Domain without Subjects
Traditional Rulers in Post-Colonial Africa

Oscar Edoror Ubhenin

Abstract

The domain of traditional rulers in pre-colonial Africa was the state, defined by either centralization or fragmentation. The course of traditional rulers in Africa was altered by colonialism, thereby shifting their prerogative to the nonstate domain. Their return in post-colonial Africa has coincided with their quest for constitutional “space of power.” In effect, traditional rulers are excluded from modern state governance and economic development. They have remained without subjects in post-colonial Africa. Thus, the fundamental question: How and why did traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa lose their grip over their subjects? In explaining the loss of traditional rulers’ grip over subjects in their domains, this essay refers to oral tradition and published literature, including official government documents. Empirical evidence is drawn from Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Keywords: African politics, chiefs and kings, post-colonialism, traditional domain.

During the era of pre-colonialism, African chiefs and kings (also called traditional rulers) operated in the domain of the state, characterized by either centralization or fragmentation. This characterization refers to the variations in political cum administrative institutions along the lines of several hundred ethnic groups that populated Africa. “Centralized” or “fragmented” ethnic groups were based on the number of levels of jurisdiction that transcended the local community, “where more jurisdictional levels correspond[ed] to more centralized groups.”¹ Traditional rulers in Africa had mechanisms for formulating public policies and engaging public officers who assisted them in development and delivering relevant services to their subjects. Public policies

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enhanced territorial expansion, wealth accumulation, maintenance of law and order, and the administration of vassal states. African state policy also enabled checks on excessive use of power in the kingdom. As powerful as they were, however, the course of traditional rulers in Africa was altered by the superimposed Western-inspired and Western-styled state organizations on top of African institutions. For example, Dahomey’s Behanzin was the final king to lose his throne to the French in 1893. Benin kingdom, which was easily the envy of the Negroes’ civilization, was shattered by the British invasion of 1897. The emirates of Borno, Ilorin, Kano, Nupe, Kontagora, Yola, and Zaria as well as the caliphate of Sokoto were captured by the British colonialist Lord Lugard in the early twentieth century.2

The prerogative of traditional rulers shifted to the nonstate domain in Colonial Africa, albeit with great faith in the traditional institutions. These rulers were engaged by the colonial authorities for administrative convenience. In British Colonial Africa, the system of indirect rule accommodated traditional rulers as leaders of the people on behalf of the British authorities. Thus, traditional rulers were fronts and intermediaries enlisted by the British to enable them to govern. Lord Lugard first experimented with indirect rule in Asia and then in East Africa before its import into Colonial Nigeria. In Nigeria’s northern provinces, indirect rule could preserve the traditional institutions, providing the British colonialists agreed to the arrangement.3 Empowered by the Native Authority Ordinance (1916), the system of indirect administrative rule also was introduced to the western provinces. This was facilitated by the centralized and well-organized political structures of the Yoruba (an ethnic group of southwestern and north-central Nigeria, as well as southern and central Benin). However, to the extent that the powers of the Oba (king or ruler) were limited by traditional chiefs and associations, and the Yoruba kingdoms relied on tributes rather than taxes, indirect rule was only partially successful in the West. A prototype of nonmonarchical and nonstate order is Igboland (Southeastern Nigeria).4 Lack of centralized traditional authorities in the eastern provinces inspired the British colonialists to appoint warrant chiefs, who did not belong to the traditional ruling class in Igbo. The great revolt against the warrant chiefs in Igboland occurred because those chiefs were created by warrant of the colonial governor.5

Apart from their role in indirect rule and direct taxation, traditional rulers also served in an advisory capacity in the legislative councils. The six Africans

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3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
in the thirty-six-member Nigerian Council were traditional rulers, seated as unofficial representatives from Lagos, Calabar, Oyo, Benin/Warri, and two emirates in the northern provinces. During the last decade before Nigerian political independence, there was an inauguration of a House of Chiefs in each of the eastern, northern, and western provinces, comprised of first-class chiefs and selected second-class chiefs. Perhaps African chiefs and kings demonstrated a lack of ability to represent their people in the colonial government, and therefore were not really interested in the affairs of the legislative councils. African chiefs and kings were moved to abandon the interests of indigenous people in favor of colonial interests, a marked departure that threatened their self-preservation. Opposition to colonial ideals was curtailed by acts of humiliation, deposition, subjugation, imprisonment, and deportation. Briefly, two cases are the British sacking of Benin’s Oba, Ovoranmwen Nogbaisi, in 1897, and Ghana’s reigning Asantehene (traditional ruler of the Kingdom of Ashanti in Ghana) in 1900.

Africans’ earlier faith in traditional rulers was eroded by the demeaning acts of the colonialists. Sadly, educated Africans found a rationale for opposing the undemocratic traditional values because it facilitated their participation in the colonial socioeconomic and political space. Bona Chizea and Oarhe Osumah have noted that the Nigerian nationalists perceived the traditional system as personalized and antithetical to democratic values. Thus, African chiefs and kings carried the burden of the public perception that traditional institutions had a detrimental effect on modernization in post-colonial Africa. The loss of faith in traditional rulers also suggested their exclusion from modern state governance and economic development. Early post-colonial policies witnessed reduction of the spheres and powers of traditional rulers. In the case of Nigeria, Alhaji Shehu Shagari’s civilian administration (1979–1983) appointed prominent traditional rulers merely to advisory positions such as chancellors of universities, and this has remained the practice until today. Yet, traditional rulers served to provide political legitimacy to authoritarian regimes, such as to some of the government’s military. In sum, the policies implemented by successive post-colonial regimes in African states drove traditional rulers into oblivion. An indication of the present desire of African traditional rulers to be included in political affairs is their request for a constitutional “space of power.” This demand is encouraged by the presence of a constitutional monarch in Swaziland in southern Africa. Here, the traditional ruler, His Royal Highness Prince Makhosetive and Crowned King Mswati III, is one of the world’s last remaining absolute monarchs. For the record, King Mswati III

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has the power to choose the prime minister as well as top government and traditional posts. Between 1922 and 1952, Egypt also had a constitutional monarchy, complemented by a “shaky democracy,” defined by a multiparty system and universal adult suffrage. Egypt had a small but wealthy landed class, an even smaller but quite dynamic urban entrepreneurial class, and a vast, poor, largely illiterate, largely peasant population. The peasants were “tied to the landed class in an essentially feudal relationship.”

