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## Grassroots governance?: chiefs in Africa and the Afro-Caribbean

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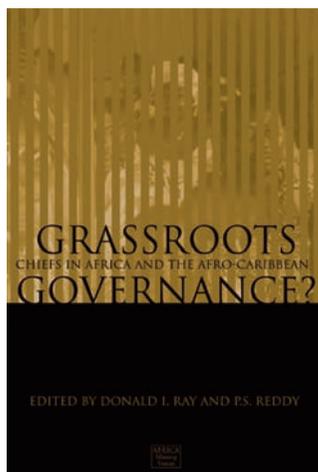
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## GRASSROOTS GOVERNANCE? CHIEFS IN AFRICA AND THE AFRO-CARIBBEAN

Edited by Donald I. Ray and P.S. Reddy

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## SETTING THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT OF RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT: TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY VALUES

CHAPTER 2

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CHRISTIANE OWUSU-SARPONG

CHRISTIANE OWUSU-SARPONG holds a BA in modern languages (Strasbourg), an MA in ethnolinguistics (Sorbonne), and an MPhil and a PhD in literary semiotics (Besançon). From 1979 to 2001, she lectured at the University of Kumasi (KNUST) in Ghana, where she rose to the rank of associate professor. In August 2001, the Calgary Institute for the Humanities awarded her a research fellowship. She has been participating in two international research projects (Women Writing Africa and the Traditional Authority Applied Research Network [TAARN]); has published numerous articles and books, applying theories in ethnolinguistics and semiotics to Akan oral literature, including *La mort Akan – Etude ethno-sémiotique des textes funéraires akan* (L'Harmattan); she also edited a yearly journal (*Le Griot*) for nine years and two trilingual anthologies of Akan folktales. She is presently living in Paris, where her husband was recently appointed Ghana's ambassador to France.



Otumfuo\* Osei Tutu II (Asante King or Asantehene) having an Adae reception at his palace in Kumasi, Ghana (2000, photo by D. Ray). (\*traditional leadership title)

## INTRODUCTION

Whilst the UN millennium summit was in process, the *Financial Times* published an interview of Kofi Annan, in which the famous Ghanaian Secretary-General summarized his vision in the following manner:

I have made clear that the UN should put the human being at the centre of everything it does, and, indeed, the whole discussion – whether it is on issues of human right, issues of lifting people out of poverty, the issue of development – all focuses and centres on the people. (Annan 2000)

The topics mentioned by Kofi Annan are central to all African governments and, in particular, to the government of Ghana; and the Secretary-General's persistent concern for the people – their wishes, their needs, their most intimate thoughts, and the representations of their minds – does encourage us to try and understand how a political system like the rural local government of Ghana can help solve the nation's problems with the support of the traditional authorities still in place, only by concerning itself directly with the rural folks and their expectations.

If *culture*, on the other hand, is, in Mathew Arnold's words; "the pursuit of our total perfection by getting to know, on all matters which concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world" (quoted in Briggs 1992, 4), then the study of the evolving process of the political culture of Ghanaians – acquired, refined, modified over time, by choice or imposition – is central to the understanding of the contemporary history of this West African composite group of people.

Kwame Arhin has, in a number of studies, outlined the changes that have occurred over the past centuries in the traditional political culture(s) of Ghana: He mainly discusses the internal changes in the system of chieftaincy, the Asante political structure remaining a model soon imitated and adopted by other ethnic groups of Ghana, and the external forces which tried, in vain, to suppress it (under and after colonial rule).

The present chapter will revisit the topic of traditional authority values, in order to set the context of the contemporary Ghanaian Rural Local Government. This seems to be a necessary intellectual step which could promote a better understanding of how and why the central government of Ghana, still an abstract entity for the majority of rural folks, can safely carry out its development projects only by relying on a strong co-operation between the two complementary local political entities: the institutionalized

local government structure and the perennial traditional authority structure; for the latter remains close to the heart of the people.

We will first locate the argument within the context of the African Cultural Renaissance movement. Thereafter, we will briefly present the system of political and legal pluralism in Ghana, as it has apparently come to stay, focusing the analysis mainly on Donald Ray's studies. We will then proceed to demonstrate the viability of this system through a survey of its positive representations in the Ghanaian press over the recent months. Finally, an overview of the various images of the traditional leader in a variety of discourses and genres will attempt to unravel the conundrum of the surviving popularity of traditional authorities in a country whose people are just as much attracted by all the facets of modernity.

## THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF GLOBALIZATION

La culture clonée est une culture avortée, parce que lorsqu'elle cesse d'être une relation, elle cesse d'être une culture. La relation est sa marque principale, au point de l'identifier. Or, cette relation est métissage, donc tout le contraire du clonage. Avec le clonage, l'autre est le décalque de l'un; avec le métissage, l'un et l'autre donnent naissance à un nouvel être différent mais qui conserve aussi, naturellement, l'identité de ses origines. (Portella<sup>1</sup> 2000, 9)

Politicians and economists are carrying on with the accelerated process of globalization, which aims at transforming the whole wide world into one big village, by attempting to unify all judicial, economic, and political systems under the umbrella of the human rights culture which brought about the Western model of the liberal welfare state, now to be generalized.

Yet the hidden dangers of globalization are being exposed both by Western intellectuals and artists who strongly support the necessity of a dialogue of cultures and by the partisans of a cultural renaissance, in particular in the endangered Sub-Saharan regions of Africa, who lament the near-death situation of their original languages, (oral) literatures, and entire cultures. In the words of a writer in a popular Ghanaian newspaper:

Globalization is re-colonising the world, particularly Africa whose political independence is becoming increasingly meaningless. The IMF-World Bank prescriptions for economic recovery do no more than emasculate Africa's political will to take effective decisions in its own interest, or develop its economies in the interest of its people. (Krafona 2000)

The entry into the Third Millennium seems to be characterized by a tremendous meltingpot of ideas, by a deconstructionist reconceptualization of *one's own world* in the light of the discovery and acceptance of the *other self* (that is of people of *other* cultures and places, and of one's own ancestors of *other* times).

## THE RESURGENT HERITAGE

Se wo were fi na wo sankofa a yenkyiri.

“Should you have forgotten something / to do something / or to say something..., you may go back because it is never too late to get it / to do it / or to say it...” (Akan proverb)

The word “tradition” has often been misconstrued and perceived as referring to an ancient body of rules, of habits, of beliefs, of knowledge, only worthy of preservation in the ethnographic *Museum of Mankind*, notwithstanding the Latin origin of the noun *tradition*, itself derived from two Latin verbs (*tradere* + *transmittere*). As a matter of fact, Quintilian, the rhetorician, did use *traditio* with the meaning of *teaching* in his *De institutione oratorio* (Alleau n.d.); and this usage implies that, right from its creation, the noun *traditio* did suppose not only the mere passing on from one generation to another of the same cultural contents (*tradere*), but also and more so the continuous reactivating of values (*transmittere*) a specific society considers as *traditional* – that is, as inherited from its founding fathers.

