African Culture and Tradition at the Crossroad: The Institution of Chieftaincy and the Paradox of Modernity in Bekwarra

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Abstract

The institution of chieftaincy is one of the most enduring traditional institutions of Africa in spite of the many vicissitudes it displayed remarkable resilience from colonial through post-colonial times. Historically, chiefs constituted the axis for the exercise of executive, legislative, judicial, military, economic and religious roles. Although chieftaincy institution has experienced ebbs and flows depending on regime preferences and dynamic changes since independence, Chiefs and traditional institutions have manipulated their legitimacy to entrench itself. It is argued that despite assertions that chieftaincy has been overtaken by events, the reality is that the institution has become central to government and cannot be discarded. The challenges of recent times, has raised serious concerns about the importance of chieftaincy against the backdrop of the institution's ambiguous role in modern times. This study traces the historical roles of chiefs, and the inscriptive, non-democratic and anti-modern character of the institution which some pessimist believe would not guarantee its survival in the face of "modernization."

Key words: African culture; Bekwarra; Chieftaincy

INTRODUCTION

The notion of "chieftaincy" evokes a political system always understood and legitimized as being founded on the principle of "traditional" customs, and values. Remarkably, this institution has flourished among Bekwarra people and is presided over by a traditional ruler who by virtue of his ancestry occupies the throne or stool of the community in accordance with the customs and tradition of the people. Three categories of traditional title holders are identified among the Bekwarra people. The first category is those who hold titles conferred on them by superior traditional rulers in appreciation for their contributions in community development. Those so conferred have neither political enclave nor authority to enforce laws on any group of people. Whatever degrees of respect, prestige and power or status accruing to them is such that they, in the first instance, worked for it, and secondly, must work to sustain their individual relevance and continued acceptance or else go into the oblivion. (Ukpokolo, 2009, pp.9-10)

In the second category are holders of titles as a result of recent recognition of such positions. They may have some executive functions, but these executive functions are defined and restricted by the same laws that created them. These examples are replete in Cross River State and some southern parts of Nigeria where, through Edicts, chieftaincy titles were created or formal recognition was given to titles that existed before but not long enough for them to have generated and commanded veneration and respect without the help and sanction of Edicts. The third category consists of full time traditional title holders who derive their executive functions from traditions and are simply referred to as traditional rulers. In spite of this categorization, all three play complementary roles and have the welfare of their subjects as their primary responsibility.

This chapter, African Culture and Tradition at the Crossroad: The Institution of Chieftaincy and the Paradox of Modernity in Bekwarra is divided into three parts viz: pre modern, early modern and modern periods. This demarcation is intended to present historical development of the institution and a springboard for assessing the transformations that have occurred. This chapter argues that although in the pre modern era, traditional leaders gave effect to traditional life and played an essential role in the day-to-day administration of their areas and lives of traditional people, the early modern and modern period witnessed a systematic but gradual adulteration of the institution and loose of power by chiefs.

1. INSTITUTION OF CHIEFTAINCY IN PRE MODERN BEKWARRA

Bekwarra political institutions prior to the advent of the British were predicated on a solid structure of institutions organically related to one another. These institutions, most of which were fashioned out of the social structure of the society have been the embodiment of unity and tradition. The institution of chieftaincy having grown out of the consensus of elders at the birth of the society has consistently thrived as a highly revered institution that was largely symbolized by a chief. Bekwarra Chiefs as 'embodiment of local custom' and icons of honor had their position guided by specific institutionalized traditions with respect to accession to office and performance of functions. The office often resided in specific lineages that were genealogically linked to the founding ancestors. (Omagu, 1997)

It should perhaps be stated here that once a man was installed a chief, he occupied the position for life. It was only on event of grievous wrong doing that led to banishment, dethronement or death another chief was installed. Indeed, customary rules of succession are primarily designed to perpetuate a bloodline and as such, if a stool is declared vacant, the onus rested on the council of elders to produce the most appropriate successor to the throne from a pool of the deceased's sons. In instances where no qualified successor to the throne is found among the deceased chief's children, the position is rotated within a particular ward; (Ikah) has legitimate right to the throne. In Bekwarra, before the option of rotation among family unit is explored in the absence of a son to the throne, other family members who are of the royal family are sort for. Indeed, to fill a vacant stool in cases where there are multiple candidates for the position, the kingmaker's exercised great judiciousness; wisdom as well as the personal qualities which among other things will include honesty; integrity and tolerance were given serious attention. It was however, not uncommon for an heir to the throne to decline taking up the responsibility. Although this happens on few occasions the reasons was probably hinged on the fact that traditionally in Bekwarra, chiefs participated in an incredible number of elaborate rituals, and regulated all religious ceremonies as well as sacrifices to the gods. So a chosen successor who was opposed to the performance of the rituals attached to the title may decline the office and proceed on self-exile to an undisclosed location to avoid being abducted and crowned.

The process of investiture of a chief under the practice of gerontocracy as was the case in Bekwarra was complex, ritualistic and interminable. Once chosen, by the king-makers, the matter was expected to remain secret so as to ensure that that the chosen candidate never absconded. After the seizure of the candidate, he was kept in seclusion for seven days under the care and protection of an appointed individual. The chief however, was never so accepted until he went successfully through the seven days period of seclusion and lying on a traditional bed known as "Anwia". This practice is symbolic because traditionally, it proved the eligibility of the candidate because if he is not the choice of the gods, he is expected to die on top of the "Anwia".

After seven days, he came out fully dressed in his regalia, usually a long thick cloth called Igbagiri, a red cap, a noisy traditional rod Unachi, and Ugbe Ushie, a neck worn around the neck as well as some charms that made up his paraphernalia of royal office. (Omagu, 1997) At the formal investiture, a series of injunctions publicly recited before the new chief defines his political authority and the political relationship that is expected to be maintained between him and his subjects (Gekeye, 1997). He enjoyed a large measure of privileges. Among these are that all his farm work were done for him by the community; he was also entitled to the ham of certain animals killed during individual and group hunting, his compound was constructed and maintained by the community. On the other hand, a chief was surrounded by many taboos. Chiefs are barred from going to the market, carry load on their head, and eat at the market square, they were also forbidden from seeing human blood, a corpse, as well as a grave and a new born baby, fight or strike even his own child. Generally, Bekwarra chiefs are adored by the people and as such acting contrary to demands of traditions, which could incur punishment from the gods. The chief on his part was expected to reciprocate this respect and power accorded him by ensuring the prosperity of his subjects and domain. In order to sustain this, the common cultural attributes of chiefs are preserved as part of their ancestral heritage—and this is a major obligation of traditional leaders.