Yet, there have been changes. The wave of democratization in Africa coincided with the recognition of chiefs, clan elders, and other kinship-based authorities by donor agencies and African states, described as “an ambiguous revival of traditional authority.” Traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa provide stability and facilitate development at the grassroots level. Again, they officially have become “tax-collectors,” “peace-builders,” “land administrators,” and “development project managers.” Traditional rulers are being repositioned as representatives of local communities, through national legislation and donor policies. The resurgence of traditional rulers has been perceived as a side-effect of democratic decentralization, because chiefs use the space opened by new locally elected governments. In some cases, traditional rulers are involved informally in mobilizing votes in competitive multiparty politics. Despite their status as “new agents of change,” however, traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa have remained without the subjects they had prior to colonialism. The fundamental question, therefore, is: How did traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa lose their grip over their subjects? This essay focuses on the domain of traditional rulers without subjects in post-colonial Africa. It is based on oral tradition and published literature, including official government documents. Empirical evidence is drawn from Nigeria and other parts of Africa. The next section illuminates the concepts that are central to the essay. This is followed by investigation of the sources of traditional rulership. The fourth section discusses the space and role of traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa, while the fifth section explains the loss of their grip over the subjects formerly under their rule. The essay concludes with recommendations.

Conceptual Framework

To avoid creating confusion, the concepts chosen for elucidation in this essay are limited to “traditional ruler,” “first Africa,” “patrimonialism,” and “citizenship.” Ascertaining the essence of this essay requires understanding these concepts as a framework of investigation.

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10 Ibid.
Traditional Ruler

A traditional ruler was a chief of a village, head of a clan, leader of a local community, or king of a large autonomous community located in the tier below the local government or community body of governance. The traditional ruler was vested with power and authority over the subjects in his domain. Subjects were ordinary people with no rights or privileges except those bestowed by the ruler. A traditional ruler was the head of a band and a lord with authority and control over village communities. Mahmood Mamdani has provided a typology, of sorts, of chiefs in Africa. They were kin-based chiefs, hereditary chiefs, and administrative chiefs. The kin-based chiefs included elders who dominated clan or kinship. The hereditary chiefs were in office by right of descent. The administrative chiefs included commoners appointed by royal authorities. Administrative chiefs were loyal appointees who could not stay in office without the king’s pleasure.

As in many other parts of the world, village self-government existed in many societies in Africa under the leadership of traditional rulers, particularly before the emergence of colonialism. The traditional ruler was the emperor or king, with exercise of control over every department of administration in a centralized state, that is, a large state and a fused political structure. In Buganda Kingdom of present-day Uganda, the Kabaka (title for the king), occupied the top of the Ganda hierarchy of government. “In Buganda, the king emerged supreme with control over land but with an administrative hierarchy whose personnel came from both humble and noble origins: the line of chiefs recruited from ordinary citizens predominated over hereditary chiefs.” In the forested “centralized” state of Ashanti, in what is modern-day Ghana, the Ashantehene commanded high respect from the subjects. In the eighth-century Sudanese state of Ghana, subjects knelt before the king to have sand thrown on their heads as a mark of respect. Oba Ewuare the Great (1440–1473) reportedly extended the Benin kingdom to the “northern” Idah and “western” Lagos, as well as to Dahomey in the present Benin Republic. In fragmented pre-colonial settings, the king was called Sarki (in Hausa), Akwamuhene (in the Akan states of ancient Ghana), Denkyirahene (in Denkyira), and Bur (in the Sere Kingdom of Sine-Solum of Senegal). The rather small states and societies had “sacral kingship,” based upon a set of doctrines, beliefs, and customs that were indigenous to the African peoples. Thus, traditional rulers in fragmented societies used ancestor-worship to bind the various tribes together. Powerful pagan kingdoms emboldened the rulers’ strong belief in the supremacy of gods.

11 Mamdani, Citizen and Subject.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 41.
A quick reminder is the Tsoede of Nupe (according to legend, the Kingdom of the Nupe was formed by a man called Tsoede), who was “renowned for his magic[al] powers, with which he established a divine authority.”16

Traditional rulers in pre-colonial Africa determined who got what, when, and how,17 and also authoritatively allocated values.18 Public revenue was not subject to scrutiny, and as argued elsewhere, “the African pre-colonial economy was the king’s economy.”19 This suggests that African chiefs and kings were despot who ruled with absolute power. In practice, however, very few African rulers exercised absolute power because they enjoyed the advisory of a certain class of people. In effect, “some enhanced the ruler’s forces, while others counter balanced.”20 In Buganda, the organized power of clans served as a check on both the king and the appointed administrators. In Toro, also, members of the landed nobility were a check on the centralizing ambitions of the king. This led to secession in the most extreme cases.21

During colonialism, the traditional African political system was destroyed ruthlessly to enable the integration of the nations as co-equals with the white. “The principle of equal rights was applied in its crudest form, and while it gave the native a semblance of equality with whites, which was little good to him, it destroyed the basis of his African system which was his highest good.”22 The African traditional chief functioned within a bureaucratic model of “command-and-control,”23 which enabled the exercise of power consisting mainly of the right to allocate land, albeit in consultation with the wider community. The chief was the pillar in the structure of native authority. In the French colonies, duties of a chief included collection of taxes, requisition of labor, compulsory cultivation of crops, and provision of military recruits. In colonial Mozambique, the chief’s jurisdiction over residents covered problems pertaining to petty theft, drunkenness, tax evasion, and adultery.24

On its part, the British colonial power was monarchical, patriarchal, and authoritarian. The presumption was that a king was at the center of the polity, a chief was present on every administrative ground, and a patriarch was in every homestead. In all cases, “authority was considered an attribute of a personal despotism.”25 Specifically, the introduction of indirect rule was

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16 Oscar Edoror Ubhenin, African Forms of Administration (Benin City, Nigeria: Dos-Nitas Global, 2014), 81.
19 Ubhenin, African Forms of Administration, 95.
20 Ibid.
21 Mamdani, Citizen and Subject.
22 Ibid., 5.
23 Ibid., 45.
24 Ibid., 53.
25 Ibid., 39.
a colonial reform in response to peasant resistance to colonial occupation. Indirect rule sought to broaden the social base of colonial administration. In northern Nigeria, the Emir was chair of the chief-in-council and was required “to consent and act in accordance with the decision of his council, but could act against the majority in the interest of order and good government.”