This etymological clarification is further exemplified by the paradoxical answer recently given by Alain Finkielkraut, the contemporary French philosopher, when he was asked to identify the value(s) which is (were) to be absolutely preserved in this new millennium:

Avant même de s’interroger sur les valeurs, l’essentiel serait pour moi que nous puissions transmettre une certaine idée de la transmission. Je dois avouer que je suis assez inquiet devant la fascination que ce changement de millésime provoque un peu partout, car j’y vois une bizarre impatience et l’idée que ce qui importe avant tout, c’est de s’adapter à des mutations ... si l’on s’abandonne complètement à cet enthousiasme, on risque d’en arriver au paradoxe selon lequel la seule chose à transmettre serait le futur! Or justement l’idée de la transmission repose sur le fait que le présent ne connaît pas toutes ses réponses. S’il est livré à lui-même ou s’il ne se conçoit qu’ouvert sur le futur, le présent est une prison. Nous devons savoir nous distancer de nous-mêmes, et les œuvres du passé peuvent nous y aider... Ainsi je dirai qu’il faudrait léguer *une exigence de transmission* et une valeur essentielle, qui est la passion de comprendre. (Finkielkraut 2000, 2)

But, unfortunately, this passion for a real transmission is receding. This is all the more disastrous in societies that have only recently adopted writing as a mode of transmission and whose most authentic and original values used to be handed down and, at the same time, constantly re-evaluated through very structured forms of their oral tradition.

African societies, so claims Amadou Hampâté Ba, are suffering nowadays from a “rupture in transmission,” as their last living *traditionalists* are about to die without successors and, with them, the vast treasures of their knowledge and understanding of African traditions. The Bambaras called these traditionalists *Doma* or *Soma*, that is the “knowledgeable”; the Peuls, in their various regional languages, called them *Silatigi*, *Gando* or *Tchiorinké*, with the same meaning; some African societies of the Savanna, like those of Mali, had schools of thought, such as the *Komo*, the *Koré*, the *Nama*, the *Dô* ..., where the great Masters of the Word were trained; some of these *knowledgeable* people were also members of corporations (weavers, blacksmiths, herdsmen, healers, hunters ...), and additional duties of transmission related to their art and craft had been assigned to them (Ba 1995, 191–230).

These traditionalists were the living memory of their communities, their oral poets, their historians; they were the counsellors of the political and religious leaders, the mouthpiece of the commoners, the link in the unbroken chain between the living and the dead. In their words rested the most precious seeds of wisdom; their soothing and

rejuvenating texts were able to achieve wonders whenever they were orally performed during a traditional ceremonial event, or in the daily resolution of conflicts: they fostered in each individual member of the society a sense of pride, of belonging, of togetherness, and they instilled in each of them the desire to continue to build on the common heritage.

But the successive historical tempests of the past two centuries – colonialism and post-colonial modernism – have attempted to erase all traces of the pre-colonial African past, and this long and subtle process of acculturation and of socio-political change could well result in the complete vaporization of the last monuments of Africa's oral tradition in the heat of the rush for technological advancement.

Providentially though, the strong belief in the need for a cultural renaissance of Africa, launched in the 1930s by the *Négritude* poets of francophone West Africa (Léopold Sédhar Senghor, David Diop, Bernard Dadié) and of the Black diaspora (Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, Léon G. Damas, Aimé Césaire), has gradually permeated all levels of contemporary African societies (A. Owusu-Sarpong 1998). Beyond this fundamental literary and political movement of the pre-independence era, a profound awareness of the importance of the revival of indigenous African values is now widespread amongst the people of Africa: amongst the young and the old; the rural folks and the urban-dwellers; the literate and the non-literate; the rich and the poor. It has become evident to all that political independence did not lead to a return to the African grassroots, but to what many times has been tagged as neo-colonialism, and that economic growth, wherever it had been achieved through the instrumentality of foreign agencies, was achieved to the detriment of human development and welfare.

A quick listing of media titles sampled randomly from recent editions of Ghanaian dailies may suffice to indicate the vivid interest shown by Ghanaian readers and writers of today in *traditional* matters:

- “Chieftaincy forever” (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 12–13 May 1999)
- “Traditional arbitration, a model for communal responsibility” (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 28–30 August 1999)
- “Don’t condemn African Traditional Religion” (*The Daily Graphic*, 12 January 2000)
- “Respect our traditional values” (*The Mirror*, 15 January 2000)

- “Herbalists urged to pass knowledge to others” (*The Pioneer*, 2 February 2000)
- “We have lost our identity” (*The Statesman*, 27 February 2000)
- “Culture does not mean only drumming and dancing” (*The Pioneer*, 2 March 2000)
- “A need to re-organize our social values” (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 8–9 March 2000)
- “Christianity and traditional practices” (*The Weekend Statesman*, week ending 26 March 2000)
- “We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are” (*The Pioneer*, 29 March 2000)
- “Cultural values under threat” (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 29–30 March 2000)
- “The great prophet Okomfo Anokye” (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 5–6 April 2000)
- “Adhere to traditional norms” (*The Mirror*, 15 April 2000)
- “Sustain Traditional Values” (*The Pioneer*, 18 April 2000)
- “Nana Yaa Asantewaa is back in my dream” (*The Pioneer*, 27 July 2000)
- “Let’s honour Yaa Asantewaa” (*The Daily Graphic*, 29 July 2000)

The African youth, which is the most vulnerable component of the population and the most likely to be disturbed by the exercise in cultural ambiguity Africa has embarked upon over the last fifty years, is participating in its own creative way in this intense claim for the recovery of an already fading heritage. So did Allavi Solomon, in January 2000, when he sent in the following poem for publication in *The Daily Graphic*’s “Children World” – thus voicing his protest against the cultural no-man’s-land created by the adults around him, as well as his request for a cultural identity:

*Our fading heritage*

*Tell me stories, Nana,  
Blood-and-thunder tales of your days,  
Of those memorable heroic days*

*That now belongs to the past.  
 My spirit yearns for accounts, Nana,  
 For the stories of the unforgettable,  
 Who shed their rich royal blood,  
 To redeem our beloved land.  
 Nana, wise Nana,  
 Let me hear of your potent kings,  
 Of Osei Tutu, the unbeatable,  
 And the architects of your boundless domains.  
 Let me hear of your women too, of Yaa Asantewaa and Dwaben Seewa.  
 They were gentle yet unyielding spirits, who nursed and fostered our warriors.  
 Feed me from your wisdom pot, Nana,  
 Sweet Nana of the grey hairs,  
 Nourish me with our rich heritage,  
 Lest it fade away.*

## POLITICAL AND LEGAL PLURALISM IN GHANA

In its awareness of its continent's triple heritage (indigenous, Islamic and Western),<sup>2</sup> Africa's intelligentsia is craving for a total understanding of the continent's complex experience of what Georges Balandier described as its dynamic, sometimes turbulent, and incredibly creative re-invention of the present, over the centuries and in the light of its constant memory of its past. When inaugurating the yearly Marcel Mauss Conference of the Société des Africanistes, in Paris, on 26 March 1999, Georges Balandier emphasized the enormous task that is confronting the makers of the newly-born African nation-states of today, especially in the arena of political power, that determines the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed:

L'unité qui donne à celui-ci [à l'État moderne naissant] son assise est d'abord bureaucratique, les forces économiques et les intérêts particuliers y prévalent rapidement, le pouvoir n'est plus contenu dans des limites définies par une "charte" mystique, originelle, mais dans des rapports de forces instables, et sa légitimation, encore mal assurée, contient insuffisamment les tendances à l'autocratie et aux confrontations. L'Afrique est engagée dans



Main street, Kokofu town in the Ashanti Region, Ghana. Mourners gathering at a funeral (photo by D. Ray).

une période de refaçonnage des espaces politiques et de mutation dont l'État moderne est l'instrument, et le tragique peut surgir. (Balandier 1999, 267)

In several West African countries, various forms of traditional authority still do coexist with the new rules of governance set (with or without a constitution) within the modern (republican or military) nation-states, and this situation has often led to internal struggles over sovereignty, legitimacy, and power.