Chiefs as political head are rallying points for development in the community. Through a chief's office, his subjects were mobilized to assist in projects that position the community into serving the needs of its member's well-being. Such projects may include but not restricted to clearing bushy areas of the community, building of markets, roads, and providing security. In

this respect, the institution first and foremost becomes a focal establishment for uniting community members and promoting a sense of belonging among people in rural communities. Conventionally, a chief has powers to declare war and make peace, conclude alliances, send and receive emissaries, appoints subordinate officials and is also the final arbiter in the administration of justice. Indeed, the Institution of chieftaincy held sway as the organizational structure around which the socio-political, cultural, and economic life of the people revolved. Such powers as possessed by chiefs and conferred on them by tradition were obtainable in other African societies.

The institution functioned as the political and administrative center of governance for traditional communities. The village assembly represented the largest and very powerful organ of government in the village polity that the chief worked closely with in carrying out his duties. Important civil disputes were dealt with by an *ad-hoc* town meeting held when the need arose. The spokesman of the village council - *Idengeli* summoned meetings of the council on the instruction of the chief through the town crier who disseminated the invitation by beating a drum or hitting of a gong. These meetings were usually held at the market square, playground or in the chief's compound. Here, the elders in the community laid specific issues concerning the unit before the people. Every man had the right to speak, oppose or accept any issue brought before them. Popular proposals were naturally applauded and unpopular ones shouted down. (Omagu, 1997).

Historically, the institution of traditional leadership played a vital role in the body politic of pre-colonial African communities. It embodies the preservation of culture, traditions, customs and values of the African people, while also representing the early forms of societal organization and governance.(Department of Justice and Constitutional Development,) In recognition of the fact that people entrusted with power are capable of political tyranny, to borrow a phrase from John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, great men are almost always bad men", the council of elders provided efficient checks and balances on a chief's functions and power to safeguard against abuse of power. Viewed from the perspective of contemporary democracy, the formal mechanisms of accountability in African traditional institutions were rather weak, since chiefs often combined both executive as well as judicial powers and the councils, were often composed largely of members of the nobility or close relatives of the chiefs (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development).

The chief's council (*Ikem Udiara*) in Bekwarra like most African societies was composed mostly of male heads of different family units. They served as advisers and met periodically to formulate policies and take decisions on village matters. Indeed these people were generally seen as a "committee of wise men" who possessed the innate ability to understand the intricacies of human organization. Prominent among the elders was the *Idengeli*, chosen on account of his personal qualities, such as, imposing and commanding personality, oratory, knowledge of the community law and custom.

The council is presided over by the chief and he is obliged to act on the advice and with the consent of his councilors, whom he has to summon regularly. The councilors freely discuss all matters affecting the community and, in any such atmosphere of free and frank expression of opinions, disagreements are inevitable. But in the event of such disagreements, the council would continue to listen to arguments until a consensus was reached with the reconciliation of opposed views. (Senyonjo) The councilors and the people had a symbiotic relationship and as such no important decision was passed by the councilors without first consulting the people. The government's decision-making process was not far removed from the people. And since the people were involved throughout much of the process, the decisions taken by the councilors were most likely to be endorsed by the community as legitimately representing their interests. The active participation of the community in its own political affairs was not new in traditional Africa where elders would sit and discuss clan or state affairs in open view of everyone. Such participation and ownership of the political system is arguably the essence of democracy. (Senyonjo) This point is further buttressed by Meyer Fortes, and E.E. Evans-Pritchard who opine that: "the structure of an African State implies that kings and chiefs rule by consent. A ruler's subjects are as fully aware of the duties he owes to them as they are of duties they owe to him, and are able to exert pressure to make him discharge his duties" (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p.12).

Bekwarra laws, like those of most non-literate societies, were unwritten and based on legal interdictions promulgated by rulers or arising from general disapproval, and taboos which depended on a magico-religious sanction. Thus besides civil prohibitions, there were also religious and ecclesiastical inhibitions. But because there was no hard and fast division between the two, it is difficult to say where the former ended and the latter began. A very strong sense of justice prevailed among all ethnic groups, perhaps because the mystical connection between kings and their people meant that their prosperity depended on justice and due observance of the laws and taboos. No difference was made between the executive and judicial powers, as they were combined in the chief ruler, or rulers, of the people (Adejumobi, 2000, p.156).

The process of dealing with offenders was based on a hierarchical structure that had procedural guidelines. For offences committed within a family the matter was heard and determined by the family head. However, if a family head was unable to resolve a matter he would call upon the clan elders to adjudicate the matter (Kinyanjui,

n.d). Similarly, if the offender and the victim belonged to the same clan, the council of elders in that clan would adjudicate the matter. (Kinyanjui, n.d) Once a case is reported to the village head, he consults with other elders in the village and then sets a day for the hearing of the case. Both the plaintiff and the defendant are asked to deposit a certain amount of money which is then shared by the presiding elders. On the appointed day, litigants appeared before the elders and other participants who listen to their presentation. The presiding elder outlines the expected decorum and fines for violators and then asks the plaintiff to present his/her case. After the presentation, the plaintiff is aggressively and thoroughly questioned, by the defendant, elders and members of the audience present. Witnesses were called and their testimonies strictly scrutinized through questioning. Both the offender and the victim would have a spokesperson from his or her family to represent the facts to the clan elders. In an inter-clan matter, where the offender and the victim belonged to different clans, elders from the different clans would come together. Spokespersons to represent each clan would then be selected to facilitate the hearing of evidence from both sides (Kinyanjui, n.d). Cases not concluded in one day are adjourned. Elders decision are based on oral evidence and facts presented before it.

It may however be appropriate to discuss some important modes and means of settlements of disputes as employed by Bekwarra judicial system. Indeed traditional Bekwarra justice was tested in a number of areas.

Stealing is abhorred and it is in fact, an abomination to steal things relating to people's vital life-interests and occupation, like agricultural products or animals caught in a snare laid by a hunter or farmer in the bushes. Indeed thieves are treated with the severity their crimes deserve. The penalties usually focus on compensation or restitution in order to restore the *status quo*, rather than punishment. (Merry, 1982, p.17-45) However, sometimes traditional justice forums may order the restitution, for example, twice the number of the stolen goods to their owner, "especially when the offender has been caught in *flagrante delicto*" and fines may be levied. (Elias, 1969, p.20; MINARS (Ministry of Social Assistance and Rehabilitation of Angola, 1984, p.94).