In the chief-and-council, as chair, the Emir was to act in accordance with the council majority. The Land Tenure Law of 1962 empowered the Emir to issue rights of occupancy over customary land (owned by indigenous communities and administered in accordance with their customs), make subsidiary legislation, including orders over persons in their locality, rules with respect to services in the locality, and instruments regarding representation in subordinate councils.

Also, the colonial powers created a chiefship built on the administrative model, not on the traditional one. Administrative chiefs in the colonial period were liberated from all forms of institutionalized constraints by undermining both popular (clan) checks on state authority and traditional constraints. In essence, administrative chiefs were “the full-blown, village-based despot, shorn of rule-based restraint.”

Even today, the traditional rulers remain visible in modern African states, through their various titles such as Emir (in Fulani, emirate), Eze and Igwe (in Igboland), Kabaka (in Buganda), Kabiyesi (in Yoruba), Mai (in Kanem-Borno), Obong (in Calabar), Oba (in Benin and Yoruba), Obi (in Onitsha), Olu (in Warri), Sarki (in Hausa), and Zaiki (in Esan).

First Africa
The endurance of the foregoing titles is a good reminder of earlier times and order, which this author choses to call “first Africa.” Before Europe’s invasion of the African continent in the nineteenth century, Africans lived in a society that was relatively simple. A paramount chief (or king) was usually recognized within a group of people. The paramount ruler, in turn, had chiefs who surrounded him in his court and assisted with justice and public administration. There also were age groups, influential secret societies, and the paid agents or policemen who watched over the courts and carried messages as requested by the chiefs. Overall, each community or village was self-sufficient in the production of its needed consumables. The principal occupation of the Africans was agriculture: yams, plantains, and oil palm were produced. Asian and American people brought maize, cassava, oranges, and mangoes. Goats, dogs, sheep, and hens were the major domestic animals. This was an era of isolated economic units, that is, a “subsistence economy,” in which all that was produced was consumed by the village groups.

26 Ibid., 105.
27 Ibid., 43.
28 Ubhenin, African Forms of Administration.
However, the literature suggests the existence of various local and distance trading networks in all the regions of pre-colonial Africa. Thus, pre-colonial Africa had patterns of specialization in its production of more than what was consumed locally. Consumption commodities such as barkcloth, dried fish, grain, salt, and timber were traded in various local networks in South and East Africa. The basic commodity of long-distance trade in this region was ivory. In West and Equatorial Africa, the consumption commodities were copper, fish, meat, millet, salt, shea butter, and iron. Barter dominated the trade from village to village in southern Africa, albeit without a merchant class. “In most regions, trade was controlled and taxed, as trade was seen as a convenient source of wealth and power, both in West and in East Africa. Especially long-distance trade is in many instances linked to state formation in pre-colonial Africa.”

It is on record that Askia the Great’s Songhai empire had flourishing enterprises in agriculture, blacksmithing, cloth weaving, and salt mining. However, the ravaging effects of tse-tse flies in the forest lands restricted the rearing of cattle and horses to the Africans. In the evolving manufacturing sector in pre-colonial West Africa, the significant industry was iron, whose production could withstand European competition relatively well until the emergence of rail and motor roads. The Senegambia had a cloth manufacturing industry, which also engaged in production for export. This is corroborated by Ade Ajayi’s account of the textile industry in Nigeria, including impressive comments on the textiles, which were distributed in Lokoja through a wide network that spread as far as to Kano. The textile samples were sent to a museum in metropolitan Britain.

Sadly, first Africa witnessed a tremendous decline in productivity with the discovery of the more “lucrative” slave trade. This occurred prior to the imitation of African textile designs by British manufacturers. Thereafter, cheap imitations from India and Manchester were introduced to Africa. Although “first Africa” was a society with relatively good manpower for economic development, the communities were marred by raids on each other for livestock, slaves, and women. Yet, “first Africa” was a buoyant and prosperous society. For example, it is recorded in history that Benin had a flourishing trade. “In 1553, the first Expedition led by Thomas Wyndham came to Benin [the ancient city, now in the current Edo State of Nigeria] and collected 80 tons of pepper. In 1589 and 1591, Captain James Welsh of London visited Benin and took home, ivory, pepper, cotton cloths and palm oil.”

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30 Ibid., 32.
32 Ibid.
The changes that followed the arrival of European invaders led to replacement of African cultures with European practices. African economies were destroyed by the “business-minded” colonial powers. The European invasion made Africa vulnerable to the colonial powers, economically, politically, and socially. First, African chiefs and kings were victims of “unequal exchange.” They exported productive and reproductive capacity in men and women, in exchange for cheap gin, textiles, mirrors, and other items, which Ade Ajayi called “meretricious goods.”

Second, the economic effect was that, for years, African resources were channeled to Europe, refined, and conveniently brought back and sold at very high prices to Africans. In other words, the Europeans were encouraged to scramble for Africa because of the cheap raw materials they could extract to satisfy their industries at home. Third, politically, the European invasion set African peoples against themselves as national boundaries were carved out to the convenience of European invaders. Fourth, the social impact was that local customs and ways of life gave way to the practices and behaviors of the Europeans.

**Patrimonialism**

Patrimonialism is traceable to the German sociologist, Max Weber, in his categorization of “three pure types of authority” or “legitimate domination.” These are legal authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority. Legal authority extracts obedience based on legally established impersonal order. It is the basis for Weber’s classic formulation of bureaucracy, which is the chief instrument of the state. Charismatic authority refers to the obedience inspired by personal trust in a leader’s revelation, heroism, or exemplary qualities. Traditional authority refers to the obedience owed to the person or the chief who occupies the position of authority, sanctioned by tradition. The authority of the chiefs or rulers in African states falls under Weber’s concept of traditional authority.

Weber’s definition of patrimonialism pointed to the small, isolated communities with rudimentary economics, including pre-colonial African chiefdoms. Pockets of these practices persist at the local level in a number of different political settings. Yet, these pockets do not adequately characterize any of the national political systems. Traditional or patrimonial authority is identified by certain characteristics. In a setting of patrimonial authority, dint

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36 Ubhenin, *African Forms of Administration*.
38 Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
of personal prestige and power enables rule by an individual. An extension of the big man’s household is the ordinary people who enjoy only the rights or privileges that are bestowed by the ruler. In its entirety, personalization, or meeting needs more effectively and efficiently, is guided by the preferences of the ruler rather than by a codified system of laws. The stability and survival of the polity are ensured by the ruler, who selectively distributes favors and material benefits to loyal followers. In a patrimonial state, there is a blurred distinction between the public and private spheres. Individuals and their property are not protected from the whims of capricious leaders. Most nations in sub-Saharan Africa retain a modified version of patrimonial rule. Where there are hybrid political systems, that is, the coexistence of customs and patterns of patrimonialism with rational-legal institutions, the political system is called “neo-patrimonialism.”