The topic of political and legal pluralism in West Africa has already been the sole focus of two recent symposia. The first one, held in September 1994 in Kumasi and Accra (Ghana), and co-organized by Nana Kwame Brempong Arhin, Professor Donald I. Ray, and Professor E. A. B. van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal<sup>3</sup> addressed the theme of “The Contribution of Traditional Authority to Development, Human Rights and Environmental Protection: Strategies for Africa.” One year later, a symposium on Legal Anthropology was held at the University of Vienna and resulted in the publication of a book on *Sovereignty, Legitimacy and Power in West African Societies* in 1998. The topic remains central to an international research project launched in Durban (South Africa) in December 1999, the Traditional Authority Applied Research Network (TAARN),<sup>4</sup> which is presently embarking upon a comparative study of the relationship between traditional leaders and the modern states in South Africa, Botswana, and Ghana.

These new avenues of research, and the integrated and/or multidisciplinary approach followed by researchers in this field, could certainly facilitate the dialogue between the representatives of the modern African states in question and their traditional authorities. The success of such a dialogue, nevertheless, may depend, as Zips and van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal point out, “on the humility with which the power holders of modern African states are willing to acknowledge the authority of original African institutions and learn from the democratic principles on which these institutions rest” (1998, xv).

Ghana has been noted, in this respect, by the same scholars, as having taken an interesting “stance towards chieftaincy that strives towards co-operation, transparency, and internal peaceful relation” (van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Zips, 1998): Even though the June 1999 blunder, committed by the then president of Ghana, Fl. Lt. J. J. Rawlings, when he (insultingly) waved his left finger at the newly installed Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, in front of television cameras, nearly provoked an ethnic confrontation and points to the fact that “all is not entirely well in this best of all political worlds of West Africa” – to paraphrase Voltaire.<sup>5</sup>

The 1992 constitutional provisions on chieftaincy certainly indicate that traditional rulers were still relevant in Ghana at the end of the twentieth century, and that chieftaincy may well become one of the traditional values to regain new strength and importance for the building of an authentically African *and* modern nation-state in the Third Millennium.

In his article on “Chief-State Relations in Ghana,” Donald Ray seems, to us, to have rightly concluded his analysis of the positions towards chieftaincy adopted by the successive governing and legislative bodies under and after the colonial rule in Ghana, by stating that “the 1992 Constitution of the Fourth Republic contained a shift back to the Third Republic’s policy of constitutionally-limiting the sovereignty of the state over chiefs” (Ray, 1998, 62–63).

He was referring, in particular, to ART. 270, which deals with the power to control the recognition of chiefs – that is, to control their selection, the process of enstoolment and/or enskinning, and that of destoolment and/or deskinning – and has now taken that power from Parliament and given it to the National House of Chiefs, the Regional Houses of Chiefs, and the local Traditional Councils.

Donald Ray’s argument is that there was constitutional evidence that “chiefs should not be considered to be ‘inferior agents’”; that, in Ghana, “an entity (i.e., the state) which is sovereign in most respects coexists with an entity (i.e., traditional authority) that seems to be sovereign in this respect”; and that “history and religion combine to provide the distinctive basis of legitimacy for chiefs” in Ghana. Donald Ray thus restates an earlier claim: “In Ghana the relation between the state and chiefs has been characterized by divided sovereignty and legitimacy” (Ray, 1998, 64–65).

Although the 1992 constitution establishes clearly that “A chief shall not take part in party politics” (ART. 276), it does assign new and important tasks to the National and Regional Houses of Chiefs – in particular that of a re-evaluation and a transcoding (or systematizing and putting in writing) of traditional rule and of all socio-cultural practices classified as “tradition” under *Customary Law* (ART. 272).

In practice, this constitutional recognition of “the honour and dignity of chieftaincy” (ART. 270 2b), which sounds more like an official acceptance of traditional authority, did certainly derive, first and foremost, from the actual influence traditional rulers of Ghana still have over their people; 70 per cent of Ghana’s population lives in rural areas and tends to recognize its traditional rulers as its legitimate moral and social leaders (not to talk about the political influence some partisan and corrupt chiefs could and do have during and even outside electoral periods).

The current policy of decentralization and local government in Ghana is, in this set-up, a major factor contributing to the conducive atmosphere of co-operation which seems to prevail between locally elected representatives of the District Assemblies and the traditional rulers of the same regions.

## RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CHIEFTAINCY IN GHANA TODAY

In the media, decentralization has been perceived favourably in most cases, and is often described as an important aspect of Ghana's current democratic dispensation:

The decentralization policy has brought about a lot of improvement in the management of affairs, in particular in the rural areas. The policy has enhanced the participation of the people in the decision-making process. District municipal and district assemblies have executive, deliberative and administrative powers. The assemblies can now enact by-laws to regulate the activities of the people and organizations operating in their areas of jurisdiction. (Onoma-Barnes 2000)

Local government representatives and traditional rulers in the same traditional areas/regions of Ghana, appear as working hand-in-hand for the benefit of the people; the Ghanaian newspapers have been reporting frequently on this positive development and chiefs are now perceived more and more as valuable intermediaries between the State, NGOs and the people, as development agents. and as mediators in conflicts. The following story is an interesting point in case:

The Cape-Coast Municipal Assembly has appealed to the Oguaa Traditional Council to help resolve the differences between the assembly and the Member of Parliament (MP) for the area, Ms. Christine Churcher. The Municipal Chief Executive, Mr. Percy Ashun ... said the Assembly has appealed to the Omanhene, Osabarima Kwasi Atta, and his elders to settle the matter to enable the Assembly and the MP to work together for the development of the municipality. (Owusu-Sekyere 2000)



Osagyefuo\* Ofori Atta is the Okyenhene or King of Akyem Abuakwa in the Eastern Region of Ghana. In order to promote income generation possibilities in his kingdom, he has established a pilot scheme for local people to grow large snails for sale as a protein source (2002, photo by D. Ray). (\*traditional leader title)

In this case, the traditional ruler and his elders were called upon to use their good offices to arbitrate on a very *modern* moneypalaver that had led to a serious disagreement between agents of central and local government.

The chiefs of contemporary Ghana are active opinion leaders whose words and actions are often quoted in the papers; their presence alone, reproduced in numerous pictures taken at official – and not necessarily traditional – gatherings, serves as a guarantee of the regional and national importance and significance of the event:

- “Okyenhene wants Akwatia mines turned into mining college,” in *The Ghanaian Chronicle* (29–30 November 1999).
- “The Omanhene of Banda Traditional Area ... has expressed great concern over the high rate at which some timber species and savannah trees are being destroyed in the area through illegal felling of trees....” in *The Free Press* (7–13 January 2000).
- “Queenmother advocates women empowerment,” in *The Mirror* (26 February 2000): “I believe [declared the queenmother] women can contribute significantly if they are given the chance. Women are better managers and if they are economically empowered, they can help their husbands to raise up happy families.”
- “Chiefs are urged to promote census” by Odeefo Boa Amponsem III, Denkyirahene, who is also the President of the National House of Chiefs and a member of the Council of State, as reported in *The Daily Graphic* (25 March 2000).
- Under the title “Romeo village teacher sent to another village after impregnating thirteen-year-old,” *The Ghanaian Chronicle* (28–30 March 2000) reported on a local scandal which provoked the ire of the people and their chief, Barima Asiedu Boafo II; in this instance, the moral condemnation of an irresponsible adult by a village community was channelled through a petition by the chief to the Regional Director of Education.
- “Establish camps for AIDS patients,” so said the Asantehene’s Nsumankwahene Baffour Domfe Gyeabour III addressing newsmen; he, according to *The Pioneer* (6 July 2000), “advised the public to refrain from indiscriminate sex and to stick to one partner, adding ‘the disease is real and no cure has been found for it’.”