For boundary dispute or trespass, the Bekwarra sense of justice is brought to bear by way of traditional history and adjudicated over by family heads, or expressed in terms of litigation before the chief and elders. In the olden days when the use of modern day beacons was unknown, boundaries were demarcated by the use of some economic trees like palm trees and coconut trees which can survive the adverse effects of various weathers. In land disputes, what is therefore just is identified with the goodness of the title and correspondence with boundary. It should be stated here that a dispute cannot be settled unless the victim, as well as the offender agree with the final decision. For the elders to be sure that genuine reconciliation has been achieved after dispute mediation, both parties may be expected to eat from the same bowl, drink palm wine, or local gin from the same cup and/or break and eat kola-nuts. This forms part of the reconciliatory approach intrinsic to most African traditional dispute mediation. The public also partake in the eating and drinking as an expression of the communal element inherently present in any individual conflict and of their acceptance of the offender back into the community (Omale, 2006).

Bekwarra chiefs presided over communal strife resulting from land/boundary disputes, murder of a member of a particular town, feuds for farm lands, as well as market quarrels. Resolution of issues of conflicts took the form of negotiation and plea bargaining between the two towns. Often, representations of men recognized for their wealth of knowledge, closeness to power, or the performance of some important religious duties (Falola, 2000, p.32) from the two towns would meet to deliberate on the issue. At the end justice is done in terms of compensation, reparation, apology, and payment of damages

In crimes like murder, considered to have dislocative and destructive impact on the society (Adejumobi, p.155) utmost care and evidence relating to the charge was critically analyzed and any iota of doubt observed was resolved in favor of the accused. However, where all available evidence pointed incriminatingly at the accused, no amount of plea could save him/her from the full wrath of the law. Murder, called for atonement, propitiation of gods or ancestors and punishment which was as severe as banishment or even the death sentence (Adejumobi, p.155). Whatever approach is adopted, first the moral pollution has to be cleansed in order to appease spiritual beings and ancestors who are believed to have been also offended without which the entire community stood a real and imminent danger of suffering a disaster.

Belief in witchcraft is widespread across Africa. It is the explanation for otherwise inexplicable misfortune among people who are looking for personalized causes. (Omale, April, 2009) Accused witches can be men or women, young. Men and women accused of practicing witchcraft are brought before the chief' court and tried either through oath taking or appeal to god or supernatural forces. Considerable wisdom was displayed by the Chief and his council in deciding cases in which no element of witchcraft or other belief repugnant to modern feelings enter. It is most probable that the right decision is given with as much certainty as in a European court". (Fisiy, p.264). Suspects certified guilty of witchcraft are stigmatized, discriminated against for life and stood irrevocably condemned to whatever penalties the law prescribed. (Omagu, 1997) The fate of witches was death or perpetual exile, the former being, in fact, the lesser alternative. (Shorter, 1977, p.32-51) For most African groups, ostracizing an individual or group that has fragrantly disobeyed the community is thought to be the most severe punishment that could be meted out to

anybody. It feels like death for any one so punished since such a person is regarded as an outcast. He/She would not be allowed to share in the life of the community anymore. There would be no visits to the family, no exchange of greetings, no one would sell or buy from members of the affected family, and may not be allowed to fetch water from community streams. So severe is the punishment of ostracisation that every member of the community highly dreads it, and would do everything possible to avoid it. It does, on the other hand, show the kind of tremendous power of the community in traditional African background. Sometimes, victims accused of witchcraft are subjected to psychological and physical violence, either by family members and their circle of friends, or traditional healers.

Indeed, the penalties ordained by the laws may be said to have been imposed partly as a deterrent, partly in revenge, and partly because the crimes were thought unpleasing to the gods and ancestors. The punishment varied according to how the crime was regarded either as an offense against community law, priest, chiefs or age grade and club laws (Omagu, 1997). On the whole, Bekwarra laws appeared to have been sensible and the penalties were mild when compared with most pre-colonial laws; they were harsh according to modern European standards. Sir James Marshall's testimony as to the efficiency of the West African pre-colonial justice system is important here. According to him:

> … These people have their own laws and customs, which are better adapted to their condition than the complicated system of English jurisprudence. The adoption of them would, it is maintained, be more conducive to the best interests of all than the present system. (Balonwu, 1975, p.31- 67).

The main thrust of traditional Bekwarra justice system is often to bring closure to disputes between people living in the same community, based on restoration and who will have to live and work together in future. Braithwaite, for example, asserts that "restorative justice has been the dominant model of criminal justice throughout most of human history for perhaps the entire world's peoples". (Braithwaite, 2002) Its emphasis, according to Armstrong *et al*, is on the "processes of achieving peaceful resolutions of disputes rather than on adherence to rules as the basis of determining disputes".(Armstrong, *et al*, 1993, p.14). A fair and just judgment must take into account a wider range of facts and interests, including that of the community, without necessarily compromising the facts of the matter in dispute and the rights of the litigants. Nsereko notes that African customary legal processes "focused mainly on the victim rather than on the offender". (Nsereko, 1992, p.22). The goal of justice was to vindicate the victim and protect his/her rights. The imposition of punishment on the offender was designed to bring about the healing of the victim rather than to punish the offender. In any conflict, rather than punish the offender for punishment sake, the offender was made to pay compensation to the victim. Compensation according to Nsereko goes beyond restitution. It also represents a form of apology and atonement by the offender to the victim and the community (Nsereko, 1992, p.22).

In the determination of any charge against a person, professional legal representation is not a feature of the traditional justice system, nor can it be regarded as required. Indeed with traditional justice system, decisions can be delivered more promptly and financial costs involved for litigants, are minimal (Stevens, 2000). The importance of traditional courts derives from the fact that proceedings are quick and take place within walking distance. They are also conducted in the local language and carried out in a manner which everyone understands by people who are socially important to litigants, rather than impersonal state officials. (Stevens, 2000) Traditional justice is inherently flexible and can adjust to changing circumstances more easily. Although not mandatory, family participation in the legal proceedings was an important feature of the Bekwarra justice system. The involvement of the families of the wrongdoer and wronged party reaffirmed the communal ties. Having in mind that individual conduct had repercussions on one's kin; individuals bore the responsibility to act properly. Therefore this social structure, which was based on communal living, facilitated the operation of restorative justice (Kinyanjui, n.d).