African chiefs and kings had the power to control their domains, including social and economic resources. Power is an extension of physical capability beyond that of an individual or group used to achieve certain goals through the ability to act or influence; reward or punish; or wage war or mediate. The anthropologist, Georges Balandier, treats power in separate categories, namely: “kinship,” “political,” “religious,” and “social stratification.” Henry Bretton also re-echoed Weber’s conception of economic means, social prestige, and legal positions as sources of power. Power has companionship with “influence.” Political influence comes into play when there is use of “persuasion without power or direct threat” to affect the decisions and orientations of leaders. Yet, for Talcott Parsons, power and influence were closely interconnected. In the context of Africa, traditional rulers used their chiefly and kingly positions to attain initial capital, and, thereafter, achieved more substantial feats by other nontraditional means, including favor and influence. Furthermore, traditional rulers can generate additional power by factitious means, described by Bretton as “mythmaking.”

Also, traditional rulers are interested in the preservation of a social order that is convenient and profitable to the upper levels of the community, but not without value to secular rulers. In pre-colonial Africa, traditional rulers or their agents held all land in trust for the whole community. Traditional rulers mobilized to produce food, sometimes in excess of what was needed.

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39 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
for subsistence. The predominantly agrarian economies had a functional prerequisite for the social order. Many traditional rulers were believed to be living gods or divine kings, or at least descendants of such divinities, who themselves were former kings. They operated variously as heads of established religions in their respective domains, supreme judges, as well as heads of states and societies. Their judicial prerogative enabled them to punish offenders. Rewards for exercising traditional powers included tributes, taxes, fines, and other types of compensation. Other forms of reward were male or female human resources and reproductive services. These rewards were a result of the roles they played in society, including their allocation of unused lands, regulation of agricultural practices, performance of rituals for prosperity, mobilization of manpower, and creation of large armies. Yet, privileges and existing structures allowed traditional rulers to interact, negotiate, bargain, and compromise with any government (civilian or military, elected or appointed). Such interactions, negotiations, and bargaining afforded them and their descendants good education, medical care, and choice positions in business and politics. Naturally, therefore, a prince or a princess stood above ordinary African citizens who were the subjects of the African chief and king in pre-colonial Africa.

Arguably, people’s respect for chiefs and kings in Africa hinged on tradition, which dictated so. With the advent of the modern state, the grip of African chiefs and kings on the people has loosened. Therefore, the major challenge facing traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa is the deployment of available power toward “a second relevance.”

Citizenship

Modern state constitutions recognize citizenship as a potent source and marker of social identity. The concept of citizenship has varied connotations, including a right, an institution, and an instrument. As a right, citizenship finds a comfortable space in being “man’s basic right, for it is nothing less than the right to have rights.” Citizenship captures the “civil,” “political,” and “social” aspects of relationships. This is in consonance with Thomas Marshall’s description of citizenship, supported by Vicki Jackson’s

investigation of the entire spectrum of relations between government and individuals (and even corporate entities, which are treated as “citizens” in some polities). Access to public benefits, including education, health care, and social benefits, also may depend on citizenship. In democracies, the citizen is the fundamental lawmaker. Nation-states are the fundamental political units from which law emanates. All power flows from the citizen upward to the elected representatives and legislative and executive bodies. Only citizens are empowered to change the effect of laws. This, at least in Richard Ford’s view, symbolizes “popular sovereignty,” that is, liberal democratic states grounded in affirmation of the universal rights of individuals as human beings and the practical reality that the citizens of particular states must effectively exercise these rights.

As an institution, citizenship is based on membership and loyalty that transcend ethnic, religious, racial, and economic self-interest. Citizenship is an instrument that is being affected by the relative decline of the traditional nation-state. This is important in the organization of human political geography. Francis Deng distinguishes between the exclusionist understanding of ethnicity and the inclusive concept of citizenship. On the one hand, citizenship represents an ascriptive concept of ethnicity defined through shared bloodlines, common (inherited) cultural characteristics and practices, and a shared origin of historical descent. Such aspects of one’s being highlight an ascriptive model of membership. On the other hand, citizenship is a democratic concept based on shared political allegiances, common territorial residence, and collective participation in self-government. Rather than being hereditary, these attributes emphasize a consensual or voluntary (and participatory) model of membership. Since nearly every modern state, particularly in Africa, is a construct of multiple tribal, ethnic, and cultural groups—creating a framework of unity in diversity, often with sharp discrepancies in the shaping and sharing of power, wealth, and other entitlements—a state’s use of ascriptive membership criteria can be a potent source of division, conflict, and marginalization. In contrast, a democratic model of citizenship offers an important alternative (to the ethnic model) basis of demarcating national membership boundaries that transcend

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52 Ibid.


particularistic group identities.\textsuperscript{55}

Moreover, citizenship is an instrument. As an instrument, citizenship enables human equality within the polity, much like that derived through affiliations in organizations such as churches or civic clubs. In semi-authoritarian states—those states that are neither authoritarian nor democratic—citizenship is a tool used to exclude dangerous competition or competitors from political office. “All countries, of course, require that candidates for political office be citizens, and in some cases even that they be born in the country.”\textsuperscript{56} A semi-authoritarian regime would go further to require that candidates’ parents be born in the country. This requirement has become a threat to democracy in Africa, where most modern states were not independent, and did not become separate entities until the 1960s.

