TIMO KALLINEN

Divine Rulers in a Secular State

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7th November 2015
Timo Kallinen

Introduction

> … [W]e are tired of chieftaincy affairs! Why? March 2010, March, 2010, we are still glorifying the chieftaincy institution, what is that institution? The most undemocratic institution, how does one become a chief? It is based on blood relations. One's ancestor's [sic] went to conquer this one and conquered that one. They were slave-raiders and so on, and therefore one is a chief. That is the basis of selecting chiefs. No democracy in it at all!
>
> Ghanaian journalist Kwesi Pratt on a live FM radio show (transcript at theodikro.blogspot.com 23rd March 2010).

> In the old Testament, Moses got the new Laws from the mountains and directly from the one and only God we cannot see but feel in our spirit, and among the laws or Commandments of God he made were: THOU SHALT NOT WORSHIP IDOLS. Nana, I know some of the Chiefs are Christians, and still do this blood over stone sacrifice. Do you think that conflicts with the new post Moses Ten commandments? I have been trying to find out the root cause of our underdevelopment, and [...] I am convinced there is some kind of curse associated with certain behavior and acts of humans in any society. Not to list all of them but Idol worshipping is one of them, which is also listed in the Bible as against the ten commandments.
>
> A posting in an internet discussion group (Ghana Leadership Forum 20th August 2011).

The two quotes above exemplify the conflicting views expressed on the topic of traditional chieftaincy in contemporary Ghana. Chiefs are nowadays a common subject of public discussions – about good governance, democracy, development, civil society, and the like – which address whether, and how, 'traditional political institutions' could co-exist with, or become a part of, modern government. Many have recently argued that a 'true' or 'direct' democracy must be dependent on the consensus of local communities represented by their traditional leaders. In this scenario, the chiefs should also have a positive role in the socio-economic development of the country (see e.g. Gyapong 2006; Ray and Eizlini 2004; Wiredu 2000). The critics, on the other hand, maintain that customary authority based on hereditary succession runs counter to the values of electoral democracy,

drawing attention, perhaps, to the prevalent abuses of chiefly power as well as recurring conflicts over succession and land rights (see, e.g., Afrane 2000; Tsikata and Seini 2004; Ubink 2007). In this light, chieftaincy is perceived as a secular political institution comparable with those of the modern administrative state. This debate is taking place among politicians, civil servants, journalists, scholars, and civil society activists.

However, as the second quote indicates, there is also another significant public debate going on in today's Ghana about chieftaincy that seems to have only a little to do with politics, one that is carried on mainly by the members of some Christian churches, particularly those that belong to the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement that has flourished in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa since the 1980s. These debates emphasize the chief's role as a ritual leader who performs sacrifices on behalf of his community. Since the divinities and rituals associated with traditional religion are considered unchristian and immoral, chieftaincy too has assumed a negative character and is perceived as a 'pagan institution' or, as some Ghanaian Christians would put it, a form of 'idol worship'. This religious discourse on chiefs has recently expanded its presence in the public sphere as the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches have gained better access to audiovisual mass media (see, e.g., Meyer 1998a; 1998b; 2006). Although these discussions are very contemporary, increasingly taking place in broadcast and social media, they have a long history that stretches back to the era of colonial rule and missionary Christianity.

In this book I argue that closer examination of the debates concerning traditional chieftaincy helps us better understand the processes of secularization in Ghana and other post-colonial societies, thereby bringing a standard topic of classical ethnography into more current and far-reaching discussions about the idea of modernity itself. In a general sense, secularization could be defined as a process in modern society whereby divinity is separated from the ways in which human society is regulated and physical nature is understood to function (De Pina-Cabral 2001, 329; see Latour 1991, 32–35). More specifically, this book focuses on two different but related aspects of secularization. First, studying the recent history of the chieftaincy institution helps us to chart a structural transformation in which a colonized African society was divided into spheres of politics and religion. How were the different ideas, practices, and institutions of local worlds distributed between these two domains? What sorts of negotiations were entailed and how has this dichotomy been contested? Second, by examining the changes in the religious role of the chiefs we are able to address the question of the kind of religiosity that is acceptable in a modern secular Ghana. Which types of spiritual ideas, practices, and institutions are considered objectionable in terms of modern sensibilities and therefore excluded from the category of religion? Have the spiritual forces of the traditional cosmology or the Christian God been granted agency in political relations or are they treated as transcendent objects of individual beliefs?

There has been a growing interest in secularist ideologies and secularization in general among anthropologists in recent times (see, e.g., Asad 2003; Bowen 2010; Cannell 2010; Özyürek 2006), and scholars have

started to ask what exactly the anthropological perspective can offer to their study. Too often secularization is accorded a taken-for-granted quality and consequently it is implicitly suggested that the history of Western modernity has been, and is being, repeated in other parts of the world. Hence, a call for "genuine comparative anthropology of secularisms" based on particular ethnographic and historical studies has been raised (Cannell 2010, 86). Hopefully, this book will have a part to play in that.

Kingship in the postcolony

The history of this book is closely linked to a particular era in African and global politics which coincides with my own research career on Ghana and the Asante people. In recent literature this post-Cold War period has been characterized by a 'resurgence' or even a 'renaissance' of traditional chieftaincy in many parts of Africa – although certainly not everywhere. Consequently, many analysts have pondered why and how chieftaincy has persisted through all the enormous political, economic, and social changes of the colonial and post-colonial periods, and the "resilience of chieftaincy" has become something of a popular notion in Africanist anthropology, history, development studies, political science, legal studies, and other related disciplines (see, e.g., Englebert 2002; Ntsebeza 2005, 16–35; Ubink 2008, 13–31; Van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal and Van Dijk 1999).

In the late 1990s when I decided to write my doctoral dissertation on Asante chieftaincy I was fascinated by similar questions. As a person who had lived all his life in a modern, bureaucratic-state society I was amazed by the simple fact that chiefs still existed in Africa: this, I thought, demanded explanation. Accordingly, the very first research proposal that I submitted to my supervisors was titled "Natural Attenuation?", a critical allusion to Kwame Nkrumah's (1964, 84) famous assertion made in the 1960s that chieftaincy would disappear under the impact of "social progress". Subsequent fieldwork in 2000-01 gave me the impression that chieftaincy really was as strong as ever and I thought that we might indeed be living a renaissance of a sort. A new king of Asante – the *Asantehene* – had just been elected and installed. He was a youngish man with an overseas business background who made bold, no-nonsense statements about putting an end to local disputes over traditional offices and engaging all his chiefs in work for development. During those early days of his reign he enjoyed great popularity not only in Asante but also elsewhere in the country. The media reported his activities and statements in an admiring tone, photos and paintings of him adorned the walls of shops and bars, crowds greeted him by chanting his nickname "King Solomon" when he moved through the city of Kumasi with his retinue of cars, and so on. Amidst all this, however, I became immersed in the social and cosmological principles that ordered the chiefly hierarchies among the Asante and questions about resilience and resurgence were relegated to the background (see Kallinen 2004). Ultimately, it is doubtful if I wrote anything truly original about chieftaincy's relation to modernity at the time (see, e.g,. Kallinen 2006).

Today, I am rather sceptical of the whole notion of resilience and this time around I believe I have something new to say about chieftaincy in colonial and post-colonial eras and beyond. As noted above, the presence of traditional leaders in the political arena of African states in the 1990s – an epoch marked by the introduction of multi-party democracy and neoliberal economic reforms in many countries of the continent – quickly caught the attention of social scientists. Consequently, chiefs were also given a role in the grand theories about political processes in the region (see, e.g., Bayart 1993; Herbst 2000; Mamdani 1996). What many of the studies of that era have in common is the assumption of a separate political sphere of society, where institutions, agents, or groups compete, co-operate, or co-exist. These studies define, even if implicitly, politics as that which relates to power, which is what both traditional chiefships and modern states are supposedly all about. Conversely, even a superficial glance at the classic ethnographies of African societies reveals that the kings and chiefs of the pre-colonial era were not 'political' leaders in the same sense as modern political theory suggests. They were characterized as diviners, healers, priests, magicians, rain-makers, or controllers of witchcraft, and the origins of their offices were traced to the spiritual realm (see, e.g., Forde 1991 [1954]; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1969 [1940]). The contemporary political theorists who write about chiefs rarely address this spiritual quality of the chiefly office, not to mention that of the whole community over which the chiefs ruled. Of course, the differences between the classics and present-day post-colonial theorization could be attributed to a number of factors and, indeed, the classics have received their share of criticism concerning their heavy emphasis on the unifying function of shared religious values (Asad 1973, 270–271; Fields 1985, 64–66), their biased methodological choices (Stewart and Strathern 2002, 19–20), commitment to "equilibrium models" of political systems (Bailey 1990 [1969], 12–18), and so forth. Nevertheless, despite these often well-grounded critical points, it would be very difficult to deny that religion and ritual had a central place in African pre-colonial social formations.

A comparable inconsistency was very much evident during my fieldwork in the form of the two separate public discourses on chieftaincy that are represented at the beginning of this chapter. On the one hand, I could, for example, read a letter to the editor in a newspaper about how the hereditary succession to chiefships should be abolished and chiefs should be voted to office by the people; or I could listen to a phone-in radio show where a concerned listener was demanding greater transparency with regards the fees chiefs received from timber concessions or mining rights. But, on the other hand, I could also talk to members of chiefly families who were 'born-again Christians' and refused to become chiefs because they considered sacrificing to the ancestors and gods 'satanic'. Or I might hear stories about chiefs visiting the shrines of famous divinities, located possibly hundreds of kilometres away from their home towns, in order to seek out prophesies and protective medicines. It was almost as though the institution of chieftaincy addressed by these two discourses was two distinct things functioning according to two different sets of principles. Observations such as these, coupled with the gaps in the scholarly literature, made me seriously think

that it might be more pertinent to look at the ruptures and breaks in the history of chieftaincy rather than tracing continuities. These ideas fully hit home after completing another spell of fieldwork in 2006 when it also became obvious that it was necessary to take a new look at the historical source materials.

Yet what happened to the divinity of the kingships and chiefships in Africa still does not seem to be an important question for contemporary political theory. My contention is that this omission has left us poorly equipped to understand the nature of colonial and post-colonial-era developments. For instance, it has become more or less commonplace to argue that the post-colonial states have inherited the power structures of the colonial era or, more precisely, the central governments have sought to rule the rural populations by using local chiefs or 'big men' as their middlemen and clients, in the same vein as the European indirect rule system (see, e.g., Hansen and Stepputat 2005; 2006; Mamdani 1996; Piot 2010). I have no objections to this claim as such, but I find it intriguing that the process of annexing sacred kingships and chiefships to secular political machinery is not usually problematized by the analysts. How are god-like figures transformed into political instruments and with what consequences? What sort of process is entailed in converting high priests into local-level bureaucrats? Instead of tackling these questions, there rather seems to be an underlying assumption that they were all 'political' institutions and thus somehow commensurable. Or conversely, what should we think when we read about the ways that common perceptions of modern political leaders are influenced by ideas that used to be connected to sacred kingship in different parts of Africa (see, e.g., Ashforth 1998; Taylor 2004)? Religious ideas and ritual functions seem to have become separated from political institutions but, obviously, not entirely. It appears that in a relatively short time, the central institutions of African societies have transformed radically and this alteration is not primarily a question of political oscillation between democracy and autocracy, consensus and coercion, or transparency and secrecy. It rather has to do with the quality of the institutions and the structures of the societies, where they exist. If such a transformation has actually taken place, to what extent is it then fruitful to discuss African chieftaincy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries within the rubric of resilience?

Since questions like these have been left largely untouched, the tropes of inescapable processes of rationalization and disenchantment are looming in the background as presuppositions about the nature of modernity. Such views cannot be taken for granted and hence it is time to look more closely into how the category of politics, in contradistinction to religion, came into being in colonial societies. What has this African secularization been like? Was it to some extent comparable to the shift that took place in the relations between the church and the state in Western Europe in the period between the sixth and eighteenth centuries? Has it been inevitable and is it leading toward similar ideological concerns and dilemmas about religion and politics that are prevalent in the contemporary West? As a recent observer points out, the exploration of these kinds of questions is still "either completely lacking in the literature or in a state of infancy" (Van Dijk 2015, 215). In

this book I illuminate this transformation by analyzing the processes of, and pressures for, secularization that developed with regards the sacred kingship and chiefship among the Asante. One should be very careful in making generalizations but I hope to establish that questions raised in the course of analysis are definitely worth asking in the contexts of cases from other parts of Africa and elsewhere in the former colonized world.

Theoretical outlook

The ethnographic focus of the book is directed towards transformations in divine kingship and chiefship of the Asante people of central Ghana.[1] Analysis is primarily inspired by the work of Louis Dumont (especially 1971; 1980; 1992 [1986]). One of his main interests lay in studying how holistic, or traditional, societies become individualistic, or modern, as a result of an internal process of transformation. As Jonathan Parry (1998, 153) has pointed out, Dumont inherited from his teacher Marcel Mauss an interest in studying "the progressive fragmentation of an originally unified conceptual order". Much like Mauss (1966 [1954]), who had pondered how modern economic exchanges and relationships had developed from the "total prestations" of "archaic societies", Dumont was interested in how the domains of politics and the economy had become separated from the previously all-encompassing category of religion. In his work secularization, whether it concerned the differentiation between kingly and priestly orders in India (Dumont 1980 [1966], 287–313), or church and state in Europe (Dumont 1992 [1986], 60–103), was a historical development – an evolution of a sort (Parry 1998, 151–153). Dumont (1992 [1986], 1–52; 60–72) traced the origins of Western secularism to Christian thinking prior to the emergence of the modern state and the Enlightenment. Similar genealogical accounts of the development of secularism have ensued more recently, most prominently Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007). In this book I also ask how traditional Asante society, as an undifferentiated order, where the 'political' was not separated from the 'religious', came to be divided into spheres of politics and religion: an arrangement distinctive to the modern West. I further argue that missionary Christianity, an individualistic religion that posits great importance in ruptures and change, has had a significant effect in the process (see Robbins 2007; 2012).

Drawing inspiration from Dumont and applying his approach to the Asante material does not come without problems. First, the developments in the colonial and post-colonial contexts of Africa are not like the transition from traditional to modern with which Dumont himself dealt. European

1 The Asante people belong to a larger ethnic and language group called the Akan. The Akan people live in the coastal and forest areas of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. In Ghana they are the largest ethnic and language group constituting roughly 40% of the total population. The Akan language and its dialects are classified under the Tano language family, including Asante Twi, Fante, and Akuapem, which also have their own distinctive written forms.

colonial expansion was the medium through which Western secularism became globalized. As José Casanova (2010, 273–274) puts it, non-Western societies "did not undergo a similar process of historical development but instead always confronted Western secular modernity from their first encounter with European colonialism as 'the other'". In colonial Ghana the disintegration of the religious order had a sudden and aggressive nature and hence it cannot be discussed in terms of evolution, following Dumont. Second, binaries like traditional / modern, holistic / individualistic, and non-Western / Western have proved problematic in many ways and no longer have much purchase in present-day anthropology. It is often understood that the application of such binaries constitutes a form of "epistemic violence", in which the categories and distinctions of local realities are forced into the binary mould of modernist social science, thereby removing the phenomena being studied from their actual social and historical contexts (see, e.g., Clifford 1986; Spivak 1988). However, it should be underlined that the conceptual pairs Dumont utilized in his analysis were not mutually exclusive, and both holistic and individualistic elements can be discerned in all cultures, even though differently valued (Siikala 2014, 215–216). Hence, if we accept traditional and modern societies as ideal-typical models without assuming any necessary evolutionary or historical relationship between them, we will be able to have a more comprehensive view of the impacts of Christian conversion and secularist ideology in Asante. Starting from the holistic configuration of traditional society, wherein politics is not defined separately from religion, helps us to understand how in a specific place and historical instance certain ideas and practices came to constitute the secular. After all, modern categories were not simply duplicated in an African setting: what became understood as 'political' and what 'religious' was a result of complicated orderings and negotiations, where nothing could be taken for granted. To put it in more concrete terms, we are not merely discussing 'changing beliefs' or 'church-state relations' but an overarching transformation that touched not only belief and ritual but also such seemingly mundane issues as, for example, village living arrangements, forms of collective labour, or extraction of natural resources. I believe that the Dumontian perspective, which does not assume Western categories as a starting point, will help us to avoid the pitfalls of those approaches that take the 'political' nature of chieftaincy as a given. Not surprisingly, Dumont's theories have recently been used fruitfully in the analysis of cultural change in the context of globalization (see Robbins and Siikala 2014), and one goal of my study is to contribute to these discussions.

Although Dumont presented a critique of Western secularism, he was above all interested in the development and comparison of ideologies and did not comment on the political dimensions of secularization, for instance, with regards to colonialism. Yet Talal Asad (1993; 2003) has underlined secularist ideology as an important instrument of statecraft and criticized those commentators who have emphasized its liberating and redemptive qualities. For instance, Taylor's (1998, 38–53) claim that secularism is the only option if a pluralistic democratic state is to work has been emphatically opposed by Asad. When Taylor asserts that in order to avoid hierarchies and

conflicts citizenship has to become the most important part of an individual's identity (ibid., 43–44), Asad counters this by stating that secular citizenship is rather the way in which the modern state is able to create a "unifying experience" that transcends other identities based on religion, gender, or class. Hence, secularism is more about securing the undivided supremacy of the nation-state than about peaceful co-existence and toleration (Asad 2003, 3–5). Following these insights, this book seeks to demonstrate the role of secularism in the creation of unified 'native states' or 'tribes' in the colonial period. Furthermore, it looks at how the chieftaincy institution, stripped of its religious associations, has been turned into a symbol of a secular Ghanaian nation.

On the level of ideology secularization entails the 'emancipation' of the modern state, the economy, and science from the confines of religion, which does not mean simply that religious ideas are excluded from public discussions. The question is rather what sort of religious ideas and arguments are considered viable in this context (Asad 2003, 181–187; Casanova 2006). In modern states, people's political identities might be religiously-based and their political choices might conform to a religious ethic, but God and other spiritual beings are regarded as otherworldly and they are not considered to have agency on the immanent level. Thus it could be said that modern societies support religions in which God is considered transcendent and rituals that aim to influence God are seen as futile and misdirected. Whatever effects rituals may have depend solely on the human agency that they express and the psychological responses they induce (Keane 2013, 163–164). Contemporary Ghanaian debates about chieftaincy and ritual reveal that for many people the involvement of spirits in political affairs is an embodied fact, while the secularists classify such ideas as superstitions which do not belong to modern religion and even less to politics. Here I apply the concept of purification introduced by Bruno Latour (1991) and later developed by Webb Keane (2007). Purification is seen as the process that determines the types of agents and actions considered appropriate to modern society. In 'purified' religious thought spiritual beings have a recognized existence inside the 'hearts' or minds of people, but it is not acceptable to grant them agency in 'real' relations between people. In Ghana such views are effectively contradicted by religious groups, who see spiritual forces as the most powerful agents in social relations; consequently, ideas about separating religion from politics in the modernist sense are not of interest to them.

Book outline

The chapters of the book have been divided into three thematic parts, each with a short theoretical introduction. The first part of the book builds up a picture of the undifferentiated order of the pre-colonial Asante kingdom, in which the chiefly and priestly functions of the rulers were not separated. Chapter 1 posits sacrifices and marriage exchanges as the most important responsibilities of the chief, both of which were directed at establishing

and perpetuating relations between the living and the spirits of the dead ancestors. In Chapter 2 the founding of the kingdom and its authority structure are framed as results of sacrifices offered to various gods by the Asante king and his chiefs. Both chapters illuminate how ideas and things that Western ideology would perceive as specifically religious were all-encompassing in Asante society. This is the starting point, and a necessary qualification, for understanding the secularization process with which the chapters of the second part of the book deal. Although this formulation of the pre-colonial order is my own, I am heavily indebted to the previous generations of anthropologists responsible for the classic ethnographic treatments of Asante chieftaincy, most notably, R. S. Rattray, Meyer Fortes, K. A. Busia, and Alex Kyerematen. I would also add the work of legal scholar E. E. Kurankyi-Taylor to that list. The same applies to historians such as Ivor Wilks and T. C. McCaskie. Even if my account of the Asante past looks quite different from theirs, the importance of the knowledge and inspiration received from the previous generations of scholars must be recognized.

The second part discusses how the unified order is being dissolved. The secularization process was initiated by the colonial administrators' and missionary bodies' aspiration to maintain Christian converts under the 'political' authority of their non-Christian, 'pagan' chiefs. Therefore, it was necessary to start dividing the society along 'political' and 'religious' lines so that only the former was a mandatory concern for all. Here we are able to see the kernel of modern citizenship, since the 'religious' opinion of individual people started to define their relationship to their 'political' ruler. Chapter 3 deals with this process and the various problems that accompanied it. Despite its improvised qualities, administrative secularization had its basis in Western social theories, most importantly evolutionism, and the leading British political ideologies of the time. Chapter 4 explores the different colonial-era theories of the Asante kingdom as a secular state, based on conquest, contract, and the rights of citizens. Chapter 5 discusses how the now-political chiefship was put into the service of the post-colonial independent nation state – both as an instrument of administration and a cultural symbol. It also considers why the new kind of secular, 'politico-cultural' chieftaincy has not been accepted by some contemporary Christian groups. Chapter 6 explores the most recent developments, in which chieftaincy is escaping the grip of the state by forming alliances with global horizontal organizations. In accordance with neoliberal ideologies the chiefs are expected to work towards improving the functioning of the market economy, with a particular emphasis on their judicial role. These projects also draw their legitimation from certain types of political theories about chieftaincy.

In the third part of the book I discuss the purification of the spheres of politics and religion in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. God, natural deities, witches, and other spiritual beings have been both considered and rejected as possible agents and this has led to prolonged negotiations about the accepted place of religious ideas in modern society. The cases discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 deal with attempted state control of witch-finding 'cults', the efficiency of 'protective magic' during political upheavals, and

Pentecostal Christian notions of demonic influences in secular politics. Here the theoretical ideas of Keane and Latour are of central importance. The Conclusions section brings the themes of the book together by discussing the large-scale effects of the secular project in contemporary Ghanaian society.

Research is based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in Ghana between 2000 and 2001, and 2005 and 2006, along several archival sources obtained from Ghana and the United Kingdom, and, of course, the voluminous anthropological and historical literature on Ghana and the Asante. The field-notes are in the possession of the author and can be consulted with permission.

I Divinity and exchange

In Dumont's (1971) approach, analysis of the development of the idea of modern politics started from the "whole configuration", where politics is not defined separately from religious or social relations. In what he called holistic or traditional societies "the configuration of values has a hierarchical form where the all-embracing normative consideration which we usually call religion contains and limits whatever other social considerations are recognized" (ibid., 31). Politics is, therefore, either not seen as something separate from religion, or is subordinated to it. In such societies, states and rulers are intermediaries between God or a spirit world, and society, the latter consisting of collective elements such as estates, orders, or clans (see Dumont 1980, 65–67).

An Asante chiefdom of the pre-colonial era, a polity that was composed of several matrilineages established on the basis of common descent from a known female ancestor, can be described in these terms, while an Asante person was considered a whole person or a human being through his or her membership in the lineage. The matrilineage was understood to comprise not only its living members but also the unborn and the dead ancestors, the greatest of whom were those of chiefly lineage because they were considered the original 'holders' of the territory where the chiefdom was located. The office of chief held a central position, since it stood between the living, who were considered the existing guardians of the chiefdom, and the ancestral spirits who had absolute power over their descendants. The ancestors were understood to use their powers to help the living in their worldly undertakings, but wrongful deeds by the living brought shame on the ancestors, who did not hesitate to punish their transgressions. Thus the prosperity and welfare of the living was believed to depend directly on good relations with the ancestors. Because of the fragility of this connection it was vital that the office vested in the chiefly lineage was occupied by a person who was a matrilineal descendant of the founding ancestor of the lineage and thus close enough to the ancestors to communicate with them via sacrifice. In addition to the spirits of the dead, the chief also made sacrifices to nature spirits and charms in order to guarantee the well-being and success of his people. The kingdom of Asante was a union of several chiefdoms, and the king, the *Asantehene*, performed similar ritual duties to his royal ancestors and the gods on behalf of the kingdom.