In pre-colonial Bekwarra, imprisonment did not exist as a penalty for any offence. Corporal punishment, however, has been and continues to be administered by a number of traditional systems in Africa—almost invariably on juvenile offenders, but never on women or girls. (Elias, 1956, p.288) Such offenders are isolated and despised by their peers and the community at large, but a habitual criminal who has consistently manifested a propensity for stealing is banished from the community. It is however, only after several attempts by the community to restore order by employing corrective action has failed would an offender be banished from the community—this would be a last resort where an offender did not attempt to mend her/his ways. Public consensus is necessary to ensure enforcement of the decision. It is, therefore, not surprising that the procedures used in traditional systems allow members of the public to tender evidence and generally make their opinions known (Allott, 1968, p.146).

The vast majority of norms, taboos and prohibitions are directed towards protecting the community as well as promoting peace and harmony. Communal farmland, economic interests like the market-place, stream, or shrine are generally surrounded with taboos, including who may or may not enter, and when, and under what circumstances people are permitted or not to enter such places. There are also special restrictions and norms regulating the behavior of people towards public functionaries like lineage heads, the king or queen, traditional priests, diviners and medicine-practitioners. Such persons are generally

regarded as specially sacred, and representative of the community. Their residence is equally sacred so, are instruments of their office (Ejizu).

The institution therefore symbolizes stability. It is through this legal role that the traditions, norms and values of his community are validated and transmitted. The powers, roles and functions of traditional leaders were defined in terms of customary law. It was through this framework that the traditional political institution in Bekwarra functioned and was not as claimed by the European's that the traditional system lacked cohesion and was inundated with disorder and confusion. Indeed, Bekwarra institution of chieftaincy in the pre modern period exhibited democratic norms of governance, justice and checks and balances. Such values were to be found in many traditional institutions elsewhere in Africa. The next part, will examine the early modern period and the impact of the institution of chieftaincy in Bekwarra.

2. INSTITUTION OF CHIEFTAINCY IN EARLY MODERN BEKWARRA

It must be noted that the defining contact between Africa and the West dates back to the slave trade era immediately followed by the formal colonization of the continent whereby, the Europeans implemented various political, economic, and social policies that enabled them to maintain or extend their authority and control over different territories in Africa.

The establishment of a regular administration in Nigeria began with the appointment of Sir Claude Macdonald as consul in 1891 with the mandate to consolidate the territories and bring them under a uniform system of government (Omagu, 1997). Later in 1900, these areas, together with those hitherto controlled by the Royal Niger Company, were amalgamated to become the protectorate of Southern Nigeria with headquarters at Calabar. In 1906, the colony of Lagos and the protectorate of Southern Nigeria were merged. The creation of three provinces, viz: Western, Central and Eastern with headquarters at Lagos, Warri and Calabar respectively attended this new development. Significantly, 1914 witnessed another administrative shake-up with the three provinces of the south becoming nine. Four of these situated East of the Niger included Onitsha, Owerri, Calabar and Ogoja each of which was split into districts. (Afigbo, 1980, p.415).

The penetration of the colonial force into Ogoja province was followed by the subjugation of the inhabitants of the area including Bekwarra (Tamuno, 1972, p.44). According to Talbot, the conquest of the country between the Cross River and the Northern Nigeria boundary completed by the military force under colonel Trenchard resulted in a wide extension of government jurisdictions and control of Ogoja including Bekwarra and

Ikom districts (Talbot, 1926). On 13th March, 1908, Hives, the acting divisional commissioner for Ogoja province arrived to assume charge over the area and later that year, he paid a courtesy visit to Bekwarra (Omagu, 1997, p.145).

As expansive territories were being brought under colonial control in Nigeria and other territories, the British were faced with cost and logistical issues associated with colonial administration. It was therefore not surprising that the colonialists who came to impose their own social order on the indigenous existing nationalities that later coalesced into the present day Nigeria, found it expedient to enlist the support and cooperation of traditional rulers in securing their hold on the conquered territories. To administer their colonies effectively, the British government introduced the policy of indirect rule (Department of Chieftaincy Affairs).

For the British, indirect rule, which had been applied successfully in Northern Nigeria, was the most expedient method for local administration in British colonies where the existing indigenous state systems had recognizable, organized, well-structured political and administrative hierarchies. Indeed, traditional rulers proved so indispensable in this regard that where none seemed to have existed, the colonialists appointed same as in the case of the warrant chief in some parts of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria (Department of Chieftaincy Affairs).

The introduction of the Warrant Chiefs (among other policies), undermined the powers of the chiefs. It re-arranged the political terrain by introducing a new organizational superstructure. This new order, which the Warrant Chiefs signified, created a new socio-political climate in which uncontrollable deceit, extortion's and various forms of corruption held sway. Unlike in the traditional society where decisions were reached in the presence of the community and anchored on accepted customs, the Warrant Chiefs operated under a different system characterized by surreptitiousness. They were accountable only to the colonial officer and not to the people or community. Once the colonial officer was happy with them, then they needed not border about their people. Due to the manner of their selection, these public officers themselves never felt any loyalty or responsibility to their own people (Isichei, 1976, p.145).

The Warrant Chiefs took undue advantage of the authorities bestowed upon them by the colonizers and the linguistic barriers between the people and the colonizers. Within a few years the appointed Warrant Chiefs became increasingly oppressive. They seized property, imposed draconian local regulations, and began imprisoning anyone who openly criticized them. Justice in the case of settling disputes became a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder.(Afigbo, 1972, p.316; Isichei, 1976, p.145; Afigbo, 1981, p.316). In effect, many Warrant Chiefs solely constituted colonially-backed usurpers of power and had little legitimacy beyond the fact of their being installed by the colonial state. Nonetheless, they

held power and used it for their own gain. Their main source of power was the control of Native Courts and of labor, for example, for colonial road and waterway construction (Ofonagoro, 1982, p.219-243). With such illicit funds they acquired, they lived a life high above the entire community. They built zinc houses; storey building and their children were able to acquire western education within and outside the country. Buttressing this statement, Isichei, remarked that "of the first Igbo's who studied abroad and fully mastered the skills of the Western world, a notable proportion were the sons or close relatives of Warrant Chiefs" (Isichei 1976, p.149).