In pre-colonial Africa, all powers were invested in the King of Zulu, who ruled over his subjects. The subjects in Zulu were fired for various offences, including plotting the death of a chief, trying to kill a king, or disobeying the direct order of a king. The subject also would be made to return any property given to him because he deserted his tribe, but would be at liberty to depart.\textsuperscript{57} The peasants could become subjects in Egyptian society during Egypt’s constitutional monarchy. French citizens were raised in the four coastal towns of Senegal, which enjoyed commune status. French citizenship separated them from the status of being colonial subjects. The first Senegalese were elected to the French National Assembly as early as 1914.\textsuperscript{58} In British Nigeria, the colonial authorities constructed a dichotomy between the natives and British protected citizens. This policy prepared the ground for the sprouting of a dual notion of law, reflecting customary law and the penal codes of Nigeria. As argued by Odia Ofeimun, the deliberate colonial administrative manipulations to ensure that the North prevailed over the South were meant to “repress, or at least depress, the exuberance that appeared to be the main characteristic of the Southern position,” resulting in the building of a Nigerian polity that gave the advantage of a permanent veto to the North, with the South left only with the right to protest, a right that never changed the pattern of governance.\textsuperscript{59}

Citizenship also is visibly absent in post-colonial Africa, which is defined by neo-patrimonialism, wherein the right to rule is ascribed to a person rather than to an office, regardless of the existence of an official constitution. The individual “strongman,” “big man,” or “supremo” is a president for life, dominates the state apparatus, and stands above the law.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, the

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 151.
\textsuperscript{57} Mamdani, \textit{Citizen and Subject}, 44-45.
\textsuperscript{58} Ottaway, \textit{Democracy Challenged}.
\textsuperscript{60} Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, \textit{Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective} (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 62.
fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy as captured by various post-colonial state constitutions cannot be enforced.

Sources of Traditional Rulership

Regardless of time and season, traditional rulers derive their powers and mandates from a variety of sources, including birth, age, divinity, new chiefdoms and kingdoms, conquest, and the need for survival. The first acceptable source of traditional rulership in Africa is birth. Particularly in an environment in which the chief or king is succeeded by the first son, there may be no dispute over succession. In Benin and other surrounding small states and societies of Edo, succession to the throne is by primogeniture in accordance with social convention carried on by tradition. In Yorubaland, on the other hand, succession to the throne of an Oba is by birth into the ruling family. For example, the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adéyeyé Enitan Ogunwusi, is from the Giesi family, whose turn it was to produce the king. Yet, there are levels of mechanisms for electing the Oba. Another source of traditional rulership in Africa is age. In the case of the head of a family, lineage, clan, or village, ascension to the throne is by age. Heads of families, lineages, and clans have contributed to the evolution of traditional authority. The reemergence of traditional rulership in Africa corroborates what Balandier calls the survival of “the onslaught of modern economic forces.”62 In Edo communities today, the Odionwere is usually the most aged person.

Divinity also is a source of traditional rulership in Africa. In the emirates of northern Nigeria, the Emir leads the people based on Islamic tenets. In a pagan society, the chief priest could be the traditional ruler. Magical powers enabled the Tsoede of Nupe to establish a divine monarchy. Senegalese marabouts (Muslim hermits or monks) would deploy religious loyalty to exercise some control over group members. Divinity also was typical of the Mossi-Dagomba states, such as Temne of Sierra Leone, which was firmly grounded in religious sanctions that did not favor Islam. Powerful secret societies of men (poro) and women in Temne provided informal education concerning codes of social behavior, customs, morals, and local industry. Like Mossi, the divine kings of Jukun used religion to influence the people. In the past, chief priests in Benin wielded some traditional powers in terms of performance of rituals as well as land administration. This was altered by community development associations (CDAs), which sometimes chased away some of their elders to pave the way for the sale of community lands. However, the CDAs have become extinct

61 Balandier, *Anthropologie Politique* [Political anthropology].
in Benin communities due to the proclamation of Oba Ewuare II of Benin, supported by state law.64

Another source of traditional rulership in Africa is the creation of new chiefdoms and kingdoms, perhaps due to conquest. For example, Igueben in present-day Edo State (Nigeria) reportedly was founded in the sixteenth century by Eben, the warrior-loyalist to Oba Esigie. Eben had led a team to conquer Idah, a town on the River Niger bank. On return to his strategy camp, Eben discovered that the location had become a flourishing “farm” for growing yams. Thereafter, permission was sought from Oba Esigie of Benin, and Igueben became a new settlement.65 During colonialism, authorities leaned on traditional authority to benefit from the potential of conquered territories regarding resource allocation, land administration, and the cultivation of agricultural produce, such as rubber (in the Congo) and groundnuts (in West Africa). Traditional rulers were direct instruments of the central authority in the copper mines of Zambia and the tin mines of Nigeria to achieve increased production. Traditional rulers in pre-colonial Africa also drew their authority from the survival needs of the people, whom they regarded as subjects. The weak desired to be protected from the strong, and the poor wished to be protected from the rich. There was need for order and defense.

It must be mentioned that traditional rulership was reflected in the laws of the land. The powers of traditional rulers were recognized by colonial authorities. Just as in Colonial Nigeria, early Colonial Uganda (1890–1910) witnessed British reliance on traditional chiefs for building roads, organizing schools, and providing sanitation, among other functions. African chiefs managed an African infrastructure under British personnel, notably district commissioners and their assistants. Centralized groups were made to sign agreements with the British, and native authorities accepted their payment of tribute to the administration. In exchange, their indigenous system was upheld.66 In post-colonial Nigeria, the choice of traditional ruler must receive the backing of selected public institutions, such as the ministry of justice, as well as the ratification of the state executive council through the ministry of local government and chieftaincy affairs.67 In all, in post-colonial Africa, modern laws and constitutions stand out uniquely in their reduction of the powers of traditional rulers.

66 Gennaioli and Rainer, “Precolonial Centralization and Institutional Quality in Africa.”
Space and Role of Traditional Rulers in Post-Colonial Africa

Mamdani has identified two distinct constellations, “conservative” and “radical,” in post-colonial Africa. In the conservative African states, the hierarchy of the local state apparatus, from chiefs to headmen, continued after independence. In the case of radical African states, “a constellation of tribally defined customary laws was discarded as a single customary law transcending tribal boundaries was codified.” As a result, a uniform, country-wide customary law, applicable to all peasants regardless of ethnic affiliation, was developed to function alongside modern law for urban dwellers. The conservative regime reproduced the decentralized despotism that was characteristic of the colonial state in Africa, which the radical regimes sought to reform. In essence, the radical regime recognized decentralized power to achieve a unified “nation” through centralized reform. However, “the antidote to a decentralized despotism turned out to be a centralized despotism.”

Thus, there are elements of the traditional administrative structure in modern African states.