It would, however, be incorrect to say that the Asante chiefs were only ritual rulers, ceremonial figureheads, or symbols. On the contrary, the chief had many functions that we could describe as political, legal, military, or economic. For instance, he presided over a decision-making council of elders and a judicial court, he commanded an army, and he also allocated farmland to his subjects. Nonetheless, what must be emphasized here is that all these functions were derived from the chief's connection to the spirit world. To take an example, he did not distribute farmland because the land belonged to him; yet neither did the land belong to the community who might then have vested the right of allocation in the chief. He did so because the land belonged to the ancestors and he was their representative or, more accurately, their reincarnation among the living. Hence, all the other functions of the chief were hierarchically subordinate to the value of his religious functions. This, in fact, should be considered typical for societies with kingships and chiefships, as noted by Dumont (1980, 293):

> In most of the societies in which kingship is found, it is a magico-religious as well as political function. This is commonplace. In Ancient Egyptian or Sumerian kingship, or in the kingship of the Chinese empire for instance, the supreme religious functions were vested in the Sovereign, he was the Priest *par excellence* and those who were called the priests were only ritual specialists subordinate to him.

Views of this type have encountered criticism. Nicholas Dirks (1996; 2001), for instance, has argued that the very idea of an encompassing religious order has its origins in the colonial situation and its representations, and, consequently, the Indian society Dumont had studied in greatest depth was "literally created by colonialism" (Dirks 1996, xxvii). According to Dirks, British colonial rule in India was based on the idea that its social world was organized according to religious principles, that is, the caste system, with only oppressive and epiphenomenal political institutions and no civil society to speak of. This conception of 'religious' India was first canonized in the works of colonial ethnographers and later found its way into academic anthropology, offering an emphasis that served to de-legitimize existing Indian political formations and justify the colonial project. Furthermore, Dirks connects Dumont's work to a long line of so-called Orientalist scholarship (see Said 1978) on non-Western societies which Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) has traced back to the nineteenth-century division of labour among the different social sciences. At the time, modern secularized Western societies were studied by separate disciplines (political science, economics, and theology), each specializing in their own social spheres, of which religion was only one. Oriental studies and anthropology, on the other hand, studied non-modern societies that were presumed to be "thoroughly in the grip of religion, as all aspects of life were supposedly determined and dictated by an archaic metaphysics of the magical and the supernatural" (ibid., 16) and hence lagging behind in terms of progress. The assumed predominance of religion was, therefore, the decisive characteristic that set so-called tribal societies as well as ancient civilizations apart from the modern West. Since

non-Western societies were defined as 'timeless' or 'declining' in this sense, they could not truly be agents of history, and therefore responsibility for their 'development' would have to rest on the shoulders of Western colonial powers, thereby providing scientific justification for Western colonialism.

I am not competent to comment on the accuracy of the Dumontian view on India, but the criticism concerning the Orientalistic character of his work has to be taken seriously. After all, it is vital that the adoption of his approach does not lead to enforcing old ideas of Africa as "trapped in the past through religious constructions" (Green 2007, 39). However, I consider labelling Dumont an Orientalist to be a misunderstanding of his comparative project, and here I follow those who have previously addressed the criticism toward him (e.g. Rio and Smedal 2009; Kapferer 2010). Above all, it should not be overlooked that Dumont was as much a student of the West as he was of India and that these two projects were inseparable. For instance, Dumont's treatise on the caste system, *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980), begins with a critical examination of the Western conception of the individual as a basic building block of society, and hierarchy as a system of graded authority, highlighting that these concepts are far from universal and are, in fact, tied to a particular time and place; most importantly, he arrives at this conclusion from the viewpoint of his Indian material. Thus, not content with comparisons limited to the categories of one society, he strives to analyze the West by using Indian categories: a type of "radical and relentless comparativism" that is often mentioned as Dumont's strength (Rio and Smedal 2009, 15). This study emulates Dumont's approach by showing how Western concepts such as politics, religion, citizenship, or civil society are inadequate for discussing pre-colonial Asante chieftaincy and the transformations that followed the colonial occupation and Christian conversion. This is achieved by using the concepts and cultural logic of Asante society itself. Hence, following Dumont, the objective has been to examine the voluminous ethnographic and historical record of religion and ritual in Asante and use it in interrogating our own ideas about religion and society rather than dismissing it as 'colonial representations' or 'othering' (ibid., 24).

Discussing pre-colonial Asante as a holistic or traditional society does not imply a synchronic view of culture and society, where historical processes and the agency of individuals are excluded. What it highlights, however, is that the analysis of the thoughts and actions of people must always be lodged in "*cultural* definitions of personal and social value, rather than in externally defined criteria" (Ortner 1981, 361; italics in the original). Political history, however rich in its analysis of historical processes and sensitive to nuances and variation, always has the risk of becoming encapsulated within a synchronicity of a different order: namely, a cosmology in which human desire for power and profit is the universal constant (Sahlins 2004, 16). In the case of Asante, the historians have very impressively described and analyzed the lives and careers of some pre-colonial officeholders, and more generally, the mechanism and strategies of personal advancement, especially in relation to generating wealth in land, people, and gold. Similarly, the role of the state as both the enabler and disabler of these processes has been

discussed comprehensively (see, e.g., McCaskie 1995, 49–73; Wilks 1993, 127–167). This may easily lead us to think of pre-colonial Asante as a society where great power and great wealth as such created great prestige. However, as the two initial chapters of the book confirm, power and wealth always had a reference point outside the realm of living human beings. In the Asante ideology they were not ends in themselves. Hence, for instance, the great accumulators of wealth in the pre-colonial period strived to transform their riches to a title of a 'big man' (*ɔbirɛmpɔn*, pl. *abirɛmpɔn*), which was a ritual status granted by the *Asantehene* and a great amplification to one's ancestral name (McCaskie 1995, 42–49). Similarly, in the colonial period the 'newly rich' commoners, who had resented and protested against the chiefly rule of the pre-colonial period, used their money and influence to become enstooled as chiefs (McCaskie 1986a, 7–8). Thus the powerful men of different eras, operating in different institutional settings, sought to 'immortalize' themselves in similar ways by joining the ranks of the ancestors.

As is evident from the above, the two chapters that follow do not seek to document the 'real politics' of pre-colonial Asante. The chronological scope ranges from the foundation of the kingdom at the turn of the eighteenth century to its destruction in the late nineteenth century. At relevant points the account refers to the major ways the political history of the pre-colonial kingdom has been previously periodized in terms of greater or lesser centralization of power or hereditary versus 'meritocratic' principles in access to high offices and titles. The main emphasis, however, is always on the value system that had to be drawn upon in order to legitimate these types of operations involving political or economic power. In Chapter 1 offering sacrifices to ancestral spirits and contracting marriages are singled out as the most important functions of the chiefs. The chief was first and foremost a priestly figure who made sacrifices to the spirits of his departed ancestors, who watched over the affairs of the living. Ultimately, chiefly marriages served the same purpose as the sacrifices – they were exchanges that sought to enhance, perpetuate, and diffuse the greatness of the ancestors. Through his own and his offspring's marriages a chief was able to secure the reincarnation of the dead chiefs among the living and pass on important ancestral names. Chapter 2 discusses how the modern distinction between politics and ritual easily steers one to suppose that politics are prior to ritual and thus give only a symbolic or 'sacralising' role to the latter; when considering the ideologies of societies with an undifferentiated structure, however, it has to be understood that the sequence is exactly the opposite. From the point of view of the people of pre-colonial Asante, their kingdom and its complex gradation of rights were the result of the performance of an antecedent series of major human sacrifices. To summarize, states like this transcend themselves: they always exist for an external, higher purpose (Dumont 1992 [1986], 84).

1. The great ancestors

Blood, spirit, destiny, and spiritual backing

A study of Asante chiefship must begin with a discussion of indigenous Asante notions of human essence: namely, the conception that a person was made of 'blood', *mogya*, which was inherited matrilineally, and 'spirit' (*ntɔrɔ*) which was transmitted patrilineally. Without both, acknowledged maternity and paternity, a person was not seen to be complete (Fortes 1963, 59–60). In addition to these two, individuals also had a 'soul'(*kra*) which affected their 'destiny' (*nkrabea*) in life, and a 'spiritual backing' (*sunsum*) which could be 'tall' or 'short', that is to say, more or less potent, depending on the experience and knowledge of the person in question. However, *kra* and *sunsum* were not acquired through filiation, but directly from spiritual sources.[2]

Matrifiliation conferred membership in a local matrilineal descent group (*abusua*, pl. *mmusua*) the members of which traced descent from a common ancestress. It was also based on the notion of shared blood which can only be transmitted by women. This perception was exemplified by a well-known proverb: *abusua baako, mogya baako*, one lineage, one blood.[3] The lineages belonged to exogamous matriclans, also called *abusua* or *abusua kɛseɛ*, big lineage.[4] The clans were not localized units and they included member lineages from all the Akan chiefdoms. All persons belonging to the same clan, irrespective of their place of residence, were considered to be related by

2 Similarities and linkages between the constitutive elements make this quadripartition problematic and hence it should not be considered a definitive model of the Asante conception of personhood. Both Fortes (1969, 198–199) and Rattray (1959 [1927], 153–155) as well as many contemporary writers (e.g., Gyekye 1987, 85–102) have pondered on this matter.

3 This notion is still strong even today and well exemplified by one of Gracia Clark's (1994, 98) informants, who maintained that abandoning the lineage would mean that "I would have to open my wrists and drain out all my blood first".

4 The number and names of Akan matriclans vary in different accounts (see Wilks 1993, 80). Contemporary Asante usually mention the following eight: Oyoko, Bretuo, Asene, Aduana, Ekuona, Asona, Agona, and Asakyiri.

blood, or more specifically, to be descendants of a common ancestress (Fortes 1969, 158–162).[5] Assisted by a female head (*obaa panin*), the matrilineage had a male head (*abusua panin*) who exercised authority over the internal matters of the lineage, but in that capacity he was largely dependent on the support of the elders of the lineage. These matters were mostly concerned with spheres referred to by Fortes as domestic, such as marriage, divorce, property relations, and the like (ibid., 163–165). The lineage also formed a link to chiefly authority since the decisive criterion for residency in a chiefdom was "membership, by right of birth, of one's mother's matrilineal lineage" (ibid., 145–146), while "all transactions of a political or juridical nature" were conducted through the lineage heads (ibid., 163). The most important corporate possession of the lineage was the stool (*akonnua*, pl. *nkonnua*), that is, the office vested in it (ibid., 165).

Rights to offices, land, and property were transmitted through the line of matrilineal descent. According to Fortes it was a "fixed principle of Ashanti[6] social structure" that at death every person had to have an heir and successor. What was actually inherited was status, "anchored in a person, labelled by kinship terms, and represented in material possessions which can be passed on" (ibid., 173). This idea is more or less identical to the notion of positional succession.[7] Men were in most cases succeeded by their nephews and brothers, and women by their daughters and sisters. The basic unit of inheritance was the minimal lineage (*ɔyafunu koro*), which Fortes called the "nuclear and paradigmatic descent unit" within the larger maximal lineage.

5 There was no constituted ranking order of matriclans. Their relationship should rather be seen as complementary in terms of their mythical contributions to society and the offices vested in their lineages. For instance, the ancestors of the Asakyiri clan are considered to be the first people who built houses, while the ancestors of the Aduana clan were the first ones to put out fires. Similarly, although the fact that the office of the *Asantehene* is vested in a certain lineage of the Oyoko clan is a source of pride for every Oyoko person and lineage in the country, there are important and powerful offices vested in other clans as well, whose members are equally proud of them. Nowadays, many people, at least of the older generations, still know which stools are vested in the lineages of their clans and take interest in their affairs.

6 Ashanti is an anglicized version of Asante (see Arhin 1983, 47) adopted by the colonial administration and still appearing in many official names, titles, maps, etc. It was also the term most commonly used in the scholarly literature before the 1970s. Furthermore, there are various versions of many place names and personal names due to differences between indigenous Asante and English spellings, for example, Kumase – Kumasi, Nkoransa – Nkoranza, Prempe – Prempeh.

7 This parallel with Central African materials, such as Audrey Richards' (e.g. 1962 [1950]) work on the Bemba of Zambia, was recognized by Fortes (1969, 173) himself. Elsewhere Fortes (1975 [1962]) discusses both kinship statuses and offices as instances of "corporation sole" as defined by H. S. Maine (1861). As Marilyn Strathern (1985, 199) has pointed out that the notion of kinship roles as "miniature offices" bestowed with rights and obligations regarding people and property is characteristic of West African (and presumably Central African) societies. Hence status devolution, or what she calls a holder/heir model, is not necessarily a good analytical metaphor for discussing kinship in other societies.

The household (*ɛfie*, pl. *afie*), which could also include wives of male lineage members and their children, was usually built around a minimal lineage (ibid., 169–175), while relationships within the lineage were regulated "by law and sanctioned by the deified jural authority projected in ancestor worship" (Fortes 1963, 60).

Patrifiliation, in contrast, conferred membership in a *ntɔrɔ* division, which did not constitute a social group like the matrilineage, but rather a ritual category, members of which shared a specific weekday for rituals connected to *ntɔrɔ*, certain avoidances and names, and a formal salutation;[8] there were nine divisions which were divided further into several subdivisions (McCaskie 1995, 170–173). In terms of shared bodily substances, *ntɔrɔ* was considered to be transmitted by semen in sexual intercourse, and also by saliva, which was put into an infant's mouth by his / her father or paternal grandfather in a name-giving ceremony. Whether the *ntɔrɔ* divisions were exogamous has been matter of dispute: Fortes (1969, 198) claims that the boundaries of the category of unmarriageable patrilateral relatives are defined by demonstrable genealogical connections and not by shared *ntɔrɔ* as such, whereas Rattray (1955 [1923], 45) states the opposite.[9] I will return to this question below when I discuss the considerable importance of both *abusua* and *ntɔrɔ* in the inheritance and distribution of so-called great ancestral names.

As the references to Fortes imply, older structural-functionalist theory tended to see *mogya* and *ntɔrɔ* as qualities of individuals on the basis of which they formed certain important social groups and categories. However, in line with more recent anthropological discussions on African conceptions of personhood, especially those influenced by Melanesian studies, one could argue that the Asante idea of person was "relational" or "composite" (see, e.g., Englund 1996; Geissler and Prince 2010; Piot 1999; Shaw 2000). As will be made evident below, people were in many ways seen to be a product of the marriages of not only their own parents but also of their ancestors. Hence, persons came into being through exchange.[10] However, I would here rather stress Dumont's (1980, 1–20) notion of holism: *abusua* and *ntɔrɔ* were not groups formed by individuals, but wholes that had a prior existence. In the Asante ideology these wholes could be then divided in order to 'make' persons and therefore the idea of an individual person was possible only in reference to these categories.

8 According to McCaskie (1995, 170), the most important *ntɔrɔ* rituals were the "blessing of the mouth" with water and the "washing" of one's *kra*. Some *ntɔrɔ* rituals were recorded by Rattray (1955 [1923], 50–54).

9 The fact that the beliefs and practices associated with *ntɔrɔ* were already dying out in Fortes' time has made it difficult to study it (Fortes 1962 [1950], 265). Nowadays, most people do not know to which *ntɔrɔ* division they belong and some are not even familiar with the concept. However, the *ntɔrɔ* affiliation remains an important matter for the chiefs and royals who continue to perform the rituals connected to it.

10 In fact, the Asante notion of person was one of the many ethnographical examples mentioned by Mauss (1985 [1938], 12) in his famous essay on the concept of person, which was an important precursor to the current discussions about relational / composite personhood (see Englund 1996, 275).

The black stools

The term chiefdom (*ɔman*, pl. *aman*) refers to towns and villages which were made up of matrilineages of diverse clan origin. One of the component lineages was the ruling lineage, or royal lineage, of the chiefdom, whose position was based on ancestral occupation of the land.[11] The offices of the chief (*ɔhene*, pl. *ahene*) and the queen mother (*ɔhemaa*, pl. *ahemaa*) were vested in that lineage. The other component lineages comprised the descendants of those groups and individuals who had arrived later to the locality and had been given permission to settle there by the ruling lineage, or had been conquered in war. They were represented by divisional chiefs or lineage heads who had sworn an oath of allegiance (*soaye*) to the chief, and together they formed a council of elders. The relationships between the offices within a chiefdom were expressed in a "military idiom": the army of a chiefdom was made up of "lineage contingents grouped in companies, each under a captain who, in peace time, served as a councillor" (Fortes 1969, 150). Military service was expressly a lineage obligation. All able-bodied men of a lineage formed a single fighting unit, which was led by their lineage head and each was allocated an area of operations: for instance, the members of a particular lineage formed the main body, *Adonten*, of the field army, and accordingly the head of the lineage was titled *Adontenhene*, the commander of the main body.[12] All units were subordinate to the paramount chief, and he was the supreme commander of the whole army.

The chiefly stool, as an instantiation of the ancestors, 'owned' the soil (*asase*), whereas the members of the so-called commoner lineages had the right to 'eat on the soil' (*didi asase so*), meaning that they could have their homes and farms on the land, and also hunt, fish, and make use of any collectable products of the forest. In return the chief was entitled to a part of the crop during the annual harvest festival and to a fixed share of the catch of the hunters and fishermen as well as of other products of the forest. Customarily, he had the right to levy a wide range of taxes and mobilize his subjects for war or communal tasks (Fortes 1969, 139–150).

Kurankyi-Taylor (1951, 18) called the Asante lineage a perpetual corporation, meaning that it consisted not only of its living members but also of the dead and unborn. In this scheme of things, the office of the chief held a nodal position since it stood between the living who were considered the guardians of "the fortunes and affairs of the whole body corporate" (ibid., 172) and the ancestors (*asamanfoɔ*) who had absolute power over

11 According to Alex Kyerematen (1971, 17–19) in Asante traditional accounts the ancestral occupation is established through discovery, gift, purchase, or military conquest.

12 In addition to the military title, a lineage head or a divisional chief could be called after the original name of the group that he represented, which was derived from its clan identity or place of residence or origin (see Dunn and Robertson 1973, 23–24, 180–184). For instance, the *Nifahene* of Nkoranza, the commander of the right wing, and his people occupy a place called Seseman and hence he is most often called the *Sesemanhene*.

the former. As noted above, the ancestors were considered to be benevolent towards their successors, but shameful deeds by the living that disgraced the ancestors invited punishment (ibid., 191–192). Hence, the kinship relation between the ancestors and the living was not severed by death and the descendants of the dead chiefs were perceived as the most appropriate persons among the living to approach the ancestral spirits with offerings and petitions (Busia 1968 [1951], 23–37). As Fortes (1963, 59) put it, the Asante matrilineages were committed to being "of pure freeborn descent" because "their entire social existence hinges on their prerogatives of hereditary office and rank; and these would be jeopardized if the established laws of kinship, descent, inheritance and succession were set aside in the slightest particular". In other words, the imperative of keeping the lineage, from which the chiefs were elected, a closed group ultimately arose from the relationship between the living and the ancestors, which had its nexus in the office and its occupant.

The principal occasion for ancestral sacrifice was the Adae ritual that took place twice during every 'month' of the Asante calendar, that is to say, in every successive period of forty-two days (*adaduanan*).[13] In Adae the chief would offer sheep, alcohol, and cooked food to the ancestral spirits and ask them to let his "town prosper" (Rattray 1955 [1923], 92–108). In the course of the ritual the offerings would be placed on the stools of the dead chiefs, which functioned as shrines for the ancestral spirits:

> After the death of a wise ruler, if it be desired to perpetuate his or her name and memory, the late owner's 'white' stool is 'smoked' or blackened by being smeared all over with soot, mixed with yolk of egg. It then becomes a black stool (*apunnua*), and is deposited in the stool house (*akonnua dan*), and becomes a treasured heirloom (*agyapadie*) of that clan. The stool, which during the life-time of its possessor was so intimately bound (literally and metaphorically speaking) with its owner's *sunsum* or soul thus becomes after death a shrine into which the departed spirit may again be called upon to enter on certain special occasions […] that it may receive that adulation and those gifts that were dear to it in life, and so be induced to continue to use its new and greater spiritual influence in the interest of those over whom it formerly ruled when upon earth. (Ibid., 92)

In addition to calendar rituals like Adae, the ancestors could be contacted in times of need (see, e.g., Wilks 1993, 232–234). All in all, the safety and closeness of the ancestral stools was of utmost importance to the chief: during a war, for instance, the blackened stools were carried to the field and consulted during battle. In the face of defeat, it was explicitly the responsibility of the chief and his elders to defend the shrines to the bitter end and, in the worst case, to commit suicide by blowing themselves up along with the stools (Rattray 1929, 122–123).

13 The first early-nineteenth-century European descriptions of Adae are by T. E. Bowdich (1966 [1819]), who visited Kumasi in 1817. The fullest accounts are by Rattray (1955 [1923]), who recorded several Adae rituals in the 1920s. See McCaskie (1980a, 190–192) for a discussion of the importance of Adae in the Asante calendar.

"Bantamah Kings Cemetery" (TNA CO 1069/31). The skeletons of the dead Asante kings were stored in a mausoleum where they were attended by female custodians knowns as "the wives of the ghosts" (Rattray 1959 [1927], 188–119). The Asantehene *also performed yearly sacrifices at the mausoleum (McCaskie 1995, 159–160). The building was eventually destroyed by British troops in 1896 (Wilks 1993, 242).*

Encompassed election

The methods of electing a new chief varied in detail from one chiefdom to another (see Rattray 1929), but some general characteristics were shared by most. The principal officeholders of the chiefdom functioned as 'kingmakers' and made the final decision in the matter. Basically, they were the same persons who formed the council of divisional chiefs or elders and who were also able to depose, or 'destool', a chief if he had violated the oath of allegiance he had sworn to his elders or transgressed any of the taboos of his office (Busia 1968 [1951], 21–23). In the election process some members appear to have been more important than others, so that their concurrence was necessary in order to hold a valid election. When the paramount office in the chiefdom fell vacant, the first duty of the kingmakers was to approach the queen mother to ask her "to nominate one of the members of the Royal family whom she discretionally considers suitable for installation" (PRAAD ARG 6/2/28a). The queen mother herself was elected and installed by the chief and his elders, and she hailed from the same matrilineage as the chief but did not have to be in any exact relationship to him (such as mother or sister). At this point, any man who was able to make a reasonable claim to the office could offer himself as a candidate by presenting himself to the queen mother through the medium of an appropriate dignitary. After weighing up the available candidates and nominating one of them, the queen mother and the elders of the ruling lineage would "then inform them [the kingmakers] through the linguists [chief's orators] of her nomination and address them of

his conduct and capability" (ibid.). The kingmakers would then consider the nominee brought forward by the queen mother and either accept or reject him. In the former case he was introduced to the public and his training could begin; in the latter, the queen mother was asked to appoint another candidate. A number of candidates could be introduced and rejected before final approval. Only after the chief-elect had been ritually installed, the blackened ancestral stools and other paraphernalia of office connecting him to his ancestors were presented to him. During the transitional period they were in the custody of caretakers (*wirempefoɔ*) who were not eligible for succession (Fortes 1967, 17–18).

The focal point of the installation ceremony was the oath of allegiance. The oath was reciprocal: the lineage elders swore it collectively to the chief and received it from him collectively. For example, in the chiefdom of Nkoranza the elders took the following oath to the chief, the *Nkoranzahene*:

> How my ancestors served yours likewise will I serve you; If I do not help you in any way I violate Boakye, Kwasiada and Yawda. (PRAAD ARG 1/2/12/10a)

The chief, in his turn, answered:

> I swear Kwasiada, Yawda, and Boakye that I will follow the example of my ancestors and obey what my elders will tell me. (Ibid.)

Here Boakye, Kwasiada, and Yawda are 'names of oaths' referring to certain historical disasters that had befallen the Nkoranza stool. In an oath a person made the welfare and stability of the community conditional on his / her / others' actions by referencing some specific misfortune in the past, although the verbal content of oaths differed from one chiefdom to another. In a number of them specific responsibilities were mentioned; for example, the chief could swear not to wage war against his sub-chiefs, not to seduce the wives of his subjects, or not to run away in battle (Rattray 1929, 165–166). Sometimes the content could be rather abstract, with the elders pledging, for instance, to respond to their chief's call whether they were summoned during the day or at night (ibid., 86–87). Generally speaking, the oaths did not enumerate the rights and obligations of the parties concerned, but rather re-confirmed the tie or union formed by the ancestors. However, despite this seeming abstractness, the people involved took the oaths very literally. As one of my informants affirmed: "If you have sworn that you will respond to his [the chief's] call, you have to do so. It is not a matter to be taken lightly! I think it's only in case of sickness that you don't have to respond. Otherwise there is no excuse." A violation of oath was considered both "a politico-jural delict and act of sacrilege" which fell under the jurisdiction of the chief or the king (Fortes 1969, 153–155). Furthermore, although the relationship was dyadic, it formed a link in a chain of similar relationships. As the elders pledged allegiance to their chief, so did the chief to his overlord. At the top end of the chain was the king, the *Asantehene*, and, at the lowest, the chiefs of the most inferior rank like the village headmen (*adekurofoɔ*, sing. *odekuro*) and their elders.