Apart from the modus operandi of the Warrant Chiefs, the haphazard and arbitrary style of their selection helped to make the whole system as detestable as it was despicable. (Isichei 1976, p.143). Their selection did not follow a particular order like that of seniority, integrity or general acclamation. Most often the colonizers imposed a candidate of their will, at times such people were social misfits who would work for the interest of the British. In response to this disturbing development, Bekwarra people started insulting and ridiculing the Warrant Chiefs by calling them derogatory names like "warrant thieves", the white men's slaves, white men's messengers. Notwithstanding, British colonial authorities were reluctant either to change them or the system thus paving the way for the Women's war of 1929. It is perhaps necessary to add here that the action of these women had a domino effect in the whole of Southern Nigeria. Sequel to this, successive British administrators instituted a number of reforms particularly from 1929 culminating in the county council reforms of 1951 (Omagu, 1997, p.145).

An additional measure introduced by the British to achieve its imperial design was the establishment of native court where members of the community had their disputes resolved. With the native courts proclamation of 1900 and 1906, Bekwarra people fell under the jurisdiction of the divisional native court at Ogoja which they attended from 1915 till 1927 when a separate session was held at Abouchiche, Bekwarra (Omagu, 1997, p.145). The establishment of these courts was based on the wrong assumption that the groups never had institutions capable of settling inter-group disputes, maintaining law and order as well as regulate other local matters. These courts not only served as tribunals of justice but were also regarded as the local executive arms of the central government. According to Hailey these courts were vested with judicial responsibilities empowered to make laws (with the sanction of the Governor), modify any native law as required for the peace, good order and welfare of the natives in their areas of jurisdiction (Hailey, 1951).

The Warrant Chief system was inseparable from the native courts. Hatch, observed that as members of the native court, these Warrant Chief wielded full executive powers in the respective villages. The District Officer dealt almost exclusively with these court members,

passing all orders to the village through them. They also performed such functions as keeping the peace inside the towns, turning people out to work on the roads, collecting taxes (Hatch, 1969) which were unknown to the people. As a matter of fact, the native court and the warrant chiefs had taken over the executive, legislative and judicial responsibilities of the age grades (*Aten*), the traditional rulers and the council of elders (*Ikim Udiara*).

In Bekwarra, for instance, it was no longer the responsibility of these indigenous institutions to make laws or punish offenders who went contrary to these laws. These responsibilities had been taken over by the native courts; a situation which amounted to introducing foreign elements into indigenous system and the destruction of the sovereignty of the people of Bekwarra. Forde, observed concerning the loss of judicial power by natural rulers that, "What would be regarded as civil actions in British law such as settlement of debt, criminal charges including assault and also breaches of native system formerly punished by the native elders in councils were all actionable before these courts" (Forde, 1939, p.34).

In retrospect, chiefs made it possible for the colonial government to bring immense, often impassable territories under their control. They carried additional responsibilities of a civic nature, as they were entrusted with responsibility for local infrastructural development, including agriculture, health, education, and livestock farming. Inevitably, as chiefs performed the function of "auxiliaries" to the colonial government—as go-between linking the two centers of administration—they found themselves in an uncomfortable, often unenviable position. Their relationship with the seats of colonial administration became increasingly ambivalent as they were the object of local discontent (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006).

Indeed, the British government undermined the political authority of the natural rulers through the native court system. The natural rulers were relegated to the background becoming mere figure-heads and in some cases ceasing to exist and the Warrants Chiefs of the native courts usurped their position and authority. The British government, however, failed to provide the people of Bekwarra with a better alternative since any individual who was able to speak English was made Warrant Chief even though he had no claims to chieftaincy. Thus, the personality of these Warrant Chiefs and their corrupt practices did not inspire confidence on the people. It is, therefore, clear that the native court system not only constituted a check on the political influence of the traditional institutions in Bekwarra but also undermined them.

The impact of colonialism on traditional institution in Bekwarra, like most African societies, largely transformed the form and content of chieftaincy and, thus, the relations between chiefs and their communities. The colonial state either demoted or eliminated African leaders who resisted colonialism or rebelled against it. Leaders who submitted to colonial rule were mostly incorporated into the

colonial governance structure of indirect rule, which was designed to provide the colonial State with a viable low-cost administrative structure to maintain order, mobilize labor, enforce production of cash crops, and collect taxes. Indeed, the contemptuous attitude of the British colonial administration to traditional rulers was rife as many chiefs fell victim to dethronement at the hands of the colonial administration and had limited control of land thereby making ordinary people to shift their allegiance.(Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), 2007).

In spite of their precarious position, there has been conflicting views about the involvement of traditional leaders with the colonial enterprise. Although some scholars have contended that chiefs did not view themselves as conscious cogs of imperialism, yet the ambivalence with which many chiefs were viewed as pliant tools in the colonial project cannot be dismissed despite the insistence of some observer. On the contrary, during the depression years, for example, chiefs and their councils were the vehicles by which the colonial government made increased demands for exports to offset dwindling imperial resources. (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006)

In terms of the chiefs' power, the 1947 Native Authorities Ordinance of Nigeria entrenched their increasing diminution in autonomy. Lord Lugard's Political Memorandum of 1907 painted a clear picture of the diminished role of the chief, when it cunningly stated that "There are no two sets of rulers—British and Native—working either separately or in cooperation, but a single government in which native chiefs have well-defined duties and an acknowledged status equally with the British Officers. Their duties should never conflict and should overlap as little as possible..." (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006).

There is no better place for understanding the limits or the lack of chiefly powers in Nigeria under colonialism than the constitutional frameworks adopted over a period of time, beginning with the Richards Constitution of 1947 (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006) which greatly reduced the constitutional powers of the traditional rulers both at the centre and in the regions. While it can be stated that Native Authorities' reforms were attempts to create new progressive changes, in reality, they were antithetical to the Nigerian chieftaincy in general. The constant attacks on the NA system by leaders such as Tafawa Balewa and other major opposition politicians lent credence to the undermining the institution of chieftaincy. The ruling Northern People's Congress (NPC) pushed for the creation of a Ministry of Local Government and an elected premier solely to oversee the NAs. Thus the introduction of the Chiefs-in-Council system was part of the grand strategy to reduce the powers of the chiefs by both the British and Nigerian nationalists. Similarly, the vast system of District Officers, who were political appointees, subordinated chiefs to the Provincial Administrative Law. Thus, the authority to appoint or depose chiefs were vested in the hands of few politicians as was clearly happening in both the North and South. Perhaps the major nationalist attack on the Nigerian chieftaincy came from no other than Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a leading national politician, whose contempt for the institution stemmed from chiefs' role as collaborators in the independence movement in the South (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006).