The foregoing provides the context of post-colonial Africa, an era that is witnessing a resurgence of sorts of traditional rulers. As “new agents of change,” traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa occupy some space in modern state governance. African chiefs and kings are involved in development projects. They help in the introduction of new technologies to agriculture and community health. As community developers, African chiefs and kings serve in the transformation of communities into state capitals and urban centers. International recognition also is associated with these milestones, such as the thirty-four-year reign of the late Ataoja of Osogbo. Osogbo gained a place on the world map through its recognition by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and a listing as a world heritage site. UNESCO also established the Category II Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding in the town.

African chiefs and kings serve as agents of decentralization. They are involved in tax administration through campaigns and enlightenment to increase the revenue base of the state. In Mozambique, traditional rulers “are seen as representing a specific African democracy and as an element of democratic decentralization.” African chiefs and kings play key roles in the peaceful resolution of conflicts in communities. They serve in peace and security committees of the state. At the height of youth restiveness in Nigeria’s

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68 Mamdani, Citizen and Subject, 25.
69 Ibid.
71 Kyed, “‘New’ Agents of Change,” 7.
Niger-Delta, traditional rulers and other community leaders were engaged in preaching an amnesty message to the youth.\textsuperscript{72}

African chiefs and kings also have demonstrated “a stabilizing capacity” in the resolution of deep-seated conflicts over public matters. In Nigeria’s Ogun State, the conference of Yewa/Awori Obas, including those from Oke-Ogun, cautioned the G15 lawmakers of the state legislature over their Resolution 167, which urged financial institutions to shun the move by then Governor Otunba Gbenga Daniel’s administration in raising money from capital markets for its mega projects.\textsuperscript{73} On May 7, 2009, Oyo State pensioners resolved to approach the traditional rulers regarding unpaid arrears and gratuity due to them. The aggrieved pensioners directed their members to report daily at the respective palaces of the monarchs in the thirty-three local government areas until the state government acceded to their demand. The women among the pensioners, including the pensioners’ wives, were prepared to protest in nudity if the traditional rulers failed to prevail on the governor.\textsuperscript{74}

Traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa are land administrators. They play key roles in the land allocation committee of a community, and sometimes as members of land dispute resolution committees. African chiefs and kings serve as policy formulators in the fields of collective goal attainment regarding the founding of new villages, defense and security, and economic, social, and religious activities. They also are able to mobilize resources for the creation and building of states. In 2009, the Oba of Osun State called for the creation of Oduduwa. Led by Oladele Olashore, the Owaloko of Iloko-Ijesa, the traditional ruler based his argument on sentimental attachment to the name “Oduduwa” by over two hundred forty-six million Yoruba-speaking people.\textsuperscript{75} Oduduwa is generally ascribed to the ancestral dynasties of the Yoruba, as the first man created by God.

A number of reasons can be advanced for the space and role of traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa. Tradition is being redefined to capture the relevance of Africa’s chiefs and kings, particularly in the terms of liberal-style democratization and its emphasis on civil society.\textsuperscript{76} In addition, state failure and its inability to cater to its citizens has brought back African chiefs and kings, including expansion of their scope of influence. The state appears incapable of extending its grip both politically and economically. Thus, African chiefs and kings have elevated themselves to positions of intermediaries between the


\textsuperscript{76} Kyed, “‘New’ Agents of Change.”

state and society. Nevertheless, this factor does not explain the return of the “new agents of change” in relatively well-functioning states. Also, available evidence suggests the relative lack of traditional resurgence in collapsed or failed states.

Another plausible explanation for the resurgence of traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa is donors’ emphasis on grassroots processes in development. This is understandable: African chiefs and kings have the capacities to drive development processes in their domains. They belong to the class of people who have reached the height of their chosen field before accepting the “ancestral call” to serve. It can be argued that the education of African chiefs and kings is a “carry-over” from African pre-colonialism when the king or emperor had the opportunity to shape the education of his offspring. It was recorded that Benin’s Oba Esigie (c.1504—1550) learned to speak Portuguese. His son and successor, Oba Orhogbua (c.1550—1578), was the first Benin ruler to be educated in European schools. Indeed, educational attainment never has been a consideration for mounting the throne, but media debate suggests the foolhardiness in having an illiterate as traditional ruler.

Table 1 illustrates selected Nigerian (and Ghanaian) traditional rulers and their professions. The table captures more of the traditional rulers in Nigeria, who formerly held positions in public service before retiring to their domain. The oil magnate Olugbo, Frederick Obateru Akinruntan of Ugbo (Nigeria), is the second richest traditional ruler in Africa, ranking just behind His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco. The entrepreneur Ashantehene, Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II of Ashanti (Ghana), is the fifth wealthiest in Africa.

Explaining the Loss of Grip over Subjects in the Domain

Obviously, the powers of traditional rulers have been decimated when evaluated in the context of modernization in Africa. Post-colonial African chiefs and kings have lost a grip over the subjects in their domains. This loss can be traced to three periods of political history in Nigeria: colonialism, early post-colonialism, and the contemporary wave of democratization and globalization. Colonialism is chiefly defined by the imposition of Western-
Table 1. Selected Nigerian (and Ghanaian) Traditional Rulers and Their Professions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Traditional Domain (title)</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Joseph Edozien</td>
<td>Asaba (Asagba)</td>
<td>Retired Professor of Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II</td>
<td>Ashanti (Ashantehene)</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oba Ewuare II</td>
<td>Benin (Ewuare II)</td>
<td>Retired Diplomat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Alfred Diete Spiff</td>
<td>Brass (King)</td>
<td>Retired General, Nigeria Army/Ex-Governor, Rivers State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Adesanya Aladejare</td>
<td>Efon (Alaaye)</td>
<td>Retired University Don</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oba Adedotun Gbadebo</td>
<td>Egbaland (Alake)</td>
<td>Retired Colonel, Nigeria Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi Ojaja II</td>
<td>Ilfe (Ooni)</td>
<td>Accountant/Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alhaji Kolapo Gambari</td>
<td>Ilorin (Emir)</td>
<td>Retired Judge, Court of Appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alhaji Sanusi Lamido Sanusi</td>
<td>Kano (Emir)</td>
<td>Retired Banker/Former Governor, CBN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oba Rilwan Akiolu</td>
<td>Lagos (Olowo-Eko)</td>
<td>Retired AIG, Nigeria Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igwe Nnaemeka Achebe</td>
<td>Onitsha (Obi)</td>
<td>Retired Staff, NNPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alhaji Awal Ibrahim</td>
<td>Suleja (Emir)</td>
<td>Former Governor, Niger State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alhaji Saa’d Abubakar</td>
<td>Sokoto (Sultan)</td>
<td>Retired Brigadier General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oba Frederick Obateru Akinruntan</td>
<td>Ugbo (Olugbo)</td>
<td>Oil Magnate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Author’s compilation from various sources.

style state organization on African centralized and fragmented states. Before the European invasion of Africa, chiefs and kings raised revenues from trade, tax, and royalties, among other sources. It is on record that Ghana’s emperor received “ten shillings worth of gold for [a] donkey load of salt (worth about £150) entering Ghana, one pound (£1) for a donkey load of gold leaving Ghana; ½ ounce of gold per load of copper and 1¼ ounces of gold per load of general merchandise.”