It could be said that the transfer of power among the Asante combined both prescriptive and elective elements. On the one hand, there was a group of people known as the royals who were all, given the certain restrictions of sex and age, genealogically qualified to occupy the office vested in the ruling lineage.[14] On the other, a candidate put forward by the ruling group had to be suitable, not only in terms of genealogy, but in other respects as well. According to Busia (1968 [1951], 9) the qualities required from a candidate were "intelligence (*adwempa*), humility (*ahobrɛ-ase*), generosity (*ne yam ye*), manliness (*abooduru*), and physical fitness (*dɛm biara nni ne ho*)". While, from a Western perspective, these may sound like individualistic attainments, the degree to which a candidate was considered to possess these qualities depended partly on his name or his membership in one of the *ntɔrɔ* divisions. In addition, the candidate had to have support among the kingmakers in advance, and in order to secure that he had to have access to economic resources, since the use of money in 'lobbying' was a central feature of the election process (Wilks 1993, 136–139). Nonetheless, despite the complexity of demands made on a candidate, it is safe to say that an accepted genealogical relation to the royal ancestors was the primary charter for the chiefly office; without it the other qualities would not have been taken into consideration. But even in terms of common descent there were differences in eligibility. Some segments of the ruling lineage, in certain cases all but one, could be considered non-eligible because of their status as 'latecomers'; that is, groups of people absorbed into the original lineage after the founding of the office (Fortes 1969, 146–147). In some chiefdoms the office rotated among the eligible segments of the lineage, sometimes referred to as 'branches' or 'gates', whereas in others all eligible segments could contest it. As a result of these practices, the candidate elected could be quite distantly related to the ex-ruler, both in terms of collateral kin as well as ascending and succeeding generations. Moreover, if a suitable candidate could not be found, the search had to be extended to the group of 'non-eligibles' of the same lineage or even to the collateral lineages of the same clan. Thus, theoretically speaking, all clan members were potential officeholders. Interestingly enough, the Twi word *ɔdehyeɛ* can mean both a 'royal' and 'freeborn person': a lineage or clan member of full standing. On a more practical level, the Asante themselves have always made a very clear distinction between 'true royals' whom the actual incumbency of office concerns, and 'commoners' who are not directly involved. "There is a stool in the family of every Akan [person], but it is only the royals that can have it," as one of my informants confirmed. Similarly, Fortes (1969, 162) pointed out that "[t]he notion that every true member of a clan is eligible to succeed to any of the offices vested in its branches is understood to be a fiction"; but he too realized that there were certain situations where the rules of succession had to be altered:

14 Among the Asante there were no strict rules of primogeniture: "[b]rother may succeed brother; nephew, uncle; grandson grandfather; and the younger may be chosen before the elder" (Rattray 1929, 85).

> There are well-authenticated cases in most chiefdoms of lineages becoming extinct or being disfranchised for treason, and offices held by them being awarded by the chief to a member of a collateral lineage or even to a son of the last holder and thus to a different lineage. The principle [of matrilineal succession within the lineage] is not thereby invalidated. It rests on the postulate [...] that lineage vested *office is tied to the sanctioned ancestral stools and that a person who is not eligible by demonstrable descent to offer sacrifice and libation to them in his own right cannot have ancestral sanction for occupying the office bequeathed by them.* (Ibid.; italics added)

Although the electoral procedure certainly had a strong representational aspect to it, it has to be emphasized that the whole process was encompassed by religious value. The ability to offer sacrifices to his predecessors' spirits was clearly the decisive criterion for the occupant of the chiefly office and the tie between him and his people was ultimately conditioned by a sanction from the spirit world.

Ancestral sanction

The key to understanding the authority of the chiefs, lineage heads, and elders is the notion of disgrace (*aniwu*). Both Rattray and Fortes established that the Asante legal system recognised two kinds of offences: namely, the "household cases" and the "tribal sins". The former related to rules governing persons and property, preferably arbitrated by the lineage elders, whereas the latter necessarily fell under the jurisdiction of chiefs' courts (Fortes 1969, 155–157). The "tribal sins", which I will call taboos (*akyiwadeɛ*, lit. 'a thing one turns his / her back to'), were considered to be forbidden by the ancestors and / or the deities of the community. Every community had its own taboos, and it was the responsibility of the ruler to enforce them, while some taboos, such as clan exogamy, involved the whole kingdom. The most dreadful were the "violations of the sanctity of the *Asantehene*'s Golden Stool and offences against the majesty of the king" (ibid., 156). It is important to understand that *akyiwadeɛ* does not correspond to the modern notion of crime, since taboo penetrated all kinds of normative categories and was ultimately tied to the relationship between humans and their ancestors and gods. If transgressions were left unpunished by the authorities, the retribution of the spirits would not only have fallen on the transgressor him / herself but also on the community as a whole. Such consequences were believed to be disastrous. As Kurankyi-Taylor (1951, 39–40) has put it, "the land would cease to bear fruit, the animals in the bush would sicken and die, the tribe would decrease in numbers and in power and it would be overwhelmed by its enemies".

When people committed an offence they did not only bring disgrace upon themselves but also upon the community.[15] In this context community

15 This idea is expressed in a number of proverbs, for example, *onipa bɔne te manmu a ne nkoa ne nnipa nyinaa*, "one evil doer in the community makes slaves of us all" (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 158).

could be understood in various ways: for example, as the matrilineal descent group, the chiefdom, or in some cases even the patrilineal *ntɔrɔ* ritual division (ibid., 158, 197). As I have already noted, human communities were seen to exist on three different levels: those respectively occupied by the dead, the living, and the unborn. The disgrace caused by the living was seen to extend to all of these levels, and since it was also shared by all, it was in everyone's interest to do everything possible to avoid it. Whatever discontents or frictions there might have been inside the community, it was crucial not to let them turn into public matters, thereby exposing the whole community to the ridicule and judgement of others. As Kurankyi-Taylor noted, "[i]t was considered a disgrace if a grouping or community was unable to settle disputes among its members without the intervention of any outsiders" (ibid., 66), and gradual recognition of this "collectivist feeling" was an important part of growing up into a good person *(onipa pa*). Ultimately, the whole community (of whatever type or size) was responsible for the upbringing and good behaviour of its members (ibid., 152, 181). However, this was not purely a matter of collective conscience: the chiefly courts also enforced the principle of collective responsibility. Throughout Asante history there are instances where the subordinates, friends, relatives, and even superiors of the offender have been held accountable for his / her offence (e.g. McCaskie 1984, 172–173).[16] In the most severe cases the existence and self-reproducing powers of the entire community were at stake. Rattray (1959 [1927], 87), for example, described the punishment for adultery with a wife of the *Asantehene* as follows: "Not only (it is alleged) were the woman and her paramour killed […], but the mother, father, and maternal uncle of both parties also suffered death, while all the remaining families of both had to undergo the ceremony known as 'drinking the gods', and to swear that they had not connived at the offence".[17] Accordingly, any senior person or officeholder related to the transgressor would 'beg' (*sre*) for leniency on his / her behalf (see Kallinen 2004, 100–115).

Furthermore, in addition to those spiritual agencies that had decreed the taboos and sanctioned them, offenders were also at risk of receiving punishment from their own ancestors whom they had disgraced. It was believed that some violations were so shaming that the ancestors would rather exterminate the whole community through their sanctions, which

16 This is true even today. For instance, a dispute over some missing stool regalia occurred between the *Tredehene* and his elders, who belong to an 'administrative group' called *Kronti fekuo* in Kumasi, The case was not correctly reported to the *Asantehene* in the Kumasi Traditional Council and, as a result, all the chiefs of the *Kronti fekuo*, including their head, the *Bantamahene*, were ordered to slaughter a sheep each (*Asante Tribune* Sept. 12 – Sept. 18, 2000).

17 In "drinking the gods" or "drinking fetish" (*nom ɔbosom*) people guaranteed their promises by drinking water in which some "shrine objects" had been soaked, thus making themselves vulnerable to a particular deity, which was then able to punish them if the promise were not kept (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 188).

manifested themselves as the "evil fortune" (*mmusuo*) of the living, than bear the disgrace (Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 192). The extinction of the living members of the community meant the end of the community on all three levels since the living members could not give birth to 'unborn' children in whom the ancestral spirits could reincarnate. Those unable to reincarnate were "forever compelled to live in the Asaman forest in the cold dark shadows", while those ancestors able to reincarnate lived in happiness and prosperity.[18] In conclusion, it can be said that the community, whatever is meant by it in each case, was subject to punishment for the offence of its members, whether from spiritual or human agency (ibid., 181–182).

Chiefly marriage

In the above, I have argued that sacrificing to ancestral spirits was the principal function of the chief through which he mediated between the living and dead members of his lineage. It was his duty to convey the petitions of his people to the ancestor and give them the expiatory offerings that would appease the wrath caused by disgrace. The other important mediating function can be discovered from the different types of marriage exchanges practiced by the chiefs.

In general, the decisive formality that established a legal marriage (*aware*) was the giving of *tiri nsa* (lit. 'head drink'), which consisted of liquor and / or a sum of money. It was handed over by the head of the husband's lineage to the head of the bride's lineage, after which it was distributed between the bride's father and members of both lineages witnessing the transaction. The husband could also personally distribute some customary gifts to the bride, her parents, uncle, lineage elder, and sometimes to certain deities and charms. The payment of *tiri nsa* guaranteed the husband exclusive sexual rights over his wife, legal paternity of the children born in that marriage, and rights to essential domestic and economic services. Conversely, the man was obliged to provide his wife and their children with food and clothing (and also housing in case of patrilocal or neolocal marriages). He had to take care of her in case of illness, be able to satisfy her sexually, and take responsibility for her debts. Constant failure to fulfil marital duties on the part of either husband or wife provided grounds for divorce, which both parties were entitled to demand. In case of divorce, *tiri nsa* was returned to the husband's lineage, but other customary gifts presented by the husband were not returnable (Fortes 1962 [1950], 280–281).

The lineage was not a self-contained unit and thus it could not establish a society by itself. The notion of incest (*mogyadeɛ* and *atwebenefie*), which

18 *Asaman* or *Asamandow* was the "land of the ghosts" or "spirit world" occupied by the ancestors. The ideas concerning its location and nature vary greatly (e.g., McCaskie 1995, 306–307).

was listed among the *akyiwadeɛ*, compelled a person to marry outside his / her own lineage group.[19] Those unmarried men and women who were forbidden as sexual partners were also prohibited as spouses, a dictum that was particularly important in the case of members of the same matrilineage. Strictly speaking, the prohibition extended to the matriclan throughout Asante and to all the other Akan peoples sharing the same clan system. On the paternal side marriage was prohibited with any "patrilineal descendant" of one's great-grandfather (ibid., 278–279). Polygyny was accepted, and customarily it was an obligation for chiefs and priests. In the case of ordinary men, the husband needed his wife's (or wives') approval before taking a new spouse, though their real and classificatory sisters in the same lineage were prohibited (Fortes 1963, 63).

In genealogical terms, the most desirable spouse was a real or classificatory cross-cousin from either side. This did not necessarily reflect the preference of the couple but rather that of the senior men, the mother's brothers and fathers, who traditionally had the final say in marriage contracts (Fortes 1969, 213). The members of the parental generation defended these unions on various grounds, but very often the reasons had to do with expediency in distributing and transmitting property and wealth within the matrilineage (Fortes 1962 [1950], 281–282). For instance, in the case of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, a man could ensure that his daughter had a decent husband in his nephew and, since the latter was possibly also his successor, the inheritance he left would indirectly benefit his daughter as well. Similarly, a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage gave a father the assurance that his son had a good wife in his niece and that when he gave material gifts to his son he was not neglecting his sister's children because the gifts would be at least partly shared by his niece, now also a daughter-in-law. These benefits concerned the two marriage forms generally, but for the chiefs they were of extraordinary importance in securing the possibility of reincarnation for the past chiefs as well as distributing some of their greatness to the other component lineages of the chiefdom.

Keeping the great names: marriage and reincarnation

In addition to the practicalities often connected to it, there is one aspect of cross-cousin marriages that has fascinated many anthropologists. This debate was launched by Rattray who had tried to explain "cross-cousin marriage and its particular relationship to the social organization of the

19 The term *mogyadeɛ* refers simply to sexual intercourse with a 'blood relative', i.e., those of the same *abusua*. The term *atwebenefie* is more problematic since it entails sexual relations with patrilateral relatives but also with the spouses of certain persons with whom one has close social relationships (including both relatives and non-relatives), and hence, as Rattray (1929, 304–306) noted, in many cases it has more to do with adultery than incest. More recently, this distinction has been discussed by Françoise Héritier (1999, 160–170).

Ashanti, by metaphysical beliefs" (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949], 111).[20] Rattray's proposal was based on the observation that people were thought to be able to reincarnate through a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Quite simply, when a man's son (sharing his *ntɔrɔ*) married his niece (sharing his *mogya* or *abusua* through his sister), their children would bear exactly the same inherited components of blood and spirit as the paternal grandfather. In these instances the grandson was a potential reincarnation (*kra pa*, lit. 'good soul') of the grandfather (see Figure 1.1). After his death the grandfather became an ancestor, and it was believed that he could be born again in those of his descendants who combined both matrilineal and patrilineal elements of his person.[21] Exactly how, when, and how many times the actual reincarnation is thought to occur is a complicated question, and different interpretations have been proposed which are based on a variety of ideas concerning the qualities and interrelationship of *mogya*, *ntɔrɔ*, *kra*, and *sunsum* (e.g., Kurankyi-Taylor 1951, 172). Based on discussions with contemporary Asante, I have come to the understanding that the possibility of rebirth was not limited to the paternal grandfather and grandson relationship. It might take place in later generations as well, provided that there was a conformity of *mogya* and *ntɔrɔ* between the person and the ancestor whom he personified.[22] Only this particular form of marriage creates offspring in the grandchildren's generation who are ideal for reincarnation.

Rattray asserted that the same idea of reincarnation also lay behind matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, even though contemporary evidence did not support his claim. The whole argument was based on his hypothesis that a dual organization had previously existed in Asante, a hypothesis which he developed on the strength of certain oral traditions claiming that all communities had started as pairs of men and women who lived in isolation and hence did not intermarry with any other group or place. In the long run these groups kept on growing until there were "a great many people who

20 The other major anthropological debate is whether the Asante have a double descent system. It has been reviewed by others (e.g., Goody 1969, 106–111) and I do not see any reason to take it up here.

21 I cannot see any reason why these same principles should not have been applied to women as well, and hence in Figure 1.1 granddaughter Aa could be a reincarnation of her maternal grandmother Aa. But since senior men contracted the cross-cousin marriages which were seen predominantly as the business of male officeholders, I am referring here only to men. Nevertheless, I disagree with Luc de Heusch (1981, 69–70) who suggests that *ntɔrɔ* constitutes a case of "the regime of masculine sex affiliation" and thus does not concern women. Although *ntɔrɔ* was transmitted only *by* men, it was not transmitted only *to* men. Women inherited it from their fathers just as the men did and they also needed it in order to exist as 'whole persons'.

22 For instance, the present *Asantehene* Osei Tutu II is often said to be the reincarnation of the first *Asantehene* Osei Tutu. I have heard numerous stories that testify to the change in kingly persona whereby people who knew the king "as a young man" were surprised to meet him "as a completely different kind of man" after he had been installed to office. In this case, there are ten generations between the ancestor and his reincarnation, and hence the status as a reincarnation of the first king is not seen to result directly from any single marriage, but rather from a new relationship to the ancestor established in the installation rituals.

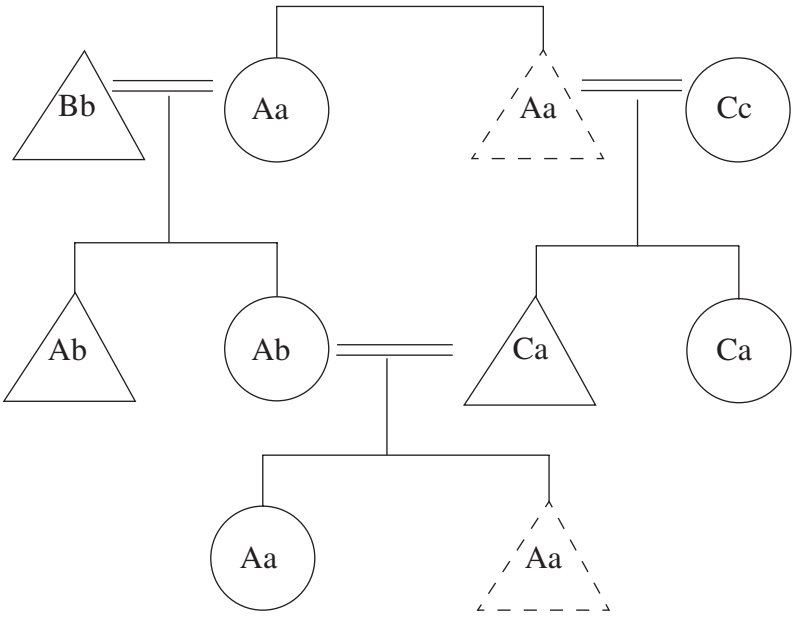


Figure 1.1 Inheritance of abusua *and* ntɔrɔ *in patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. A, B, and C signify membership in an exogamous matrilineal descent group (*abusua*) and a, b, and c signify membership in a patrilineal ritual division (*ntɔrɔ*). Grandfather Aa and his reincarnation, grandson Aa, are marked with dotted line.*

belonged to one or other of the two clans, and one or other of the two *ntoro*" (Rattray 1959 [1927], 328).[23] Accordingly, as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949], 107) puts it, a double dichotomy of the social group was established. In such a case, if similar rules of exogamy prevailed,[24] there would not be any difference concerning the 'direction' of marriages; both patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousin marriages would produce male and female 'duplicates' of (some of) the grandparents.[25] Finally, the groups started to

23 According to Rattray (1929, 66–67), the Asante matriclans were formerly divided into two intermarrying moieties that later merged into each other, and the name of one or the other moiety had come to represent the clan as a whole. Thus, for instance, the Bretuo clan was originally "a twin clan", supposedly named *Bretuo ne Tena*, "Bretuo and Tena", signifying its dual character. The relatedness between the Bretuo and Tena is still acknowledged; e.g., the *Okwawuhene*, a non-Asante paramount chief from the Tena clan, is considered to be a brother to the *Mamponhene*, who is Bretuo.

24 It has to be kept in mind that Rattray considered the *ntɔrɔ* divisions to be exogamous and that same view was also adopted by his critics.

25 In Figure 1.1 a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage between son Ab and daughter Ca would not create a possible reincarnation of anyone in the previous generation. However, in a dual organization, this would happen. If grand-uncle Aa had married his brother-in-law Bb's sister, his nephew Ab's matrilateral cross-cousin marriage with his daughter (in that case Ba) would produce 'duplicates' of grandfather Bb and his sister (Aa's wife). Hence, the difference between patrilateral and matrilateral marriages would merely depend on one's point of view.

expand and found other groups to marry, which led to the disintegration of the dual organization and the locally-bound, isolated, intermarrying descent groups were incorporated into a single exogamous group, members of which started to marry into new, previously unknown groups (Rattray 1959 [1927], 328). After that point, Rattray (ibid., 330–331) insisted, there has been no "true dual organization", and this has resulted in a "curious anomaly", where the *abusua* and *ntɔrɔ* "can come back independently of any special combination", except when a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is arranged by two parties.

Rattray's critics, namely Brenda Seligman (1925) and later Lévi-Strauss (1969 [1949]), did not pay much attention to his evolutionary hypothesis, and concluded that "the dialectic of the *ntoro* and of the *abusua* would entail the marriage of bilateral cross-cousins only if each category comprised two and only two exogamous groups", but this was not the case among the contemporary Asante, who had "an indefinite number of clans and *ntoro*". Hence, "the metaphysical necessity of reincarnation through alternate generations" could only be met by the patrilateral type of marriage (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949], 111–112). So, for Rattray, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage remained some kind of survival from times immemorial while for other anthropologists it constituted a dilemma which had to be solved by using other approaches (Heusch 1981, 68–70). Whether the dual organization described by Rattray really existed in pre-historic Asante is not important here. What concerns us are the ways in which these two forms of marriage allocated the so-called great names which connected individuals and descent groups to noble ancestry both matrilineally and patrilineally.

The Asante themselves have expressed the significance of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage through naming. A child was named by a man who belonged to the same *ntɔrɔ* division, usually his / her father or grandfather; in the case of a boy, he might have been named after his father, father's brother, grandfather, and so on. In general, the names used were those of his patrilineal ancestors and are thus considered to have belonged to the *ntɔrɔ* division (or sub-division) in question. Some were known as great names (*aboadenfoɔ,* sing. *aboadeni*) which had belonged to chiefs, war heroes, great accumulators of wealth, and other prominent persons in the past, although naming children after them was not merely a way of commemorating their great deeds. The "admirable characteristics displayed by such persons were understood as accreted properties of the *ntɔrɔ*" and they might be reincarnated in their patrilineal descendants (McCaskie 1995, 172).

When Rattray (1959 [1927], 324) enquired about the justification for patrilateral marriage from his informants he was told that "[i]f my niece does not marry my son, but marries a man not of my *ntou* (*ntoro*), then I cannot call any of her children after myself or my ancestors". To put it in another way, if a man wished to name his successor, that is, his male matrilineal descendant, after himself or his patrilineal ancestors, it required that they both shared the same *ntɔrɔ*, which was possible only between a grandfather and grandson produced by a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Through such a marriage the predecessor could pass on his status, office, and property, and also his name: the admirable qualities of his *ntɔrɔ*.

Furthermore, he could be secure that he himself would be reincarnated in his successor. Hence, it follows that the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage was the primary technique by which patrilineally inherited great names could be given to matrilineal descendants and thus kept in the matrilineages. To put it more figuratively, it was a way of directing flows of matrilineal and patrilineal ancestral greatness along the same channel.

> The reason given for making cross-cousin marriages may now be analysed in detail. The majority give as the reason for these marriages the desire 'to bring back certain names'. When the family group was centre of the social world, the uncle, who was its head, wanted his name to be perpetuated; later the uncle became the chief, and still later the king, and names came more than ever to mean a link with the aristocracy. A clan [i.e., matrilineage] is therefore not anxious to lose any names, and […] family arrangements are necessary to ensure that no loss takes place. (Rattray 1959 [1927], 323)

Therefore, it was not only that the great names of a particular *ntɔrɔ* division made the division itself noble,[26] but (some of) these names also became associated with lineages, since famous lineage ancestors once carried them and were able to pass them on to their matrilineal descendants. In terms of succession to an office, a candidate's name and his *ntɔrɔ* affiliation differentiated him from the rest of the candidates, who might have been equally eligible in terms of matriliny. In this sense, therefore, the names were things withdrawn from the sphere of exchange because they affirmed the differences of identity between groups and individuals within groups, meanwhile connecting individuals to their origins. For example, a candidate to the office of the *Asantehene* had to be a member of a particular lineage of the Oyoko clan, preferably carrying the name of one of the former rulers, and thus belonging to the same *ntɔrɔ* division.[27] Nonetheless, the name or membership in a 'famous' *ntɔrɔ* division did not in itself give similar guarantees of candidacy as did full membership in the matrilineage, while candidates with 'modest' names might have had other virtues valued more by the electors (McCaskie 1995, 172–173). Similarly, the great names were not considered great merely because they were associated with great ancestry. Every man had the potential to make his own name great. In fact, as a very prominent officeholder once put it, a "man was born to make name" and it was a huge misfortune if a man came to realize that "after his death his name might go into oblivion" (cited in Wilks 1975, 462). A pertinent historical example is provided by *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua Panin,

26 There was no constituted rank order of the *ntɔrɔ* divisions, but precedence was claimed by referring to the great names of the past officeholders who had belonged to the same division (McCaskie 1995, 170–172).

