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Africa Since Independence

A Comparative History

PAUL NUGENT



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First published 2004 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

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ISBN 0-333-68272-6 hardback
ISBN 0-333-68273-4 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Nugent, Paul, 1962–

Africa since independence : a comparative history / Paul Nugent.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-333-68272-6 (cloth) – ISBN 0-333-68273-4 (paper)

1. Africa – History – 1960– I. Title.

DT30.S.N84 2004

960.3'2—dc22

2004044503

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04

Printed by Creative Print & Design (Wales), Ebbw Vale

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Modernity and Tradition, Power and Prestige: Monarchs, Chiefs and Politicians, 1956–74

A chief is a chief by the people.

Pedi proverb

If Africans have had chiefs, it was because all human societies have had them at one stage or another. But when 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.

Govan Mbeki

In 1970, Pierre Alexandre, who had served a lengthy stint in the French colonial service, observed that:

The problem of chieftaincy in Africa would seem today, according to certain points of view, to be outmoded, a thing of the past relegated to the background by the more pressing questions of political, social and economic development which are more in tune with the modern world. Chiefs now appear to interest only the ethnologist, if not the archaeologist or even the paleontologist.¹

More than three decades later, the suggestion that chieftaincy is destined for extinction seems decidedly misplaced. Although post-colonial chiefs have lost most of their formal powers, they have often carved out other niches for themselves. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the chiefs were also able to turn the clock back in many countries, by demonstrating the role they could play in conflict mediation and reconciliation. With the time-lag that is inevitable in academic writing, historians, political scientists and anthropologists have all begun to reappraise chieftaincy as post-colonial phenomenon.² As things stand, there is nothing which really serves as an adequate synthesis. This chapter therefore attempts to bring together some of the most recent research as well as drawing on an older literature, with a view to making some broad conclusions

about the saliency of 'traditional' institutions in the first decade-and-a-half of independence.

4.1 The conceptual framework

Decolonisation was such a fraught affair because it involved a transfer of power at two levels simultaneously: that is, from European officials to African politicians and from chiefs to locally elected leaders. The electoral principle, which had never found favour amongst the colonial authorities, was now formally enshrined as the basis on which the right to command rested. In the last days of colonialism, there was almost constant electioneering as a myriad of decision-making bodies – local and urban councils, regional and national governments – were voted into office on the basis of universal adult suffrage. Office-holders now claimed legitimacy on the basis of their popular mandate. National governments were often reluctant to accept that locally elected leaders enjoyed legitimacy in their own right. A common pattern therefore was for the elective component of local councils to be watered down, as central governments installed their own nominees – normally comprising those who were loyal party members. However, it was not all one-way traffic. Elected politicians at the centre also faced challenges to their authority from different quarters. One was the newly indigenised Armed Forces, as we will see in greater detail in Chapter 6. The second challenge tended to be less dramatic and therefore attracted less attention and that emanated from the chiefs.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, chiefs had been the most trusted intermediaries of the colonial regimes, only to find themselves jilted at the altar of independence. Traditional rulers did not take rejection lightly and during the run-up to independence they often fought a rearguard action to recapture a political voice. They argued that, as the custodians of hallowed tradition, they embodied a deeper legitimacy than politicians who came and went like the changing of the seasons. Amongst other things, this meant that they were duty-bound to speak out on behalf of their people when the politicians got it wrong. In some countries, like Rwanda, the tussle between the chiefs and the politicians assumed an explicitly ethnic dimension, which was resolved through resort to force. In many others, however, chiefs continued to matter because aspiring politicians needed their backing at the polls. When soldiers seized power, they were even more desperate to find political allies and the chiefs were amongst the first groups they turned to for endorsement. The salience of chieftaincy therefore varied, depending on the skill with which the chiefs played their card as intermediaries between national leaders and their local constituents.

Mahmood Mamdani contends that colonial rule in the countryside was characterised by a 'decentralised despotism' exercised by chiefs who owed their authority to their European masters, and that this setup was never effectively dismantled.³ Now, there is abundant evidence to suggest that colonial chiefs were never 'traditional' in any straightforward sense. Even where the incumbents (almost always male) could trace their claims to pre-colonial ruling lines,

they were less dependent upon their councillors and survived on the basis of keeping their European superiors happy. Mamdani's distinction between urban and rural power structures is equally instructive. Nevertheless, his formulation is a curious one because it implies that the chiefs were scarcely affected by decolonisation, whereas the overwhelming weight of evidence would suggest that they were amongst the principal casualties of the independence settlement. The 'decentralised despots' of post-colonial Africa were not the chiefs, but rather the *préfets* and District Commissioners who administered rural peoples through local bureaucracies and appointed local councils. At best, the chiefs found themselves at one remove from the structures of decision-making.

Nevertheless, across the greater part of the continent the institution of chieftaincy did not enter a terminal decline. Indeed in the later twentieth century it even experienced something of a revival. This apparent paradox can be resolved by making some fundamental distinctions: namely between formal power, influence and prestige. By formal power we mean the inherent right to exercise and execute decisions. Whereas the latter is normally laid down in writing, often in the form of a constitutional provision, influence is altogether more elusive. Formal power almost always confers influence as well, but the latter may also derive from social networks which lie outside the formal structures altogether. Hence when a chief is courted at election time, it is not because he has the right to instruct voters, but because he is likely to know what themes will play well with the local electorate. Prestige is something different again. It arises in part from the conscious display much loved by traditional office-holders – such as the dazzling exhibition of gold and other artifacts surrounding the Asantehene in Ghana during traditional festivals – but it is also manufactured by the daily expressions of respect on the part of state officials and/or deference on the part of ordinary people. Where there is formal power, prestige is sometimes part of the package, although governments have often been inclined to treat chiefs as mere functionaries. But it is important to recognise that the prestige of chiefs in post-colonial Africa has often had very little to do with the possession of formal power. Indeed, some distancing from the power structure has helped chiefs to present themselves as the custodian of a quite separate sphere, bounded by 'tradition' which lies beyond the ken of the politicians. The latter have courted the chiefs precisely because they preside over a cultural commodity which they do not possess. Because certain governments played on a modern-traditional dualism after independence – revealing different faces to different audiences – this helped the chiefs to preserve their own role.

The relationship between formal power, influence and prestige is therefore a complex one, and the permutations vary from one country to the next. In this chapter, I aim to give some sense of the combinations which worked themselves out in the early years of independence. I have used the colonial legacy as an organising principle because this set the broad contours of what was to follow. I will begin with a discussion of those countries where a single monarchy, with substantive power, was in place during the terminal phase of colonial rule. I will then consider the fate of traditional rulers in the former British colonies where the Indirect Rule legacy was profound. I then turn to the former French

colonies where there was a long tradition of regarding chiefs as mere instruments of administrative rule. Finally, I will consider the special case of South Africa, where Bantu Administration policies attempted to breathe life back into an Indirect Rule canon which had only just been abandoned elsewhere.

4.1.1 We four kings: Ethiopia, Burundi, Swaziland and Lesotho

In colonial Africa, European officials tended to think in terms of an ensemble of chiefdoms, which were more or less uniform in appearance and more or less hierarchical depending on the predilections and phobias of the powers concerned. However, there was a handful of territories in which a single monarchy held sway – namely Ethiopia, Burundi, Lesotho, Swaziland and Rwanda – and it is with these somewhat exceptional cases with which we begin.

Ethiopia falls into a category all of its own by virtue of the fact that its modern imperial system was the creation of the Emperors Menelik and Haile Selassie rather than the Europeans. The Italian occupation, which lasted from 1935 to 1941, brought the suspension of the monarchy and enabled some of the regional nobility to pursue their own ambitions in collaboration with the invaders. On the back of the Italian defeat, Haile Selassie picked up more or less where he had left off. Since becoming the substantive Emperor in 1930, Haile Selassie had embraced a modernising agenda, which included road-building, the creation of a professional standing army, the establishment of the Bank of Ethiopia, the founding of modern schools and administrative reforms. He even introduced Ethiopia's first written constitution in 1931, borrowing freely from the Japanese constitution of 1889.⁴ This provided for a Parliament, comprising a Chamber of Deputies elected by members of the nobility and a Senate directly appointed by the Emperor. After 1941, the modernisation project was resumed with greater urgency across the board, with financial backing from the United States.⁵ This entailed further improvements to communications and, although the expansion of educational was slow at the base (with only 52,965 school-goers in 1950), the opening of the University of Addis Ababa reflected a determination to nurture a cadre of skilled Ethiopians. This bore directly on the issue of administrative reform. Whereas the empire had previously been ruled through devolution of power to the nobility, Haile Selassie sought to nurture a new class of officials who would be loyal to their creator. These were individuals whose position rested less on high birth than on educational attainment. In the provinces, the Emperor was sometimes forced to make compromises with powerful families – including those that had collaborated with the Italians – but his ultimate objective was to break the hold of entrenched provincial interests and to concentrate decision-making on Addis Ababa. The conception of Haile Selassie as an arch-conservative, which was one of the many by-products of the Ethiopian revolution, is in many ways wide of the mark. The Emperor actively embraced reform on the understanding that the survival of Ethiopia, and hence his own patrimony, depended on it.

All the same, it would also be mistaken to think of the Emperor as committed to bureaucratic efficiency. As John Markakis has eloquently demonstrated, the reforms were intended to strengthen the hand of a resolutely absolutist monarch.⁶ All decisions supposedly emanated from the will of the Emperor, as

befitted the notional descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This was in spite of the fact that the Revised Constitution of 1955 introduced universal adult suffrage for elections to the Chamber of Deputies (if not the Senate) for the first time.⁷ The Constitution vested full executive power in the Emperor and stipulated the responsibilities of Ministers towards himself.⁸ Those who were supposed to implement the decisions had to interpret the wishes of the Emperor, even when these were not clearly stated. Ministers, who were given overlapping responsibilities, were appointed and demoted by Haile Selassie in a manner which was designed to keep them on their toes and to foster a culture of intense competition.⁹ Reputations were typically made and unmade on the basis of rumour and intrigue carried out within the palace walls, where senior officials spent much of their working week.¹⁰ All of this made for effective political control, but also for a less than efficient administration. The Cabinet almost never met because collective responsibility was not a presumption. The elaboration of the Ministry of the Pen was supposed to impart greater bureaucratic cohesion, but this was subject to the same vagaries as the rest of the structure. The Minister of Finance had a particularly thankless task because the Emperor invented new spending commitments as the whim seized him.¹¹

Haile Selassie had, however, embarked on an enormous political gamble. By weakening the nobility, he neutralised a perennial threat to his position. But the nurturing of educated commoners as a counter-elite raised the possibility that the latter would acquire their own political ambitions. The Emperor's strategy of encouraging direct dependence on his person worked for as long as the modern elite was compact. But as the latter's numbers steadily expanded, the Emperor became dangerously detached from sections of society which were increasingly conscious of the gulf between global trends – not least African decolonisation – and what they experienced at home. The contradiction was an obvious one: how could men who had drunk at the well of modernity reconcile themselves with the divine right of kings? The Emperor's first rude awakening came in December 1960, when the head of the Imperial Bodyguard, Mengistu Newaye, and his brother Girmame, attempted to stage a coup while the Emperor was abroad. The Newaye brothers were both highly educated and close to the structures of power, and in that sense belonged to the very constituency which Haile Selassie had been so carefully cultivating. Girmame's experiences as a sub-provincial governor had, however, convinced him that 'feudalism' was to blame for the economic backwardness of Ethiopia and for institutionalised mismanagement in the provinces. The Emperor was not directly attacked and the plotters apparently envisaged the movement towards some form of constitutional monarchy.¹² But this would have amounted to a revolutionary transformation in itself.