Songhai’s Askia relied upon trade, industry, and agriculture, and the introduction of weights and measures boosted trade in the empire. Mai Ali Ghaji’s second Kanem-Bornu empire gave a boost to trans-Atlantic trade: slaves were exported, while horses were imported. During the reign of Idris Alooma, peasant subjects paid taxes on livestock and harvest to the provincial governor. In addition, tributes were collected from the vassal states, such as Kano. In the seventeenth century, cowries (marine mollusks) were common currency in Kanem-Bornu. Oyo’s Alafin was paid tributes from Borgu, Dahomey, and Nupe. Between 1729 and 1781, Dahomey paid an annual tribute worth about £32,000, expressed in “forty men, forty women, forty guns and 4,000 loads of cowries to Oyo.”

86 Ibid., 87.
However, with the European invasion, African chiefs and kings were forced to relinquish their power to the colonial authorities, whose commercial interests were to be protected on the continent. Thus, African chiefs and kings became supporters of the colonial administration. Administrative powers never were returned to the chiefs and kings in traditional Africa. Instructively, the economic survival of traditional rulers has been found in their access to the generational wealth of royalty, which they sometimes display lavishly. Swaziland’s absolute monarch, King Mswati III, recently received a twin-engine McDonnell Douglas DC-9 Private Jet as a gift on his birthday.87 During the September 12, 2016 Eid el-Kabir celebrations, the Emir of Kano, Muhammadu Sanusi II, shared pictures of his newly acquired white 2016 Rolls Royce Phantom on his official Instagram page, with the caption, “Has just been added.”88 Six weeks later, the social media again was awash with images of the 2016 Rolls Royce Phantom, which the Oba Ewuare II of Benin had purchased for the coronation thanksgiving service at the Holy Aruosa in Benin City (Nigeria).

It suffices to note that the ostentatious lifestyles of some traditional rulers have contributed to their alienation from the people. Ostentation in the palace provides a budding ground for filthy lucre in the traditional domain, an apparent learning from the “greed and lucre of the European economies.”89 For “filthy lucre’s sake,” chieftaincy titles may be awarded to people of questionable character. For the same sake, traditional rulers might demand money from an indigent student who wishes to be introduced to the local government authorities with the objective of obtaining a certification of local government of origin. Ostentatious living in the palace in the face of hardship, poverty, and unemployment in the domain is gradually propelling the image of the traditional ruler into a nose-dive.

The second categorization, “early post-colonialism,” is defined by the years immediately after the attainment of political independence by colonial African states, that is, from the 1960s to the 1980s. Years of agitation for self-government and independence produced a rather new group of rulers, groomed by colonial experience to take over the reins of state affairs in Africa. The post-independence African leaders could easily take hold of the states because their ideologies were well shaped by African culture and social values. For

example, Julius Kambarage Nyerere’s *Ujamaa*, or “African socialism,” 90 was based on the principles of freedom, equality, and unity. Kwame Nkrumah’s “conscientism” 91 hinged on the unification and liberation of Africa. Leopold Sedar Senghor’s “negritude” 92 emphasized the emergence of powerful black presence in the world. Obafemi Awolowo’s “democratic socialism” 93 defined a commitment toward the achievement of the political objectives of individual well-being through the application of social justice, equal opportunity, and personal freedom for all. These ideologies factored into the modern African state policies. A case in point is the promulgation of the Land Use Decree (1978) in Nigeria, which removed the powers of traditional rulers to control land in their domains. 94 Thus, having been stripped of the endowments of natural resources during the period of colonialism, modern African constitutions merely built upon the tradition that government should control revenue-raising affairs.

During early post-colonialism, traditional rulers did not have control over the economies of their domains; they were unable to collect royalties and taxes because modern government had taken over administration and because of the exploitation of resources. Perhaps to wield economic power, traditional rulers started to become involved in practical politics in the immediate years following independence. This turned out to be counter-productive because traditional rulers ought to be the “father of all.” For example, it is recorded that Oba Akenzua II of Benin was a strong voice in the formation of the Benin Delta People’s Party which sought the creation of the Midwestern region. In effect, he was advised by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, then premier of the Western Region, to disengage from partisan politics before it became counterproductive. 95 The Olu of Warri, Erejuwa II, was deposed and exiled for allegedly inciting the Itsekiri people against federal government officials. The Olu had backed the Action Group against an Urhobo, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), who was contesting election to the federal parliament.

From the 1980s and 1990s onward, Africa has witnessed the promotion of democracy, particularly by foreign-supported nongovernmental organizations. These organizations benefited immensely from the liberalization of the 1980s and the 1990s, the legitimacy crisis of African governments, and the rise of

94 Chizea and Osumah, “Two Sides of a Coin.”
95 Ibid.
Assistance came mainly from the United States and other industrialized democracies. The response of modern African state leaders to the accompanying standardized approaches to democracy programs has been to learn “to stubbornly resist real change that might threaten their power.” Their response includes using subtle means to engage the traditional rulers to help win their war for legitimacy. For example, traditional rulers in Nigeria are statutorily entitled to a stipend equaling 5 percent of the monthly allocation to the local governments in their domain. While millions of people live in abject poverty, various state governments in Nigeria have learned to release millions of Nigerian Naira for the purchase of cars of various brands as official and utility vehicles to enable traditional leaders to perform their functions.