27 For instance, the late *Asantehene* Opoku Ware II, who passed away in 1999, belonged to the *Asafodeɛ* subdivision of *Bosommuru ntɔrɔ* and the 'greatest name' mentioned in his case is the second *Asantehene* Opoku Ware, to whom he is patrilineally connected through *Akyempemhene* Adusei Kra, *Dwansahene* Opoku Tano, *Gyakyehene* Kwadwo Adusei, *Bepoahene* Amankwa Boko, Kwame Adusei of Gyakye, and Gyakye *Abontemdomhene* Kwadwo Adusei (Wilks 1995, 4).

who was installed in 1834, and who was considered to have a 'commoner's name', accordingly one not fit for a king; but his supporters argued that he had a great name "in his own right", notably because of his bravery in the battle of Katamanso against the British in 1826 (McCaskie 1995, 189; see also McCaskie 2000a, 24–26). After making his name and *ntɔrɔ* great in this way, Kwaku Dua made every effort to pass both his name and the office of the *Asantehene* to one of his grandchildren by arranging marriages between his favourite sons and eligible royal women (ibid., 198). Kwaku Dua had hundreds of children, and only a select few were to marry royal women, but eventually two of his grandsons were installed as kings, namely Kwaku Dua Kuma and Kwaku Dua III, who later became better known as Akwasi Agyeman Prempeh (McCaskie 1980b, 199–200).

On the whole, it appears the royals practised patrilateral cross-cousin marriage indifferently. There were no strict rules according to which the sons of chiefs (or kings) had to marry royal women. In his study of the marriages of the Asante queen mothers, Rattray constantly ran into "incorrect marriages" or "*mésalliances*" that introduced new *ntɔrɔ* elements and ancestral names to the royal lineage. He discovered that only three out of the nine queen mothers whose conjugal relations he had studied had entered into a "correct marriage" (Rattray 1959 [1927], 321–325). This "spoiling" of *ntɔrɔ*, as Rattray called it, did not result from failed marriage plans, but merely from the fact that royal women were not obliged to marry their matrilateral cross-cousins and so produce reincarnations of past kings as perfect rulers-to-be. Hence, the chiefly lineages never really had any "caste-like aspect", as Edmund Leach (1968 [1962], 25) erroneously assumed. For instance, T. E. Bowdich, an officer of the British African Company, who led an expedition to Asante in 1817, wrote that

> [t]he sisters of the King may marry or intrigue with whom they please, provided he be an eminently strong or personable man; that the heirs of the stool may be, at least, personably superior to the generality of their countrymen. (Bowdich 1966 [1817], 254)

Instead of following prescriptive marriage rules, the unions of royal women often served 'political' ends so that they were meant to confirm alliances between polities (Wilks 1975, 327–344). For example, after the first *Asantehene* Osei Tutu had incorporated the chiefdom of Amakom to the capital Kumasi and killed *Amakomhene* Akosa Yiadom, the successor of the latter married Osei Tutu's niece *Asantehemaa* Nyako Kusi Amoa and was thus able to establish an important affinal (and later patrilateral) link to his new overlord's lineage. In this case the husband and wife were certainly not cross-cousins and, what is more important, this arrangement was unique. When I discussed it with *Amakomhene* Akosa Yiadom II in 2001 he made it very clear that such marriage has not become customary and, correspondingly, he could not remember that any of the Amakom royals had ever married from the *Asantehene*'s lineage since then. However, the second *Asantehene*, Opoku Ware, was a product of this marriage and it was through this single transaction that the names of the *Asafodeɛ* subdivision

of *Bosommuru ntɔrɔ* were introduced to the ruling lineage of Kumasi, have been retained there ever since, and are considered to be among the noblest names in Asante.

As is evident in the above, patrilateral cross-cousin marriages were particularly important to the kings and chiefs. Through such unions they were able to perpetuate their reign beyond their own demise, while "office holders, and the *Asantehene* above all, were looked to atavistically in relation to their" great names (McCaskie 1995, 172). Patrilateral marriage as a chiefly marriage served also as a starting point for Heusch's explanation for matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. He claimed that the two types of marriage "stem from two different ideologies and can certainly not be put on the same footing". According to him they were practiced on different "social levels". The patrilateral type was practiced by "princely families" and the matrilateral by "ordinary folk" (Heusch 1981, 69). The former revolved around reincarnation, while the concept of *ntɔrɔ* was "quite alien" to the latter, which was rather associated with residence rules, or in the Asante case, with a variety of such rules. By referring to Lévi-Strauss' (1969 [1949], 441) notion of disharmonic and harmonic regimes, Heusch (1981, 70) deduced that Asante as a matrilineal society had a "fluctuating residential regime that hesitates between virilocality and uxorilocality". Similarly, due to the uncertainty of the residence rules, the system oscillated "between the disjunction of husband and wife and that of the siblings" (ibid., 69). Heusch suggested that through a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage the Asante were able to stabilize their residential system, because in such cases post-marital residence becomes as fixed as possible (ibid., 69–70): the nephew lived with his uncle (now also a father-in-law) and siblings, as was expected, and the daughter was not likely to live elsewhere since two important men in her life, her husband and father, lived in the same place. In patrilateral cross-cousin marriage this type of preservation of the conjugal cell was not probable, since the husband would have had to leave his own lineage kin and move to his wife's and father's house, which was not very likely. Or, conversely, the wife would have had to leave her uncle with the much-valued paternal grandchildren. This view is also confirmed by the fact that the standard answer provided by Rattray's (1959 [1927], 322) informants, when he asked about the advantages of one's nephew marrying one's daughter, was "because it will keep my daughters in my house". To my mind, this explanation adds relatively little to that already given by Fortes, according to which cross-cousin marriages were practised in order to balance the pressures arising from different fields of kinship. I do not see anything incorrect in Fortes' or Heusch's views on the functions of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, but I think their explanations as a whole remain half-finished. A fuller picture starts to emerge when attention is turned to the actual matrilateral marriages of the chiefs. Contrary to Heusch's theory, there is evidence suggesting that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage was very important for chiefs and that *ntɔrɔ* had everything to do with it.

Distributing the great names: marriage and exchange

Maybe because of Fortes' rejection of marital exchange as an integrative social mechanism, anthropologists have not really discussed the political significance of marriage alliances in Asante. Even one of Fortes' staunchest critics, Leach (1968 [1962], 24–25), claimed that among the Asante, "there are no 'relations of perpetual affinity' which can serve to express enduring political relations of superordination and subordination". However, in this he was wide of the mark, having reached this conclusion by a rather selective reading of Rattray. On the contrary, marriage alliances were linked to 'political' relations in Asante and, moreover, one can make a relatively clear distinction between those marriages that created alliances and those that expressed and perpetuated them.

In the above, I referred to the marriage between the chief of Amakom and the niece of *Asantehene* Osei Tutu as a tie that cemented the incorporation of the chiefdom of Amakom to Kumasi. Most often, when the Asante discuss such marriages, it is the *Asantehene* who married a woman from an allied or subordinate group. Accordingly, the successive *Asantehene* have married from the member chiefdoms of the Asante kingdom and other Akan and non-Akan tributaries in order to strengthen the alliance between the polities, and in some cases it is said that the chief or the whole polity in question was a wife to the *Asantehene*. Usually, it is only the affinal link once established that is preserved and commemorated in oral traditions, ritual, speech, and such things, while the alliance itself was not perpetuated by similar marriages in the succeeding generations. Such a marriage belonged to the category of *adehyeɛ aware*, a union between two persons of freeborn descent,[28] something Rattray (1929, 24) described as "the highest or most desirable form of marriage".[29] It was exactly marriages of this type that created alliances between groups. The term *adehyeɛ aware* was not restricted to marriages between chiefdoms, or to chiefs as such, and normally it referred to a conventional marriage between two freeborn persons, the distinction being that for chiefs it served 'political' ends. Marshall Sahlins (1985, 48) calls such chiefly ties "founding marriages", which are characteristic of the system of positional succession. The statuses of husband and wife are inherited by the successors of the two officeholders that originally contracted the marriage that formed the alliance between the ruling groups. In these cases a single aristocratic marriage outweighs a multitude of commoner marriages, which are not considered significant in forming political alliances. As Sahlins points out, structures of this kind are not statistical; they are not expressions of "the empirical frequencies of interactions" (ibid.). This distinction is significant in the Asante case.

28 This is in opposition to persons who are descended from slaves.

29 Rattray (1929, 22–32) lists six different forms of marriage among the Asante. The two forms that I discuss in this passage I consider to be the 'politically' significant ones.

The second form of marriage is known as *ayete aware*.[30] The most important thing that distinguished *ayete* marriage from *adehyeɛ* marriage was that in the latter case the tie was seen to exist between the man and the wife and their respective lineages, but in the former only between the chiefly office and a wife-giving commoner lineage. To put it simply, the women in the *ayete* marriages, the 'stool wives' as they were called, were not married to the chief but to his office, which, of course, was vested in the ruling lineage. Accordingly, when the chief died, his successor inherited the 'stool wives'; concomitantly, when a chief was deposed, he only stayed married to his 'personal' wives, whereas the 'stool wives' stayed married to the office. But most importantly, when a 'stool wife' died, or the chief divorced her, her lineage had to replace her with a new woman. This possibility of sororate was, in addition to marrying twin girls (Fortes 1962 [1950], 279), a form of marriage that was considered incestuous for ordinary men but not for the chiefs (Rattray 1929, 27). In 1946, when the Ashanti Confederacy Council was reviewing the colonial legislation concerning 'stool wives', the relationship was defined as follows:

> The bond is between the Stool and the House;[31] for example the original aseda [i.e., bride wealth] sealing the marriage need not be repeated; the new wife is merely continuing an existing marriage, not making a new one. […] The obligation of the House is to see that the Stool has, as wife, a woman of the House. If the individual wife of the moment for any reason vacates her place, the House must, on demand, put another individual in that place. (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a)

Basically, *ayete* marriage started as a conventional marriage, but it was perpetuated after the death of either of the parties involved. In a way, since the exchange of bride wealth did not reoccur, it was seen as a single marriage and not a series of successive marriages. However, not all chiefly marriages resulted in this arrangement. As for the question of how and when an *ayete* relationship was actually constituted, the Confederacy Council did not have a definite answer. The memorandum states that

> [t]he mere fact that a Chief has married one woman from a House does not entitle him to a replacement on her death; but if he makes the request, and it is complied with, and if this happens several times over the years; it becomes recognised that 'there is ayete in that House'. The bond apparently arises in this way, and not by one definite agreement or transaction; but there seems to be no uncertainty in a given case as to whether there is ayete in the House or not. (Ibid.)

30 The word *ayete* comes from *ɔyere*, a wife + *te*, to patch, fill a gap, replace (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a).

31 The use of the term House is slightly confusing here, particularly since it is later in the document defined as family "in the local sense" (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a). As noted above, marriages were contracts between matrilineages and not households. Most probably the authors refer to the 'clan house', the headquarters of a locally anchored lineage.

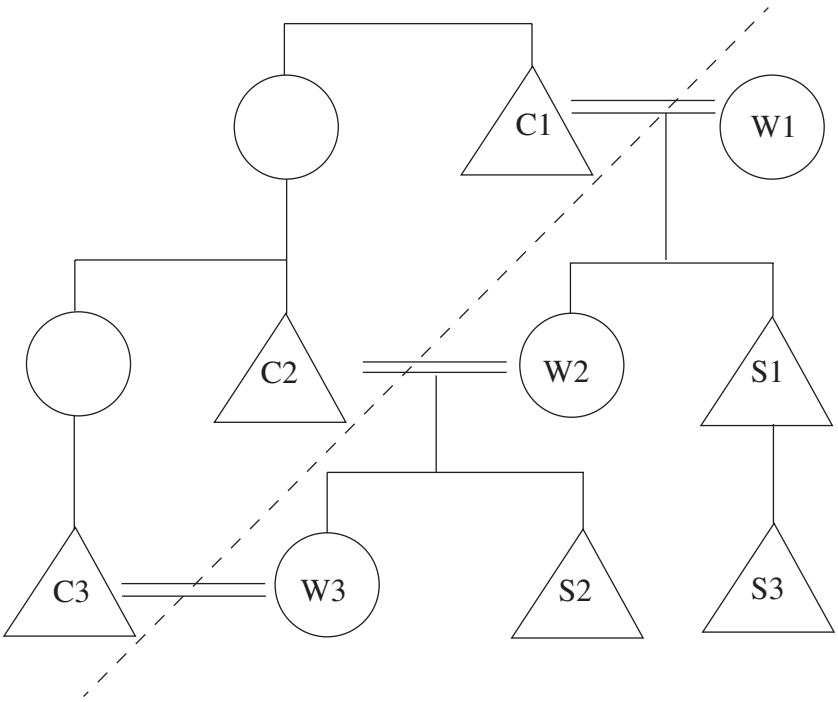


Figure 1.2 The 'stool marriage' as a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. C1, C2, and, C3 are successive chiefs. W1, W2, and W3 are their respective wives who are also their mother's brother's daughters. S1, S2, and S3 are sons and grandsons of chiefs. The dotted line separates the ruling lineage from the wife-giving lineage.

Hence one could say that *adehyeɛ* marriages could create alliances between the ruling lineage and other component lineages of the chiefdom in the first instance, whereas *ayete* marriages came to express those alliances between lineages at a later point.[32]

In the *ayete* relationship the chiefly lineage was turned into a wife-taking group and the commoner lineages into wife-giving groups and this is exactly where it becomes visible how *ayete* marriage relates to matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and *ntɔrɔ*. First of all, as Figure 1.2 clearly shows, when the

32 Nowadays, as chiefly marriages are becoming increasingly monogamous, the *ayete* relationships have undergone certain adjustments, but they are, nonetheless, still upheld. After the death of a former 'stool wife', the lineage in question will choose a woman from its ranks who will continue as 'the chief's wife'. These 'stool wives' do not perform marital duties in the same way as in an ordinary marriage, but they still have some specific obligations; for instance, they represent their lineages on ceremonial occasions with the 'real' wife of the chief, and they are not allowed to take a 'real' husband without the permission of the chief. If such permission is granted and the woman gets married to another man, the lineage still has to fill the vacancy with one of its unmarried female members. Even quite recently, chiefs have been known to use their prerogative to ban their 'stool wives' from entering a conventional marriage.

initial marriage between the chief and a woman from a commoner lineage was perpetuated by the succeeding generations the spouses were bound to be cross-cousins (real or classificatory). Hence, when an *adehyeɛ* marriage became an *ayete* marriage it also became a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Of course, in reality the unions did not always take place tidily between first cousins as in Figure 1.2, nor did the nephews automatically follow their uncles to the throne, but the basic principle of positional succession employed here was always the same. In the Asante terminological system a male ego could call all his collateral female relatives from his mother's brother's daughter's lineage by the same term and they were all marriageable. Obviously, it has to be taken into account that the 'stool wives' inherited from the previous ruler might have belonged to ascending generations and therefore not considered cross-cousins as such. However, according to the Confederacy Council's view, there were ways of dealing with this problem.

> The [age] gap usually occurs through death; but if the Stool becomes vacant there may be great disparity between the old wife and the new chief. Either party may not wish her to continue as a Stool wife, in which case she may be divorced in the ordinary way, and a new wife put in her place. (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5a)

Nevertheless, the cross-cousin status and the age difference were of secondary importance when one merely considers the 'stool wives' as representatives of their own lineages who upheld the tie between the chiefly office and the subordinate group – although the age of the wives was important in terms of the children that these marriages were to produce in abundance. This had to do with the idea that the stool had to have as many sons (*ahenemma*, sing. *ɔheneba*) and grandsons (*ahenenana*, sing. *ɔhenenana*) as possible.

> They [the Asante] say that sons are the support of their fathers. Chiefs, in particular, stress this. The more sons and sons' sons a chief has, the more secure does he feel. As their social standing depends on him and as they have no rights to his office, they will support him in all circumstances. They are the most trusted followers, and important chiefs appoint their own and their brothers' sons and sons' sons […] as titled councillors to attend closely on them. (Fortes 1962 [1950], 269)

The offices of such "titled councillors" were known as *mmamma dwa*, sons' and grandsons' stools, which were not vested in matrilineages, but were filled "by appointment or at least confirmation" on the part of the superior officeholder who (or whose ancestor) had created the office in question (Fortes 1969, 202). Sometimes these offices were reserved specifically for the chief's own immediate offspring, but sometimes they were awarded to non-relatives and passed on in a pseudo-patrilineal line to brothers, sons, and grandsons of the first occupant.[33] However, as a result of the matrilateral

33 Occasionally, these offices have also been called *ntɔrɔ* stools (e.g., PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/3a), which implies that the patrilineal dimension is not merely based on matters of practicality, such as getting uncompromised support and loyalty, but that it has spiritual significance.

marriages, the patrilineal line of officeholders may be in conformity with matrilineal succession.

The office of the *Akomforehene* of Kumasi is a good example of that. The first *Akomforehene* Boakye Atonsa was a son of *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua Panin and his wife, Nana Adwoa Adowaa, who belonged to a certain lineage of the Asona clan. Originating from this union an *ayete* relationship was established between the *Asantehene*'s office and Adowaa's lineage and the office of the *Akomforehene* was created for their son. Up till now, five kings (and some royals of the *Asantehene*'s lineage) have married from the *Akomforehene*'s lineage and had several children. As a result of this, as the late *Akomforehene* Boakye Atonsa II told me, "almost all the royals of the Akomfore stool are [real or classificatory] great, great grandchildren of the past Otumfuo".[34] When I asked about the succession to the Akomfore stool, the answer was that it is matrilineal, but "the children of the Golden Stool" are in a favoured position in comparison to the other royals. Hence, matrilateral 'stool marriage' ensured that the ruler could appoint his own patrilineal offspring as his councillors without compromising the principles of matrilineal descent. The male children from 'stool marriages' were thus eligible both matrilineally and patrilineally. This is also a point that should be taken into account when reading the works of the historians, who have often treated the 'bureaucratic' or 'patrimonial', (pseudo-) patrilineal succession as antithetical to the 'aristocratic', matrilineal succession. Hence, the so-called Kwadwoan revolution of the late eighteenth century, which Wilks (1966; 1975, 465–476) suggests gave birth to an "administrative class" based on royal appointment, was not necessarily at odds with the dominant kinship ideology. In addition to offices, it was also customary for the *Asantehene* to allocate land in Kumasi to his favourite wives and their matrilineages. They were not only allowed to settle there, but the lands became the corporate property of the wives' lineages and sometimes attached to the offices created for the sons (e.g., Berry 2001, 89, 126–127).

As noted above, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage did not produce possible reincarnations of the grandparental generation and hence, superficially, it might look like outright 'spoiling' of *ntɔrɔ*. However, it has to be understood that the objective of 'stool marriage' was not the keeping of great names as in the patrilateral type, but rather their distribution. In fact, the handing over of names was one of the reasons why the commoner lineages were eager to give wives to the chiefs. This becomes unmistakably clear from a letter to the Ashanti Confederacy Council written by a chief, *Atipinhene* Boakye Dankwa, who complained that the *ayete* system was becoming too much of an economic burden for the chiefs. In 1946, when the letter was written, the *Atipinhene* claimed that the cost of living had reached such a point that the chiefs were unable to maintain their many wives and children and thus some of the latter were in danger of becoming "ruffians and jail-birds". However, in the past such problems had not existed.

34 Otumfuo or *Otumfoɔ*, "the powerful one", is the most commonly used appellation of the *Asantehene*.

> But let us remember that in those past days, a Chief did not equally clothe and maintain all his wives. Their maintenance lay on the bare shoulders of their own relatives […] Moreover, in the past, Chiefs' sons were not trained in any work. When they married, their wives were mostly fed by their own relatives, because *they were contented with the high names which were given to their children.* (PRAAD ARG 1/2/30/5b; italics added)

Not only were the chiefs exempt from bride wealth in the case of successive 'stool wives', but they and their sons were also exempt from those economic responsibilities that were usually considered an essential part of the foundation of the whole institution of marriage. These responsibilities were seen to have been covered by the chiefly names passed on to the children, who belonged to the wife-giving lineage. By distributing them to the commoner lineages it became possible for the chiefs to maintain a large number of wives. Thus, through marriage the chiefs were able to share their 'greatness' in the form of names and receive in return the possibility of conceiving more sons. It is also important to notice how this relates to the totality of exchanges between the ruling lineage and the commoner lineages. Tribute, services, and rights to women moved up to the chief, while rights to land, offices, and names moved down to the commoners. This was the backbone of the system of mutual reciprocities and obligations that connected the chiefs to the people in Asante ideology.

From this it follows that the great names were also valuable things that could be exchanged, an observation that opens up a totally new avenue for the comparison of patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousin marriages. As there was no 'true dual organization' in Asante and people were free to marry from a number of lineages belonging to different clans and also from a variety of *ntɔrɔ* divisions, it was impossible to keep the great names exclusively in a single matrilineal descent group. As Rattray (1959 [1927], 330) noted, "[a] man may therefore to-day be compelled to bear a name which previously was possessed by a man of some clan [i.e., matrilineage] quite different from his own". However, as became apparent above, the names were important for the identity of the groups and their members, and through the idea of reincarnation they quite literally connected them to another, originary time, when the ancestors had made their names great through their great deeds. Thus they could not be given away entirely; they had to be kept to some extent. Here one runs into something that resembles the seemingly paradoxical idea of "keeping-while-giving" developed by Annette Weiner (1992). The two forms of ideal marriage were responses to this paradox. Hence, in case of chiefs who possessed the great names, the two forms stood in a peculiar relation of both complementarity and sequence. The matrilateral cross-cousin marriages, which distributed the great names, were practised by chiefs themselves, whereas the patrilateral cross-cousin marriages, which kept the great names within the lineages, were practised by the sons of chiefs. The first type give them away, but the second "get them back", as the Asante themselves have put it (Rattray 1959 [1927], 321–322).

I have discussed the marriage system at considerable length here in order to demonstrate its importance to the overall argument. At the outset

I stated that the pre-colonial chief had two functions above everything else: giving sacrifices to the spirit world and marrying to conceive children. Both are exchanges ultimately aimed at the maintenance of relations between the living and the dead. Everything else that the chiefs did – fought wars, litigated, bought and sold slaves, cleared lands, traded in gold, and so on – were seen to serve these same purposes of enhancing and perpetuating the greatness of one's ancestors and their office.

2. Sacrifice and authority

The city of Kumasi was the seat of the *Asantehene* and thus the centre of power of the ancient kingdom. The paramount chiefs of the 'provincial' chiefdoms took an ancestral oath of allegiance to the *Asantehene* directly and their 'sub-chiefs' did it through their overlords. The chains of allegiance that linked the chiefs to the common centre were crosscut by relations of kinship, marriage, and friendship between the different stools, the nature of which were decreed by complicated principles of seniority (see Kallinen 2004, 69–134). The structure of the capital city of the kingdom was somewhat different from the common type described in the last chapter. While the Kumasi army was also divided into task-oriented fighting units, the basic difference lay in the fact that in Kumasi each unit was composed of several offices (and their subjects) of diverse lineage and clan origins. In fact, such a unit comprised a group of chiefdoms, each of which was organized internally according to the traditional model. Consequently, a member of a group was theoretically capable of waging war either as a component of his own group (and the Kumasi army) or separately as an independent chiefdom. Such an aggregate was called *fekuo* (pl. *afekuo*) meaning "a group of persons sharing something in common" (McCaskie 1980b, 190). The *afekuo* were created by successive *Asantehene*, and ties of friendship and / or kinship held them together.

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, the oath of allegiance did not specify all the rights and obligations a chief had in relation to his people or his superiors. Therefore, determining which chiefs were of the same 'rank' is a very complex matter. Kinship and marriage relations, rights to use certain ceremonial objects, exemptions from certain obligations, and heroic titles were all grounds for building a claim to a higher position in relation to some other chief serving the same overlord. This chapter discusses the foundation of the kingdom and the principles according to which the authority of the king over his chiefs was defined. The objective is not to create a comprehensive account of such principles, let alone establish some sort of 'correct' order of the chiefs; rather, I merely aim to illuminate some important structural considerations. In the introduction to this book, following Dumont, I defined pre-colonial Asante as a society with an undifferentiated structure, where the religious domain was all-encompassing. In Western ideology the political domain has been separated from religion and not only has it

subsequently become autonomous, but it has also became dominant in the sense that society is ordered according to its principles, while religion is considered a private matter for individuals (Dumont 1980, 311–313). The primacy of politics (and later the economy) in Western ideology often deters our understanding of different kinds of ideologies. As a result, in the classic anthropological studies of divine kingship, the divinity of the ruler and the rituals he performed were often separated from the political sphere and seen as a part of a cultural superstructure which only reflected the more fundamental social order (McKinnon 2000, 41–42). This corresponds with the conventional view of religion and politics on the part of modern, secularist social science which is that in the ancient past the political, that is, secular, ambitions of men gave birth to oppressive superstitions (Asad 2003, 192–193) and the task of the analyst is to reveal the political underneath the religious veneer. However, we should realize that in the Asante ideology such layering did not exist and the political was ordered by the religious. Thus in the following I explain how the foundation of the Asante kingdom and the distribution of rights and privileges to the different chiefs was a ritual process: a direct consequence of sacrificial exchanges. This will also help us to grasp the enormous difference between the pre-colonial and colonial conceptions of chieftaincy and kingship in Asante.