On this occasion, the monarchy was saved by the failure of the Newaye brothers to win over the Armed Forces, although it is highly significant that University students took to the streets in their support. The coup attempt was crushed and Haile Selassie then set about restructuring his security apparatus to prevent a repeat occurrence. However, the habits and assumptions of imperial governance remained pretty much unchanged. The simple fact of the matter is

that while the Emperor could be magnanimous, he could not share power without ceasing to be the King of Kings. Although the 1960 putsch was abortive, it represented a historic turning point because it was revealed that the Emperor was not in fact all-knowing and all-seeing. In subsequent years, students and urban workers became increasingly assertive, thereby preparing the ground for the cataclysm of 1974. In some respects, the 1960 coup was to the Ethiopian revolution what 1905 were to the Russian Revolution. In each case, a systemic crisis was laid bare in most of its essentials, but the right mix of conjunctural ingredients was absent.

In 1974, students, civil servants and workers were even more deeply alienated from the regime, but on this occasion what was crucial was that disillusionment was rife within the Armed Forces as well. The malaise was brought to a head by the convergence of three crises which the imperial regime singularly failed to deal with. The first was the outbreak of famine across northern Ethiopia over 1972/73. Although the failure of the rains was the underlying cause of mass starvation, as it was in West Africa at the same time, what turned it into a political issue was the failure of the Emperor to take the matter seriously. Despite the fact that up to 200,000 peasants had died by 1973, the attitude was that famine conditions constituted an embarrassment which was best swept under the imperial carpet.¹³ Not only was the government painfully slow to mobilise internal resources and external assistance, but Ethiopia actually continued to export significant quantities of agricultural produce. However, after news of the scale of the human tragedy reached the outside world and was widely publicised, staff and students at Addis Ababa University were galvanised into action. Student demonstrations in sympathy with the peasantry led to clashes with the police, which further compounded the sense of outrage.

The second conjuncture was the steep rise in oil prices following the OPEC embargo of 1973, which hit the Ethiopian economy hard. The inevitable result was galloping inflation which left a large hole in the pockets of urban wage-earners. Taxi drivers came out on strike over pump prices in February 1974 and teachers followed suit.¹⁴ This provided the cue for a medley of strikes and demonstrations within the capital, which brought public services and communications to a grinding halt. Even priests of the Orthodox Church took to the streets, demanding better remuneration.¹⁵ Finally, there was the escalating war against Eritrean secession which was at least partly of the Emperor's own making. The hardships experienced by Ethiopian non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and the ranks contrasted with the comfortable lifestyles of senior officers who also tended to be Amharas. It was mutiny within the 24th Brigade at Neghele (in Sidamo) in January 1974 which actually ignited the revolution. The failure of the government to swiftly resolve this particular incident, after privates and NCOs had arrested their officers, led to a rash of mutinies across the country – first at Dolo on the Kenyan border and then at the Debre-Zeit Airforce base, some 50 kilometres from Addis Ababa.¹⁶ Crucially, the mutineers remained in close contact with one other, thereby spreading the contagion from one unit to the next.

What brought about the downfall of the Emperor was the steady haemorrhaging of his moral authority over the course of 1974. A pattern was

established whereby Haile Selassie, or his representatives, caved in to particular demands which merely galvanised other interest groups to table their own. With each fresh concession, the mystique surrounding the Emperor evaporated into thin air. Responding to ongoing restiveness within the Armed Forces, the government of Aklilu Habte Wolde offered substantial pay increases, but this was followed almost immediately by fresh acts of mutiny in Asmara and elsewhere. In April, the Emperor accepted Aklilu's resignation and installed Endelkatchew Makonnen as Prime Minister. Crucially, he also promised a new constitutional framework which would have made the Prime Minister accountable to Parliament rather than to himself. The Confederation of Labour Unions (CELU) wasted no time in presenting Endelkatchew with a list of demands which turned partly on wages and conditions, but also explicitly backed those of the student movement. When a General Strike was launched in March, followed by wildcat strikes, the new government was forced to concede substantial wage and salary increases to workers.

The control of the new administration was, however, slipping as Armed Forces co-ordinating committees began to take a more active part in the political process. In June, militants formed a Military-Police Co-ordinating Committee which invited provincial police and military units to send representatives to a meeting on the 28 June. The 106 delegates who attended constituted the Co-ordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and the Territorial Army – the Derg ('Committee') for short. This committee began arresting members of the former Aklilu administration and then went a step further by rounding up Ministers, elements of the nobility and even members of the royal family.¹⁷ This contributed to the power vacuum at the centre which the Derg itself proceeded to fill. In the last week of July, the Derg deposed Endelkatchew and installed Mikael Imru in his place. While work proceeded on the drafting of a new constitution, the Derg set about dismantling key institutions of Haile Selassie's government. The Emperor himself posed something of a dilemma, and he was placed under effective house arrest as the Derg considered its options. In a fascinating reconstruction of the last days of Haile Selassie, Ryszard Kapuscinski paints a picture of an Emperor whose power evaporated daily as his officials melted away.¹⁸ Having initially contemplated the retention of Haile Selassie in the role of a constitutional monarch, the Derg eventually decided that the octogenarian Emperor had to be got rid of. The anti-climax came on 12 September when Haile Selassie was removed from the palace and asked to join a waiting Volkswagen. After a brief protest at the indignity of it all, Haile Selassie was driven away, never to be seen again. He was murdered the following year and his body secretly buried. The Derg duly transformed itself into the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) under the formal chairmanship of Lt.-General Aman Andom. However, real power lay within the Derg itself, none of whose members ranked above Major. The extinction of the monarchy was now complete.

Haile Selassie's hopes of combining modernisation with absolutism proved an impossible trick in the latter half of the twentieth century when the basis of the Emperor's claims had come to be regarded as anachronistic. The cruel irony was that he was deposed by precisely the constituencies which he had so

assiduously built up – namely, students, civil servants and soldiers. As Donald Donham suggests, the latter turned their back on the monarchy, which they associated with backwardness, and embraced what they construed as modernity.¹⁹ A number of commentators have remarked on the narrow social base of the revolution. Apart from the mutinies, the high drama was confined to Addis Ababa. Andargachew estimates that the urban population comprised 3 million out of nearly 32 million people, of whom the civil servants, workers, students and soldiers made up a mere 300,000.²⁰ But while it is true that peasants did not topple the Emperor, Donham maintains that the language of modernity was no less seductive in remote rural locations.²¹ To that extent, the demise of Haile Selassie was rooted in a tectonic shift within greater Ethiopia.

The monarchies of Rwanda and Burundi differed in that while they emerged out of pre-colonial kingdoms, they were remodelled in profound ways by the Germans and later the Belgians. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the ‘Hutu revolution’ culminated in the abolition of the Rwandan monarchy on the eve of independence. In Burundi, by contrast, it appeared as if the *mwami* might turn back the tides of republicanism. A crucial difference was that Hutus had been incorporated into the chieftaincy hierarchy to a greater extent than in Rwanda, despite Belgian reforms.²² Hence the monarchy was never regarded as a purely Tutsi affair. Another related difference was that there were two fiercely competing ruling lineages in Burundi, the Bezi and Batare, creating a fault line which cut across the ‘tribal’ divide. In the 1950s, *Mwami* Mwambutsa IV from the Bezi line was under attack from Belgian administrators who toyed with the idea of installing a more pliable Batare candidate in his place. It was this, rather than ethnicity, which animated Burundian politics.

When political parties were formed in 1959 these replicated the divisions. After failing at the polls in the communal elections of 1960, the Bezi-oriented UPRONA was triumphant in the legislative elections of the following year, winning no fewer than 58 out of a total of 64 seats. The incoming Prime Minister, Louis Rwagasore, happened to be the eldest son of the *Mwami*, and so could be expected to accord due respect to the king. But at the same time, Rwagasore belonged to a younger, educated elite which was explicitly modern and nationalist in outlook. Lemarchand observes that Rwagasore also had an avid following amongst the ‘Hutu masses’.²³ The political alignments which were taking shape were, however, shattered by the assassination of Rwagasore (with possible Belgian complicity) a month after the elections. The struggle over the succession took on an ethnic dimension, influenced in part by events across the border in Rwanda. Rival Tutsi and Hutu candidates emerged, splitting the ruling party into so-called Monrovia (Hutu) and Casablanca (Tutsi) factions. The impasse enabled *Mwami* Mwambutsa to step in, initially as an arbiter but increasingly as a player in his own right. In May 1965, following two years in which domestic political rivalries became intertwined with the fighting in the eastern Congo (see Chapter 3), the king agreed to arrange elections. Because Hutus were in a numerical majority, Hutu politicians had everything to gain by playing the ethnic card. However, the refusal of the king to appoint a Hutu Prime Minister after the polls fuelled the perception that he had become a captive of Tutsi interests.