Most of the time though, it is at official functions where chiefs play significant roles (such as the opening of a school and/or of a health centre in their area, and of course on the occasion of their enstoolment and/or enskinning, or at royal funerals) that the traditional leaders do express their concerns.

Traditional festivals have now become a forum for the renewed celebration of indigenous Ghanaian cultures, led by traditional rulers, and for the discussion of matters of public concern in the presence of representatives of the local and central government, as well as of foreign agencies. As a result of this reshaping of traditional gatherings, festivals that had been consigned to the dustbin of history are being revived. An interesting report on this contemporary interface was given on the Upper East Region by the regional editor of *The Daily Graphic*:

Festivals are occasions during which chiefs and their people show appreciation to their gods and ancestors for the protection, guidance, and blessings bestowed on them in the course of the year. They equally provide the appropriate forum for the chiefs and the people to showcase the beauty and glamour of their traditional values and potentials to the outside world. While some also use the occasion to launch appeals for funds to undertake development projects to augment the efforts of both the district assemblies and the central government, others choose to enjoy the occasions through mere merrymaking. As a result, festivals that were not even being celebrated in the northern parts of the country have now been revived. Such festivals include the Tengebigre of the Nabdam in the Sakoti Traditional Area, the Kuure (Hoe) Festival of the people of Zaare, and the Adakoya Festival of the Bolgatanga Traditional Area. While one fully supports the celebration of such festivals in the three northern regions, it is the belief of many concerned citizens that such celebrations could have more positive dividends if they were used more seriously to take stock of the people's activities during the year considering the numerous problems facing the three regions. (Seini 2000, 16)

Amongst all present-day traditional rulers of Ghana, the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, who was enstooled on the prestigious Golden Stool of Asante a year ago, has started emerging as a main figure to be reckoned with in all domains of interest, not only within his region but within the country at large.

In December 1999, officials from the World Bank paid a courtesy visit to Manhyia and, as *The Pioneer* reported, Otumfuo gave them “food for thought” by stressing “the need for officials of the World Bank to have constant interactions with the people at the grassroots and stop dealing with government [alone].” (Editorial, 21 December 2000).

A few days later, at the end of year meeting of the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs, Otumfuo, already acclaimed as “the Millennium King,” touched on the necessary re-evaluation of Asante culture and, in particular, of chieftaincy itself, given the constraints of modern life:

Touching on cultural practices, Otumfuo called on the chiefs to examine Asante culture in the light of the harsh economic realities, to rid them of unnecessary and burdensome aspects such as expensive funerals. As chieftaincy enters the new millennium, and as a traditional authority within a secular state, Otumfuo said there was the need for chiefs to ensure that the vision they created for the institution will be more relevant just as their predecessors were able to preserve its relevance over the years by adapting to changes. (*The Pioneer*, 22 December 1999)

During the watch-night service at the Wesley Methodist Church in Kumasi, ... he advised Ghanaians to make truth, honesty, integrity and uprightness their guiding principle. “We can only succeed as a nation if we abide by these principles,” so said He. (*The Pioneer*, “Otumfuo’s Millennium Message,” 3 January 2000)

Otumfuo, the Asante people’s King Solomon, has, in the short period between January and February 2000:

- launched an immunization campaign at Manhyia
- urged the Public Health Department of Kumasi to “eschew filtering, laxity, backbiting and indiscipline”
- urged members of the Neighbourhood Watch to “help the police flush out the bad nuts in society so as to sustain peace and stability”
- called on chiefs “not to sell off large portions of peri-urban land as individual plots for residential development to deny indigenous food-crop farmers the traditional right to cultivate their family lands”

- urged “academics and researchers to intensify their efforts at documenting the heroic deeds of Ghanaians,” when receiving members of the Yaa Asantewaa Festival planning committee
- announced that the “Asanteman Council was to institute a health endowment fund to train doctors in and outside the country to improve on health care delivery.”

Otumfuo Osei Tutu II’s magnificent efforts as a *modern traditional leader*, and in particular his contribution to the development of education, through the launching of an Education Fund destined to provide financial assistance to bright and needy children and students of Asante descent and to renovate schools, has earned him the Millennium SYMONS Award. This award was conferred on him by a forty-two-member delegation of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) on 22 April 2000. This particular achievement has also warmed the heart of his people so much so that a singular Valentine poem, written by a social worker of Kumasi, appeared in *The Pioneer* on 14 February 2000:

*Great King Osei Tutu  
Nana Osei Tutu Ababio*

*The symbol and touch bearer of the great Ashanti Nation  
The soul and embodiment of the good People of Ashanti  
The progressive and dynamic leader of whom we are very proud  
Nana, we don't only love you  
We adore you and cherish you  
We praise you and worship you, 'cause  
You deserve praise and worship.  
Many are those who would look back  
At the year 2000 with delightful memories  
Memories of glee and happiness  
With the intent of stretching similar helping hands to those who might need it  
This is the result of your love for education  
The result of your good foresight and generosity  
Many are those who would miss their right to education but for your goodwill and  
initiative  
Allow us then to sing your praises whilst alive  
Mother Ghana is grateful to the Creator of Mankind for a great King  
Nana Osei Tutu II  
. . . . .  
Amen!*

Darling Ode (A Social Worker) – Kumasi

Otumfuo's fiftieth birthday, which coincided with the first anniversary of his accession to the Golden Stool, was celebrated in grand style on 6 May. In the morning, Nana Osei Tutu II was acclaimed in the streets of Kumasi by five thousand school children, for whom he held a party at Manhyia later that same morning: And in the evening, during a banquet attended by ministers of state, members of Parliament, members of the diplomatic corps, senior academics, and important citizens (three hundred invited guests in all), and amidst many goodwill messages, Otumfuo, dressed in an impeccable tuxedo suit, expressed joy and hope for the future:

Indeed, the past year has come to pass with some good and pleasant memories for me personally. The tremendous support I received from the government and people of Ghana towards the burial and funeral of my late brother, and the overwhelming response by corporate bodies and well meaning individuals like your good selves to my Educational Fund launch, have not only warmed my heart but have also given me strength and encouragement to pursue my quest to help find lasting solutions to some of the socio-economical problems facing my people. Tonight, as I enter my second year on the Golden Stool, I am more than determined to work towards the attainment of the objectives I have set for myself: to continue with the crusade of promoting education and health care for my people and to harness our resources, strength, and unity to develop Asanteman as my contribution towards Government efforts to develop the entire nation.<sup>6</sup>

As he began the second year of reign, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II prepared for his first trip abroad, to the U.K., at the invitation of Queen Elizabeth II who, owing to the official program drawn up by the Ghana government when she visited in November 1999, could not go to Kumasi as she had wished. This historic meeting, during which the Asante king was received in a private audience by the queen at Buckingham Palace on 18 May, continued to symbolically demarcate the future from the past turbulent relationship between the British Crown and the Asante Confederacy. During his stay in the U.K., Otumfuo also held discussions with British companies (including the Cocoa Association of London Limited); he met directors of the British Council and it was agreed that an Information and Technology Centre would be built in Kumasi; he visited the House of Commons and House of Lords, and travelled to Cambridge where he discussed the issue of drugs and delinquents with educationists (Agyeman-Dua 2000, 40–41).