Sacralizing political structures?

Analysts of Asante society usually attribute the superiority of the *Asantehene*'s office to its "aura of mystical preeminence", which is derived from its connection to the Golden Stool (*Sika Dwa Kofi*, lit. 'Friday's Golden Stool') (Fortes 1969, 142). The histories concerning the birth of the kingdom and emergence of the stool are widely known and they may be summarized as follows.[35]

The chiefdom of Kwaman (later renamed Kumasi) was held as a tributary state by the kingdom of Denkyira, a southern neighbour of Asante. A young Kwaman royal, Osei Tutu, had been sent as a hostage to the court of Denkyira. While in Denkyira, Osei Tutu stole gold and other valuables belonging to the court and also attempted to kill the *Denkyirahene* through magic, managing to escape back to Kwaman with pursuit on his heels. His uncle, Obiri Yeboa, who was the chief of Kwaman at the time, was shocked by his unruly behaviour and sent him to the kingdom of Takyiman to seek shelter from the revenge of the *Denkyirahene*. In Takyiman Osei Tutu took the queen mother as his lover and, while sleeping together, killed her, beheaded her, stole her gold, and fled home. Enraged, Obiri Yeboa warned Osei Tutu not to disappoint him for a third time, and the wayward nephew was sent as a final resort to seek refuge in the chiefdom of Akwamu east

35 The classical account is by Rattray (1955 [1923], 288–290), who has also recorded a second, somewhat different version (Rattray 1929, 276–277). The earliest written history is by Basel missionary Reverend N. V. Asare, who recorded it in 1903–1904 (McCaskie 2000b, 62–63).

of Asante. While Osei Tutu was in Akwamu, Obiri Yeboa decided to wage war on the neighbouring people of Domaa. The Kwaman army attacked the enemy in a single group without covering their sides or rear, were consequently defeated, and Obiri Yeboa was captured and killed.[36] In the meantime, while in Akwamu, Osei Tutu had made a close study of their military organization. When the news of his uncle's death reached him, Osei Tutu decided to hurry back to Kwaman and accept the office of his late uncle which he had been offered. Komfo Anokye, a priest to whom he had been introduced in Akwamu, accompanied him. On his way he performed several feats of valour. In Kwaman he vowed revenge on *Domaahene* Domaa Kusi, his uncle's killer. He started preparing for war by arranging the army into different groups, each having a separate function. Finally, he led his army to the battlefield, drove the Domaa away from their lands, and killed Domaa Kusi (McCaskie 1992, 238–241; Wilks 1993, 103–106).

After Osei Tutu had returned from exile and the neighbouring Domaa had been defeated, it was time to direct attention to Denkyira, which still held Kwaman and other chiefdoms of the region under its sway. During the reign of *Denkyirahene* Ntim Gyakari, the level of tribute became intolerable, and the chiefdoms serving Denkyira decided to take up arms with Osei Tutu as their leader. This coalition has often been called *Asante Aman Nnum*, 'the five Asante states', although there is no general agreement on the exact number or names of the original members.[37] Subsequently, Denkyira was defeated after a decisive victory in the battle of Feyiase around 1701, and the military alliance was transformed into a political union called *Asanteman*, the Asante state. Osei Tutu, the head of the coalition, became the *Asantehene*, the king of Asante. Right before the decisive battle, the priest Anokye informed the Asante chiefs that "he had a special mission from Onyame, the God of the Sky" (Rattray 1955 [1923], 288–289). A big meeting was held in Kumasi, where Anokye "brought down from the sky, in a black cloud, and amid rumblings, and in air thick with white dust, a wooden stool with three supports and partly covered with gold" (ibid., 290). Anokye told the chiefs that the stool contained the *sunsum*, the spiritual backing, of the Asante nation, and Osei Tutu was to become its first custodian and thus the chosen head of the newly formed state. At the same time Anokye also decreed the taboos of the stool and stated that if they were violated *Asanteman* would "sicken and lose its vitality and power" (ibid.).[38] Hence, by guarding the Golden Stool, the *Asantehene* also protected the 'character' or 'health' of the

36 I was told by *Domaahene* Agyeaman Badu II in 2001 that the skull of Obiri Yeboa is still kept in the main palace at Domaa. During their annual 'yam festival' the *Domaahene* places his foot on the skull, thus commemorating the victory over the historical enemy. Likewise, the skull of *Domaahene* Domaa Kusi, the slayer of Obiri Yeboa, was deposited in Kumasi, and used in a similar manner during the Odwira festival (McCaskie 1995, 214).

37 Rattray has compiled at least five different lists (see RAI MS 107: 1: 1679; Rattray 1929, 73, 99, 132, 235).

38 See Kurankyi-Taylor (1951, 44) for the list of taboos "surrounding and protecting the Golden Stool".

state. Regular sacrifices were made to it in order to preserve and enhance its spiritual powers (see, e.g., Akyeampong and Obeng 1995, 495–496).

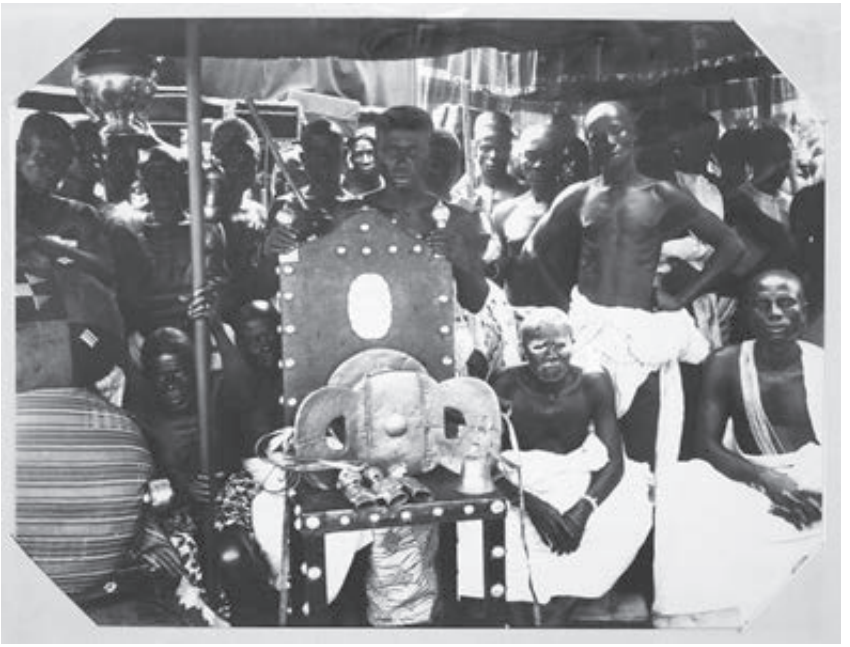
These events were paired with the destruction of old stools. The stool history of Hia has it that:

> In order to eradicate off the existence of the memory of all the irregularities, the defeats and discomfitures that the other enemy nations had previously inflicted upon Ashanti, especially, in the war that took place between the Ashanti and Dormas [...], fought in Ashanti during the reign of the Asantehene Nana Obiri Yeboa Manwu, Komfo Anokye, with the consent of the Asantehene Nana Osei Tutu and the Asanteman, buried all the then existing black Stools being then occupied by all Native Rulers in Ashanti in a deep trench-hole dug in the ground at a place near the present Kumasi Central Hospital upon which, Komfu Anokye placed and planted an Ashanti State Sword which is still there to this day.[39]
>
> In substitution for the said buried Stools, Komfuo Anokye caused new Black Stools to be made for all chiefs in Ashanti at that time, and on every one of the Stools, he nailed "Dadikro" (i.e. Ashanti native made) nails, signifying that, those were the very first and original Stools in Ashanti solely being occupied by chiefs whose official appellations should thenceforth be known as "ABREMPON" [i.e., big men]. (MAG IAS/AS 154)

The combination of these two events can be read as a realization of (some formulations of) the idea of divine kingship, where the problem of segmentary or particularistic interests is overcome by elevating leadership to "a mystical plane" (see, e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1962, 66–86). The segmentary interests, materialized in the form of the blackened ancestral stools of the chiefly lineages, are buried underground and their 'tomb' is sealed with a state sword, removal of which is vetoed by a taboo. A superior, golden stool is received from the Sky God, which is said to contain the spiritual core of the emergent polity. Similarly, new, 'first' stools are made for the lineages, which commemorate a new beginning under the Golden Stool. A leader of a temporary alliance is made into a hereditary king by appointing him as custodian of the stool.

The most important ritual occasion, when the Golden Stool was celebrated, together with a 'magical charm' (*suman*) known as Apafram, was Odwira, a harvest festival originally dedicated to the ritual consumption of new-season yams. Thus the general timing of the festival followed the horticultural cycle marking the closure and beginning of a 'year' (*afe*). During Odwira all of the paramount chiefs travelled to the state capital and renewed their oaths of allegiance to the *Asantehene*; usually, meetings of the assembly of chiefs (*Asantemanhyiamu*) also coincided with Odwira (McCaskie 1995,

39 Tradition has it that if the sword is removed it will mean "the collapse of the Asante Empire". There are several recent stories about failed attempts to do so; it is said, for example, that during the 1950s, when the hospital was built, a building contractor tried to remove it with bulldozers and other such machinery. Then, in 1964, when the world heavyweight boxing champion Mohammed Ali visited Ghana, he also gave it a try, but in vain (see Kwame Ofori n.d., 7).



"The Golden Stool with its immediate caretaker" (TNA CO 1069/44). The wooden structure and golden decorations of the stool suffered severely while it was kept hidden from the British occupation authorities 1896–1926 (see Rattray 1935; McCaskie 2000b). In the photo, taken in 1935, the repaired stool is on display.

144–146). The ritual highpoint of the festival took place on 'Apafram Sunday', when the *Asantehene* made sacrifices to the Apafram charm in front of the skulls of the dead enemy chiefs, and made a plea to it that if there is "[a]ny king who does not like to serve me, let me get the chance of killing him and put his head into you" (Wilks 1993, 116). On the following day the chiefs "returned each to their own country, there to continue and complete" the Odwira by ritually "purifying" their own ancestral stools, the shrines of the local deities, and the regalia of their offices (Rattray 1959 [1927], 137). In 1933 one paramount chief described the origins and later developments of Odwira in a following manner:

> Before all the chiefs who took part in this campaign [against Denkyira] could scatter to their several seats [they] were told by Komfu-Anokyi that the skull of Ntim Jakari would be kept at Kumasi to be worshiped yearly. This was the beginning of the "Odwira" custom or "Apafram" at Kumasi at which all members of the Confederacy were present…
>
> This occasional meeting at Kumasi for the observance of the "Odwira" custom was the beginning of what was later to be subordinated to the Kumasi Stool, and since that time Kumasi had ever continued to be the central meeting place of the Ashanti Chiefs. From the foregoing it would be seen that the meeting at Kumasi was decreed by Komfo Anokyi after the fall of Denkyira. (PRRAC 1984, 88)

Hence, one is inclined to follow anthropological conventional wisdom and say that the unity of the new state had its ritual expression in Odwira, where its core symbols were venerated and which superseded those rituals associated with the ancestral spirits and / or local deities of the component chiefdoms. This, of course, would be closely related to more general processes when religion becomes divided into public 'state religion', and private 'family religion'. For instance, Michael Jackson (1977, 133–134) has suggested that when political groups are not coextensive with the pattern of descent grouping, there also occurs a shift in ritual orientation: ancestor cults, which are thus considered segmentary, will be significant only at the level of domestic organization, whereas group rituals of larger scale become centred on "desocialised categories", such as high-gods. Jackson claims that in states like Asante "ancestor cults were ritual foci for kinship groups but pantheons of gods and nature divinities dominated the religious system at the higher levels of community organisation" (ibid., 135).

As is evident from the references above, there is a substantial body of literature, both anthropological and historical, on the history and meaning of both the Golden Stool and Odwira. Despite the obvious merits of some of these studies, however, used alone they risk producing a simplified picture of religion and polity in Asante. Specifically, the discussions seem to revolve around the centralization of government, reduced to state / society or kingship / chiefship dichotomies, and how its hierarchical structure is 'sacralized', enforced, and reproduced in ritual, yet the ideas of the pre-colonial Asante did not conform with such notions: for them the ritual preceded the political and thus the kingdom was perceived as a product of the former.

'Emergence through gift'

The order of precedence of the *fekuo* heads of Kumasi has been the subject of constant dispute (e.g., Rattray 1959 [1927], 86–87, 90–92). What seems to be endorsed by most is that the office of *Krontihene* is the senior among them, and in the absence of the *Asantehene* he presides over the administration of the capital. Thus the *Asantehene* often refers to him with terms like 'my right hand man' or 'my second in command'. The seat of the *Krontihene* is located in the village of Bantama, now one of the central districts of Kumasi, and hence its holder is in most cases called the *Bantamahene*. Despite its high status, the Bantama stool is not an ancestral stool, but rather a *mmamma dwa*, an office that is not filled according to matrilineal succession. The first occupant of the office, a man called Amankwatia, was of slave origin and therefore not eligible for any hereditary office (Wilks 1993, 244). As recalled by *Bantamahene* Kwame Kyem in 1924, Amankwatia worked as a servant and a stool carrier for Osei Tutu when he was appointed the *Krontihene* of Kwaman / Kumasi forces in the war against Domaa:

> [W]ar followed and Amankwatia who had had Osei-Tutu's favour to be created as his principal stool carrier was asked to go and fight King Domina Kusi [*Domaahene* Domaa Kusi] as a result of an injunction from Komfo Anokye. Komfo Anokye as a prophet asked King Osei-Tutu to give him with 7 men who would be created Asafohene; these 7 men were supplied as follows:- Osafo, Ofram, Akyerapong Kwasi, Gyedu, Brofo Apau, Amponsa-Akusaa, Twafoobaah.[40] These are the 7 Kurontie [*Kronti*] Asafohene whom Komfo Anokye made for Amankwatia to fight against Domina Kusi. […] King Osei-Tutu as a token of remembrance and of good service presented to Amankwatia all the lands stretching from Bantama to Komon [?]. All the lands stretching from Bantama to Komonano are for Bantamahene. King Osei-Tutu dashed [i.e., gave] all these lands to Amankwatia […] and created him […] as his Colonel… (PRAAD ARG 3/2/38a)

After helping Osei Tutu in the Domaa war, Amankwatia was awarded a chiefly title and land. In addition to this, he was 'given' seven chiefs, who fought alongside him as 'friends'. Thereafter they formed a *fekuo* group, in which the *Bantamahene* held the senior position. This tradition exemplifies what Kyerematen (1971, 17) has called the emergence of a new chiefdom "through gift". According to his research, based on traditional accounts of the origins of different Asante chiefdoms, it was the practice of the *Asantehene* to award offices and land to persons "who had distinguished themselves in battle or had rendered some significant political service" (ibid., 18). Hence Kyerematen appears to be suggesting that hierarchy is established by political means.

However, other traditions reveal something very interesting about the nature of Amankwatia's services to his overlord; firstly, it is said that Osei Tutu was accompanied by Amankwatia into exile in Akwamu. On Osei Tutu's return home to succeed his uncle and revenge his death, yet before he could be installed as a chief or attack the Domaa, his first duty was to celebrate his uncle's funeral: one which almost proved fatal to his trusted friend Amankwatia:

> According to the custom those days, Nana Osei Tutu was to present a person with dignity to accompany his uncle to the land of the dead, but since he had been away from home for years, he knew no such person than his friend Amankwaatia. Therefore on his arrival he smeared red clay for the offer,[41] but the Asafohene [another Kumasi chief] sent one of his servants to be smeared with red clay instead of Amankwaatia […] When Nana Osei Tutu was enstooled as Kumasehene he decided to create a stool for his friend Amankwaatia who had helped him so much in life and had even given himself for the sacrifice. (Kwadwo 2000, 32)

In Asante thought the spirit world was seen to parallel the lived world as the hierarchies that prevailed among the living were also considered to prevail

40 These are the names of the chiefs, also known as 'the seven gunners' (*atuo nson*), who originally constituted the *Kronti fekuo* of Kumasi. See Wilks (1993, 245–246) for an alternative composition.

41 Red clay is a sign of mourning. Victims prepared for human sacrifice were daubed with red clay (Rattray 1959 [1927], 214).

among the ancestors. Hence, a dead chief was still a chief: "he occupied the same status and role, and had the same needs and requirements – wives, servants, cloths, gold, food" as he had had in his this-worldly existence (McCaskie 1989, 428). In order to provide for some of these needs human sacrifices had to be performed, and in the past they formed a significant part of the royal funerals. It was the obligation of the surviving relatives to see that the sacrifices were carried out properly, thereby enabling the departed spirit of the deceased to continue his life in the spirit world. Otherwise, the ancestors would have been disgraced and have withdrawn their support, and the crucial connection between the living and the dead mediated by the ruler would be at risk of collapsing (ibid.).

Consequently, in this specific tradition, Osei Tutu had to establish a relationship with his ancestors through sacrifice so that he could fully function as a chief. A human sacrifice was needed for that, and Amankwatia offered himself, meaning that the service he provided was not 'political', but rather 'ritual'. Accidentally, Amankwatia was saved, but he was rewarded for his readiness, becoming a chief himself. Clearly, this is not merely a system of services and awards. It is rather a network of exchanges that connected the ancestral spirits, the chief, and his subject. There was also a similar network between the gods, the *Asantehene*, and his chiefs.

Chiefly sacrifice

The *Asantehene* performed those rituals for which he was exclusively qualified by his office (e.g., veneration of the Golden Stool). He also provided for other rituals (e.g., by sending objects to be sacrificed elsewhere), and maintained his own spiritual potency (e.g., by observing the taboos of his office, descent group, and *ntɔrɔ* division). Nevertheless, his role was essentially different from that of a priest (*ɔkɔmfo*, pl. *akɔmfoɔ*), who became possessed by the deities, and thus rendered up his / her body as a 'terminal' for the spirit world.

In the affairs of state chiefs made sacrifices to three categories of spirits: the ancestral spirits, deities called *abosom* (sing. *ɔbosom*), and charms (*asuman*, sing. *suman*), all of which were seen as potential sources of power.[42] Here I am primarily interested in the second category. The *abosom* had their origins in 'nature', that is, in the forests and bodies of water, but since they had come to live with people, they were expected to be open to consultation,[43] and thus it would have been highly irresponsible on the part

42 See Gilbert (1989) for the problems involved with classifications of this type.

43 McCaskie (1995, 118) emphasizes the ambiguous nature of the *abosom* by stating that "[t]he expectation that they might prove cooperative and consoling when petitioned to assist in human affairs was tempered by recognition of their origin in an antagonism to culture". Although the *abosom* are considered to be unpredictable and potentially dangerous, some of them are seen to have made a conscious decision to live with humans and thus to become associated with a particular group of people. Conversely, there are those *abosom* who have decided to stay in 'the bush', of whose existence people do not usually know.

of the chief to engage himself and his subjects in any important activities without resorting to divination. Particularly in crucial matters, such as war, a chief had to ask for guidance from the *abosom* through a priest and, as many traditions testify, the priests were "punished by death in the olden days when they told lies to the King on consultation" (MAG IAS/AS 194).

In the Denkyira war Osei Tutu and his allies did not make an exception in this respect. In order to ensure final victory over their oppressors they turned to the priest, Komfo Anokye. According to one tradition:

> Okomfo Anokye when consulted assured them that they would be victorious provided some men would give themselves up for sacrifices. Three men would be needed for sacrifice. One would be buried alive. His hands would appear at the surface of the earth and two brass pans full of war medicine mixed in water would be put in the two palms for the warriors to bath before they left for the war front. The second volunteer would be butchered to death and his flesh thrown away for vultures to take to Denkyira land. Wherever any piece of the flesh would fall the men of the place would lose their bravery and become cowards. The third volunteer should be a Paramount chief. He would be armed and he would be in front of the marching soldiers. He was not to fire a shot even if he met an enemy. He should look on for the enemy to shoot him. (Kwadwo 1994, 7–8)

The three chiefs who volunteered to give their lives were Asenso Kofo, the chief of Adwumakase Kese, *Edwesohene* Diko Pim, and *Kumawuhene* Tweneboa Kodia.[44] Variations of the same theme can be found elsewhere. A tradition from Kwaso recounts that a royal "who was a left-handed person should be sacrificed to the gods of the nation to guarantee victory in all the ensuing wars to establish the Dynasty". In addition to this, seven chiefs from the Aduana clan, known as "the bearers of the seven Fetish Pots", were "killed to further appease the gods" (PRAAD ARG 2/2/105a). Similarly, traditions of Mampon mention that *Mamponhene* Boahen Anantuo took command of the Asante army in Feyiase instead of Osei Tutu himself because Komfo Anokye had prophesized that whoever led the troops into battle would not live longer than seven days after the war. Subsequently, Boahen Anantuo was badly wounded and died three days after the guns had fallen silent (Kwadwo 1994, 84). These are the most widely known stories of chiefly self-sacrifice preceding the crucial battle, but there are other similar accounts.

The most interesting element common to all the traditions is the exchange nature of proceedings. Before sacrificing his life for the sake of the others, Asenso Kofo requested that from then on no one from his town should ever

44 The name Tweneboa Kodia is synonymous with self-sacrifice even among contemporary Asante. For example, in 2000 a local newspaper published an article in which the writer urged readers not to think of the cost when the development of modern infrastructure was at stake. The article was titled "The Spirit of Tweneboah Kodua must be re-incarnated" (*Asante Tribune*, Aug.1 – Aug. 7, 2000).

be executed.[45] *Edwesohene* Diko Pim was promised that no person of the Asona matriclan, to which he belonged, would ever be condemned to death, and *Kumawuhene* Tweneboa Kodia asked the same for the inhabitants of his own chiefdom (Kwadwo 1994, 8).[46] According to the traditions from Kwaso, the successors of the seven chiefs from the Aduana matriclan became recognized as paramount chiefs, and all their descendants were spared execution (PRAAD ARG 2/2/105a). *Mamponhene* Boahen Anantuo demanded that his chiefdom should have a senior position over other chiefdoms of the same rank. Thus his successors became the custodians of the Silver Stool (*Sika Dwa Pɛtɛ*), and in the absence of the *Asantehene* it is the *Mamponhene* who presides over the affairs of the kingdom (Kwadwo 1994, 8). To put it briefly, in the sacrifices preceding the final battle the order of seniority of chiefly offices was constituted, and certain chiefs, members of certain descent groups, and subjects of certain chiefs were assigned certain privileges.

Performing human sacrifice in order to guarantee success in warfare was commonly practised among the Asante (Akyeampong and Obeng 1995, 498–501). Usually the victims were prisoners or slaves who were obtained and kept partly for sacrificial purposes, but in this case those sacrificed were chiefs whose duty it was to sacrifice in order to make the state prosper. Obviously, Osei Tutu could not offer himself to be sacrificed, since he had already been chosen as the future ruler of the *Asanteman* by Komfo Anokye, who was the intermediary between the human realm and the gods. To employ the terminology introduced by Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1968 [1898], 19–49), Osei Tutu could not be the *victim* since he had been chosen to be the *sacrifier* by Komfo Anokye, the *sacrificer*. Nevertheless, some of his allies volunteered to sacrifice themselves if he would give them something in return, and in the absence of a better term I call that something 'jural rights'. By involving himself in exchange with both gods and humans Osei Tutu was finally able to "establish his dynasty".

Spirits as exchange partners

In Akan cosmology the world was created by Onyame, the superior being, who had also impregnated it with his own power (*tumi*, 'ability to change things'). Onyame has been described as a "withdrawn god", who instantly distanced himself from this-worldly affairs after he had completed his

45 "Executions" usually refer to both judicial executions of criminals as well as mortuary slayings in which the (slave) victims were expected to accompany the ancestors into the spirit world. Wilks (1993, 215–217) claims that in the nineteenth century human beings were no longer used as offerings to *abosom*, but other sources state the opposite (e.g., Akyeampong and Obeng 1995, 498–501).