A crucial turning point came in October 1965 when Hutu elements within the security forces killed the Prime Minister and attacked the palace. *Mwami* Mwambutsa fled across the border to the Congo, and it was left to Captain Michel Micombero to quash the rebellion. The reprisals taken against 'Hutus' as a category led to thousands of deaths, thereby adding a dose of objective reality to the perceived primacy of ethnicity. *Mwami* Mwambutsa never returned to the country, but appointed his son to act in his place, who formally assumed the throne as *Mwami* Ntare III in July 1966. The monarchy had been severely shaken, but it stood every chance of bouncing back because of its possible role in bridging the ethnic divide. Unfortunately for *Mwami* Ntare, his attempt to take an active part in proceedings was not to the liking of Tutsi militants, and the king soon found himself at odds with the military junta. The king waited for an official delegation to leave for an OAU summit and then, on 7 November, endeavoured to make a radio broadcast suspending the government by royal decree. This royal putsch misfired and on the 28th the Micombero regime declared the abolition of the monarchy.

This was not quite the end of the story. In the years that followed, the conflict became increasingly ugly as Hutu insurgents and their Congolese allies raided across the border and the military took reprisals against Hutu civilians. This culminated in the pogroms of 1972 when perhaps as many as 200,000 people were slaughtered and some 150,000 fled to neighbouring states. The deposed *Mwami* might have still have provided a focus for those Burundians who wished to see the conflict brought to an end. Possibly for that reason, Ntare was abducted from Uganda on 30 March, flown back to Bujumbura and secretly murdered by agents of the military regime.²⁴ Micombero later claimed that the former king had been conspiring with Hutu plotters whose attempted rebellion at the end of April provided an excuse for the killing. Although this is highly doubtful, it does support the contention that the monarchy was not regarded as the property of the Tutsis alone. Unlike in Rwanda, the Burundian monarchy was extinguished precisely because it had the capacity to straddle the ethnic divide.

In Southern Africa, the kingdoms of Basutoland (Lesotho) and Swaziland had been forged during the turbulent years of the nineteenth century. Swaziland was later reduced to a protectorate of the South African Republic and lost most of its land to white settlers. After the South African War (1899–1902), Britain converted Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechualand (Botswana) into High Commission territories under the joint administration of a Commissioner who was physically located in South Africa. All three territories remained closely tied to South Africa through the export of migrant labour to the gold mines, and there was a British expectation that they would ultimately be absorbed by their more powerful neighbour. The election of the National Party regime in 1948, however, put paid to that prospect in the short term. Nevertheless, deep-seated fears about annexation continued to animate the internal politics of these territories during the 1950s. Another feature which all three territories shared was a British attachment to Indirect Rule. Whereas eight Tswana paramountcies were recognised in Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland were administered through a single monarchy. The British initially left considerable

powers over the allocation of land, the dispensation of justice and the appointment of lesser chiefs to the respective kings. In the mid-1940s, these territories experienced their own version of the 'second colonial occupation' which was manifested in a greater European willingness to interfere in the daily lives of rural populations. However in Swaziland, a series of Proclamations in 1950 enabled the king to claw back many of his prerogatives. He was given powers to regulate many areas of Swazi life, to issue rules which did not conflict with British laws and to oversee the native courts.²⁵ Furthermore, the king held in trust the land which was formally allocated to Swazis as well as that which was later bought back from the white settlers. Because half of the total territory continued to lie in non-Swazi hands, there was considerable land hunger which placed the chiefly hierarchy in a powerful position vis-à-vis the peasantry.²⁶ In Basutoland, by contrast, the king was left in a rather weaker position. He lost the power to appoint and dismiss chiefs in 1946. The chiefs themselves lost their courts and the right to collect fines, which were taken over by government bureaucrats.²⁷ Crucially, however, the monarchy retained control over the system whereby chiefs allocated land.

When the winds of political change finally swept into this corner of southern Africa, the effect was as profound as elsewhere. The end result was, however, strikingly different in Lesotho and Swaziland. In Basutoland, the very large numbers of migrant workers who shuttled backwards and forwards from South Africa (around 200,000 per year by independence) had an important influence on local politics. Many of the founders of the first truly political organisation – the Basutoland African Congress (BAC), which was launched in 1952 – had been involved in the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, including its leader Ntsu Mokhehle. The BAC campaigned for substantial progress towards self-government lest Basutoland fall prey to South African imperialism. The BAC, which was largely composed of teachers and migrant labourers, also demanded a legislature in which the seats would be held by elected representatives rather than chiefs. At this time, the monarchy was in a transitional state because the heir to the throne, Bereng Seeiso, was pursuing his academic studies in Oxford, leaving the kingdom in the hands of an unpopular female Regent, Mantsebo.

After some resistance, the British agreed in 1958 to establish a legislature in which indirectly elected representatives would enjoy parity with nominated chiefs. Although this was a limited concession, it did confirm that Basutoland was not to be treated as an exception to the African rule. With an eye on the 1960 elections, the BAC reconstituted itself as the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). Modelling itself on Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP), the BCP consolidated its hold on the teachers union, and infiltrated a range of voluntary associations, including football clubs, youth and women's associations.²⁸ The image of the BCP as a radical nationalist party provoked consternation within the British administration, the upper echelons of the chiefly hierarchy and the Catholic Church, all of whom began looking for more palatable alternatives. One was the Basutoland National Party (BNP) which was formed in 1958 by Chief Leabua Jonathan (a minor chief), who enjoyed very close links to the Regent. The BNP advocated some modernisation of chieftaincy, but promised to do so in collaboration with the chiefs. Another was the pro-royalist

Marematlou Party (MP) which was formed in 1957 around the single issue of the enthronement of Bereng Seeiso. When this was achieved in 1960, the MP did not dissolve but continued to pose as the defender of royal interests.

On the basis of a very limited turnout, the BCP emerged with 32 of the 40 indirectly elected seats in the 1960 elections.²⁹ However, because half of the seats in the National Council were filled by chiefly appointees, it was possible to restrict it to a single representative on the executive. Mokhehle himself was pointedly frozen out. The BNP won a single seat, but Jonathan who had failed in his own electoral bid, was later appointed by Mosheshoe II as a chiefly representative.³⁰ The MP fared rather better, winning 5 seats on the National Council and taking one place on the executive. The BCP, which had been cut out of power at the centre, nevertheless enjoyed majority control of many District Councils where it endeavoured to take control at the expense of the chiefs. In the years that followed these first elections, the balance of forces tilted against the party which appeared to pose the greatest threat to royal interests. As happened in many other African countries, however, the politicians who appeared most supportive of the traditional power structure often turned out to be its nemesis. In the wake of the 1960 elections, the BNP continued to enjoy the patronage of the chiefly hierarchy, the Catholic Church and (covertly) the South African government. By contrast, the BCP experienced a damaging split which mirrored the breakaway of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) from the ANC in South Africa.³¹

The formal powers of the monarchy had already been pared back, but Mosheshoe enjoyed some leverage by virtue of his prerogative of appointment. In 1963, however, representatives of the main parties sat on a Constitutional Commission which recommended the confinement of royal discretion to matters of land tenure and chiefly discipline.³² Chiefly representatives in the legislature steered through amendments which were designed to swing the balance the other way, but the main party leaders were determined to stick by their republican guns. In 1964, Mosheshoe was eventually forced to sign up to a constitution in which his powers were to be strictly nominal. Real power would henceforth be vested in a Prime Minister, who was accountable to a parliament elected under conditions of universal adult suffrage for the first time.³³ The lower house was comprised entirely of directly elected representatives, although chiefs were still nominated to the Senate. In the 1965 elections, the BNP won 31 seats in the National Assembly to 25 by the BCP and four by the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP).³⁴

When Chief Jonathan made a formal request for independence, the British Government convened a conference in London in June 1966 which was a bruising encounter. Jonathan insisted that the king should enjoy the status of a constitutional monarch, but without substantive powers. In particular, he maintained that the position of head of the Armed Forces should reside with the Prime Minister, rather than the king in his capacity as Head of State. The BCP which had consistently argued for strict limits to royal power now joined the MFP in arguing for a wider constitutional role for the king. Unfortunately for them, the British decided to back Jonathan.³⁵ Independence came in October 1966 and was followed by measures which were calculated to further weaken

the monarchy. All tax-gathering responsibilities were transferred to the capital, and under the Chieftaincy Act the king lost his powers of discipline over lesser chiefs, who were henceforth accountable only to the Minister of Chieftainship Affairs.³⁶ But at the same time, the BNP regime also took the radical step in 1968 of dismantling the local government system, which had allowed people to elect their own village committees and District Councils. These reforms, which were intended to weaken the opposition parties as well as the monarchy, faced a crucial test in the upcoming elections in 1970.

When the BNP appeared destined to lose, Chief Jonathan simply suspended the constitution and declared a state of emergency. He arrested many opposition leaders, but significantly he also detained Mosheshoe himself, who stood accused of plotting a coup. The regime proceeded to dismiss swathes of officials at every level of the administration.³⁷ In place of local democracy, the BNP government substituted development committees and land development committees, both of which were made up of chiefly appointees. Although an electoral element was later reintroduced, chiefs and government nominees retained much of their dominance.³⁸ At the national level, Jonathan convened an interim parliament in 1973, in which all the main parties were supposed to be represented. However, the corporatist formula scarcely concealed Jonathan's intention to run the country single-handedly. The regime never went as far as abolition of the monarchy – although it toyed with forcing an abdication – primarily because it had no need to resort to extreme measures. Mosheshoe returned from eight months of enforced exile suitably chastened, and reconciled himself to his purely symbolic role – at least, for the time being.

On the surface, the BNP appeared to have undercut the powers of the king and the principal chiefs, whilst according greater prerogatives to village chiefs – thereby exploiting one of the fault lines within Basotho chieftaincy. However, this was an optical illusion. In 1975, Jonathan made it clear that chieftaincy at all levels was henceforth to be in the gift of the government:

I would say that the chiefs are not as important any more ... But the institution of chieftaincy is an important arm of government. It is responsible for peace in the rural areas. We have a very small police force and it cannot cope with law and order. The chiefs work on behalf of government. To keep order is a function for which the chiefs are paid. If a chief does not fulfil this function he is dismissed.³⁹

In this, the Jonathan regime conformed to a fairly typical pattern. Where Lesotho is perhaps unusual is in the extent to which local powers were usurped by development agencies and state bureaucrats especially with respect to land.⁴⁰ As James Ferguson has persuasively argued, development projects which were often a failure in purely economic terms nevertheless performed a critical function in enabling central government to strengthen its administrative grip over the rural areas.⁴¹

The outcome could hardly have been more different in Swaziland which diverged in two respects. On the one hand, white settlers were an important factor in the political equation. On the other, Sobhuza II (who came to the throne in 1921) was a shrewd operator with considerable experience in dealing

with officials and settlers alike. As in Lesotho, the greatest threat emanated from the educated sections of society and workers who felt excluded from the structures of power.⁴² In 1960, the Swaziland Progressive Party (SPP) was deliberately sidelined in the deliberations of a constitutional committee which was dominated by settlers and chiefs. After a series of schisms and realignments, the SPP transformed itself into the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC). Like the BPC, the NNLC leadership was closely associated with the ANC in South Africa and drew inspiration from Nkrumah's brand of Pan-Africanism. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it was not to the liking of the settlers or Sobhuza, who perceived it as anti-white and anti-royalist respectively. Two other parties, the Swaziland Democratic Party (SDP) and the Mbandzeni National Convention (MNC) were regarded as more accommodating.