A colonial legacy which impacted on African politics is the administrative style of the colonizers. The colonizers ruled without the consent of the people: they deposed, exiled and executed traditional rulers, when the latter failed to implement the instructions of colonial administrators or failed to serve the need of the colonial government (Shillington, 1989, p.354-357; Hochschild, 1989). The ruling structure, which was based on the control by a few, through oppression and the use of force, laid a basis for patron-client rulership after colonialism. Following the disruption of the African pre-colonial leadership form and the corresponding political culture, colonialism can be said to have set up structures and ruptured the dynamics and patterns which curtailed different and contradicting inter-ethnic relations and interests. According to John Lonsdale, the instrument of political control and economic allocation in African states had been violently constructed by outsiders, that is, the colonizers. (Lonsdale, 1986, p.126-157). Consequently, the new "bandwagons" of rulers, as Lonsdale describe them, did not see the need for discipline and responsibility in the constitution of political power but simply applied the principle of rewarding and absorbing the recruitment of supporters and civil servants: neo-patrimonial (Alemazung, 2010).

Colonial rule wiped out the dependency of the chief on his councilors, as was the case in pre-colonial rule, replacing this with autocracy and replacing the ruler's dependence on the people to elite rulership which depended upon colonial superiors and later foreign powers (Nugent, 2004, p.107-108). Following the Eastern Region Local Government Ordinance of 1950, British law, as modified and applied to Nigeria, was the basis on which all cases were decided in theory (Scarritt, 1965, p.28). In practice, however:

> Virtually the only cases which came before Native courts were tax and land disputes, many of them involving, inevitably, the authority for the colonial government. All other cases, including even some land disputes, were settled in traditional courts in accordance with customary standards. Because most cases did in fact concern local custom rather than colonial law, the British permitted the continuance of this practice. (Scarritt, 1965, p.28)

Indeed, the long history of Colonialism in Nigeria had a profound influence on the institution of chieftaincy. Presumably, this development was because the British colonial administration saw the institution and its core observance and rituals as antithetical to the ideals and objectives of good government. The social fabric was completely devastated and a new culture of violence was implanted. Traditional African systems of conflict

resolution were destroyed and, in their places, nothing was given. The democratic process, rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution, was brutally uprooted and replaced by the authoritarianism of colonialism. (Mimiko, 2010, p.641-642) This situation offer an explanation on the transition traditional institution of chieftaincy has undergone since the end of the nineteenth century. The next section thus takes a cursory look on how the institution of chieftaincy was affected in modern Bekwarra.

3. MODERN BEKWARRA AND THE INSTITUTION OF CHIEFTAINCY

In the decades that followed independence, African leaders worked to shape the cultural, political, and economic character of the postcolonial state. Some worked against the challenges of continued European cultural and political hegemony, while others worked with European powers in order to protect their interests and maintain control over economic and political resources. (Talton, 2011) The end of the colonial system of indirect rule created a dichotomy on the role of chiefs and their relations with the new African State.

Many of Africa's nationalist saw chiefs as functionaries of the colonial State and chieftaincy as an anachronistic vestige of the old Africa that had no place in the post-colonial political landscape. These leaders, therefore, often pursued policies to Africanize the bureaucracy without indigenizing the institutions of governance. The new elite, which increasingly grew self-serving and autocratic, also could not tolerate the existence of contending points of power. Many African countries, attempted unsuccessfully to strip chiefs of most of their authority or even abolish chieftaincy altogether, in many other cases African leaders, attempted, with varying degrees of success, to co-opt traditional leaders probably in an effort to enhance their own legitimacy. Despite these ambiguous efforts, chieftaincy has continued to operate with large numbers of adherents, especially in rural areas.

The precarious situation of chiefs in post independent Nigeria was determined earlier on by various ways of tight control, subordination, manipulation, removal from office, upgrading of status and salary increment, established and used by different Nigerian governments in dealing with the chiefs. Following the 1966 military intervention in politics, the position of chiefs was redefined in many ways, including directives controlling their activities, and the takeover of NAs, prisons and Native Courts by the state governments. In 1967, and subsequently on three other occasions, the military government of Nigeria created more states in the country, breaking the territorial domains of many chiefs and rendering them less important (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006).

The Nigeria-wide local government reform of 1976 was formulated to 'bring government closer to the people, and to strengthen the role of 'Traditional rulers' believed to be important 'in the context of governance and development as well as to act as 'the impartial fathers of their communities and custodians of traditional values. The 1976 Local Government Reforms gave more powers to local government council over traditional rulers and marked a watershed in the authority and powers of the chiefs since independence. The little semblance of executive authority they had was effectively removed under the reform process. It is fair to argue that the 1976 Local Government Reforms laws were the final culmination of the loss of power of the chiefs in a long protracted battle against subordination and secularization. As a result, both public expectations and service delivery lay with the councilors and not with the chiefs.

In some instances, the "reform" process has involved the creation and imposition of new chiefs, thereby further weakening the institution. In reality what had happened is not the demise of the institution of chieftaincy but rather its transformation, processes that has accentuated rather than resolve ambiguities and ambivalence. As the Oba of Benin forcefully contended neither the First Republic nor the military regimes of 1966–79 provided much for chieftaincy in Nigeria. He maintained: "I think we may conveniently jump the period of the military regimes because there was nothing outstanding in the roles of traditional rulers in the administration of that period". (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006) It is clear that over the past 120 years, the independent political authority and autonomy of the chief in Nigeria have been virtually eliminated through a process of local government reform and judicial acts. The direct access of chiefs to local revenues has been seriously undermined as access to local revenues and taxation are now vested in local councils (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006).

In addition, the 1978 Land Use Decree (Decree No. 6 of 1978) transferred control of land to the government at various levels, with the state and local councils exercising primary responsibilities instead of the chief. Similarly, while chiefs could be "upgraded" or promoted under the reform process, their steady loss of power and control over land as well as structures of local government has been significant. Also, a major provision relating to chiefs was the establishment of a State Council of Chiefs, in the 1979 Nigerian constitution, which taking a cue from the colonialists, have seen the wisdom to carve an advisory role for traditional rulers in the governance of the Nigerian polity. This advisory role was not sacrosanct as their advice could be ignored or rejected by the government at any time (Adjaye & Misawa, 2006). The situation is thus somewhat paradoxical; although traditional leaders continue to play an important role in the life of the nation, their status in law is weakly defined, and existing laws are

outmoded and in no way consonant with what happens on a day-to-day basis (Omopariola, 1985, p.72).