Commenting on Otumfuo Osei Tutu's first year on the Golden Stool, the Ghanaian novelist Kwaku Akuoko developed the theme of the rebirth of Asanteman (the Asante state) under the new king, as against what he described as "the 29-year vacuum of Otumfuo Opoku Ware II." In this incisive article, the author started with a historical account of the first 180 years of the Asante nation's history under the able leadership of competent chiefs with a vision and foresight. The last 120 years, in contrast, had been, according to him "rather dim and demure," due to the fact that some Asantehenes became totally alienated and powerless because of their conversion to Christianity (like Prempeh I or Opoku Ware II) or to Islam (Osei Kwame):

"In spite of our arrival in the twenty-first century," asserts the writer, "the Asante nation of the 1870s was a much more sophisticated society than the Asante nation of today. Its government, civil and public servants, its diplomats were far more skilled than anything that can probably be pitted against them today.... Asantehene Osei Tutu Ababio will quickly need to bridge the gap between 1880 and 2000 if the nation is to make any progress.... For the next generation to do better means we must educate Asante children of today. That must be done independently of the government of Ghana ... we need to teach our history, culture and language in order to reinforce our heritage, values, conservatism and pride. It would be a most appalling tragedy if we should end up, in spite of their relative affluence, like African Americans or worse still West Indians. Both being people with no history or culture in search of a dream.... If Asantehene Osei Tutu Ababio," concludes the writer, "does nothing at all, other than be remembered as the one who re-laid the foundation for the education of Asantes, then the bridge between 1880 and 2000 would have been bridged and with it the nation would have been reborn." (Kwaku-Akuoko 2000)

The young and dynamic Asantehene of today has, unmistakably, already become the model of what an African nation-state like Ghana (modern but, at the same time, very much aware of the importance of its cultural heritage) expects of a contemporary traditional leader, in particular in the context of (rural) local government: A national expectation which was summarized by the Brong-Ahafo Regional Minister, Mr. Donald Adabre, in his address to the chiefs at the Brong-Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs, on 27 April 2000 when:

... [he] reminded the chiefs that as custodians of the country's heritage and values, they have a great responsibility to lead their traditional areas in the effort to preserve their cultural values, which have been weakened or abandoned in the name of so-called modernization. He noted that it is this "modernization" which has brought a breakdown in moral values in the society. He said the focus of chieftaincy now is socio-economic development and not wars of expansion as it used to be in the past. (*The Daily Graphic*, 29 April 2000)

## SETTING THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT OF RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT: TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY VALUES

The active role traditional leaders of Ghana are expected to play nowadays, both as moral boosters of their people and as agents of development of their regions, rests on the fact that these traditional authorities are still perceived – especially by the rural folk and despite the fact that all political power has been taken from them – as the legitimate *rulers*.

In fact, no decision taken at the level of central government, and directly concerning the people in matters such as communal health, education, use and distribution of land, gender issues, etc., can easily be implemented without the active involvement of the traditional authorities in the various regions. This explains the multiplicity of workshops recently organized to educate chiefs on new policies and trends to enable them to play their role as intermediaries between the distant ministries, Parliament, and the people most effectively.<sup>7</sup>

This is so because, despite the fast process of modernization and the moral degradation of the youth of today, traditional authorities are still held in high esteem. They are considered as the sacred embodiment of the traditional values that strengthened their communities in the past, and can still (if reviewed) help both the rural and town folks in their daily struggles for survival as individuals, as family members, and as citizens.

Although the perceptions of these traditional authorities have slightly changed over the years, there remains a striking resemblance between the oftentimes positive

images of chiefs presented in various forms, and the contemporary social discourse on chieftancy. We shall verify this through a brief survey of oral literature texts still performed today:

- a sample of recently published books, and
- a series of interviews.<sup>8</sup>

## IMAGES OF THE TRADITIONAL LEADER IN AKAN ORATURE

Although Asante oral texts have naturally been altered and continuously re-created over the centuries, some poetic texts performed during royal funerals or during *adaes* (periodic festivals in commemoration of the spirits of dead Asantehenes and chiefs) are very reminiscent of, if not totally similar to their original form. These fixed panegyric texts mainly belong to the royal funeral genre, whose classification we have attempted elsewhere (C. Owusu-Sarpong 1995, 2001). Particular attention may be given to drum histories (*ayan*) played on the *fontomfrom* and *atumpan* talking drums, to dirges and laments (*ayinan*, *abodinsu*) for royals played on *atenteben* and *odurogya* horns and flutes, to libation prayers (*nsaguokasa/mpaebo*) addressed to dead kings, and to royal oaths (*ntam*) – all of which have in common their historic and religious attributes.

Through the regular and ritual performance of these sacred texts, the link between the living and the dead remains unbroken: The community gathered on the ritual scene of performance draws a sense of pride from the epic stories of their ancestral heroes (the first settlers, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century empire builders and conquerors, and the nineteenth-century ferocious opponents of the British invaders). These themes, retold by the masters of *dwamu kasa* or *public speech* (*akyeame*, the spokesmen; *akyerema*, the drummers; *kwadwomfoo*, the minstrels; *abrafoo*, the executioners, etc.,) are being remembered in the poetic praise-genre of the olden days (*tetesem*) mentioned above, such as the following drumstanza:

Onoborobo Osei Tutu e,  
 Bonsu who fought and seized Kings,  
 Osei Tutu Birempon,  
 Thou art a warrior,  
 Thou art ever a man,

[You whose motto is] “Were I alone, I should go and fight,”  
 Onoborobo Osei Tutu,  
 The hero who holds a gun and a sword when he goes to battle,  
 Bonsu who fought and seized Kings,  
 Osei Tutu Birempon.<sup>9</sup>

But it would be a misconception to imagine that the ideal chief of the past was solely praised and feared as a cold-blooded warrior, exercising a kind of feudal autocracy over his people. As A. L. Adu rightly pointed out, appellations given to chiefs in panegyrics rested, as they do today, on special virtues expected of them, and which brought them close to the heart of their people:

The ideal Akan chief is the head of a great big family of which his subjects are members. He is their ruler and their judge, their counsellor and their moral guide, a tower of strength in time of trouble and their captain in time of war. He is all-powerful (Otumfuo), a conqueror (Osagyefuo), courageous (Katakylie), a benefactor (Daasebre), a kind master (Odeefuo), and wise (Nana). (Adu 1949, 6)

K. A. Busia, in the same fashion, emphasized the fact that if a chief had power and authority, he was only “wealthy in terms of services which he received, not in transferable wealth”:

The tribute of firstfruits which he received at the Odwira ceremony was redistributed as presents to the elders and their subjects. The palmwine sent him was used to entertain all and sundry. The food and meat went to feed the large number of attendants in the royal household, and anyone who cared to go to the chief’s house for a meal. One of the strict injunctions given to a chief on his enstoolment was that he should be generous. (Busia 1951, 51)<sup>10</sup>

The chief’s powers, as well as his duties were conceptualized (like all socio-cultural norms of the Akan) in proverbial sayings (*ebe*), some of which are still in use today. Rev. J. G. Christaller, the Basel missionary mentioned quite a few (nineteen) in his 1881 collection of *Akwapem* proverbs, amongst which the following may be extracted (Christaller 1933):

#### POWERS

Ohene bekum wo a, ennim ahmantwe. (1305)

When a chief is going to kill you, it is useless consulting the lots.