A turning point came in 1963 when the NNLC backed a general strike, which had begun on the railways and spread to the mines.⁴³ The strike, which was construed as a challenge to the moral authority of Sobhuza himself, was crushed with the assistance of British troops, following which NNLC leaders were put on trial. This weakened the principal challenger to the traditional power structure, just as the latter was beginning to regroup. The first constitutional committee had recommended vesting substantial powers in the king, such as control over mineral rights, which the British were reluctant to agree to. When the latter sought to water down these proposals, the monarchy mobilised to defend its interests. This culminated in the formation of the Imbokodvo National Movement (INM) which was to all intents and purposes the party of Sobhuza. To the alarm of the three existing parties, the INM contested the 1964 elections with the backing of the settler United Swaziland Association (USA). The INM made optimal use of the chiefs to get ordinary Swazis to rally behind the monarchy. The result was the INM won the elections comfortably, leading to the political capitulation of the SDP and the MNC.

The constitution under which Swaziland became independent was highly favourable to the monarchy. Control over mineral rights were indeed vested in the king who was also empowered to nominate one-fifth of the members of the House of Assembly and half of the Senate. Given the coercive resources underpinning the INC, it could also expect to win a majority of the elected seats. It made a clean sweep in the 1967 elections because of the peculiarities of the voting system.⁴⁴ Five years later, the NNLC won a single constituency which entitled it to three seats. Even this was unacceptable to the INM which did everything in its power to have one of the prospective MPs disqualified on the grounds of being an alien. When the Appeal Court failed to fall into line, a constitutional crisis resulted. This was resolved on 12 April 1973 when the king announced the suspension of the constitution and his assumption of all legislative, executive and judicial powers. Following a predictable script, the leadership of the NNLC was detained and opposition was effectively proscribed. King Sobhuza remained the absolute ruler of Swaziland until 1978 when a new constitution was introduced to give the stamp of legitimacy to what was in effect a royal coup. As before, Parliament was divided into a House of Assembly and a Senate. Forty members of the House were to be elected indirectly from local assemblies (or *tinkundhla*) which could be tightly controlled by royal officials,

while the king was empowered to nominate ten others.⁴⁵ The House of Assembly in turn elected ten members to the Senate, while the king appointed an equal number. In practice, though, Sobhuza ruled by Orders in Council until his death in 1982.

The contrast between the destinies of the Basotho and Swazi monarchs could hardly have been starker. The one had been constitutionally emasculated and then publicly humiliated in the wake of a coup launched by the politicians; the other had extracted a constitution which was favourable to himself before launching his own coup against refractory politicians. However the king of Lesotho had fared comparatively well by comparison with his counterparts in Ethiopia and Burundi. Here, the monarchies were abolished outright and the last incumbents were murdered, providing spectacular illustrations of how the balance of power in post-colonial Africa had shifted.

4.1.2 *Breaking the indirect rules: Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania and Botswana*

The next set of countries are those where British Indirect Rule policies had conferred substantial powers upon chiefs prior to decolonisation. An obvious starting point is Nigeria because it was here that Indirect Rule provided the closest approximation to a British philosophy of governance. Although the British were eventually forced to concede that it could not be applied willy-nilly to the decentralised societies of the South-east, they did take the policy as far as they could in the North and West of the country. In the North, British Residents saw it as their duty to oversee the Native Authority (NA) system so as to ensure 'sound administration', and intervened in matters of succession, but to a large extent the Emirate structures were self-regulating.⁴⁶ Most northerners would therefore have encountered colonial justice in the form of Native Courts, presided over by Alkalis applying principles of Islamic law. As late as 1958, Sklar observes, there were only three Magistrates Courts for the whole of the Northern Region, with the result that 80 per cent of all criminal and 85 per cent of civil cases were transacted through the Native Courts.⁴⁷ At the same time, northerners paid their taxes – which were initially a continuation of earlier taxes, but were eventually consolidated into a flat-rate assessment – into the Native Treasuries through collectors appointed by the relevant NA. The erstwhile Sokoto Caliphate continued to be bound together by an elaborate administrative hierarchy of district and village heads and titled officials which stretched down to the smallest village. At the summit sat the Emirs, who claimed descent and thus legitimacy from the leaders of the jihads. In Yorubaland, which had been characterised by a distinct lack of unity in the nineteenth century, the British endeavoured to import the same setup. Obas with some claim to historical precedence – notably the Ooni of Ife and the Alafin of Oyo – were elevated over their neighbours and were invested with the status of Sole NA, with responsibility for the Native Courts and Treasuries.

There was some reform of the southern NAs during the 1950s, but for the most part the northern Emirs remained as firmly entrenched as ever. Hence, writing shortly after independence, Sklar could state that 'Within his

jurisdiction, the emir possesses supreme executive and judicial power in addition to shared legislative powers.⁴⁸ The introduction of representative institutions did, however, present a direct threat to the northern chiefly establishment which could not simply be ignored. An alarming prospect was that nationalist politicians would muscle in and lay claim to the powers which were had hitherto been the preserve of the Emirs. This challenge was met by stepping directly into the political arena in a bid to pre-empt unwanted change.

The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was founded independently of the Emirs, but it soon became the party of the Fulani aristocracy – or *Masu Sarauta*. Its initial advocacy of NA reform was quietly forgotten as the party campaigned for the preservation of traditional structures. Its principal rival was the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) which campaigned for a fundamental overhaul of the corrupt and authoritarian NAs. In an instructive analysis of the social composition of these two parties, Sklar observes that the NPC received the bulk of its active support from people tied in to the NAs, whereas NEPU was mostly supported by Hausa commoners (*talakawa*) – and in particular by petty traders and artisans in the cities – while many of its prominent leaders were Muslim scholars.⁴⁹ Whereas the NPC posed as the defender of the Islamic institutions upon which the Sokoto Caliphate had been founded, NEPU attacked the Emirates as a corruption of Islam.⁵⁰ Unfortunately for NEPU, the Emirs still controlled the Native Courts and were therefore in a position to systematically harass NEPU supporters with the connivance of the British authorities.⁵¹ In this way, the NPC applied a stranglehold over the Northern Region and ultimately the entire Nigerian federation. The NPC made no secret of the close collaboration between politicians and Emirs. The most important of them, namely the Emirs of Kano and Katsina and the Sultan of Sokoto, even served in the Northern government which was headed by the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello – himself a direct descendant of Usman dan Fodio (the founder of the Caliphate) and a possible future claimant to the Sultanate.⁵² Moreover, whereas the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 provided for relatively weak upper chambers in the Eastern and Western Regions, the Northern House of Chiefs enjoyed legislative powers of its own.⁵³

Significantly, however, tensions did develop between the Northern Regional government, which emphasised its electoral mandate, and the Emirs who regarded themselves as the sole repositories of customary legitimacy. Although their formal powers were not tampered with, Emirs detected an attack on their status. After the recognition of Provincial Commissioners in 1962, these political appointees were accorded formal precedence over the Emirs, and three years later the latter were required to seek permission if they wished to travel outside their provinces.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Northern government conducted probes into a number of NAs which were accused of inefficiency and financial mismanagement. The definitive proof that the power balance was shifting came when the Emir of Kano, Sir Muhammadu Sanusi, was forced to abdicate in 1963 after an investigation into the affairs of the Kano NA. Although he had served in the Regional executive and was connected to Ahmadu Bello by marriage, this did not save his skin.⁵⁵

In other parts of Nigeria, traditional rulers had never enjoyed the same measure of protection. In the Western Region, where a fierce struggle for power was played out between the Action Group (AG) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the chiefs became directly embroiled. Obafemi Awolowo had played the Yoruba ethnic card against the NCNC. This resonated with senior Yoruba chiefs who saw themselves as the bearers of a great tradition. However, the AG was led by a confident modern elite which was less inclined to defer to traditional authority than in the North. When the Awolowo administration sought to advance local government reforms in 1952, which were designed to reduce chiefly representation in local councils, some of the leading Obas shifted their allegiance to the NCNC. This brought them into direct conflict with the Regional government which proceeded to use every means at its disposal to bring them into line. In 1956, the Alafin of Oyo was removed from office, and the following year the regional government passed a law which gave it the formal right to appoint and dismiss chiefs. At the same time, customary courts in the Region were brought under the supervision of the Attorney-General, while greater controls were placed on chiefly management of communal lands.⁵⁶ The result was that chiefs became dependent on the goodwill of their political masters. When the Western Regional crisis broke in 1962, chieftaincy predictably became a key battleground. Akintola sought to cement his tenuous grip on Regional power by dissolving elected local councils and replacing them with appointed management committees to which loyal supporters could be assigned. He also rewarded chiefs who supported him and punished those who continued to side with Awolowo.⁵⁷ The Ooni of Ife was amongst those threatened with removal unless he modified his stance. Although the crises in the West also gave particular chiefs a measure of influence, this should not be exaggerated: a chief who found himself on the wrong side of the political fence could all too easily find himself deposed.

The abortive coup of January 1966 did not greatly disturb the pattern which had been established during the First Republic. Major Nzeogwu and his co-plotters had intended to strike a decisive blow against everything they regarded as 'feudal' and reactionary – but crucially they failed. Of course, they did bring about the collapse of the NPC regime, but the incoming Ironsi administration was forced to placate injured northern pride. In Northern palaces, there was particular resentment at the murder of NPC politicians, including Ahmadu Bello. The Regional Governor, Major Hassan Katsina, who also happened to be a son of the Emir of Katsina, spearheaded a campaign to win the Emirs to the side of the government by means of a series of consultations.⁵⁸ Having been openly courted in this fashion, the Emirs seized the opportunity to make some forthright demands of their own. Although the charm offensive was reasonably successful, Olufemi Vaughan adjudges that the Ironsi regime miscalculated by relying so heavily on the support of traditional rulers.⁵⁹ The latter failed to head off the mounting crisis which began with the May riots and culminated in the bloody overthrow of Ironsi in July. The Gowon regime, which stepped into the breach, did not repeat the experiment. Although it made a show of consulting important chiefs, this was a junta which was inclined to rely much more on professional civil servants.