During the pre-colonial era, chiefs were responsible for a great variety of disputes ranging from land disputes, to family issues and witchcraft within their jurisdiction, but this has virtually disappeared with the Courts Edict of 1967-8. Today chiefs appear to be complementary, if not rivals, to the administration of justice of the State. Mostly, but not always, they exercise these functions in the shadow of the State administration of justice. They also play the role of auxiliary in the local administration since colonial times. The administration has oftentimes manipulated chiefs with a view to reinforce state control or to exercise bureaucratic power. Since colonial days, they have mostly a limited competence in penal matters, but chiefs are still considered to be guards over the welfare of their people, not only by dealing with dispute settlement, but also through religious pleads to ensure social welfare and prosperity. All these activities help them to enjoy respect and maintain their authority.

The view is that at every level, the rights and responsibilities of traditional rulers, and by extension, kingmakers have been reduced by government. They no longer have the right to appoint, discipline or depose village heads, but only report to the government. They are banned from partisan politics. Traditional councils can no longer make traditional religious or administrative decisions or apply rules and procedures to execute policies coming from their traditions or religion. Traditional rulers are no longer rallying points for their communities. The federal and state government's control traditional rulers at all levels: from village chief to the clan, they are appointed or elected with great "interference" either directly or indirectly by the government (Omopariola, 1985, p.72). Political interference with traditional institutions is a source of concern because traditional rulers as appointees of government are tied to the apron or strings of government. A source of significant debate is the fact that the rampant elevation of chiefs to higher classes and status, the arbitrary creation of new chiefs, their deposition and dethronement, and the indiscriminate acquisition of chieftaincy titles by political elites have affected even the functioning of governments at all levels. It is ironic that chiefs are viewed only as important when it suits the interests of the political class (Omopariola, 1985, p.72).

Another markedly different picture emerges from the perception of chieftaincy position which in the past has been seen with distrust and fear. Cases were rife of people absconding for fear of the diverse responsibilities of the office. One of such responsibilities that made individuals abhor the position was one which seldom exists now. This responsibility, it was believed, required a chief to sacrifice seven of his relations who would have to die mysterious circumstances. Though this requirement has been revoked, the institution is still viewed with deep suspicion. It was also held that once a man is crowned as a chief his personal freedom was greatly restricted. In addition, he was banned from engaging in economic activities like farming, trading, hunting among others. Again, it was considered an abomination for the chief to be seen in the market. Besides, a chief was prohibited from seeing his parents if they still lived. And because it was an abomination for a chief to see a corpse on the event of their death he could never see their corpse. It was because of these responsibilities that were associated with the position that made chieftaincy position quite unattractive.

In Bekwarra today, there is a paradigm shift as we find an increasing number of educated people accepting and even desperately seeking for chiefly positions. This is however, not peculiar to Bekwarra because today, many prominent Nigerians including serving and past political leaders hold one title or another—either traditional, educational, professional or religious. And the trend for acquiring titles is not limited to the political elite. There is an increasing appeal in chieftaincy today, even to outsiders and non-Africans (Omopariola, 1985, p.72). This shift has tended towards materialism, a move away from predominant metaphysical tendencies that carries moral truth, which was dominant in the earlier periods, and this is a reflection of cash economy of contemporary times, which has equally affected rural economy and life style. More so, as the monetization of politics from the national, state, to the local government levels has become a common trend in modern Nigerian society, this has reverberating and snowballing effects on the local communities (Ukpokolo, 2009, pp.9-10). The implication is that Bekwarra like most groups in Nigeria, seems to inclined chieftaincy titles in contemporary times than ever before, and this is reflected in title names. Hence, such title names as *Adah Ebekwarra* (Father of Bekwarra), *Eshi Ke Beni* (The Peoples bread winner), and *Ugaba 1 of Bekwarra* among other titles are replete *in* contemporary Bekwarra society. This craze for chieftaincy titles may be eroding what was once a highly revered position in traditional Nigerian society.

In the past, it is hard to determine what the true income of traditional leaders was. The amount that a ruler can generate from legitimate sources of income depends strongly on the respect in which they are held by the local population. If that respect is high, then they will work on his farm or otherwise carry out civil works. Almost all rulers engage in agriculture and some have very large farms. Indeed the profits to be made from farming effectively are such that in some cases this has led to misappropriation of land, something a traditional leader is well-placed to do (Ukpokolo, 2009, p.71)

It is clear, however, that although in modern times, their official income depends on monthly allowance from government; traditional rulers also derive income for awarding chieftaincy titles. Indeed there is competition for local titles and the ruler can expect recompense for

awarding these. The payment of money for a traditional title in Nigeria is common knowledge. Because such conferment enhances the social mobility of individuals within the society, individuals are always ready to pay so much. Omopariola (1985) has suggested this as a service a traditional ruler can offer on a commercial basis to generate income. This could be compared to eighteenth century England, where titles such as Baronetcy could be bought for fixed sums. Even in present-day Britain, large donors to political parties expect a title to be conferred in due course, while avoiding an obvious public equivalence between payment and that title (Omopariola, 1985, p.71).

Rather more shakily, but again in line with practice in developed countries, is the award of contracts to the traditional leaders. If the local government has a good rapport with the local leader and perceives the need for further subventions for them to carry out their duties it is possible to direct contracts towards them. These may be for construction, supply of goods and services and so on. Clearly this is undesirable since the local leader may well not be the best value contractor, but this probably works better in Nigeria than elsewhere where all contractors have corrupt relationships with those who award contracts (Omopariola, 1985, p.71). Today chiefs are widely criticized for corruption and bribery. More problematic still are anecdotal accounts of bribery and illegal payments for clandestine services. For example, in areas where there have been conflicts over land and local chiefs have been accused of taking bribe to favor one of the parties involved. Indeed, customary justice is sometimes a tense area, with both parties accusing the chief of taking bribes. The truth of accusations in individual cases is hard to determine, but it is certain that such payments are sometimes made (Omopariola, 1985, p.201). These leaders have become an ideal example of corruption, general insecurity, crimes, and sometimes inciting communal feuds. Indeed, Nigerian dailies today, are replete with reports of contestations about chieftaincy successions, allegations of wrongdoings on the part of chiefs, and of incidents of violence attributable to animosities on the part contesting parties to chiefly positions.