Ohene na oyi dansefo. (1306)

The chief reveals the false witness. (The chief selects the witness)

Ohene aso te se osono aso. (1312)

The ears of a chief are as the ears of an elephant.

Ohene ntam te se bayere amoa, obi nto mu mfa neho totroto mfi  
adi da. (1314)

A chief's oath is like the hole a yam is planted in, no one falls into  
it and gets out again unhurt.

Ohene aso te se odum, onni anim onni akyiri. (1317)

A chief's ear is like an odum tree, he has no front and no back.

## DUTIES

Ohene nufuo dooso a, amansan na enum. (1309)

When a chief has plenty of milk (large breasts), then all people  
drink of him.

Ohene bedi wo kasa, efiri manfo. (1304)

When a chief is going to fine you/ to compel you to do something,  
he does so by the authority of his people.

Ohene nya ahotrafo pa a, na ne bere so dwo. (1310)

When a chief has good councillors, then his reign is peaceful.

The two last maxims give us a hint of the democratic processes which sanctioned the authority of the chiefs in the past, and at the complex and subtle system of checks and balances all traditional Akan societies had put in place. There again, A. L. Adu magnificently summarized how “all power and authority of Chiefs derived from the people” and how “they [the people] set the manner in which they (power and authority) can be exercised”:

Within the limits imposed by custom and tradition ... the chief has a very wide measure of power. But the chief can, by issuing arbitrary and unreasonable orders, soon lose the active support of his people, and thereafter, his actions will be closely watched, and he will be

deposed on the slightest excuse. This right of impeachment by people, that sooner or later caught up with the tyrannical chief, was, and still is, the most powerful and democratic check the people had on arbitrary invocation of customary sanctions. There is of course the day-to-day check which the councillors, who represent the people as family heads or sub-chiefs, have in advising the chief, reminding him of his duties, and in assisting him to regulate the life of the community through legislation and enforcement of laws. In some Akan states, the presence of the “Asafo,” that active company of “young men,” always serves as a quick reminder to the autocratic chief that he has to watch his steps. In the past, an unpopular chief ran the risk of desertion from his people in a battle. Even now, in some places, a most potent way of dealing with an unpopular chief is to refuse to render him such customary services as calling at the “ahenfie” to greet him and going out of one’s way to render him homage. He can enforce customary observance and duties, but no one will give voluntary service. A chief can, normally, not go too far, particularly if his position is not as lofty as that of a paramount ruler. The Akan system provides for a democratic climate of opinion in which democracy must prevail. (Adu 1949, 12–13)<sup>11</sup>

It is therefore quite amazing that, amongst the five proverbs mentioned in a contemporary collection by a living traditional ruler of the Brong-Ahafo Region, Agyewodin Nana Adu Gyamfi Ampem II,<sup>12</sup> one notes four proverbs on a chief’s powers and only one on his duty to remain open to advice. This choice of proverbs, old and new, amidst a very recently published anthology, tends to indicate that some present-day chiefs have a false and over bloated image of their *traditional* power and authority in a society which is, paradoxically, swiftly moving towards social levelling, through the abolition of privileges and the introduction of free education for all:

Ohene a onku wo na obo wo boo. (1186)

The King who does not want to kill you gives you the option of a fine.

Ohene akondwa nye bamma na nnipa mmienu anaa dodoo atena so preko. (1187)

A throne is not a bench to be occupied by two or more people at the same time.

Ohene akokorawa na yesisi no, na enye ohene ababunu. (1188)

It is the aged king who can be bluffed but not the young king.

Ohene kyiniie; ebi da bi akyi. (1189)

The order of the king's umbrella: some precede others.

Ohene tufuantee na odi ntakrabo a, onni tire. (1190)

A chief who is impervious to advice eats a headless bird.

(Ampem 1999)

All too soon do the chiefs of today (and, sometimes, so did those of the past) forget that a chief is only the provisional occupant of a sacred stool, that he comes and goes whilst the stool lives on, and that he can be destooled the moment he disregards the traditional warning speech he was given on the day of his enstoolment:

Kuronti, Akwamu, Bokoro, Konton, Asere, Kyidom, Benkum, Twafo, Adonten, Nifa – all the elders say that I shall give you the Stool. Do not go after women. Do not become a drunkard. When we give you advice, listen to it. Do not gamble. We do not want you to disclose the origins of your subjects. We do not want you to abuse us. We do not want you to be miserly; we do not want one who disregards advice; we do not want you to regard us as fools; we do not want autocratic ways; we do not want bullying; we do not want beating. Take the Stool. We bless the Stool and give it to you. The Elders say that they give the Stool to you. (trans. in Busia 1951, 12)

Folktales are also, as Jean Cauvin rightly points out (Cauvin 1980), constantly and more perhaps than any other oral genre, at the crossroads of the past and the present, at the junction of two worlds (the ideal traditional world built by the ancestors, and the real world perverted by their descendants over the years). The harmonious village set-up into which everyone fits with total submissiveness to the religious and political order is, during each tale's performance, presented as threatened. The narration of folktales (*anansesem*, lit. "Ananse stories," in Akan), sometimes in the midst of similar social upheavals, is supposed to have a cathartic effect on the audience: that

is, generally, on members of the society that is being described by analogy. Each one of these texts exemplifies (at the moment of its performance) particular movements of the “texture” as defined by Simon Battestini.<sup>13</sup> The tales, when performed, represent *points* of views of individuals on the dynamics of their society.

Amidst the twenty Akan folktales we have so far edited and published in trilingual versions (A. Owusu-Sarpong 1998) – all of which were recorded in the rural areas of Asante and Brong-Ahafo over the past ten years – fifteen main *dramatis personae* are traditional authorities. Amongst those fifteen chiefs and queenmothers, two can be considered as anti-heroes, or as unpopular chiefs:

- the helpless chief of tale thirteen, who was unable to protect his townfolk against the danger of a murderous monster and who had to, in the end, bequeath half of his wealth to this godforsaken kingdom’s redeemers, and
- the haughty, preposterous and unfair chief of tale seventeen, who endangered the life of his village youth by overpricing his daughter’s beauty and who did as a result, lose her to prostitution.

All the other thirteen traditional authorities, represented in this corpus of Akan tales, are representative of the virtues and qualities expected of *good* chiefs:

- they are moral leaders, problem solvers, intermediaries, intercessors, and peacemakers, capable of reconciling individuals aggrieved against one another (tales two, four, and nineteen)
- they are achievers, builders, hardworking and enterprising, worthy of their title (Nana), kind, welcoming, willing to share their wealth with their people and foreigners, and therefore respected and feared by all (tales four and sixteen)
- in their own, personal lives, they are model fathers (tales nine and twelve), husbands and sons (tale four), always dignified, understanding, merciful and just, rewarding those deserving reward and punishing those who, amongst their closest relatives, called their wrath upon themselves; they are able to accept their faults and to make amends, in particular when they have meted out unfair treatment to one of their wives in a polygamous marriage (tales six and sixteen)

- they are the central figures of all public affairs, where and when problems of communal importance are to be solved at the royal courts or during festivals, on the durbar grounds; in the courts, they appear surrounded by their advisers, the elders and they administer justice without fear (tales nine, thirteen, sixteen, eighteen, and nineteen); they defend the truth in all its glory amidst the pageantry surrounding them in public gatherings and during ritual ceremonies (tales four, six, twelve, and sixteen).

Although they are, here and there, portrayed as morally frail and human, the final image one gets from this short overview is that of a sacred office belonging to a community: That of a temporary occupant of an ancestral stool, of a spiritual leader of the people, who no more belongs to him/herself (tale eighteen).