The successor regime of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo exhibited reforming zeal on a number of fronts (see Chapter 6). Amongst other things, they decided that it was time to bring the different systems of administration into conformity with one another. In effect, this meant that many of the sacred cows of the North would have to be sacrificed in the interests of 'national unity'. In 1976 there remained basic differences in the systems of local administration, resulting both from the messy compromises surrounding decolonisation and the quality of the relationship between political parties and traditional rulers during the First Republic. The Mohammed/Obasanjo regime introduced a three-tier system of government which would at last be uniform across the country. Below the Federal and state governments a tier of local government was created with its own sources of funding and responsibilities. In 1977, the federation was further broken down from 12 to 19 states, and these were subdivided into local council areas covering populations ranging between 150,000 and 800,000.⁶⁰ Crucially, chiefs and Emirs were excluded from the local councils, although purely advisory traditional councils were created as a sop. This radical reform was justified on the basis that chiefs ought to be above partisan politics.⁶¹

Although Nigerian chiefs had been stripped of their formal power, the greatest amongst them retained a measure of political influence because politicians and soldiers alike still needed to bask in their reflected glory. However, there was no disguising the fact that a veritable revolution had been carried out, especially in the North. The extent to which the chiefs had been tamed became fully apparent some years later, in 1984, when the Buhari regime confined the Emir of Kano and the Ooni of Ife to their home areas for having dared to make an unauthorised mission to Jerusalem in defiance of government policy.⁶² As we have seen, the Bello administration had not hesitated to put an earlier Emir of Kano in his place, but the public manner in which the chastisement was carried out reverberated through Nigeria. The fact that the Buhari himself was a northerner underlined just how much the balance of power had shifted away from the palace and towards the barracks.

The same result was accomplished much earlier in Ghana because the dominant party was always much less beholden to the chiefs.⁶³ The CPP had been founded as a party of commoners who regarded the NA system, with some reason, as oppressive and corrupt. No sooner had the CPP taken office in 1951 than the first reforms of local government were introduced. In August, the Legislative Assembly passed a Local Government Ordinance which permanently altered the landscape of power. The NAs were replaced by elected local and urban councils, in which chiefs (or other appointees from the traditional councils) constituted only one-third of the membership. Moreover, the chiefs in Ashanti and the Colony were forced to cede the management of stool lands to these councils which collected the revenues. The perception that the chiefs were under attack helps to account for the emergence of overt opposition to the CPP from 1954. The National Liberation Movement (NLM) enjoyed the unconditional backing of the Ashanti chiefly hierarchy and cloaked much of its appeal in neo-traditional language. Not surprisingly, the CPP administration did everything it could to weaken the power-base of opposition chiefs. Although it

was unable to push through reforms to the Native Court system until 1958, it was empowered to change the membership of the panels and did so in a manner which tended to replace chiefs with loyal commoners.⁶⁴

By the time of independence, traditional rulers had already been forced to disgorge most of their formal powers, and their autonomy was further eroded in subsequent years. The CPP was able to justify its assault on the grounds that it was promoting sound administration, advancing democracy and even acting in the best interests of the chiefs themselves. The immediate concern was to dispense with chiefs whose loyalty was suspect. By withdrawing *de facto* recognition from the incumbents, the government invited communities to depose their chiefs. This stratagem was successful in Akyem Abuakwa, long considered a place where chieftaincy was impregnable, when Okyenhene Ofori Atta II was removed from office in May 1958.⁶⁵ These interventions were eventually given statutory force in 1959 when the Chiefs (Recognition) Act made government recognition the essential criterion for holding chiefly office as well as defining the hierarchy of offices in any given traditional area. In the same year, the chiefs were removed from local government bodies altogether. The CPP never went down the route of seeking to dismantle chieftaincy because it was able to secure compliance through other means. Indeed compliant chiefs might even help to cement party control at the local level. Across the country, though, opposition chiefs were replaced by more acceptable candidates. The government refrained from deposing the Asantehene, but it did whittle away his remaining powers and force him into a humiliating submission.⁶⁶ Within a few years of independence, therefore, the Nkrumah regime had brought even the most powerful traditional rulers to heel.

As in Western Nigeria, the next turn of the wheel of fortune created a dramatic break, but one which concealed a strong element of continuity. After the military coup of February 1966, the National Liberation Council (NLC) went out of its way to curry favour with groups which had been fallen foul of Nkrumah, including the chiefs. The NLC passed Decree 112 which was intended to restore traditional rulers who had been wrongfully deposed and to restore chiefly hierarchies which had been altered by the CPP regime. As a consequence, some prominent individuals regained their stools – notably in Akyem Abuakwa where Nana Ofori Atta II was returned to office. In all, Rathbone estimates that ‘well over 100’ chiefs who had been destooled were resurrected. However, this game of musical chairs merely underlined the fact that it was central government which was the arbiter of who was a chief and who was not. Many observers have commented on the continuing vitality surrounding chieftaincy in Ghana. This might seem surprising, given that the chiefs had forfeited most of their formal powers in the 1950s. However, much of their legitimacy stemmed precisely from the fact that they were not formally incorporated into decision-making structures. They continued to carry out certain duties in an informal manner – for example arbitration of local disputes.⁶⁷ Again, Akan chiefs remained the effective custodians of stool lands attached to their stools, despite efforts by the state to control the revenues.⁶⁸ But their performance was closely monitored by their communities who were all too aware of past abuses. Most importantly, the chiefs had to earn their respect, and it is this (together with the threat of destoolment) which tended to make

them good listeners. Apart from local mediation, their most valued contribution was as interlocutors between rural communities and the government. It was well-understood that an effective chief could win official backing for local development projects such as a health clinic or a secondary school. This is an important reason why there was increasingly a preference for chiefs who were well-educated and/or well-heeled. The fact that Ghanaians deferred to their chiefs meant that state officials also had to treat them with a certain respect, as they do to this day.

The third instance which warrants closer attention is that of Uganda, which has some resonances with both the Nigerian and Ghanaian experiences. As in Ghana, a well-organised monarchy and a dominant political party locked horns. The Buganda kingdom was to Uganda what Ashanti was to Ghana – only more so. However, the CPP was far more cohesive than the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) ever was. Whereas the British had sought to disable Asante institutions after the 1900 revolt, before going into reverse gear in the mid-1930s, they had carefully nurtured the Buganda monarchy after the signing of the Buganda Agreement of that same year. Baganda chiefs had even been sent to administer other parts of the Uganda Protectorate, establishing a special relationship which persisted down to the 1950s. One result of the 1900 Agreement was that Baganda chiefs were granted private ownership over vast tracts of the kingdom, amounting to about one half of the total surface area, thereby turning peasants into tenants.⁶⁹ Although the exactions levied upon peasants were mitigated under the Busulu and Envujo Law of 1927, the landlord-tenant relationship itself remained in place. This model of land tenure was considered far too radical in the Gold Coast, where the principle of communal land tenure was upheld. A crucial difference, therefore, was that Buganda chieftaincy had a much stronger economic underpinning than in Ashanti. In line with the prescriptions of Indirect Rule, an elaborate hierarchy of chiefly offices linked the smallest village to the Kabaka's court in Mengo. The monarchy ran itself for most of the period until the 1950s, when the special status of Buganda became problematic in the context of decolonisation.

The introduction of elections posed a double threat to the monarchy: it created a competing basis for legitimacy in Buganda, and at the same time it forced the kingdom to engage on equal terms with the rest of Uganda. A refusal to accept the modified rules led to the enforced exile of the Kabaka in 1953, but thereafter the British lost the will to impose a solution. The independence constitution of 1962 represented a classic imperial compromise in which the Baganda monarchy won acceptance of most of its demands. Whereas Buganda was granted full federal status, the other kingdoms of Ankole, Bunyoro and Toro had to settle for a semi-federal arrangement, while the rest of the country (which mostly lacked a tradition of kingship) was divided into districts which were incorporated into Uganda on a unitary basis. To an even greater extent than in Nigeria, therefore, a plurality of systems of administration was carried over into independence. The Emirs of Northern Nigeria would have envied the Kabaka for a constitution which not only ceded extensive powers to the parliament of Buganda (the Lukiiko), including exclusive control over matters relating to land tenure, but also gave it the right to select the Baganda members of the National Assembly. It is true that the Lukiiko was mostly elected (68 seats

in all), but 18 seats were reserved for the county chiefs.⁷⁰ Moreover, the political party which was founded to represent court interests, the Kabaka Yekka (KY), was virtually assured of winning the majority of the contested seats. In 1962, it actually took all 21 of the Buganda seats within the National Assembly.⁷¹ Finally, much like in Northern Nigeria, the monarchy retained local power because it continued to appoint chiefs at the county and sub-county level, and retained its own parallel court system dispensing customary law.

A crucial difference is that whereas the NPC was assured of dominating the Nigerian federation for as long as it could monopolise the Northern vote, the Baganda were in an overall minority. The security of the monarchy therefore depended on active participation in a governing coalition at the centre, backed up by constitutional guarantees. The fact that the UPC was unable to command a legislative majority at independence initially worked to the benefit of the monarchy. By entering into a coalition with the UPC, the KY secured five out of 15 Cabinet positions. Prime Minister Milton Obote even installed the Kabaka as the President of Uganda, with the Paramount Chief of Busoga as his Vice-President. On the face of things, therefore, the Baganda monarchy seemed as comfortably placed as it could have ever have hoped to be. However, within five years disaster had struck: the monarchy was abolished and the Kabaka, along with much of his court, was forced to head into exile for a second time.

What went so terribly wrong? Part of the problem was that political allegiances in Uganda were based on relations of clientage which were inherently unstable. To be excluded from power at the centre was in effect to be cut off from material resources, which in turn risked a draining away of support at the constituency level. Soon after independence, opposition members of parliament began crossing the floor, enabling the UPC to establish an overall majority by August 1964.⁷² This meant that Obote no longer needed the KY and in that year the coalition was finally abrogated. This had immediate consequences because the government set about holding a referendum in the so-called 'lost counties' which Bunyoro claimed as its own. Despite attempts to settle Baganda in the disputed area, the vote was lost and the counties were excised from the kingdom. The Kabaka appears to have realised that the tide was turning and decided to embrace entryism as a means of garnering influence in the UPC.⁷³ Hence many KY parliamentarians crossed the carpet in 1965 and pitched into a power struggle within the UPC.