The current period of the promotion of democracy coincides with the wave of globalization, including sociocultural and economic integration. It also includes agreed methods of interpretation to determine the scope and content of human rights. Modern African state constitutions recognize the place of human rights, which also are promoted by actors in social media, who are empowered by information and communication technologies. State laws do not recognize the existence of “subjects.” Rather, there are citizens of sovereign nation-states, a position that recently was reiterated by the Government of Edo State, Nigeria, in a letter of suspension issued to the Ojuromi of Uromi, Zaiki Anselm Eidenojie II: “There are no ‘subjects’ in Nigeria but citizens of the Federal Republic.” The supplemental cases against the Ojuromi, Zaiki Eidenojie II of Uromi (Edo), were that he allegedly took over the cattle market and stalls built by cattle sellers at Uromi, and assigned the revenue collection to his preferred person without the local government council’s authority. It is important to note that modern state actors deploy the terms “citizens” or “subjects,” depending on what they seek to achieve. For example, during the 2015 presidential polls, Governor Sule Lamido of Jigawa State, Nigeria, urged traditional rulers to caution their subjects against violence.

Thus, there also has been humiliation of traditional rulers during the wave of democratization and globalization. The instruments of such degradation emanated from many decades of colonialism. Once deposed, the voice of

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96 Assistance came mainly from the United States and other industrialized democracies. The response of modern African state leaders to the accompanying standardized approaches to democracy programs has been to learn “to stubbornly resist real change that might threaten their power.” Their response includes using subtle means to engage the traditional rulers to help win their war for legitimacy. For example, traditional rulers in Nigeria are statutorily entitled to a stipend equaling 5 percent of the monthly allocation to the local governments in their domain. While millions of people live in abject poverty, various state governments in Nigeria have learned to release millions of Nigerian Naira for the purchase of cars of various brands as official and utility vehicles to enable traditional leaders to perform their functions.


98 Chizea and Osumah, “Two Sides of a Coin.”


100 Ibid.

the traditional ruler may never be heard again. The former Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, was installed on December 6, 1988, but deposed in 1996 by the late General Sani Abacha, who was Head of State. For twenty years, there was no word of him until his death on November 15, 2016.\textsuperscript{102} Partisanship in politics remains a strong factor in the current era in the loss of grip by traditional rulers on their former powers. A fundamental case was that against the Ojuromi of Uromi, Zaiki Eidenojie II, lodged by the Government of Edo State for his alleged involvement in scouting for votes in favor of his preferred candidate in the opposition party, during the 2016 governorship election.\textsuperscript{103}

Succession crisis also is contributing to the traditional rulers’ loss of grip in the current period of democratization and globalization. Again, this is traceable to the dynastic conflicts or feuds in pre-colonial Africa, such as the overthrow of Songhai’s Askia the Great by his son, Musa, in 1529.\textsuperscript{104} Also in support of this thesis is the chieftaincy tussles in post-colonial Nigeria. In May 2009, hundreds of residents deserted their homes following killings and house burnings in South Ibie, a community in the Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. This followed an intractable feud between two factions that were loyal to two cousins laying claim to the Aidonogie chieftaincy title of South Ibie for well over a decade.\textsuperscript{105} Additionally, some traditional rulers have been held for drug-related offences. On January 20, 2016, the village head of Goma in the Gimi district of the Sanga Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Alhaji Ibrahim Danladi, was arrested for possession of 1.5kg of marijuana. The Government of Kaduna State thereafter suspended Alhaji Danladi from office, pending the conclusion of investigations and a possible trial.\textsuperscript{106} Where the inhabitants of a community have been subjected to pain and displacement due to violent conflict arising from tensions over who becomes the chief or king, much respect for traditional rulers cannot be generated. In such cases, traditional rulers may not really represent the community’s interests. Rather, their concerns may center on self-serving palace affairs, and in some cases, this is actually so.\textsuperscript{107}

In the light of the foregoing, some African chiefs and kings are perceived to have undermined equal access to justice by the ways in which they exercise

\textsuperscript{103} Otabor, “Oshiomhole Suspends Edo Traditional Ruler for One Year.”
\textsuperscript{104} Ubhenin, \textit{African Forms of Administration}.
\textsuperscript{107} Ubhenin, \textit{African Forms of Administration}.
\textsuperscript{108} Gennaioli and Rainer, “Precolonial Centralization and Institutional Quality in Africa.”
their positions. They sometimes have distorted justice and administration, such as in Uganda.\textsuperscript{108} African chiefs and kings have the tendency to be compromised, thereby losing respect in their domains and communities. This has sometimes led to usurpation of leadership in some of the affected communities.\textsuperscript{109} Finally, the emulation factor has played a strong role in stripping the traditional domain of its subjects. At the time of gaining independence, the remaining power structures of traditional rulers were cleared away in most African states: Guinea (in 1957), Burundi (in 1960), Mali (in 1961), Rwanda (in 1962), Tanzania (in 1963), Ghana (in 1965), and Zaire (in 1973). In Nigeria, however, there has been a complex relationship between the state and traditional rulers, resulting in the changing roles of African chiefs and kings in modern state administration.\textsuperscript{110} Naturally, therefore, African chiefs and kings operating in post-colonial states, where the traditional structures have not been destroyed, are rather fortunate.

**Conclusion**

Pre-colonial domains were ordered and controlled by African chiefs and kings for the purpose of administration and delivery of public services. Traditional rulers achieved self-sufficiency for their states and societies in the production of goods and services. Conventional sources of wealth and power in pre-colonial Africa was trade, complemented by taxation, tribute from vassal states, and royalties from companies operating in the domain. However, the “king’s economy” in pre-colonial Africa was distorted by European invasion. In place of traditional chiefs and kings, local leaders without affiliation to traditional structures were recruited to take over the reins of power. As a result, power was never returned to its original custodians. Also, modern constitutions in African states embrace the fundamental principles favoring human rights and equal opportunities, albeit with variations. Despite the space for and role of traditional rulers in post-colonial Africa, they have become figure heads, with very few cases of monarchical absolutism.

Traditional rulers may not have their former grip over subjects because modern constitutions recognize “citizens” and not “subjects.” At best, subjects remain at an informal level. Even then, the fact that fundamental objectives and guiding principles in African state laws cannot be enforced suggests that there are no citizens, but only subjects, in post-colonial Africa. The point of reasserting power should start with developing a harmonious relationship with modern actors of the state. However, where such a relationship is too strong, it may be unhealthy for the well-being of citizens. The need, therefore, is to tread with caution.


\textsuperscript{110} Chizea and Osumah, “Two Sides of a Coin.”