46 Even nowadays, some of the Kumawu people have three horizontal scars on the left corner of their mouths. I am told that this is a sign showing the executioners (*abrafoɔ*) that they are protected by the ancient contract made by Tweneboa Kodia and Osei Tutu.

works of creation (McCaskie 1995, 105).[47] He was the source of all power, but anybody with proper knowledge of the means of access was considered able to obtain some of that power (Akyeampong and Obeng 1995, 483–484). Among those were Onyame's children and grandchildren: the *abosom*. Together they all formed "a spiritual family", as one of my informants called it. Although the *abosom* were seen as essentially mobile, capable of leaving and returning at will, they had their own places of origins, and they can be classified accordingly:

1. *Asuo* (rivers): deities that originate from water, most often rivers. The biggest subdivision of these *abosom* is called Tano (or Taa), which refers to the Tano River in central Ghana. Many of the gods that the Asante consider 'ancient' (*tete*) belong to this subdivision.
2. *Mframa* (winds): deities that originate from the air or sky.
3. *Abo* (rocks, stones): deities originating from the forest. They are considered to have a close relationship with 'dwarfs' (*mmoatia*) and some of my informants actually equate the two.[48]

Their superiority to humans was based on their immortality and their extraordinary powers: they were capable of "striking you dead", as I have often been told. There were significant differences in their powers as well as their character: some were known as 'war gods', and some as 'witch-hunters'; others were known as 'gentlemen', or 'rascals'. Human beings could form relationships with the *abosom*; for example, a group of people who had settled in a place already inhabited by a god were indebted to him / her as the original 'owner' of the land, and were thus committed to obey the rules he / she formulated. These became evident in the first encounter between the deity and the human community or, at the latest, when a permanent, formal tie between the two had been established. For instance, in the village of Dandwa, located in Nkoranza, the local deity, called Asuo Akruma (also known as Kwaku Akruma or Dandwa Akruma), was living in a nearby river long before the first human settlers arrived there. At that time, I am told, monkeys instead of human beings served him. They brought him food and kept the dwelling of the deity (a cave behind a waterfall) clean. The founder and first headman of the village was a man called Adu Abo, who was originally a servant of the paramount chief of Nkoranza. One of his duties was to hunt elephants for his master, and during one of his hunting expeditions he noticed something out of the ordinary. One of the descendants of Adu Abo described the events in the following way:

47 See Rattray (1916, 20–21) for a tradition explaining how and why Onyame left the earth.

48 Descriptions given by McCaskie (1995, 108–110) and Jane Parish (2000, 489) differ from mine in some details, but the basic idea of three different places is common to all.

> Our ancestors were hunters. The *Nkoranzahene* sent them here to hunt elephants. They sent their quarries to him directly. One time they stopped here to rest. Nana[49] [Adu Abo] was thirsty. He told his people to go and get water for him to drink. They took a brass cup and went to the river to fetch water. But as soon as the cup touched the surface of the water, the water turned brown. They went back and reported this to Nana. He said: "Why don't you use a calabash instead of a brass cup". They took a calabash and went back to the river. This time nothing happened, and the water was pure and refreshing. Later some women went to the river to fetch water. Some of the women were having their menstrual periods. When they touched the water, the river stopped flowing and there was no more water coming down from the waterfall. It looked like the whole river was going to run dry. This was reported to Nana and he said: "There must be a god here". He reported this to the *Nkoranzahene*, who said that they should settle there and serve the god.

Later the deity possessed one of the settlers, and that person became his first priest.[50] Through the priest the villagers learned the taboos of the god which are, in addition to brass vessels and menstruation, dogs, goats, and farming on Wednesdays. Conversely, it became known that the deity liked sheep and palm wine, and hence these items were given to him in sacrifices. Even in 2000, when I conducted fieldwork in the village, the taboos were still carefully observed. Dogs and goats, which are characteristic of Ghanaian villages in general, were totally absent in Dandwa. On a Wednesday one was certain to meet all the villagers at their houses, because no one would even think of farming on such a 'bad day' (*da bɔne*). Even the quite considerable Christian and Muslim populations of the village, who did not usually take active part in the rituals connected to Asuo Akruma, observed the taboos strictly, because, as the traditionalists said, "they know that they are living on his land, and if they break the rules, he will punish them severely".

However, the relationship between humans and the *abosom* was never one-sided. Human communities did not entertain the *abosom* simply out of fear, as exemplified by a ritual recitation that was performed during the consecration of a new shrine of a deity called Taa Kwesi. It was recorded by Rattray (1955 [1923], 148–149), and I quote it at length:

> When we call you upon darkness, when we call upon you in the sunlight, and say, "Do such a thing for us", you will do so.
>
> And the laws that we are decreeing for you, you, this god of ours, are these – if in our time, or in our children's, and our grandchildren's time a king should arise from somewhere, and come to us, and say he is going to war, when he tells you,

49 'Grandparent', a respectful appellation used when referring to elders, officeholders, ancestors, and deities.

50 Or maybe 'priestess' would be more appropriate here since, according to Akruma's specific instructions, he should always be served by females. The term *ɔkɔmfo* refers to both male and female ritual specialists. This instruction does not contradict the notion of menstrual blood as one of Akruma's taboos, since I was told that the priestesses will stop menstruating immediately after they have come in contact with the deity.

> and you well know that should he go to the fight he will not gain the victory, you must tell us so; and should you know that he will go and conquer, then also state that truth.
>
> And yet again, if a man be ill in the night, or in the daytime, and we raise you aloft and place upon the head [refers to a consultation through a priest], and we inquire of you saying, "Is So-and-so about to die?", let the cause of the misfortune which you tell him has come upon him be the real cause of the evil and not lies.
>
> To-day, we all in this town, all our elders, and all our children, have consulted together and agreed without dissent among us, we have all united and with one accord decided to establish your shrine, you, Ta Kwesi, upon this, a sacred Friday.
>
> We have taken a sheep, and a fowl, we have taken wine, we are about to give them to you that you may reside in this town and preserve its life. From this day, and so on to any future day, you must not fly and leave us. […] To-day you become a god for the chief, to-day you have become a god for our spirit ancestors. Perhaps upon some to-morrow the Ashanti King may come and say, "My child So-and-so (or it may be an elder) is sick", and ask you to go with him, or may be he will send a messenger here for you; in such a case you may go and we will not think that you are fleeing from us.

Here it was the people who were setting the rules of conduct for the god and not vice versa. Taa Kwesi was being explicitly told that he should inform the people about the outcome of any possible war and also reveal the true cause of death if somebody in the community was about to die. Even the movements of the god had been restricted, with one exception: when he was summoned by the king. Nevertheless, he was asked to preserve the life of the town, not because he had originated it (or anything else), but because he was presumed to possess the power to do so. Similarly, the inhabitants of Dandwa expected Asuo Akruma to help the village by making "barren women give birth" and catching thieves.

At the climax of the invocation that concludes a sacrifice, an Asante priest literally shouted at the god, questioning whether he / she was even able to do the things that had been requested. Gods certainly were mightier than men, but it did not necessarily mean that the less powerful were eternally indebted to the more powerful. More likely, the gods were among those who established and controlled a system of exchanges when power was being distributed. As Rattray (1955 [1923], 146) once put it, they initially came to earth "in order that they might receive benefits from, and confer them upon, mankind". To my mind, the most important thing is that after the relationship between the human community and deities was fully established, the latter became strongly associated with a specific group of people; for example, their shrines were often the corporate property of a particular office of chief or elder. Although Onyame, as the original source of all power, could be defined as belonging to an 'extra-social' or 'desocial' category (see Jackson 1977, 134–135), the *abosom* were considered by the Asante as exchange partners and thus very social, even though not in the same sense as humans.

I do not know precisely which gods were referenced in the traditional accounts which mention "gods of the nations" who demanded the sacrifices

of the chiefs.[51] The Golden Stool, containing the spiritual backing of *Asanteman*, was said to derive its powers from Onyame, but ultimately this statement was valid for anything / anybody powerful. Onyame had no temples or priests of his own and he was not involved with sacrificial exchanges similar to those conducted with the *abosom*.[52] Communication with Onyame and his powers took place through the *abosom*, and from other instances we know that deities called 'state gods' were specifically *abosom*. But still, the *tumi* used in executing the contracts was seen to be the same power that had been used in the creation of things. The *abosom* seem to have been able to perform exchange involving power, just like humans were able to exchange the creations of divine powers (people, animals, foodstuffs, etc.) with other humans. Similarly, human leaders transformed the power obtained from the spirit world into authority and redistributed it to their followers: by creating subordinate political offices, for example, as was the case when Osei Tutu granted a chiefly title to his servant Amankwatia. In exchange, subordinates assisted their superiors in dealing with the spirit world, just as Amankwatia was ready to follow Obiri Yeboa to the land of the dead, and were thus linked into to the chain of exchanges that cross the border between the spirit world and the people.

The process described above resonates in many ways with the idea of reciprocity as "a starting mechanism" in forming relations of authority, a term that was originally used to describe how a person achieves a position of leadership through generosity (Sahlins 1972, 204–210). In Osei Tutu's sacrifice the victims were already hereditary chiefs, but by giving a gift to their followers they connect them to an order of a greater divine scale. In exchange for their lives the chiefs, or rather their own and their subjects' descendants, were given jural rights.[53] In the case of exemption from

51 I am told that the god Komfo Anokye served was called Boabuduro. The shrine of Boabuduro is still active in Agona, Anokye's home chiefdom, and my informants tell me that it is "the god of the Asene clan in Agona". However, Komfo Anokye, like other priests, could have served several deities, and Boabuduro is not mentioned by name in any of the traditions that I know that concern the sacrifices preceding the Denkyira war.

52 Rattray (1955 [1923], 141–144) speaks of, and has actually published a photograph of, an alleged priest and temple of *Onyame*, but there is no other reference to anything similar elsewhere (see McCaskie 1995, 382).

53 One particularly interesting tradition is from Dwansa. Customarily, the *Dwansahene* was responsible for carrying the gunpowder of the *Asantehene*'s army. Before the Denkyira war Komfo Anokye prophesized that the carrier of the gunpowder would certainly become barren, but still the *Dwansahene* "preferred to be sterile rather than lose the dignity of the Nation". In exchange for his sacrifice the *Dwansahene* was given the elephant tail (the insignia of the 'big men'), a shield (a symbol of chieftaincy, much like the stool), and a "golden calabash" (MAG IAS/AS 61). It is important to note that here the 'human sacrifice' involves the unborn instead of the living. What is even more remarkable is that those sacrificed are the future patrilineal offspring of the *Dwansahene* (or the matrilineal descendants of his wives), but the title and regalia received are attached to his office, which is vested in his own matrilineage.

executions, the essence of the jural rights received was that no such exchange should ever be conducted in the future. Thus the right is the negation of the sacrifice. It is the uniqueness of the whole event which is important; it could not be repeated, nor was it re-enacted. The priest, in this case the *sacrificer*, did not become the general intermediary between the chiefs and spirits as he did not assume the most important ritual duties connected to the chiefly office, namely the ancestral sacrifices. He rather remains the ritual specialist under the chief (see Dumont 1980, 293).

Sacrifice and politics

As stated above, in the classic anthropological accounts of divine kingship the religious aspects were usually separated from the political and considered as symbolic superstructure. In his classic re-study of the Shilluk kingship, for example, Evans-Pritchard treated regicide, the killing of the king who had lost his divine powers, as a political problem. In order to question James Frazer's theories on institutionalized ritual regicide, he claimed that among the Shilluk regicides did not really exist. It was rather a case of political assassination or armed rebellion. In an alleged regicide, the segmentary interests inherent in society have resurfaced, and the king as a person becomes once again associated with the particular segment of society from which he originates and not the divinity outside the society. During and after the violent elimination of the king, the kingship still remains divine, and a new person will be selected to fill it. So, when the king is considered to have lost his divine powers, in actuality, he has lost his overall support (Evans-Pritchard 1962, 84–85). In this calculation support is the independent and divinity the dependent variable: that is to say, less support leads to less divinity and not vice versa. Later approaches have led to a better understanding of how the two cannot be separated and arranged into clear-cut relations of dependency. For instance, Valerio Valeri has discussed the relationship between sacrifices performed by Hawaiian kings and the so-called succession wars they fought and, interestingly, it seems that the logic of sacrifice dictated the logic of the power struggle. Ritual and 'pragmatic' or 'political' actions were not separated into two autonomous social domains – they were parts of the same social totality – but, in their 'ritual parts', actions were linked to the divine model of society and thus its attainment could be anticipated or confirmed (Valeri 1985, 153–154). According to Valeri, "the king is recognized as divine by virtue of the successful performance of certain sacrificial ritual", but his ability to do that depended on certain 'political' actions (ibid., 153). Namely, every king was considered a conquering king in the sense that he had defeated all the other contenders to the throne and was ready to defend it by force. Thus victory in a succession war that results in one of the contenders becoming a divine king also implies the demise of others:

> But these rivals were not simply killed; they are sacrificed, hence incorporated into the god, reduced to him. Moreover, they are not only enemies, but also close relatives of the victor. Hence they are his doubles. Thus, by sacrificing them the victor is indirectly incorporated into god, given a divine status. In sum, he becomes a divine king. (Ibid., 161)

Consequently, the fratricidal nature of the Hawaiian kingly sacrifice is very important. By substituting himself in sacrifice with the closest possible 'imitation' of himself, the king gives the best possible offering and thus becomes capable of entertaining a closer relationship with the gods. At the same time, on the level of 'politics', he rids himself of challengers. Fundamentally, it is the act of sacrifice that makes the fighting and killing seem comprehensible.

Could Osei Tutu's sacrifices be regarded as a ritual context providing for the elimination of possible rivals and transgressors? Certainly, none of the chiefs who are listed in the traditions as having been sacrificed were legitimate contenders to Osei Tutu's office. In all of the accounts which I have encountered, only two of the sacrificed chiefs were mentioned as somehow related to him. The first was a "half-brother", a chief of a town called Bonwere. In exchange, his descendants were exempted from the death penalty and also given the right to use a specific type of regalia usually reserved for Kumasi royals (Rattray 1929, 277). Nonetheless, the *Bonwerehene* was only a "half-brother", not a member of the same clan, and consequently not eligible for the office of the *Asantehene*. The second was a junior brother of the *Kuntanasehene*, whose lineage was given a subordinate office in the capital in return for his offering himself as a sacrifice (PRAAD ARG 3/2/64a). The ruling lineage of Kuntanase did belong to the same clan as Osei Tutu's lineage, but to the opposite Dako moiety, and thus its members were highly unlikely ever to be considered eligible. However, in other instances royals were allegedly sacrificed. Missionaries who witnessed a funeral of a royal in Kumasi in 1873 reported that the "King himself killed some members of the royal house" (Ramseyer and Kühne 1875, 236–237).[54] Considering the Denkyira war, I do not think it is possible to see any underlying political logic that will 'explain' the sacrifices. It is rather that the sacrificial nature of the actions of the chiefs made them meaningful and important.

It is already evident that in Asante ideology, "power transcends human agency", as Sara Berry (2001, 1) has put it. Although originating from the spiritual realm, power is, in principle, accessible to all, but in practice access to it is restricted by limited knowledge and means. This partly explains the high value given to esoteric knowledge in Asante society, namely the admiration accorded people who "know secrets" (Akyeampong and Obeng

54 Haphazard killings committed by the sons and grandsons of the *Asantehene* were part of the primary funeral of the *Asantehene*, but royals were expressly forbidden as victims. Persons who were sacrificed in order to accompany the deceased in the spirit world were mainly royal wives and servants (McCaskie 1989, 432–443).

1995, 483–484). However, this notion of general accessibility to power has represented a constant threat to the rulers as it means that their own powers must be protected from the witchcraft and other malevolent forces used by their opponents. It is remarkable that during the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the power of the Kumasi central government was waning, the internal rebellions that took place were often ritual movements (see Maier 1981; McCaskie 1981; 1986b, 332–333). I return to this notion, which has exhibited considerable longevity, in the final chapter of the book in order to discuss its relevance in the contemporary political setting.

II Secularization

One of Dumont's major contributions to social theory has been his detailed examination of how holistic, or traditional, societies become individualistic, or modern, as a result of an internal process of transformation. He has documented the successive differentiation of the political category and the expansion of the modern state from the dawn of the papal state to the English, American, and French revolutions by referencing relevant developments in religious doctrine, philosophy, and law. It is not necessary to review these processes in detail here, although a brief summary of the most important characteristics of the modern state assists in understanding the ideological transformation of the Asante chieftaincy under colonial rule.

According to Dumont, modern societies may be distinguished from traditional societies by a displacement of the main value stress from the social whole to the individual, who is regarded as an embodiment of humanity at large; thus power, rights, and property are seen as attributes of the individual. The relationship between man and God is an individual matter and therefore religion has lost its all-embracing quality and has become one among other considerations. In this scheme of things, politics addresses the question of how these individuals, with similar needs, objectives, and powers organize themselves and associate with each other. States emerge through contracts made by individuals in their capacity as citizens and consequently rulers only represent the ruled, and the power of the state is nothing more than the powers of its members delegated to another level. Hence, the state does not transcend itself; it exists only for itself and not for any 'higher cause' such as ancestral spirits or gods. Consequently it does not need any external reference point to explain its own existence (Dumont 1971; 1992 [1986], 60–103). The other type of secularization that Dumont (1980) studied had to do with the division of ritual functions between the king and priests in India. There the king exercised political power and performed certain ritual duties, but the most important religious functions had been transferred to the priests. Since in India purity and higher status were not based on power, it followed that the Brahman priests, who had no secular power, were considered superior to the kings, although, as Dumont points out, "in fact priesthood submits to power" (ibid., 71–72). In his view the Indian situation was a sort of intermediate form between an undifferentiated order, like that

in pre-colonial Asante, and the modern European development described above (ibid., 292–294, 311–313).

In Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss how similar divisions and categories were introduced to colonial Asante by European Christian missionaries and colonial administrators as they sought to redefine the relationship between African 'natives' and their ruler, exploring the emergence of both folk and academic theories about chieftaincy and kingship as political institutions which were based on these principles. However, the Asante experience is strikingly different from those Dumont himself has discussed. While Dumont studied gradual, long-term processes of ideological and institutional transformation, in the case of Asante chiefship everything happened abruptly. The demarcation between political and religious spheres in colonial Asante was established by administrative order in response to an acute crisis: Asante Christian converts had refused to follow their 'pagan' chiefs and were moving out of their natal villages to form new communities centred on mission houses. This was seen as a potential threat to the indirect rule system in which the colonial administration used local chiefs as their middlemen. The administrators assumed that a full-blown conflict could be averted if the political and religious functions of the chiefs were jurally separated, working from the principle that converts could still regard their chiefs as legitimate 'political authorities' without compromising their Christian faith. Concurrently, the idea of individual citizens with private consciences as the basic building blocks of the state started to emerge. From that point on, chieftaincy has been discussed increasingly in terms of modern politics. Thus the structural differentiation between religion and politics in this case should be perceived more as a rupture than an endpoint of a long-term process: one is rather witnessing a unified order getting hacked to pieces than its gradual fragmentation. And yet, I believe that Dumont's notion of structure proves a very helpful methodological tool in analyzing these revolutionary changes. By adopting his idea of religion as the "all-embracing normative consideration" in a holistic society one is better equipped to understand the vast problems that the religious role of the chief posed to the converts, and the radical denial of traditional society that was to be their response.

I propose that understanding the significance of this 'secularist revolution' opens a new way of looking at colonial era chieftaincy. Previously the impact of colonialism on chieftaincy has been approached largely from a political perspective. Some studies have stressed how the colonial administration bolstered "traditional authority and aristocratic privilege" at the expense of the common man and the educated intelligentsia (Tordoff 1965, 382–386). Others have observed how aspiring 'entrepreneurs' repressed by the pre-colonial state were able to establish themselves as a new political and economic elite in colonial society under the auspices of the European administration (see, e.g., Arhin 1986; 1995; McCaskie 1986). There are also those who have examined how the *Asantehene* and Kumasi chiefs sought to revive their nineteenth-century prerogatives over land and subjects in the peripheries within the institutional framework of indirect rule (see, e.g., Triulzi 1972; McCaskie 1984, 185–186; see also Berry 2001, 35–55). What

all these approaches have in common is that the dynamics of the colonial era, its breaks and continuities, are understood as intensifications and suppressions of certain political tendencies or as changes in power relations between different actors and groups. This is also visible in general treatments of African history and politics, where Asante has been used as an example of a pre-colonial polity with strong democratic and decentralizing properties, which were later abolished by the indirect rule system (see Mamdani 1996, 47–48), or as an emergent liberal capitalist state, whose development was arrested by colonialism (see Davidson 1992, 52–73). However, I would argue that because of the heavy emphasis on politics we have failed to see the most thoroughgoing transformation, that is, the secularization taking place concurrently. To be fair, Christian conversion has not been totally neglected by earlier studies on Asante chieftaincy, but there has been an inclination to see it primarily as an instrument that worked towards political ends. More specifically, it is understood that Christianity initially and primarily appealed to those Asante who were "neither particularly prosperous nor particularly free subjects of existing religious and political power" (Dunn and Robertson 1973, 125). This characterization has been applied to entire social categories: for example, former slaves, or specific groups or individuals such as local rivals to incumbent chiefs, to whom Christianity offered a channel of protest or a way out of an disadvantageous position (ibid., 123–124, 135). The motives for conversion and the social demographics of Christians are, of course, important matters but, in my opinion, the most crucial issue is to understand how the accommodation of Christian religion effectively redefined the institution of chieftaincy. In view of that, it also must be asked what there was in Christianity that instigated this transformation.

At the same time as Christian converts were struggling over their religious rights in rural Asante, African nationalist thinkers and government anthropologists were creating their own models of the Asante state that rested on assumptions about the polity as an association of rights-bearing citizens. In these models the origins of the Asante polity was traced to a human imperative to bring order to chaos rather than to sacrificial exchanges with gods and ancestors. Historically, the Asante state was seen to be based on a contract between people rather than with spirits. The priestly role of the chief was devalued and relegated to the background in favour of him being considered first and foremost a political representative of his people. Theories like these also provided ideological legitimation for the colonial government's reorganizations of Asante kingship and chieftaincy. When discussing administrative secularization and political models, however, there is a risk of emphasizing the repressive nature of colonial state power and downplaying the agency of the colonial subjects. In this regard I prefer to emulate those anthropological and historical studies of indirect rule that have called attention to the ways in which the Africans themselves were also able to exert influence in the colonial system (e.g., Allman and Tashjian 2000; Berry 1993; 2001; McCaskie 1986). In their efforts to re-organize 'native states' colonial administrators were interested in the correct meaning and application of 'native customs' and in this respect they were dependent on information provided by the colonial subjects, local testimonies that were

often contradictory and led to prolonged debates about authenticity. The opportunity to participate in these debates offered the Africans a channel to affect decision-making processes, although not, it must be acknowledged, on an equal footing (Berry 1993, 7–20). Consequently, the study at hand focuses on colonial-era debates about the meanings of such concepts as politics, religion, and fetishism, in which administrators, missionaries, chiefs, converts, intellectuals, and 'traditionalists' took part from the viewpoints of their respective positions.

The idea of chieftaincy as a secular political institution was a creation of the colonial period and it formed the basis for later developments; thus Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the development of chieftaincy in the post-colonial era and beyond. When Ghana gained its status as an independent nation-state, Asante chieftaincy found itself at odds with the new post-colonial administration, as its 'liberal model' was renounced by the leftist politicians who maintained that chieftaincy could have a future only as an administrative instrument of the modern government and / or as a nationalistic cultural symbol. However, since the end of the Cold War and the weakening of nation states, Asante chiefs have found new avenues for legitimation as 'civil society leaders' – a role endorsed by horizontal institutions like the World Bank. This has meant a return to colonial-era ideologies of chieftaincy as a democratic, consensus-based institution. It is now being evaluated according to the standards of good governance, transparency, accessibility, human rights, and the like. Thus chieftaincy's political role has not remained only local; it has also been undergoing processes connected with becoming an element of global governance.

When considering these trajectories, it is important to understand when, how, and why chieftaincy became perceived as a political institution in the first place. Interestingly, despite the considerable 'modernization' of chieftaincy, problems concerning the religious basis of the institution have not disappeared. On the contrary, new Christian movements, especially of the Pentecostal-Charismatic variant, have challenged both the realm of secular politics and traditional Ghanaian culture as ungodly.