Ironically, the UPC, which had been a loose alliance from the start, became increasingly fractured as its overall parliamentary representation increased. The KY defectors joined a conservative faction within the party and sought to protect Buganda's special interests. The 'radical' faction, which had a solid base in the trade union movement, argued for the adoption of 'scientific socialism' at home and a more militant foreign policy abroad. The 'moderate' faction was headed by Obote himself and espoused a version of 'African socialism' in which control of the commanding heights of the economy was presented as the immediate priority.⁷⁴ In the trial of strength which ensued, the radicals were the first casualties. The conservatives then directed their fire against Obote and his associates. A golden opportunity was presented by revelations that rebels in the

Congo, who enjoyed the patronage of Obote, had entrusted a large sum of money, ivory and gold to the safe-keeping of Colonel Idi Amin. The conservatives in the National Assembly waited until Obote was away and then levelled charges of corruption against Amin and a number of Ministers. The effect was devastating and for a number of days it appeared that Obote might be toppled. However, the failure of the conservatives to strike decisively presented Obote with the opportunity to regroup. At a Cabinet meeting convened to resolve the crisis in February 1966, Obote had the 'rebels' arrested by loyal troops. He also pronounced the suspension of the 1962 constitution and declared that he was assuming supreme power. In April, Obote tabled a new constitution which struck a lethal blow against the Buganda monarchy. The most crucial provisions were the exclusion of chiefs from sitting in district councils and kingdom legislatures; the abolition of the separate Buganda Civil Service Commission; the elimination of *mailo* estates tied to traditional offices; the ending of the rights of the Lukiiko to sit as an electoral college; the termination of the parallel judicial system; and more rigorous central control of finances of the former federal and semi-federal units.⁷⁵ The response of the Lukiiko was to instruct the central government to remove itself from Bagandan soil, while the Kabaka appealed for United Nations intervention.

The final showdown occurred on 23 May 1966. When rebels blocked the roads leading into Kampala and over-ran police posts, the Army responded by attacking the Kabaka's palace. Fighting continued for some days, claiming many hundreds of lives.⁷⁶ However, resistance collapsed when it became clear that the Kabaka and his Katikiro had escaped across the border into Burundi, from where they made it to Britain. The last act of the unfolding drama ensued a year later when the Obote regime finally pronounced the abolition of all the kingdoms and local legislatures. Whereas the Asante monarchy survived by making a humiliating peace with the Nkrumah regime, its Buganda counterpart was completely dismantled because it posed a greater threat to a weak leader. Of course, there remained a need for some authority at the village level to serve as an instrument of the government in power, but in 1970 Obote announced that the chiefs would henceforth be elected. It fell to Idi Amin to implement this policy three years later. This meant the ending of the ancien regime across southern Uganda, but most noticeably in Buganda where kingship had meant so much. When Amin began appointing soldiers as chiefs, the full scale of the revolution finally became apparent. It reduced chiefs in Uganda to something far more ephemeral than in either Nigeria or Ghana.

Whereas it was the political insecurity of Milton Obote which motivated the assault on chieftaincy in Uganda, much the same result was accomplished in Tanzania for the opposite reason. Here it was the emergence of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) as the party enjoying overwhelming African support which made it possible to envisage a world without chiefs. As in the rest of the British colonies, decolonisation was accompanied by the creation of elected local councils. When these reforms were initiated, it was intended that the chiefs would retain some representation at the local government level. However, this was unacceptable to TANU, in large part because the chiefs were believed to have been in league with the British in their efforts to weaken the

party. Local TANU activists therefore took on the chiefs across Tanganyika in the years leading up to independence. In the Kilimanjaro region, Chagga modernisers had initially advocated the recognition of a single paramountcy in the early 1950s as a way of undercutting the divisional chiefs who had been the principal beneficiaries of British reforms. Chief Marealle was duly elected to the paramountcy. As an educated civil servant, he seemed to provide a perfect vehicle for the Chagga movement which also adopted a flag, an anthem and a national holiday.⁷⁷ The assertion of an intense local nationalism in Chaggaland posed a challenge to TANU which was seeking to create a Tanganyika-wide movement. Fortunately for TANU, many of the modernisers quickly became disillusioned with Marealle and began campaigning for the abolition of the paramountcy. This gave TANU a shoe-in to Chagga politics, and after the removal of Marealle there ceased to be much support for the notion of a paramount chieftaincy. This pattern was replicated across Tanzania over 1960–61, when local TANU activists succeeded in removing their chiefs.⁷⁸

TANU equated chieftaincy with 'tribalism' and was determined to replace it with a structure which would put the party in direct contact with its rural constituency. In 1962, the chiefs lost their residual powers over law and order and in 1963 District Councils assumed all powers at the local government level. From that year onwards, chieftaincy in Tanzania ceased to exist, being replaced by elected local councils.⁷⁹ The manner in which Tanzanian socialism was played out at the local level will be addressed at greater length in the next chapter. Here it is merely worth underlining that Tanzania was unique amongst the former British territories for the lengths to which the government was prepared to go in neutralising competing sources of loyalty. As it was, TANU knew it could take on the chiefs and win.

In most former British colonies the chiefs lost almost all of the powers which they had exercised before the Second World War. They did not normally collect taxes; they were not empowered to extract forced labour, whether for local development or for their own fields; and they had no power to regulate markets. In a number of countries, the chiefs did retain some say over the allocation of land, although they were normally expected to share this responsibility with bureaucrats and local councils. Policing and adjudication had been amongst the most important functions associated with Indirect Rule, and they were amongst the first to be stripped away during decolonisation. In most countries, the chiefs had no powers of arrest and they were expected to leave criminal matters to the police. The formal court system, presided over by judges and magistrates, was vested with absolute jurisdiction in respect of crimes against the person and against property. In civil cases, the chiefs were sometimes allowed to carry out informal arbitration, but their rulings were not always considered binding by the courts. In concluding this section, it is important to take note of a partial exception to the rule, namely Botswana.

In 1964, the earlier system of 'native administration' was replaced by District Councils which were elected under conditions of universal adult suffrage. Ten years later, Anthony Sillery, a former Resident Commissioner, was struck by the dilution of chiefly prerogatives across the board.⁸⁰ However, the retention of certain judicial functions by the Botswana chiefs represented an important

exception to the African rule. The chiefs' court, or *kgotla*, was formally incorporated into a national legal system which ran through the magistrate's court to the High Court at the apex. The state courts enjoyed primacy in the sense that they were also courts of first instance, while appeals from the *kgotla* were also heard at the magistrates' court and finally at the Customary Court of Appeal.⁸¹ The jurisdiction of the *kgotla* was limited to relatively minor civil and criminal cases. Nevertheless, Anne Griffiths argues for not being taken in by formal appearances and for taking seriously the 'social contexts in which law is embedded'.⁸² In a nutshell, litigants often preferred to turn to the chiefs' court rather than the magistrates' court, especially in divorce settlements. Although Griffiths is at pains to point out that women did not necessarily get a better deal from the *kgotla*, they were nevertheless able to choose the forum where they were most likely to receive a sympathetic hearing. Because the chief's court provided a setting where Tswana custom was constantly debated, contested and indeed reformulated, an astute litigant could effectively exploit his/her own local knowledge and social networks. On their side, the chiefs retained the respect of their people, but also a measure of national importance because ordinary Tswana actively chose the *kgotla* over the formal courts. In most African countries, this measure of chiefly autonomy would have been deemed threatening to state authorities. The reason why it worked in independent Botswana comes down perhaps to the relatively high level of social and political consensus in that country.

4.1.3 Chieftaincy in Francophone Africa: Guinea, Senegal and Niger

Having dealt with the former British colonies, I turn now to consider the fate of chieftaincy in the former French colonies. I do not wish to dwell unduly on an older debate as to whether or not British and French policies were really so different in practice. Suffice it to note that in the early days of colonial rule, all the European powers tended to act pragmatically, preserving political structures where they did not pose a threat and breaking them down where they did. But once the colonial regimes fell into their stride, there was greater scope for imperial preferences to intrude. Hence the British restored the Asante monarchy in 1935, whereas the Dahomean kings recaptured little of their power or status – a difference which is starkly apparent to this day. Again, comparative studies of partitioned Yorubaland and Hausaland have concluded that the chiefs were ultimately accorded much greater power and autonomy in British Nigeria than on the French side of the borders concerned.⁸³ On the whole, the French were inclined to treat their chiefs in a utilitarian fashion as instruments of European administration, whereas Indirect Rule was predicated upon a relatively autonomous sphere of chiefly decision-making. The French approach was famously stated by the Governor-General of French West Africa, Joost Von Vollenhoven, in 1917:

The commandant de cercle alone is in command. He alone is responsible. The native chief is only an instrument, an auxiliary ... The native chief never speaks or acts in his own name but always in the name of the commandant and when delegated formally or tacitly by him.⁸⁴

The French system hinged upon a hierarchy of chiefs working beneath a European official: the village chief, the canton chief and (sometimes) the provincial chief. The French often appointed chiefs where they had never existed before and installed chiefs who were often not even from the same area as their subjects. At the same time, they frequently broke up established polities into smaller units. The chiefs were expected to carry out a range of administrative functions: including tax collection; monitoring population movements and land use; checking the spread of human and animal diseases; extracting forced labour and exercising judicial functions. If they failed to come up to scratch, they could be fined, suspended or removed from office. The measures which the chiefs were expected to enforce were often highly unpopular and because chiefs were not well-remunerated, they tended to live by exacting informal tribute and labour from their subjects.