#### IMAGES OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES IN RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOKS

It may be of interest, at this point, to refer to one of the Right Reverend Dr. Peter K. Sarpong's most recent publications (Sarpong 1998), in which the Catholic archbishop of Kumasi symbolically makes an invocation to his ancestor to explain, in an epistolary format, the theme of inculturation. He deals, in particular, with the topic of chieftaincy and confirms the recognition still given the traditional authorities by Akan storytellers in this book of contemporary Christian theology.

In letter thirty-one, the Right Reverend Dr. Sarpong dwells on ancestral epithets, on appellations now given to Jesus, the founder of the Church, and borrowed from Akan royalty; Jesus' praise-names, now frequently in use during sermons, or in hymns and prayers, are traditional panegyrics, until then attributed to acclaimed chiefs:

- *Osagyefoo* (the conqueror)
- *Odayefoo* (doctor of medicine, healer)
- *Kantamanto* (the one who does not deceive you for he keeps his oath / he who has the power to do anything he wants)
- *Kurotwiamansa* (the leopard, cf., the *Asantehene*: the commander of the forest, fierce and beautiful / a majestic and dignified king)
- *Daasebre* (lit. "the one who wants to thank him will get tired" or

“to thank him enough is a herculean effort” = the provider)

- *Nyaamanehose* (a refuge for those in trouble)
- *Paapa* (a father to all)
- *Ahummobro* (a softhearted, merciful king).

The Akan Christian therefore identifies Christ with the perfect leader, who combines – without any human foibles – all the traditional leadership qualities the author had previously summarized in letter twenty-eight:

A traditional Asante leader, who later becomes the ancestor, is a man for others. He is chosen not for himself but for his people, and he is chosen to lead to a successful end. A traditional Asante leader, ... has, as his first task, to play a religious role. He is the intermediary between the living and the ancestors. He it is who has to lead the veneration of the ancestors. There are certain days during the year when he has to offer prayers to the ancestors; he has to see to it that the rules and regulations of the ancestors are kept; he has to keep the ancestors in the constant memory of his people.... This religious role is so important that if a chief fails to play it, he can easily be dismissed or destooled. The chief too is a legislator. Together with his counsellors, he makes laws for his people, regulations that stand the people in good stead. At the same time, he plays a judicial role, looking to it that the laws of his predecessors are kept and applied. He is the chief executive who sees to the smooth running of the society. He has a social role that he plays as father, brother and friend of those who belong to his society. His should not be a role of terror, of lording it over his subjects, but a role of love, paternal love. He must see to it that the customs and traditions of the society are kept; this is his cultural role. He must see to the aesthetic side of his society so that what is beautiful in the general connotation of the word, remains undisrupted, intact. A major role of the chief in the past was that of the military leader. He was a person that saw to it that his people were rid of the menace of internal and external aggression; and a chief who failed to play this role of courage and of protection of his people also stood in danger of being rejected. (Sarpong 1998, 141–42)

In *The Just King – The Story of Osei Tutu Kwame Asibe Bonsu*, two female writers of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Dr. Frederika Dadson and Dr. Wilhelmina Donkoh,<sup>14</sup> put their historical knowledge and their literary skills together to retell, for a young readership, and through the mouth of Opanin Owusu, a schoolboy's grandfather, the vivid story of one of the greatest amongst all Asante kings:

The story of Osei Tutu Kwamina is a good one. Long, but good. It is a good place to start. It was during his reign that the Asante people engaged both the British people and the Fante in a more direct confrontation than any Asantehene before him.... A great man, a great warrior, Osei Tutu Kwame Asibe Bonsu.... Brave and strong, a great father of the Asante nation and a great leader of the Asante army.... Osei Tutu Kwamina was never one to act in a hurry. This is one of the secrets of his success. He always seemed to reflect on the consequences of war and peaceful settlement... Osei Tutu was ... his old self, an understanding leader. (Dadson and Donkoh 2000)

These are some of the messages passed on by a fictional grandfather to his enthusiastic grandson, full of expectations about his history classes; messages passed on by two academics, desirous to transmit not only knowledge about historical facts, but a certain representation of a *good* traditional (and, why not contemporary) leader: that of a true peacemaker.

Finally, a third book worth mentioning here, is the collection of lifestories of *Ten Women Achievers from the Ashanti Region of Ghana* (Dolphyne 2000), amongst whom figures Nana Boatema-Afrakoma II, the queenmother of Juansua. She was chosen because, as indicated by the editor;

In Asante culture, the position of the queenmother is a very important one. She is the chief's major councillor. In the selection of a new chief her word is final. She also has traditional responsibilities relating to the role of women in society and the moral education of the young girls in the society.

Nana has been able to use her position to make meaningful contribution to her community and to the role of queenmothers ... she has organized workshops for queenmothers on various issues affecting their people. This is because she believes they need to reflect on the conditions prevailing in their communities and find

ways of introducing changes that will promote development. For example, ... she has advocated a reduction in the cost of funerals, and has organized workshops on environmental issues and the proper use of markets.

Nana Boatema-Afrakoma II thus appears as *the* progressive female rolemodel in this new area of traditional Asante (dual) authority described by scholars such as Beverly Stoeltje and Takyiwaa Manuh.

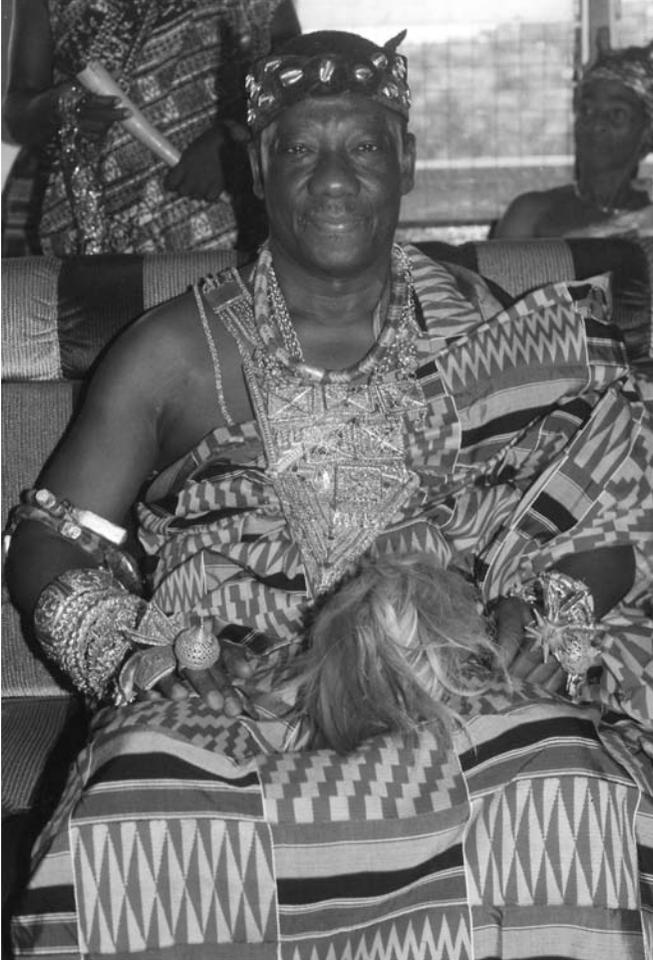
#### IMAGES OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES DRAWN FROM A SURVEY CONDUCTED IN THE ASANTE REGION

The positive appraisal of chieftaincy by contemporary court minstrels or by rural story-tellers, by a recognized Church leader, and by female academicians, was further echoed in many answers given by a cross-section of the Asante population during a series of interviews conducted as part of our TAARN Research Project (TAARN 2000).