3. Conversion to citizenship

The study of Christian missions has been a major field of innovation in the anthropology of colonialism since the 1980s (Pels 1997, 171–172; Meyer 2004a, 450–451), of which probably the most renowned study has been conducted by Jean and John Comaroff (1991; 1997) on the work of the British Nonconformist Protestant missionaries among the southern Tswana peoples in South Africa from the 1820s to the early twentieth century. In their thus-far two-volume study the Comaroffs maintain that the "European colonization of Africa was often less a directly coercive conquest than a persuasive attempt to colonize consciousness" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 313). By this the authors do not mean that conversion to Christianity was a simple matter: quite the contrary, it is asserted that for a long time the Tswana remained unconvinced by, or indifferent to, the religious message being preached by the missionaries. What the missionaries did achieve, however, was to plant a seed of modern capitalist culture in Tswana society, thereby preparing the ground for things to come. Ultimately they were successful, despite the scepticism, counterarguments, and innovations of the Tswana (ibid., 309–314).

One of the issues over which the missionaries and the Tswana, especially the chiefs, struggled was the definition of the domain of the 'political'. On their arrival in South Africa the missionaries had no intention of challenging the chiefs as "the local temporal authorities" or what they thought were their "secular powers". Soon, however, this political neutrality proved to be an illusion that had rested on the distinction between religion and politics which was well-established in their own society. The Tswana chieftaincy did not fit this mould as the chiefs not only regulated political and economic life, they were also heads of the "ancestral cult" and leaders of communal rituals (ibid., 154–155, 255–261). Hence, when the missionaries demanded "religious freedoms" – asking, for example, that the chiefs excused their Christian subjects from taking part in initiation ceremonies – they were directly defying chiefly authority and beckoning the Christian Tswana away from the traditional community. The missionaries had envisioned a society with distinct spheres of religion and politics based on freedom of conscience, but in reality their actions resulted in strife between the mission and the chiefship (ibid., 260–264). Although the chiefs often saw

Christianity as a threat – the missionary had become "another chief in town" as one ruler put it – they often wanted to make use of its rhetoric and rites and turn the missionaries into their political agents in their contacts with settler colonialists. In these dealings they had to become cognizant of a new political language that relied on modern ideas such as ethnicity and nationality (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 265–308; 1997, 89–93). The Comaroffs (1991, 264) conclude that missionary activities had "set in motion a process with very mixed, contradictory implications".

There are many similarities between the Tswana case and developments in Asante. The first missionaries in Asante also vowed not to interfere with 'politics', but soon found themselves at odds with the chiefs. This led to prolonged discussions about the relationship between the 'religious' and 'political' spheres in a society where such a distinction had hitherto been alien. On the other hand, however, missionary work among the Asante took place in very different circumstances when compared to the South African experience described above. By the time the missionaries managed to secure a permanent local footing, Asante was already an occupied and colonized country whose administrators had taken charge of regulating the religious life of the indigenous inhabitants. The use of orders, judgements, and interventions by force were always a possibility, meaning that what came to constitute the secular in colonial Asante was based on commands from above. Nonetheless, this did not make the situation any less complicated or contradictory. In this chapter I first discuss some characteristics of missionary Christianity and Christian religion in general that I think are important for understanding what took place in the mission houses, chiefly palaces, and villages of the early twentieth century. This is followed by a brief history of missionary work in Asante and a discussion of fetishism, as the missionaries called the local cosmology, focusing especially on those aspects that made it difficult for Christian converts to continue living their lives in the 'pagan' communities ruled by chiefs. Here the Dumontian notion of traditional religion as an all-encompassing category will be of great importance. I then move on to describe the conflicts between Christians and the chiefs and also the resulting interventions by the colonial administration. The chapter concludes with an analysis of a 'missionary model' of Asante society, wherein 'citizens' of different religious convictions could supposedly live together under their 'secular' chiefs.

Missionary Christianity as a modern religion

In addition to well-deserved admiration, the Comaroffs' analysis of the impacts of missionary work has also invited criticism. There are two critical positions that I think are important in terms of the argument I put forward in this chapter. Generally speaking, both have to do with the Comaroffs' (1991, 310) idea of the missionaries as "the media of modernity" and "the human vehicles of a hegemonic worldview". The matter is very important, since I also connect the arrival of the Christian missions to the emergence of modern political conceptions. The first criticism concerns the role of religion

in the transformation of those societies where Christian missionaries have worked, whereas the second questions the idea of the missionary as an exemplary representative of modern secular society. Reviewing these criticisms leads me to consider some important qualities of Christianity and the African missionary project that will hopefully help us to understand the history of secularization in Asante.

Joel Robbins (2007) has argued that in the Comaroffs' treatment the influence of the missionary project on Tswana society is linked almost exclusively to the cultural logic of Western capitalist society, while religion itself, "Christianity, as a system of meanings with a logic of its own" (ibid., 7), is seen as relatively unimportant. Robbins relates this to a more general tendency in anthropology to view cultural change as a slow process that tends to conserve the past, meanwhile downplaying the significance of ruptural change that people who identify themselves as Christian converts, for instance, often underline in their biographical accounts and 'confessions'. Still, becoming and being Christian, a choice which explicitly set people apart from the rest of the society and their own pasts, are meaningful concepts to the converts themselves, and therefore Christian conversion should be an object of serious study (ibid., 9–16). I think this is also an important question in relation to the case I am pursuing here. Robbins has argued that Christianity in general is a religion that focuses on radical change, although different variations of Christianity emphasize different aspects of it. The idea of change is at the heart of the Christian doctrine since most believers tend to think about their religion as historically established by Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection and how this constituted a decisive break in relation to Judaism. Furthermore, some Christian groups highlight the necessity of personal conversion or the magnitude of the coming millennium (Robbins 2012, 12–15).

In addition to perceptions of time, the notion of rupture is also present on the social level in the form of Christian individualism. In Christian thought the individual is "ultimately the bearer of potentially the highest value – that of salvation" and hence one is always to a greater or lesser degree disembedded from social relations, although the sort of social relations that are considered detrimental and how one is expected keep a distance from them do, of course, vary (ibid., 18–19; see Dumont 1992 [1986], 23–59). In the context of conversion, avoiding pre-conversion 'pagan' society and its 'demonic' influences is a crucial issue. In my opinion, the early Christians' resentment towards their chiefs should be approached from this perspective. When the colonial administration in Asante made a ruling about the separation of the 'political' and 'religious' functions of the chiefs it was an institutional reaction to something that was perceived as a crisis of chieftaincy. In my view the abruptness and severity of this crisis has to be understood in relation to the rupture that the converts experienced when they came to the conclusion that their social surroundings were permeated, at least potentially, by immoral persons, practices, objects, and places. "Anything and everything about fetishes was regarded profane, ungodly, a sin, and was therefore to be shunned like a plague", as a son of a convert family explained when recalling the attitude of the early Christians (Kyei

2001, 46). Hence, as I demonstrate in greater detail below, the cultural logic of Christianity had a very important role in this 'political' crisis.

John Peel (2000, 2–7) has expressed similar concerns as Robbins with regards the importance of religion in the Comaroffs' model. More generally, he has criticized the ways in which the missionary endeavour is too simplistically blended with "other grand narratives". According to Peel, the adoption of capitalist ideology, scientific rationalism, and other strands of modern European culture in Africa should not be seen as automatic by-products of the missionary project. Although Evangelical Christianity was born in the intellectual atmosphere of the Enlightenment, and the modern idea of civilization had religious roots, the premises and aims of missionary work – the sinfulness of human nature and the salvation of souls – were markedly different from secular projects that put their trust in human reason and the fortunes of this world. Many Christians had "become progressively estranged from the dominant culture" of their own societies (ibid., 5), to the extent that they thought that their own countrymen were also badly in need of a reformation.[55] Hence, it should be understood that the religious message of the missionaries was not tied to the culture of modern capitalism in any taken-for-granted way. "[T]he redemptive sacrifice of Christ [...] does *not* imply double-entry book keeping or vice versa", as Peel himself puts it (ibid.; italics in the original).

Yet it was important for the missionary project in Africa to align itself with the 'civilizing mission' ideology of the colonial project and thus at least give an impression of shared objectives. This required that the missionaries could effectively take part in a secularist discourse about religion. By the nineteenth century, religious denominations were regarded as forms of voluntary associations that were separate from states and the world of politics and power in general. Churches were expected to have an effect on social change indirectly by furthering the moral education of individual citizens who, on their part, contributed to the welfare of the nation that they comprised. Christian missions that aimed at the transformation of foreign societies were thus considered a part of a larger social project (van Rooden 1997, 80–83). So, when the missionaries stated that they intended to bring whole nations from darkness into light, as one writer of a missionary magazine described it (*The Friend of Africa*, August 1841, 157), they emphasized the view that the religious conviction of individuals would provide a basis for major secular developments. The missionaries saw the human soul as the original source of all social ills and, therefore, the prerequisite for civilizing African society

55 The missionaries used expressions like "so-called Christian England" and characterized their fellow citizens as "at least nominally, Christian men" (see East 1844, 244), when they wanted to emphasize that the 'civilizing' of Africa could not be a secular process conducted by administrators, merchants, and educators. The Christian anti-slavery movement, which in many ways preceded the missionary movement (Peel 2000, 7–8), exemplified this philosophy as it blamed both Europeans and Africans – whose greediness had created the slave trade and kept it extensive and flourishing – for the "evils of slavery" (see e.g. Buxton 1840, 69–70).

was the reformation of the individual. Civilisation could not be achieved by the implementation of any 'human policy'. For instance, one could change the laws of a 'heathen country' so that they would be in agreement with high moral principles, but in the long run society would not improve because laws could always be abused by the wickedness, love of gain, or passions of humans (East 1844, 238). Similarly, economic progress brought on by the introduction of new technologies, improved trade relations, or more effective extraction of natural resources, could not take place before the people were liberated from their superstitions concerning nature, time, geography, and such things. As John Beecham (1841, 339–340), the secretary of Wesleyan Missionary Society, wrote about the future of Asante:

> Is an improved system of agriculture to be introduced? The visible representatives of the gods of the people are growing upon the very spot where the experiment is to be attempted. Are the natives to be taught to work the invaluable mines, with which their country abounds? It will be found that the hills which contain the precious treasures are the imaginary residences of the national deities, and that superstition will deprecate the sacrilegious touch. Are the advantages of an improved commerce to be recommended? Yes; but the intervention of the numerous "unlucky days," and the time necessary for the consultation of the heathen oracles, before any important business can be undertaken, will retard, and often entirely defeat the best-concerted arrangements. […] It may, therefore, be considered as certain, that, whatever may be done by other means, in the way of *facilitating* the introduction of the Gospel, the work of civilisation will not be advanced to any considerable extent, until the superstitious spell by which the people are bound shall be broken by Christianity.

Here a true Christian conviction was seen as the only way to civilization: "No man can become a Christian in the true sense of the term, however savage he may have been before, without becoming a civilised man" (East 1844, 243). Hence, for the missionaries, a true Christian conviction was the kernel of civilization from which all other benefits sprung. Nevertheless, if necessary, the missionaries were prepared to discuss Christianity from a secular position, using, for instance, the register of economic rationality. To put it bluntly, Christianity was vital in terms of salvation, but it was also profitable, although to compare Christian religion with the fetishism of the Asante from the 'neutral' vantage point of the economy is certainly a very modern stance and, I would assume, inconceivable for the clergymen of earlier eras. It exemplifies what Taylor (2007, 12) has called "a disengaged standpoint", in which one is able to see oneself "as occupying one standpoint among a range of possible ones", something which is characteristic of modern secularism.

Early contact

In the pre-Enlightenment era, conquest and conversion had been fellow travellers: from the expansion of the Christian Roman Empire originating in the early fourth century, to the conquest of America by the Roman Catholic

kings of Spain and Portugal, the conversion of 'pagan peoples' to Christianity had been a part of a state policy. Later, however, the major colonial powers in Africa promoted Christianity only indirectly and sometimes even discouraged it (Peel 1978, 445–446). Protestant missionary work as an ongoing and consistent activity emerged only at the end of the eighteenth century and, as indicated above, it was detached from the political projects of the states (van Rooden 1997, 66–67). Furthermore, unlike their Catholic predecessors, the nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries who arrived in Asante were not interested in converting 'pagan kingdoms' through their kings (see Addo-Fenning 2003, 193–198). The unit of salvation was the individual soul, not the whole polity, and conversion as well as civilization was thought to happen from bottom to top.

The establishment of Christian missionary work in Asante preceded the British occupation, but the missions were not able to consolidate their position there before the full imposition of colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century. The Asante had already come in contact with Christianity during the eighteenth century through the Dutch (Debrunner 1967, 75–76), and, consequently, when T. E. Bowdich, an officer of the British African Company, arrived in Kumasi with the first ever British diplomatic mission to Asante in 1817, he encountered a Dutch bible and a copy of *Refutation of Popery* (ibid., 101). However, concrete missionary work among the Asante did not start until the two visits to Kumasi in 1839 and 1841 by the Wesleyan-Methodist, the Reverend T. B. Freeman, during which time *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua Panin granted the Methodists permission to build a mission house in the capital, and negotiations about opening a school were started (Freeman 1968 [1844], 1–181). Six months after Freeman's first visit, Danish Basel missionary Andreas Riis had also travelled to Kumasi, but was turned down and "came back with the impression that we had to wait for better hints from the Lord" (quoted in Kimble 1963, 152). Although their usual activities, such as arranging church services, running the school, and occasional public preaching on the streets, were protected by the king (*The Missionary Chronicle* 1845, vol. xiii, 16), the Wesleyan missionaries gained very limited and closely supervised access to the life of the kingdom. Their movements within the capital city, and Asante in general, were strictly monitored and regulated. The slow processing of requests and pleas to the king and his chiefs was also a constant source of frustration for missionaries eager to proceed with their work (e.g. Freeman 1968 [1844], 37–71). Moreover, the Asante subjects seemed to know that anything more than superficial curiosity about the new religion would not be acceptable. For instance, in 1850 John Owusu-Ansa[56] wrote to Freeman that "[t]he people of

56 By the terms of the 1831 peace treaty between the Asante and the British, *Asantehene* Osei Yaw Akoto had to deliver two Asante 'princes' to the care of the British (Wilks 1975, 190). Consequently, Owusu Ansa, a son of *Asantehene* Osei Bonsu, and Owusu Nkwantabisa, a son of Osei Yaw, were taken to Britain, where they received an English education. They were repatriated in 1841 and travelled to Kumasi with Freeman (ibid., 204). Owusu Ansa worked as a catechist in charge of the Kumasi mission for some time in the early 1850s. He later withdrew from missionary work and became a 'royal secretary' at the *Asantehene*'s court (ibid., 597–600).

Kumasi are in a state of slavery under their masters; they indeed listen to the preaching of the Gospel with attentive ear, and they know the freeness and happiness of those who embrace it; yet they so dread their masters that they will not come forward" (*The Wesleyan Missionary Notices* 1852, vol. x, 9). Despite great optimism in its first stages,[57] the early Methodist missionary project in Asante was a failure. It produced only a handful of converts (see McCaskie 1995, 391–392) and the work was constantly interrupted and hindered by illness, language problems, and visits to the coast or Europe. From the early 1850s onwards, the mission house in Kumasi was occupied only by a local hired caretaker (*The Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, August 25, 1862, 149). Finally, as relations between the Asante and the British worsened in the 1860s (Wilks 1975, 598–599), the likelihood of carrying on mission work in Asante became more and more improbable (Kimble 1963, 153).

It is hard to say anything conclusive about the initial opinion of Christianity by the pre-colonial elite, or what exactly they thought Christianity was.[58] More than anything else, the Asante rulers seem to have been concerned about the impact that schools would have on the younger generations. From their point of view, missionary education was liable to make young people "rebellious", "disobedient", or "troublesome" (Freeman 1968 [1844], 150–151, 168–169). Furthermore, the missionaries' position on the total abolition of slavery, the slave trade, and the prohibition of human sacrifice was considered troubling (ibid., 131–132, 164–165). Consequently, it is difficult to avoid the question: why was the missionary project tolerated in the first place? One interpretation given by the historians is that the missionaries had "practical utility" for the Asante who saw them as suitable intermediaries in the context of political relations and trade with the Europeans on the coast (McCaskie 1995, 136–137). They were needed as peacemakers to "help the peace of the nation and the prosperity of trade", as *Asantehene* Mensa Bonsu put it in 1876 (Debrunner 1967, 180). Indeed, the missionaries did deliver messages about "secular business", as Freeman (1968 [1844], 178) called it, between Asante and the coast, and some of the information gathered by them was used for military intelligence purposes by the British (Wilks 1975, 597). Publicly the missionaries insisted on having a neutral, 'apolitical' role and merely asked the *Asantehene* to adopt a tolerant attitude towards missionary work. For

57 In their journals and reports the missionaries often had a tendency to interpret the curiosity and compliments of the Asante as signs of far-reaching acceptance of Christian teachings. For instance, in 1844 the Reverend G. Chapman was convinced that "many respectable and influential persons in the town [Kumasi] entertain the conviction that Christianity will effectually accomplish its great design; and, eventually surmounting all opposition, become the religion of the land". Apparently, this conclusion was based on a rather imprecise comment made by an unidentified old chief, who had told Chapman that the *Asantehene* had discussed the mission with his chiefs in a favourable tone (*The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 1844, vol. xxiv, 324).

58 See, for example, *Asantehene* Kofi Kakari's attendants' enigmatic statement ("It is the Word of God, and had better remain unopened") about a copy of New Testament presented to the king by the Basel missionaries (Ramseyer and Kühne 1875, 134) and McCaskie's (1972, 36) interpretation of it.

instance, in 1862, the Reverend William West pleaded to *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua Panin for permission to reopen the Wesleyan mission house in Kumasi by stating the following:

> I told them, that, […] I wished […] to ascertain the mind of the King with regard to our Mission; that I was desirous of impressing upon the mind of the King that *we had nothing whatever to do with politics, or the affairs of the Government, but were solely engaged in spreading the Christian religion*, which we know to be of God; that in fact we had no other end in view. I ventured to express a hope, that, as our only object was the happiness and salvation of his people, he would in no way oppose the preaching of the Gospel, nor hinder his people in making a profession of Christianity. (*The Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, August 25, 1862, 157–158; italics added)

Conversely, discussions with the missionaries and observing their behaviour provided the Asante a sort of keyhole view onto the European way of life and affairs on the coast (see, e.g., Freeman 1968 [1844], 138–143). One could also speculate on the extent to which the Asante chiefs thought of encompassing Christianity (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 265) by making the clergy and the church institutions a part of the indigenous state structure, as had happened earlier in the case of Islam. The Muslims (*Nkramofoɔ*, sing. *Kramo*), both from Asante and of outside origin, had their own niches in the pre-colonial state structure and hence Islam was a part of, rather than a threat to, the prevailing order (Owusu-Ansah 1987; see Taylor 1998, 47).[59]

Whatever the Asante kings' interest in Christianity had originally been, towards the end of the nineteenth century their tolerance had become resentment. In 1874 a British expeditionary force invaded and looted Kumasi (e.g. Lewin 1978, 43–47). The Asante kingdom retained its sovereignty, but it had to be constantly wary of British interference and the threat of permanent military occupation. This was also a time of local rebellions against the Kumasi-based central authority (ibid., 85–109). The relationship between the Asante and Christian missions was also altered: during the last two decades of the pre-colonial period some missionaries worked independently in southern Asante against a direct injunction from Kumasi (see, e.g., Debrunner 1967, 180–181). However, missions had to wait for the final downfall of the kingdom in 1901 to get a permanent foothold

59 The Asante came in contact with Islam through their northern tributaries and trading partners. Probably from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, a community of Muslims lived in Kumasi and worked as scribes, annalists, and physicians in the *Asantehene*'s court (Wilks 1975, 344–345). The first Imam of Asante, who prayed for the king and acted as his spiritual advisor, was appointed by *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua in the 1840s (ibid., 277–278). According to McCaskie (1995, 389), the Muslim influence in Asante politics during the pre-colonial period has been exaggerated in twentieth-century histories. For instance, the famous claim that *Asantehene* Osei Kwame had secretly converted to Islam and been deposed for that reason is not supported by most sources. Accordingly, the Muslim community in Asante was not proselytizing although many Islamic ideas and practices were incorporated into the indigenous beliefs and rituals.

in the whole of Asante and fully start proselytizing work. Before discussing Christian conversion and its implications, however, it is important to take a closer look at what was understood by fetishism: a term used to describe and explain the Asante religion by Europeans.

All-embracing fetish

According to William Pietz (1987, 23–24) the idea of fetishism originated in a mercantile intercultural space between European traders and their West African counterparts from the fifteenth century onwards. The merchants saw the essential element of African culture to be the Africans' way of personifying material objects and thus misconceiving natural causal relations. Consequently, they found it difficult to regard the Africans as 'rational' trading partners since the latter were ignorant of the 'real' nature and value of things. Later on, fetishism was also seen as a form of social and political organization, where the 'irrational primitives' were ruled by their immoral 'fetish priests', who used people's fear of the 'fetish gods' to promote their self-interest. Thus the unequal distribution of material goods in African societies resulted from a powerful religious illusion. Social theorists of the European Enlightenment era highlighted the immorality of fetishism and juxtaposed African society, allegedly ordered by the interests of religious elites, with a truly enlightened society organized according to rational principles (Pietz 1988, 105–106). During the missionary era of the nineteenth century fetishism became closely associated with the religious human sacrifice of West African states and the institution of slavery, as the slaves were the primary victims of sacrifice. This was contrasted with the European civilizations' supposedly truer respect for the value of human life (Pietz 1995, 23–34). The linkage between fetishism and sacrifice also brought the kings and chiefs closer to fetishism, since performing sacrifices was explicitly their duty.

However, here I wish to draw attention to the all-embracing quality of fetishism, which not only puzzled Western observers, but also proved highly problematic for the early African converts to Christianity. For the Europeans, the fetish seemed to be omnipresent, pervading all categories of nature and society and, therefore, it was hard to see what actually constituted 'African religion'. Major A. B. Ellis (1966 [1887]), stationed in West Africa with the First West India Regiment, noted, for example, that "[r]eligion is not with them [the Akan peoples], as with civilised peoples, a matter outside one's daily life; it is a subject which affects and influences in some degree almost every action of their daily life, and which is closely interwoven with all their habits, customs, and modes of thought". Similarly, Henry Meredith (1812, 34), the governor of the British fort in Winneba, described the religious life of "the natives of the Gold-coast" by pointing out that "[t]heir object of worship, no matter what it is, goes by the indefinite term, *Fetish*". According to Meredith, it was impossible to say precisely what "the object of worship" actually was, because

> *Fetish* is a word of great license, and applied in great variety of ways: it frequently means anything forbidden. One man refuses to eat a white fowl, another a black one; saying, "it is *fetish!*" There are places into which they do not wish a White man to enter; enquire, Why? They are *fetish!* To kill an alligator, or a leopard, is *fetish* in some places. If a person be poisoned, or unwell, in a way they cannot account for; it is *fetish!* In lieu of an oath to prove truth of any assertion, they take *fetish.* (Ibid., 35; italics in the original)

Although deliberately exaggerated, this quote strikingly exemplifies the problem of delineation. It seemed that anything and everything could have a religious meaning. Africans themselves, on the other hand, did not share this feeling of confusion. The explanation about the importance of fetishes in Asante society given by *Asantehene* Mensa Bonsu to a Wesleyan-Methodist missionary, the Reverend Thomas Picot, is highly illuminating in this sense. Picot arrived in the Asante capital Kumasi in April 1876 requesting permission to carry out missionary work and, what is more, demanding that the king grant the "liberty of conscience" to all Asante people (McCaskie 1995, 139–142; Mobley 1970, 25). In his reply, the *Asantehene* turned down the request by explaining meticulously why the Asante could not abandon their fetishes:

> It is a tradition among us that Ashantis are made to know that they are subjects, altogether under the power of their King, and they can never be allowed liberty of conscience. The Bible is not a book for us. […] Our fetishes are God's interpreters to us. If God requires a human sacrifice or a sheep, He tells our fetishes, and they tell us, and we give them. They tell us too where the gold is with which we trade. We know God already ourselves, and we cannot do without human sacrifices.
>
> … [W]e will never embrace your religion, for it would make our people proud. It is your religion that has ruined the Fanti country, weakened their power and brought down the high man on a level of a low man. The God of the white man and of the Fantis is different from the God of the Ashantis and we cannot do without our fetishes. (Quoted in McCaskie 1995, 140)

Mensa Bonsu's views were supported by *Bantamahene* Kwabena Awua, who also added:

> The Fantis can do without polygamy, and without slaves, but we cannot. As men differ in complexion so in religion. Your God is not like Our God… if you send in twenty missionaries, you will not get one Ashanti man to be a Christian. (Ibid.)