As in the rest of Africa, decolonisation had lasting consequences for chieftaincy in the French territories. The role of the chiefs changed as the distinction between citizen and subject was abolished, along with forced labour. The French also embraced – albeit in a somewhat fitful manner – the principle of election to traditional office. In 1947, the French launched a fairly radical reform in Senegal by introducing elections for chiefs. The electors were to consist of men and women at the village level and a more select group of men at the canton level.⁸⁵ In 1957, the system actually became less democratic because the electorate was narrowed to male notables at the village level, while the candidates for election now had to come from recognised chiefly families. But it was in Guinea that the most far-reaching reforms were carried through. Here the chiefs continued to be imposed from above until 1957, which goes some way towards accounting for their singular unpopularity. When the Parti Démocratique de Guinée (PDG) gained control over the local legislature in the 1956 elections, it did so on the basis of a popular wave of anti-chiefly sentiment. In December of the following year, the PDG was able to pass a law which abolished the position of canton chief altogether. The village chief remained in place, but was henceforth to be an elected figure who carried out his duties alongside a village council.⁸⁶

After independence, the Sekou Touré regime finally dispensed with chiefs altogether by introducing a hierarchy of elected committees. A number of villages were grouped together to form a single administrative unit, without any consideration being given to the character of earlier relationships. The elders of a given community elected a *comité de base* (base committee) while the young men and women elected a *comité de jeune* (youth committee). In an illuminating account of the operation of these parallel committees, William Derman notes that they carried out ‘the organisation of co-operative work projects, collection of taxes, distribution of goods from the state, organisation of receptions for visiting dignitaries, and dispensing justice in inter- and intra-village disputes, divorce and theft’.⁸⁷ In other words, they performed most of the same functions which had previously been devolved upon the chiefs. In the highly dirigiste system which prevailed after independence (see Chapter 5), the committees were also intended to act as conduits for the flow of information and instructions from above. The area committees were grouped into sectional committees

which were also elected by them. Here they came up against the *commandants d'arrondissement* who were appointed officials vested with responsibility for executing government policies as they were fed down from the provincial governors. The Guinean system was one which was tightly controlled at the top, but seems to have left some scope for local autonomy at the lower reaches. The institutionalisation of the distinction between youth and elders also built upon cultural norms at the village level. However, as Derman demonstrates, the social distinction between the old ruling elites and their former slaves was effectively eradicated as the latter came to fill most of the elected positions at the local level.

Much as Tanzania stood out from the rest of the Anglophone states, so Guinea was singular amongst the former French colonies. The country which bore some resemblance was Senegal. Here, the chiefs suffered from some of the same unpopularity as their counterparts in Guinea. In the early 1950s, Léopold Senghor skilfully presented himself as the defender of the poor peasants against the oppressive canton chiefs. Whereas the latter tended to favour the cause of Lamine Guèye, Senghor cultivated the leadership of the three Muslim brotherhoods: that is the Qadiriyya, the Tijaniyya and the Mourides.⁸⁸ Whereas chiefs had relatively little purchase over villagers, the same could hardly be said of the *marabouts* (or 'saints'). The greater societal leverage of the *marabouts* helped the Socialist Party to come out on top in the political contest. The Mourides became a particularly valuable ally as Senghor (a Catholic himself) attempted to consolidate his grip on power after independence – initially against his Malian rivals and subsequently against Mamadou Dia in 1962 (see Chapter 5). Having steered his way through successive crises, Senghor struck up a good rapport with the *marabouts*: the latter lobbied for rural amenities and in return they delivered rural votes to the ruling party. In 1960, a fundamental reform of the administration was embarked upon, which had a lasting impact on chieftaincy in Senegal. The country was divided into seven regions, headed by a governor, and these were broken down into *cercles* which more or less conformed to the earlier *subdivisions*. The real innovation lay in the creation of a third tier, the *arrondissement*, which was made up of two or three of the old cantons.⁸⁹ The canton chiefs were abolished and replaced by *arrondissement* heads. Some of the appointees had previously been canton chiefs, but this continuity was a transitory phenomenon. That left only the village chiefs, as the lowliest functionaries in the bureaucratic hierarchy. These chiefs commanded little influence or prestige, and were regarded by everyone concerned as secondary in importance to the *marabouts*, especially in the large number of villages which owed their origins to a founding religious leader.

The Malian experience ran parallel to that of Senegal, given that they did not go their separate ways until 1961. But elsewhere in Francophone Africa, the years immediately after independence were characterised by a broad measure of continuity. That is, chiefs continued to be regarded as auxiliaries of the governmental apparatus: they were merely serving a different set of political masters. They were expected to carry out official orders, and they could be sanctioned if they failed to comply.

4.1.4 *Apartheid as decentralised despotism*

There remains one final case which is worthy of examination in greater detail, and that is South Africa. Although the latter tends to be treated as exceptional, Mahmood Mamdani has made a convincing case for viewing apartheid as the lineal descendant of Indirect Rule.⁹⁰ Any anachronism lies merely in the fact that the NP was seeking to resurrect a formula which was in the process of being jettisoned in the British colonies. Apartheid did not come out of the blue, but amounted to a reworking of the main themes of segregationist discourse which took a tenacious grip in the 1920s, but whose origins can be traced back to the nineteenth century.⁹¹ The central axiom was that Africans were to be treated as subjects, whereas whites were citizens bearing rights. This was why the qualified African franchise in the Cape could not be extended, and why it was ultimately extinguished in 1936. Perhaps the most crucial tenet of segregationism, which was carried over into the apartheid era, was that the cities were the exclusive preserve of whites and that Africans would only be tolerated as 'temporary sojourners' selling their labour.⁹² At the end of their labour contracts, Africans were expected to return to their rural homes. Every effort was made to regulate the flow of migrant labour to the cities and to determine the conditions under which Africans lived and worked. Although *indunas* (or 'headmen') were recognised on the mines, urban Africans were without structures of representation because the authorities preferred the fiction that they really did not exist. In the rural reserves, which were construed as the true home of the African, the 'native' was to live under the authority of a chief who was, in turn, closely supervised by a Native Commissioner appointed by the Native Affairs Department (NAD).

The NP was elected in 1948 because the United Party government had failed to resolve problems with implementing segregationism. Growing impoverishment in the reserves was creating a situation in which Africans were in danger of being pushed off the land and drawn towards the cities. This threatened the foundations of cheap labour, which had always depended on the rural areas bearing part of the costs of reproduction of the labour force.⁹³ However, it was also threatening to ordinary whites who feared 'swamping' by a black majority in the urban areas. The Malan regime was therefore mandated to take decisive steps to restore the equilibrium. The 1913 Native Land Act had set aside a mere 7 per cent of the land for the reserves. This was raised to 14 per cent under the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, which provided for the purchase of white farms and Crown lands by the South African Native Trust, but acute land hunger remained a fact of life. Although the Native Economic Commission of 1930–32 recognised this fact, it chose to place greater emphasis on the supposedly wasteful manner in which Africans utilised the land. It therefore advocated a 'comprehensive reorganisation of rural society which would include significant reductions of stock, the fencing of lands, concentrated settlements, improved seed and the expansion of agricultural education'.⁹⁴

In short, Africans were to be cajoled and coerced in an effort to head off the impending collapse of the reserve economy. This new technocratic mentality echoes the 'second colonial occupation' in post-war Kenya (and also in

Basutoland), and it was similarly resisted on the Trust lands and in the reserves proper.⁹⁵ One indictment of the Smuts government was that it had backed off in the face of resistance in places like the Zoutpansberg and Sekhukhuneland. The NP was also sensitive to complaints from white commercial farmers that they could not secure sufficient labour because poorer white farmers were encouraging Africans to squat.⁹⁶ The NP promised to beef up the operations of the NAD and to remove African families from white land who had not signed recognised labour contracts. The NP regime later dedicated itself to eradicating so-called 'black spots', that is areas outside of the reserves which had historically been farmed by Africans – whether on mission stations or on lands which had been purchased by them. The net effect was to push many African families into already overcrowded reserves.

Whereas the NP was initially rather pragmatic in its approach, apartheid became more ideologically driven in the later 1950s, and this had an important bearing on chieftaincy. The key figure in this transformation was H. F. Verwoerd, first in his capacity as Minister of Native Affairs and later as Prime Minister. Whereas the crude interventionism of the 1930s had tended to undermine the authority of the chiefs, Verwoerd understood that the latter were crucial to his strategy of 'retribalising' Africans – or, as he would have preferred it, of helping Africans to develop 'along their own lines'. Verwoerd regarded the partially elected district councils of the Eastern Cape and the purely advisory Native Representative Council as an anathema because they were not based on 'traditional' political forms. In their place, he advocated a return to a 'natural Native democracy'.⁹⁷ The Bantu Authorities Act of 1952 enshrined the chief-in-council as the basis on which rural Africans would henceforth be governed.⁹⁸ A three-tier system stretched from the 'tribal' authority at the bottom through the regional authority to a territorial authority for each ethnic group at the summit. These various Bantu authorities were expected to exercise a wide range of administrative, executive and judicial functions. Although this was trumpeted as promoting 'the supremacy of the Bantu in his own sphere', Native Commissioners were nevertheless expected to extend a guiding hand for the foreseeable future.⁹⁹ Moreover, once the Native Representative Council had been wound up, there was no voice for Africans at higher levels. In its commitment to an exaggerated form of cultural relativism, which conveniently precluded demands for electoral representation, Bantu Administration echoed British policies of the pre-war era.

Within the reserves, a struggle ensued over the entire raft of apartheid innovations, including conservation, Bantu Education, the extension of pass laws to women and an increase in rural taxation. The chiefs were caught between the (renamed) Bantu Affairs Department (BAD) who demanded their co-operation in New Bantu Authorities, and their people who regarded the latter as the thin end of the wedge. Alongside a physical battle for control of the countryside, in which violence was resorted to on both sides, a debate unfolded about what constituted tradition. Critics of the BAD programme pointed out that chiefs would be required to enforce unpalatable regulations and would become less accountable to their people. Such has been the fascination with urban politics that the struggles which were played out across rural South Africa have only

recently begun to be properly documented. It is worth summarising some of the main findings here. In the case of Sekhukhuneland (northern Transvaal), Peter Delius has demonstrated how Pedi migrant workers were in the vanguard of opposition to the BAD. In 1955, they founded Sebatakomo, an association whose aim was to persuade the paramount chief to stand against the creation of a Bantu Authority. The campaign in Sekhukhuneland, which enjoyed some support from the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC, escalated into a attack on perceived collaborators, a number of whom were killed. The response of the state was to deport the paramount from Sekhukhuneland, while the full force of the state was used to intimidate the rebels. Once the government had re-established control, the BAD demonstrated its sound appreciation of the tactics of divide-and-rule by recognising 26 'independent' chiefs, thereby effectively downgrading the paramountcy.¹⁰⁰

