapter two is principally a historical chapter. It presents the historical background to the chiefdom of Tshivhase since the eighteenth century to the apartheid era. It describes the story of Venda migration to its present site, its 'glorious era' under Thohoyandou and its disintegration after his death. With the advent of colonial rule and later, the crystallisation of the apartheid state, Venda is reunified as a homeland under the leadership of Chief Patrick Mphephu who traces his descent to the legendary leader, Thohoyandou. Venda eventually becomes an independent homeland in 1979, still under Mphephu. The chapter ends with the increased demand for an end to the homeland and apartheid systems, the rise of Kennedy Tshivhase to power in the Tshivhase chiefdom and the re-incorporation of Venda into South Africa in 1994, following the demise of apartheid.

Chapter three poses and answers some of the sociological questions regarding the status of chiefs in Tshivhase. It examines the interaction between chiefs, subjects and the new democratic local government in Thohoyandou. This is based on the researcher's ethnographic findings, which took place in 2001 as already indicated above. In general, the chapter answers the key question: why in the democratic era has the chief become popular despite the presence of new democratic structures?

Chapter four presents a historical overview of the chiefdom of Bali in the North West Province of Cameroon. It examines in similar manner as in chapter two, the migration history of the Bali to their present site and the advent of colonial rule. This chapter

shows the regional influence of successive Bali chiefs during the colonial period and in particular, the involvement of its legendary leader, Galega II in the struggle for the independence of the British Southern Cameroons. It also highlights the postcolonial episode and the policies that defined the role of chiefs in local and national politics. The chapter ends with the rise to power of Ganyonga III in 1985 and the clamour for democratic reforms that led to the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1990.

Chapter five examines why *fon* Ganyonga III who had been a popular chief before 1990 became unpopular following the introduction of democracy in Cameroon. The chapter argues that although Ganyonga's legitimacy was initially undermined owing to his association with a self-serving party, he has however, won new legitimacy based on his dynamism and his involvement in the so-called Anglophone problem. Thus this chapter is about the ways in which Ganyonga has coped with, and made use of the democratic era and why his leadership continues to find new scope despite his unpopularity in other spheres.

Chapter six is a comparative analysis of the status of both chiefs in their respective chiefdoms and countries. I also draw from my theoretical approaches to interpret the differences and similarities that result from my ethnographic findings. I also endeavour to show how my findings and interpretations relate to existing literature and on-going debate on chiefs and democracy in both countries. Lastly, I explore the implications of my analysis in our understanding of the democratic transitions in the two countries, and particularly the nature of the postcolonial state in South Africa and Cameroon.