We shall have to limit ourselves, for the purpose of this chapter, to three significant answers only, which all touch on the cherished memories of the past as well as on the hopes for the future. These three answers also illustrate the awareness and objective rationalization of the Ghanaian of today as far as the process of alteration of his culture is concerned.

“There are so many traditional values; some of them are truth and honesty, love and respect for the fellow man, respect for authority and long suffering,” said a seventy-year-old queenmother, Nana Serwaah Kwarteng, of Asante. “To me,” she added, “the most important is the respect for authority and for chieftaincy in particular. In the past, the chieftaincy institution wielded considerable influence because citizens could be banished from their hometowns when they constantly erred. With the introduction of the White man’s rule of law, who talks of banishment? The people are even in a hurry to leave the town already.”

Two other interviewees did propose a very balanced and critical view of the institution of chieftaincy (past and present); the first one was Akwasi Emmanuel, a thirty-five-year-old Asante headmaster who declared:



Daasebre\* Osei Bonsu II, Mamponghehene. He is the second in command of the Asante kingdom in Ghana. He is the Hon. Ghana Country Team Leader for the Traditional Authority Applied Research Network. He was also the registrar of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana. (\*traditional leader title)

“Each society needs a leader to direct its affairs. This is the reason why we enstool chiefs. A chief brings peace, he is a legislator. He solves conflicts, as soon as they surge forward. In the past he led his people to war; today problems are solved more amicably. A chief is now considered as an intermediary between his people and central government. This is how our contemporary society can develop effectively.... Unfortunately, the installation of a chief sometimes brings forth misunderstandings, disputes amongst royal families. A chief can also become an autocrat – which is dangerous; it can lead to dictatorship. Anyway, before the arrival of the Europeans, this was the system of government in our territory; it presented more advantages than disadvantages.” (TAARN 2000, no. 167)

A fifty-five-year-old banker, Richard Adusei, had this to say:

“Chieftaincy is an ideal leadership. A chief is the spiritual leader of his people. He is the leader of an army. In times of war, he goes ahead of the army, he faces the battle, as the Akan proverb says: “If the royal retreats from the battle front, the servant will be nowhere.” A chief is the father of his people. He is the link between the people and the gods. He is the supreme judge. A chief helps to improve his people’s living conditions. As their spiritual leader, he is the intermediary between his people and the gods in times of natural disasters.... A chief brings peace and creates harmony in his society. One unfortunate thing is that chiefs are only eligible amongst royals. And it happens that when a chief is a bad ruler/leader there is nobody to replace him meaningfully. Someone else might be competent to be a chief, but because he is not of royal blood he is not eligible. This state of affairs can lead to dictatorship and to corruption on the part of kingmakers. It is at the origin of chieftaincy disputes. But on the whole I believe that chieftaincy is a good system of traditional governance.” (TAARN 2000, no. 172)

## CONCLUSION

To describe *all* traditional values which serve as a context for rural local government in Ghana (such as the communal way of life), would require several chapters. For the purpose of this book, and in relationship with its other chapters, it was imperative that we limited ourselves to the sole domain of chieftaincy as a traditional form of government: Who were the *ideal* chiefs in the past? Who were they supposed to be? Who are the chiefs of today? What role does the Ghana Constitution of today devolve on them and what, from the point of view of their people especially, is expected of them? Chieftaincy for the people, of the people, and by the people.

The result of this varied survey of discourses is amazing: A wonderful consensus, both in tone and accent, transpires from all those voices that we have questioned from past oral sources, or from contemporary scholars, researchers, and interviews. Chieftaincy as an institution has come to stay in a country whose modern leaders have understood that the traditional authorities remain a vital source of inspiration for the Ghanaian population. Chieftaincy can survive in glory if regenerated according to the wishes of the people over whom the chiefs rule. But chieftaincy is also likely to degenerate and, thereby, lose its moral legitimacy if the chiefs of today give in to corruption and graft, self-seeking aggrandizement, when they should be looking for the vested and time-tested interests of the people that they are supposed to represent.

In this respect, Louise Bourgeois' artistic mural statement<sup>15</sup> of 1999 on "The Marriage of Reason and Squalor," in the Museum of Modern Art (New York), is, it seems to us, instructive:

"HAS THE DAY INVADED THE NIGHT  
OR  
HAS THE NIGHT INVADED THE DAY?"

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## NOTES

1. Eduardo Portella, a Brazilian philosopher and writer, was the director of Unesco from 1988 to 1993 and minister of Education in Brazil from 1979 to 1980.
2. Cf. Ali A. Mazrui's films and Mazrui and Levine 1986.
3. For an account of the conference, see Ray and van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal 1996. See also the edited complete collection of papers from the conference: Arhin, Ray and van Rouveroy 1995.
4. Project financed by the IDRC, Canada and coordinated by Donald I. Ray of the University of Calgary, Albert Owusu-Sarpong of the University of Kumasi, Tim Quinlan of the University of Durban–Westville, and Keshaw Sharma of the University of Botswana.
5. Cf. the multiple articles in the Ghanaian press, between 18 June and 13 July 1999, amongst which one may quote some vitriolic titles like "Mr. President, it is wrong to wave a finger at Nananom" (*The Pioneer*, 24 June 1999), "Rawlings must apologize to Asanteman" (*The Free Press*, 23–29 June 1999), "Is Ghana's unity under threat?" (*The Free Press*, 25 June – 1 July 1999), "Disrespect and contempt for Otumfuo" (*The Weekend Statesman*, 2–8 July 1999), "John, Ghanaians saw and heard it all" (*The Free Press*, 2–8 July 1999), or "Frankness or rudeness?" (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 12–13 July 1999). Cf. also Perrot 1999.
6. "Message from Otumfuo Osei Tutu II-Asantehene," as read and printed in the Official Programme distributed during the Banquet held at the Prempeh Assembly Hall, Kumasi, on Saturday, 6 May 2000.
7. For instance, the two-day seminar on HIV/AIDS organized jointly by the Manhyia Palace, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare; and the three-day Workshop on Land Management and Development organized by Otumfuo's Planning, Environment and Development Committee on "Chiefs: Custodians of Land, Inspiration for its sound use and Development," National House of Chiefs, both in Kumasi, in July 2000.
8. N.B. For the purpose of this chapter, we shall restrict ourselves to Akan texts, to books launched recently in Kumasi, and to a survey conducted in the Asante Region.
9. Extracts from the "History of *Mampon* in the Drum Language," in Rattray 1969.
10. K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti: A Study of the Influence of Contemporary Social Changes on Ashanti Political Institutions*, London: Oxford University Press, 1951, p. 51.
11. A. L. Adu, *The Role of Chiefs in the Akan Social Structure*, op. cit.
12. Alias Prof. Kessey, who was at the time of writing the Chairman of Council, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

13. Battestini 1997, 434: « Autour du mot, il y a les règles et le jeu de ses transformations, de ses associations dans le cadre général de la culture, de l'expérience, de l'histoire, de la psychologie de chacun et de chaque groupe humain. Cet ensemble de formes vivantes, imbriquées et dynamiques, paradoxalement libres, existe dans toutes les sociétés et pour tous les individus. Nous proposons de la nommer *texture...* ».
14. Dr. Donkoh is also a member of the IDRC-funded TAARN project.
15. Prof. Albert Owusu-Sarpong took pains to read through the text and offered a number of useful insights. For this we are grateful to him.