Another important site of struggle was in the Bafarutshe reserve on the Botswana border, where opposition to Bantu Authorities became intricately bound up with resistance to the pass laws in 1957.¹⁰¹ Once again, the chief was won over to the opposition cause, which was co-ordinated by another association of migrant workers. The difference was that women played a more active part, by refusing to accept the new pass books or burning them in public. The authorities responded by deposing the chief and, in the face of physical attacks on perceived collaborators, resorting to brute force. The state had re-established effective control by 1958. A Bantu Authority was duly established and was headed by one of the loyalist chiefs, Chief Lucas Mangope. No sooner had the flames subsided than a further outbreak occurred amongst the Mpondo of the Transkei in 1960. Here a secret organisation called Intaba was formed with the aim of using violent action to forestall the creation of a Bantu Authority and the implementation of destocking, resettlement and other conservation measures.¹⁰² The difference was that the Mpondo paramount chief – whose powers already greatly exceeded that of most of his peers – had already consented to the establishment of a Bantu Authority in 1958. The Intaba campaign was initially successful in bringing about the collapse of the local administration, but by January 1961 a police and army crackdown had reasserted the authority of the paramount chief.¹⁰³ Finally, there remains the instance of Tembuland in the Transkei/Ciskei. Here the creation of Bantu Authorities entailed the abolition of the partially elected General Council or Bunga.¹⁰⁴ In 1961, the paramount chief and most of the chiefs in Tembuland proper opposed this reform, but in Emigrant Tembuland (in the Ciskei) Chief Kaiser Matanzima agreed to co-operate.¹⁰⁵ The upshot was a very bitter struggle within Emigrant Tembuland, in which Chief Matanzima used intimidation to ensure compliance, whilst local dissidents and Poqo (the armed wing of the PAC) attempted to assassinate the chief and his allies. Whereas the ANC, the SACP and the PAC drifted in and out of the other struggles, the Tembuland case is singular because of its centrality in the PAC's plans for a general uprising. In crushing this revolt, the state put paid for all time to the thesis that South Africa was a country ripe for guerrilla warfare. The liberation movements thereafter concentrated more of their energy on mobilising an urban constituency.

After the efflorescence of rural resistance in the 1950s, the following decade ushered in a period of relative acquiescence, born of a combination of

exhaustion and fear. With the banning of the ANC, the PAC and the SACP in 1960, and the issuing of detention orders against anyone construed as obstructing Bantu administration, many of the old forms of organisation (often established by migrant workers) became untenable. The strangulation of rural protest was accompanied by a further elaboration of apartheid ideology which went a step beyond the Indirect Rule canon. In 1959, the government passed the Bantu Self-Government Act which created eight (later ten) Bantustans out of the existing reserves, constituted on the principle that all Africans belonged to discrete 'tribes'. In view of the push towards decolonisation elsewhere, the Verwoerd regime felt the need to offer some kind of riposte. Given the hegemonic status of a new international discourse of equality, it was difficult for the government to simply deny its relevance for South Africa. What it did instead was to fall back upon an earlier line of colonial defence which contended that political institutions were organic and could not therefore be adopted and discarded like so many changes of clothing. The problem in South Africa, it was argued, was that white and black simply did not share a common political culture. Instead of trying to co-opt Africans into a parliamentary system which was thoroughly alien to them, would it not be better to help them to evolve their own institutions? Hence the NP's counterblast to European decolonisation was to insist that blacks would enjoy full rights within their own 'Bantu states' – dubbed Bantustans and later homelands. That this was in large part a response to external events was made clear by Verwoerd himself:

The Bantu will be able to develop into separate states. That is not what we would have liked to see. It is a form of fragmentation that we would not have liked if we were able to avoid it. In the light of the pressure being exerted on South Africa, there is however no doubt that eventually this will have to be done, thereby buying for the White Man his freedom and the right to retain his domination in what is his country.¹⁰⁶

Following suppression of the revolt in the Eastern Cape, Verwoerd pushed ahead with the grant of internal self-government to the Transkei, where he promised that chieftaincy would be safeguarded. The Transkei Constitution of 1963 provided for a Legislative Assembly in which 64 chiefly appointees outnumbered the 45 members who were popularly elected.¹⁰⁷ Chief Matanzima was elected Prime Minister on the strength of the chiefly vote and in the expectation that he would know how to make the most out of his client status with the South African government. Matanzima ensured that his grip on power never slipped in subsequent years. The Transkei government accepted 'full independence' from South Africa in 1976, followed by Bophutatswana in 1977, Venda in 1979 and Ciskei in 1981. In the case of Bophutatswana, the principal beneficiary was Chief Mangope, who clung to power with the same tenacity as Matanzima did. Some homeland governments stopped short of independence, most notably that of Kwazulu where Chief Gatsha Buthelezi realised that there were limited advantages to becoming 'independent' in name only. But in these homelands, the pattern of politics was much the same as in the notionally independent states. In Kwazulu itself, Buthelezi had beaten his brother to the

chieftaincy because the BAD reckoned that he was more likely to support the formation of Bantu authorities. Like Matanzima and Mangope, Buthelezi became Chief Executive Officer in 1970 with support from the chiefly majority in the legislature. Where Buthelezi was singular was in the skill with which he set about turning Inkatha into a formidable political machine, reaching all the way down to the smallest settlement. Access to land, education and employment all became contingent on membership of Inkatha, which simultaneously functioned as the personal vehicle of Chief Buthelezi.¹⁰⁸ By refusing the offer of independence, Buthelezi signalled that he intended to act as a key player in the wider political game within South Africa.

The homelands policy suited the South African government and its homeland clients equally well. The latter were given a free hand to establish a system based on patronage, in which they could materially reward their supporters and bludgeon their opponents. The perks of office, which were underwritten by Pretoria, were also very considerable. Newell Stultz has estimated that by the time of Transkeian independence, chiefly members of the legislature were earning no less than 60 times the minimum stipend for a chief in 1963.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Matanzima became the most highly paid political figure in all of South Africa.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, the South African government could claim that it was within its rights to withhold citizenship rights from Africans who had other political homes to go to. In 1970, all Africans were assigned to a homeland on the basis of their presumed ethnicity, regardless of whether they even had any rural ties. The ultimate objective was to dispense of that category of Africans who had acquired urban residence rights by virtue of their birth or length of stay.¹¹¹ In their greatest flights of fancy, apartheid ideologues imagined they could whiten the cities, by forcing Africans to commute from their assigned homelands towards industrial zones created just within the boundaries of white South Africa. Any Africans who remained within the cities would be there on temporary labour contracts, having been directed there by a labour bureau. Other Africans would be channelled towards white farms by means of the same bureaucratic process. As we shall see in a later chapter, the gap between theory and reality became increasingly obvious towards the end of the 1970s, forcing significant modifications to the apartheid system.

At this juncture, it remains to consider precisely how much power the chiefs could really exercise within the homelands setup. Elsewhere in Africa, political leaders who aligned themselves with traditional rulers could not always be counted upon to respect their status once they were safely installed in office. In the homelands, this pattern was repeated. At the local level, chiefs were often able to wield considerable power over the people placed beneath them. In the case of Sekhukhuneland, which was absorbed into the homeland of Lebowa, Pedi chiefs regulated people's access to land, trading licenses, labour bureaux, and even the payment of pensions.¹¹² The same story was repeated in Kwazulu.¹¹³ But while the chiefs gained leverage over their people, and ruthlessly extracted money from them through the exercise of these gatekeeping functions, it is a moot point whether the chiefs were powerful in their own right. In each of the homelands, the governing party jealously guarded its monopoly on the right to command. Chiefs were expected to toe the party line, failing

which they could have their salaries suspended or be removed from office. The position of the Zulu monarchy is perhaps the crucial test-case.

King Goodwill Zwelithini came to the Zulu throne in 1971 at the very moment when deliberations over a constitution for Kwazulu were reaching a watershed. Whereas the draft constitution had made the king a member of the Assembly, an amendment was eventually adopted which reduced the king to the position of a constitutional monarch. The Chief Executive Officer was given the right to choose his cabinet unhindered, while the king was reduced to a largely ceremonial role.¹¹⁴ This evidently rankled within the court, where hostility to Buthelezi ran surprisingly deep. Shortly after his coronation, Zwelithini despatched a delegation to Swaziland to study the constitutional position of Sobhuza. This was regarded as an affront to Buthelezi who set out to clip his wings. In 1975, the government insisted that all invitations to the king be sent through the cabinet who also needed to approve his travel plans. In 1979, Buthelezi even went as far as accusing Zwelithini of dabbling in party politics, and imposed strict reporting restrictions on him.¹¹⁵ Unlike in Buganda, however, Buthelezi could not afford an all-out confrontation with the monarchy. After all, Inkatha positioned itself as the very embodiment of Zulu tradition in which the king was the focus of identification. In the event of a take-on, it was by no means certain that most Zulus would side with the Chief Executive rather than their king. The net outcome was similar to that in Lesotho, where the king was used as a nationalist symbol, but kept on a tight leash. As far as the chieftaincy as a whole is concerned, Buthelezi consistently stressed the importance of building upon Zulu culture, but as Maré and Hamilton suggest this vote of confidence in the chiefs was contingent on the latter's acknowledgement of his own pre-eminence.¹¹⁶

4.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to give some sense of the different trajectories along which African chieftaincies were propelled from the 1950s. I have sought to draw an analytical distinction between formal power, influence and prestige. In Swaziland, Sobhuza II possessed all three in spades. But he was unique in the success with which he reinvented monarchy for the post-colonial age. Haile Selassie of Ethiopia ultimately failed in his attempt to marry tradition with modernisation, and paid with his life. In most African countries, the formal powers of traditional rulers were significantly reduced during decolonisation and after independence. Even regimes which were ostensibly pro-chief, such as the NPC in Northern Nigeria, found it difficult to tolerate a potential rival. Although their formal powers were reduced, chiefs nevertheless retained a measure of influence and prestige in the former British colonies. The exception was Tanzania where the Nyerere government abolished the institution outright.

In the Francophone states, the chiefs seemed to command more power, but this was not inherent in the institution but was, in a sense, borrowed from the central authority. In most Francophone states, the chiefs functioned as pliable instruments of higher authorities, pretty much as in colonial times. The exception was Guinea, where the Sekou Touré regime decided to dispense with

their services altogether. Finally, I have sought to demonstrate that the NP regime sought to reinvent the notion that Africans were happiest when governed through their 'traditional' institutions. The duties which the South African chiefs were expected to perform were not unlike the unpleasant tasks devolved downwards by the French colonial authorities. According to the local defenders of chieftaincy, to comply with Bantu Administration would mean sowing the seeds of destruction of an institution rooted in consent. The defeat of these rural rebels paved the way for the further elaboration of the homelands policy, in which chiefs became the junior partners of regimes which were only loosely accountable.