Chiefs, in addition to their main role as intermediaries between their community and the government, articulate the interests and concerns of their people, acts as advisers to the government. In view of their importance, traditional rulers had constitutional role in the 1960 and 1963 constitutions. These constitutions had provisions for a Council of Chiefs in the regions and some of them were even regional governors. In addition, the 1979 Constitution gave them representation in the National Council of State. Lamentably, there is no prescribed role for traditional rulers in the 1999 constitution (Nworah, 2007).

Chieftaincy has undergone significant transformation since the last century and thus finds itself in a dilemma as chiefs are trapped in their relationship with those who wield State power and have a hard time breaking free, so,

they end up getting involved in politics. Chiefs have been actively vying for new political space within the context of the African State, articulating such claims that they are the "true representatives of the people" (Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, 1996, pp.39-78). Available reports from the print and electronic media suggest that all over Nigeria, monarchs are deeply involved in partisan politics, a clear indication that they have not learnt from lessons of the past. The familiar story is either that a traditional ruler is taking sides with one politician or at loggerheads with another. Monarchs openly join forces as opposition against some political elements in their domains.

Most disturbing, however, is the case of monarch who openly endorses candidates. Although traditional rulers in Bekwarra and other parts of Nigeria reserve the fundamental freedom of expression as enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution, they are, nonetheless, only expected to be seen—not heard—on issues regarding partisan politics so that they do not get into troubled waters. Monarchs are expected to be neutral while receiving politicians who come to pay homage during electioneering campaigns. The result has never been pleasant. But the present crop of monarchs seems to be oblivious of the fact that, though theirs appear to be the most precarious position in the Nigerian socio-cultural terrain, they could still be easily removed from office. (allAfrica.com, 2011).

The military regime under General Muhammadu Buhari (1984-1985), after having alienated many other interest groups by its autocratic and repressive political style, strengthened the position of traditional rulers, not the least as a counterweight against more radical political tendencies. Councils of Chiefs were created on the level of the States. Under General Ibrahim Babangida's rule (1985-1993) ex-politicians and Traditional Rulers from the old Eastern Region even formed a lobby group to advance the "eastern interest". In contrast, the Political Bureau (1986-88), set up by Babangida to discuss a future political system, wanted to keep Traditional Rulers out of formal positions in local administration (Vaughan 1997, p.418-427). In spite of this contrast, as Vaughan (1997, p.427-429) has argued, it would be misleading to construct an outright opposition between conservative "neotraditionalists" supporting the military government of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998), and liberal intellectuals and businessmen opposed to it. In practice, Traditional Rulers as well as considerable parts of the "political class" have been manipulated into supporting the military regime. (Harneit-Sievers, 1998, p.57-70).

A thorny issue relates to how successive military governments since 1983 have relied on traditional support for their own legitimacy. The trend since the 1970s has been for government to use traditional rulers to legitimize their power. This practice expanded into outright manipulation under the military regime of General Sani Abacha. For instance, in early 1998, traditional rulers

all over the country converged at Abuja. Here they were made to watch video clips which allegedly proved the involvement of a number of senior military officers in a coup attempt against the incumbent government. After being shown the videos, and before a military tribunal tried the culprits to prove their guilt or innocence traditional rulers (with a few exceptions) publicly declared that the officers detained were indeed guilty of the alleged offence (Adegbulu, 2011).

Since the colonial era, chiefs have been dependent on the central government for recognition of their legitimacy as representatives of their people as well as for obtaining economic and political favors in the interest of the people they represent. In the intricate and delicate power struggle between the local and central authority traditional rulers have gradually witnessed the erosion of their powers. A particular trend from the 1990s onwards has been the widespread upgrading and creation of chieftaincies either to reinforce ethnic agendas or to reward wealthy political donors. As a result, the position of these 'new' chiefs is regarded with skepticism by the general population and they do not command the allegiance essential to effective functioning. The sheer numbers of recently created chiefs inevitably contributes to the dilution of the authority of traditional chiefs as well as reducing the extent of their domains.(Blench, Longtau, Hassan, & Walsh, 2006, p.iii). In pre-colonial times, chiefs played a greater role in handling high-profile court cases within their jurisdiction, but this has virtually disappeared with the Courts Edict of 1967-8. The role of traditional rulers is thus most prominent in settling family matters, cases of witchcraft, land disputes and religious disputes (Omopariola, 1985, p.78).

Although chiefs serve as repositories of local history and spirituality, upholders of local values and symbolize pride in history, at every level, the rights and responsibilities of traditional rulers, and by extension, kingmakers have been reduced by government. They no longer have the right to appoint, discipline or depose village heads but only report to the government. In addition Traditional leaders can no longer make traditional religious or administrative decisions or apply rules and procedures to execute policies coming from their traditions or religion. Indeed, Traditional rulers are no longer rallying points for their communities (Omopariola, 1985, p.78). According to Nworah, some of the key issues that have contributed to the waning influence of the traditional institution are either self-inflicted or caused by globalisation and coupled with the dwindling economic fortunes that have eroded their influence and authority, a situation where traditional rulers depend on government for survival (Nworah, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Chiefs commanded a great deal of autonomy and were responsible for the maintenance of good order in his state. He is guardian of the fundamental values of his people, mediated between them and was the final arbiter in the administration of justice. As rallying points for development in the community he retained legal powers and authority over land allocation as well as local taxation, administered tributes, court fines, market tolls, and other revenues. Through a chief's office, his subjects were mobilized to assist in projects that position the community into serving the needs of its member's well-being. Even in its weakened state, past and present governments recognize traditional leaders as important agents of development, especially at the local level.

It is interesting to note that the so-called negative characteristics of chieftaincy which make the institution repulsive to its detractors are rather ironically present in any system of governance in the orbit of either Western or Eastern ideology. For instance, the issue of hierarchy, which was evidently necessary as a means to maintain order and stability in traditional society, is not peculiar to chieftaincy, but rather present in any governance system. In his observation of American democracy, the sociologist C Wright Mills, made it clear that the major decisions in that society are made by a few overlapping interests and not by the majority of people as their brand of democracy will have us believe (Seleke, 2010).

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