It would be interesting to know how terms like 'liberty of conscience' and 'religion' were translated and understood by the king and his councillors and, consequently, what sort of conceptual common ground existed between the missionary and the king. Nevertheless, in Mensa Bonsu's and Kwabena Awua's response there are several interesting points concerning the place of 'religion' in Asante. First of all, they single out the two major types of exchange and distribution of spiritual powers: sacrifice and marriage. It is made adamantly clear that giving up human sacrifice and polygamy would severe the tie between the spirit world and the living and consequently

'weaken their power'. The society described in Chapter 1 would simply cease to exist. Therefore, what the Christian God "liked, and what he disliked", as one chief put it to the Reverend Freeman (1968 [1844], 20), were not viewed as compatible with tradition. Secondly, the *Asantehene* states quite plainly that the acceptance of Christianity would eventually collapse two important divisions in Asante society: that between chiefs and their subjects and that between free men and slaves. Since the Christian Asante would no longer revere their ancestors, there would be no distinction between people with ancestors and those without. As one would expect, in such a situation differences generated by the 'greatness' of one's ancestors would also become meaningless. The 'high man' would indeed be no different from the 'low man'. Consequently, there could be no such thing as a Christian Asante kingdom as the new religion would simply erase the foundations of the lineages and offices. The missionaries, on the other hand, certainly wanted to put an end to human sacrifice, slavery, and polygamy, but seemed to have no objections to the 'temporal power' of the chiefs. In their sermons to, or conversations with, the chiefs, the missionaries emphasised the "folly of the heathenish observances" and the "gracious influence of His Holy Spirit" on their hearts, but they never said or even insinuated that a Christian society would somehow be a leaderless society (e.g., ibid., 14-28). It seems that from their point of view a Christian Asante nation would be governed by kings and chiefs just as Christian England was ruled by the English monarchs and aristocrats. Thirdly, the *Asantehene*'s answer to the missionaries links the fetishes to material production and commerce but in an entirely different way to earlier perceptions of this relationship by Europeans. From the Asante point of view, the gold that was used in commerce with the Europeans was discovered by the fetishes and for that reason trade would not be possible without them (see also Guyer 2004, 11; Ofosu-Mensah 2010, 130–132).

The missionary view of fetishism differed from that of merchants, soldiers, administrators, and the like. On the one hand, they could agree that fetishism was just an illusion inside the heads of the Africans and hence the spirits to whom the Asante made sacrifices did not exist. Therefore, a missionary only needed to convince converts that the traditional ideas were false in order to liberate their minds (see, e.g., *The Friend of Africa*, August 1841, 153–155, 158). On the other hand, fetishism was seen to represent true evil and therefore it should be fought against and avoided (see, e.g., Ramsayer and Kühne 1875, 169). As a result, the fundamental problem for conversion was that, since fetishism was all-embracing, how could one possibly avoid it? If Christian conversion is marked by change, rupture, and discontinuity, what actually can be salvaged from the past, or does everything have to change? Here one can see a link to the situation described by Dumont (1992 [1986], 23–59) in his treatment of the process of an "outworldly individual" becoming an "inworldly individual". As spiritual salvation is considered an "outworldly" matter and this world is not only seen as worthless in that respect, but also potentially dangerous and diabolical, the relationship between the Christian and the world has to be thoroughly reassessed; and the first requirement for a Christian (*Ɔkristoni*, pl. *Kristofoɔ*) to live in a world filled with fetishes was the disenchantment of nature. 'Sacralizing' or 'personifying' plants, animals,

bodies of water, rocks, and so on, became perceived as a misunderstanding (see Kyei 2001, 46). Consequently, sacred animals could be hunted, sacred rivers fished, and the catch of both could be eaten (see Dunn and Robertson 1973, 133–137). The devil was not in nature. It should be noted that the introduction of the idea of 'physical nature' as something differentiated from the social world is an enormous issue, certainly meriting treatment of its own (see Meyer 1997; also Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 200–213), whereas here I have only briefly indicated it as a prerequisite for the second stage: (re-)entering the society of 'pagans' as a Christian individual. The rest of the chapter focuses on that question.

Conversion

After 1901, when Asante was permanently placed under British occupation, both the Wesleyan-Methodist and Basel missions started operating there by special invitation from the Governor (Mobley 1970, 25).[60] They were soon joined by a Roman Catholic mission (Obeng 1996, 108–109). The early missions made slow yet steady progress, although most of their churches and schools were primarily attended by non-Asantes. For instance, in 1912, after a good ten years of missionary work, only two percent of the total population had converted (Colonial reports No. 771). Although the missions were independent 'enterprises', separate from the official colonial establishment (Dunn and Robertson 1973, 122–125), the slow conversion of the Asante reflected the general hostility towards the military occupation. The Asante had never seen "the Church as an agency with separate existence, differing in purpose, from that of the other European agencies like trading firms and governments" (Bartels 1965, 113). After all, there had been nothing corresponding to these institutions in indigenous pre-colonial society and the first European missionaries to visit Asante had been accompanied by soldiers, carrying letters from the British government on the Gold Coast (ibid.). More importantly, however, the resentment must have had to do with the fact that the teachings and way of life endorsed by the missions put the converts very radically at odds with their communities.

The missionaries understood their work in terms of calling the converts from 'pagan' associations and surroundings to a Christian way of life by all means possible. This notion of rupture, characteristic of many Christian groups, also fuelled in a very important sense the transformations of larger society that were to take place. Using scriptural injunctions, the missionaries insisted that the converts had to be, at least spiritually, separated from their old allegiances and live apart as individual men and women; the Basel missionaries, for example, often referred to the instructions of 2 Corinthians,

60 The German and Swiss personnel of the Basel mission were deported by the British authorities during World War I and their work was continued by the United Free Church of Scotland Mission. In 1925 the Basel Mission was permitted to resume its work in Asante and a year later the Basel and Scottish Missions united under the name Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast (Debrunner 1967, 279–294).

"Our boys in their 'Sunday best.' (The girls do not reside in the house.)" (TNA CO 1069/33). The Reverend Dennis Kemp and Mrs. Kemp of the Wesleyan Missionary Society photographed with boarders of a mission school in the Gold Coast. Kemp travelled to British-occupied Kumasi in 1896 in order to re-commence proselytization work in the Asante capital (see Kemp 1898, 235–264).

Chapter 6, wherein the Christians were told to separate themselves from the "infidels" and not to touch the "unclean" (Williamson 1965, 56).[61] However, in a social setting where the spirit world was all pervasive, an attempt to separate oneself from it spiritually could ultimately mean that one had to abandon it completely because every aspect of Asante society could be brought under suspicion and condemned by the new order. Even such fundamental and, at first sight, commonplace matters as village living arrangements could become an insurmountable problem. Customarily, as described in Chapter 1, every Asante village or town was divided into quarters, where the members of a single lineage were supposed to live in several households. The lineages also had their own burial grounds in the same locality. Each of these quarters was under the protection of its own ancestors and gods and was directed by the elders responsible for the ritual veneration of these spirits as well as the chief (Debrunner 1967, 198). Consequently, for the Christians, even everyday activities in the domestic circle with relatives could put them in contact with fetishes. Sometimes this was avoided by moving the Christians from their 'ancestral quarters' to detached settlements, new communities that were called Salems, Jerusalems,

61 The books of Corinthians are still referred to by many Christian Ghanaians when discussing their relationship to traditional cosmology. Also some passages from the Old Testament, especially Exodus (Chapter 20) on "serving carved images" and Isaiah (Chapter 44) on the "the absurdity of idolatry" are often brought up.

or 'White man's towns'.[62] Hence, the idea of 'religious separation' led to an actual physical separation. There, drawn away from their past lives, they entered a new type of society, built around the mission house, the church, and the school, where new ideals and concepts were expressed in terms of European culture (Williamson 1965, 56–57; Mobley 1970, 73–80). Although it has to be remembered that these changes touched only a small minority of the Asante people, and not even all Asante Christians, it is clear that such radical renunciation of society – and indeed of personhood – as it had been previously understood must have had a widespread shock effect. According to one critical observer, Christianity meant externality:

> The effect of the separateness of the two towns was to make the people look upon becoming a Christian as a physical act embracing the bodily removal of one's person from the heathen to the Christian town, the sending away of all but one of the convert's wives, and the normal upkeep of one's attendance at prayers and services of the Church. From the earliest times it became a fad to be a Christian. Christians were those who were free of restraints and taboos of the heathen town, and as they thought, of the authority and rule of princes of this earth. (Danquah 1928, 90, quoted in Mobley 1970, 75)

In the early decades of the colonial rule the government received a considerable number of complaints from chiefs whose converted subjects refused to heed their summons or to provide services on the grounds that service to the chief was 'fetish worship' (Busia 1951 [1968], 133–135; Tordoff 1965, 197–198). "I now go to church, I am not under the chief", was a common reply from the converts when asked why they refused to provide their services (Busia 1951 [1968], 137). At worst, these differences led to violent altercations between the Christians and 'traditionalists' (Tordoff 1965, 197–198). Furthermore, there was evidence that some people had turned to Christianity in the first place in order to avoid their traditional obligations. Some were said to be Christians in name only who had converted for 'worldly gain' – in order to avoid paying taxes collected by the chiefs, for example. It was also understood that the introduction of cocoa, a cash crop that required a low labour input, was making people selfish and greedy, and conversion to Christianity provided a way for some of the newly rich cocoa farmers "to protect their money" from the claims of their kinsmen and chiefs (Allman and Tashijan 2000, 28–39).[63] In some places it was reported that opposition

62 The establishment of segregated Christian communities was a characteristic of the Basel mission. However, the Wesleyan mission houses were also located apart from the villages (Mobley 1970, 75).

63 In addition to economic motives, some scholars have also discussed Christian conversion in Asante as a weapon in factional politics (Robertson and Dunn 1973, 135); as abandonment of an unfavourable social status (ibid., 125); and as a part of achieving the standing of a 'modern person' in one's community (McCaskie 1986, 12; 2000a, 114–123). I do not have any objections to these interpretations as none of them maintain that conversion could be explained solely by these factors. However, it is important to point out how the "utilitarian" and "intellectualist" approaches to conversion should not be understood as opposites, but rather as complementary views addressing different stages of the conversion process (Robbins 2004a, 84–88).

to a particular chief had taken the form of conversion, and subsequently a wholesale rejection of chiefly rule (Tordoff 1965, 197–198). In 1905 the governor of the Gold Coast wrote:

> The tendency of Christian converts to alienate themselves from the communities to which they belong is very marked, and is naturally resented by the chiefs, who claim their hereditary right, in which they are supported by Government, to make the converts in common with their fellow tribesmen obey such laws and orders as are in accordance with native custom, not being repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience. (Quoted in Busia 1951 [1968], 133–134)

Roughly fifteen years later, as the number of converts underwent a sudden increase, the chief commissioner of colonial Ashanti started to doubt the benefits of Christian conversion if it broke the fabric of traditional society:

> In fact in certain parts of Ashanti something in the nature of a "mass movement" towards Christianity has set in. It may be, and Missionaries are alive to this fact, that such a movement has attendant dangers. Possibly set native habits of morality and the valuable and it may be the inspired elements in native religion will be cast aside in an access of momentary enthusiasm without anything lasting or substantial to take their place. (Colonial Reports No. 1142)

These developments presented a dilemma for the British officials who tried to implement indirect rule – a policy of conserving African society and culture and ruling the colonial subjects through traditional institutions – but who also had to facilitate Christian missionary work. The missions wanted to stay out of 'politics', as they understood it, but did not want their religion to become branded as subversive and assisted the government to enforce the principle that Christians cannot shirk "ordinary obligations imposed on them by native custom" (Tordoff 1965, 198).

Separating religion and politics

The colonial authorities tried to come up with a solution for the conflict in 1912, when the governor of the Gold Coast visited Asante. He met a committee consisting of the chief commissioner, three other government officials, and representatives of the Christian missions: Wesleyan, Basel, and Roman Catholic missionaries. This committee, comprising only European members, drew up rules for the chiefs and the churches. The two rules regulating chief-subject relations were:

1. No Christian shall be called upon to perform any fetish rites or service, but shall be bound to render customary service to his chief on ceremonial occasions when no element of fetish practice is involved
2. An effort should be made to draw a distinction between fetish and purely ceremonial service. (Quoted in Busia 1968 [1951], 134)

When a Christian convert refused to perform a service required of him on the ground that it was fetish, the district commissioners were to decide whether this was the case or not (ibid.). Furthermore, it was reiterated that all Christians were under the jurisdiction of their chiefs' courts which they had to attend when summoned (Allman and Tashijan 2000, 31). It would be difficult to list all the things that finally became included in the category of fetishism and thus not mandatory for the Christians, but what is important is that a real attempt was made to separate in detail the religious from the political and thus secularize the Asante chieftaincy. However, the separation remained vague, to say the least, and the district commissioners dealt with a wide variety cases. A Gold Coast-based official described a case received in his court on "a typical day":

> Next is a case of assault, which is defended, half a dozen prisoners being paraded. The complainant states that he has lately become a Christian, and therefore holds that he is not liable to answer the company [i.e. group for communal work] call to go and cut thatch grass. The company objected, and, according to native custom, tied him up and fined him 5*s*. As he can show no marks of violence, he is told that the fact that he is a Christian does not appear a valid reason, to the court, for shirking his share of work for the public good, and the case is referred to the native tribunal. (Freeman 1919, 29)

Although for the commissioner this was just another case among the thefts, burglaries, and other minor offences, it clearly demonstrates the sort of disintegrative potential the committee's ruling had brought with it. Since the whole of social life was immersed in religious meaning, a Christian convert could potentially reject any sort of activity or relationship on the basis that it was fetishism. The colonial official's task was then to point out that cutting grass, for instance, is 'work', not fetishism. For the commissioner such distinctions were patently obvious, and indifference to the fulfilment of such obligations implied shirking, laziness or, what is worse, mutiny, but for the community in his jurisdiction all these small verdicts had real structural implications. One can certainly ponder whether the refusal to cut grass was a genuine issue of private religious conviction for the convert or a form of everyday resistance against both traditional obligations and colonial authorities under a religious pretext, but here the most important issue to note is that such arguments were reasonable enough for some people. After all, it is not in any way obvious that Christians have to cut grass.

Despite this noticeable open-endedness, the committee's ruling seems to have clarified the relationship between chiefs and their Christian subjects to some extent. In the year following the ruling, the chief commissioner of Ashanti wrote that the new rules "have so far had the effect of lessening the breach between the factions" and that relations now showed a "decided improvement" (Colonial reports No. 771). At least in some locales peaceful co-existence between the town and the Salem seems to have been achieved. An old school master reminisced how in his childhood during the 1910s the chief was a respected figure even among the Christians:

> It was the practice that the *Ɔhene* of Agogo and his Stool Elders went to church in State on the New Year's Day to join the Christians to worship God. The admonition sternly made by the Catechist, and repeated several times, to the effect that *members of the congregation should show their respect for their earthly ruler* by full and punctual attendance at that particular day, was heeded obligingly. (Kyei 2001, 146; italics added)

The isolation of Christian communities within towns and villages remained a heated topic up until the 1950s (Mobley 1970, 71–77). Similarly, the debate about the 'customary services' mandatory for the Christians continued throughout the colonial period. Substantial ambiguity remained, even after the government's rulings, and disputes about the borderline between religion and politics persisted.

Christian citizens

The Christians did not merely refuse to obey; they also had propositions about their own position in the social world in which they lived, in which, in a very concrete manner, a 'rights-bearing individual' was placed at the centre of society. Ever since the converts had been freed from 'fetish services' by the colonial government, a person's 'free choice' of religion had started to determine the nature of relationships with his / her chief. Consequently, the previously dominant traditional view of the 'constitution' of the Asante polity had been challenged (which was, of course, directly contrary to what the administrators thought they were doing). To put it another way, the Christian Asante of the early colonial period were depicted increasingly as 'citizens' of their natal chiefdoms.

One well-known instance took place in 1942, when Christian clergy, both European and local, submitted a petition to the *Asantehene* in which they requested that Christians should not be forced to treat Thursdays as days of rest. Previously, the *Asantehene* and his council had decreed that farm work on Thursdays, a sacred weekday for the Asante 'earth-goddess' Asase Yaa, was an offence (Busia 1951 [1968], 135). The petition was titled "Memorandum on the relation between Christians and the State" and it argued that the converts were loyal to their chiefs but could not rest on Thursdays because Sunday was already their holy day. The petition was eventually turned down by the king, but it illustrated how a group of people that had been constantly growing in numbers was thinking about their relationship to their rulers. The three quotes that follow are from the memorandum and they reveal some notable changes in the ways the traditional state was conceptualized:

> On the part of the chiefs we would ask that they accept as a fact the existence of *Christians as members of their State* and lay down ways by which *they can show their allegiance to their chiefs without at the same time offending their Christian conscience* (e.g. if a chief orders community work, say on roads, to take place on a Sunday as being the day most suitable to the majority of his subjects, he might at the same time state that Christians may do their share of the work on

> the preceding Saturday. This taking of the initiative by the chief in remembering those of his subjects who are Christians would, we believe, go a long way towards relieving the strained feeling at present existing in such matters).
>
> We believe that *the Christian Community is large enough for the State to be the loser if Christians are cut off from a share in the country's political life*. If no recognized place exists in Native Customary Law for *those who do not believe in 'fetish'*, has not the time come in view of many changing circumstances for the adaptation of Native Customary Law in order that it may include in its provisions all loyal *citizens*?
>
> Against this background we look at the position of Christians in relation to the observance of Thursday. We recognize that this is an observance closely linked with ancient beliefs of the Ashanti people; beliefs which, however, are not to our mind wholly compatible with the Christian belief in God. Our members, if they observe the day, cannot do so for the ancient Ashanti reason. *The question arises should they be asked to observe the day out of respect for the beliefs of others in the community*. We feel that we cannot ask this of our members, in that to refrain from work on Thursday would be to them a confession of faith in Asase Yaa and her relation to harvest and famine and therefore a denial of the Fatherhood and providential care of God. A like difficulty of conscience holds in relation to other special days and observances which have a similar significance to Asase Yaa. If, however, the chief reason behind this observance is not so much the association with Asase Yaa as a desire for some *communal act to express the unity of the nation, we would ask whether there is not some other act of allegiance in which the Christians could take part*; an act which would not place the working life of farmers under the disadvantage of refraining from work on two days in the week. (Quoted in Busia 1968 [1951], 220–222; italics added)

First of all, allegiance and conscience are separated, which corresponds to the divisions between politics and religion as well as citizenship and humanity as an attribute of the individual. In fact, the word citizen is used here, along with terms like subject and member of a state. Secondly, when referring to 'traditional religion' it is spoken of as a "belief of others in the community", which entails the idea of religion as a private matter that does not concern the community as a whole but rather each of its members separately. Thirdly, when a "communal act to express the unity of the nation" is discussed, the authors of the memorandum seem to put forth an idea that the community exists as the result of a conscious effort by the individuals that comprise it. In an indirect way this relates to the notion of contract, since the Christians see themselves here as negotiating how their individual contributions to unity should be channelled. It is also implied that the state is a sum of its individual members, given that it is predicted that the state would actually lose if Christians were excluded from it.

Here one is able to see how the Christian element of Asante society had developed its own individualistic understanding of chieftaincy, which on the surface could look very much like traditional holistic chieftaincy, but which ultimately rested on an entirely different foundation. From the point of view of the missionaries and administrators, the kings and chiefs were

religious rulers of their 'traditionalist' subjects in the sense that they shared the same faith – much like modern-era British monarchs who had retained their positions as the head of the church although their rule was no longer based on divine right (see Dumont 1992 [1986], 71). Christian converts could live their lives unaffected by the putative divinity of the chiefly office, but politically they were still subjects of their chief and this was to be their primary identity. Here we can see political allegiance (or nationality) departing from religion and it is becoming a concern for everyone (including the Christian believer) that the latter is not allowed to violate the former (see Asad 2003, 181–194). What should be specifically emphasized is that this new conception was not limited only to the position of Christians: it covered the whole polity and thus the non-Christian members of the community were depicted as 'people who believed in the fetish' as though they had also selected to exercise their right to freedom of conscience and, in consequence, merely subscribed to a different set of beliefs than the Christians. Hence, at the outset, both the convert and the traditionalist were 'citizens' of their chiefdom or, to put it in the harsher parlance of indirect rule, they were first and foremost 'natives' who lived under 'native authority'.

Retrospectively, we are able to see that the discourse on rights, freedoms, citizenship, and contract had come to stay, and it has now become central in shaping the ways in which the Asante people see their own society. Thus it can be argued that the clash between the Christians and the chiefs in the early twentieth century has had a far reaching impact on Asante and Ghanaian society. In the next chapter I examine in closer detail the theoretical constructions created by both administrators and scholars who saw the Asante kingdom, and Akan polities in general, as states comprising citizenry, with kings and chiefs as their representatives or 'political leaders'.

4. A liberal kingdom?

Colonial sovereignty in Africa has often been depicted as particularly brutal and arbitrary. The late nineteenth-century scramble for the continent gave birth to a form of governance in which sovereignty was exercised "in an almost elementary form upon populations that *a priori* were reduced to the state of bare life" (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 24; see Agamben 1998). Accordingly, in the case of Asante, some commentators presented the colonial conquest as a necessity arising from the savage nature of its inhabitants. Even as late as the 1930s a civil servant in the colonial office wrote that the Asante had basically been "a set of war-like, rather truculent natives with an overweening belief in their own powers which, of course, they had to unlearn" (TNA CO 96 715/3a). The African colony became a "permanent zone of exception", since its native inhabitants were not recognized as members of the "community of civilized men" and thus their administrators were not under any obligation to treat them according to the kind of laws that were applicable in their European home countries (Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 302–305; see Agamben 2005). In this setting the Christian missions saw themselves as "islands of order, aiming at imparting 'civilization' by more benevolent means" (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 25). Nevertheless, the colonial administrators did not work in an ideological void and they were inclined to justify their plans and decisions by making references to social theories and 'authentic' information about 'native customs' provided by local informants. Even if the Africans were not considered civilized men and therefore not equals, their societies were thought to conform to the same evolutionary and social 'laws'. Hence, as in other corners of the empire, the administrators of colonial Africa also furnished sociological and historical models of the 'native societies' they ruled (see Cohn 1983; Kaplan 1990). In fact, colonial-era discussions of subjects such as "native authority" and "customary law", which some contemporary political theorists see as the institutional foundation of "decentralized despotism" (Mamdani 1996, 37–179), used ideas about the development of the modern state and its civil society as principal reference points.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, I must emphasize here that I do not wish to deny the atrocious and repressive nature of colonialism in practice, let alone claim that the 'native states' created by European powers

in Africa were somehow civil and democratic. Nor, on the other hand, am I claiming that the pre-colonial political formations were basically democratic or consensus-based, subsequently destroyed or distorted by colonialism, and possibly resurrected or rejuvenated at some future point. I am rather stressing that kingship and chieftaincy became 'politics', partly because their formal legitimation in the colonial era was connected to Western ideas about how individuals organize themselves in groups, divide labour, elect leaders, make laws, and so on. This is by no means a simple matter and the objective of this chapter is to discuss the multiple ways chieftaincy was understood to be political in the colonial period.

Drawing the line between religion and politics in the missions and villages was a matter of complicated negotiations and contestations between the administrators, missionaries, chiefs, and converts. Piece by piece, from one situation to another, such things as attending court or participating in communal work were separated from the religious sphere of fetishism. Alongside this process, however, a theory of the Asante political system was developed. Its intellectual roots lay in British political thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the result of which was to award chieftaincy an explicit conceptualization as a political institution. These theories should not be assessed only as ideological products created to bolster the different projects of indirect rule, however, as they also formed the intellectual foundation of the politics of early Ghanaian nationalism. In what follows I begin by reviewing these theories, especially with regards the question of secular politics. The last part of the chapter is dedicated to the foremost instance in which the colonial government publicly invoked these theories in their reorganization of the Asante political system; that is, when the colonizers decided to 'restore' the pre-colonial Asante kingdom they had dissolved earlier.

Colonial folk models

Indirect rule was never really a politico-administrative dogma, but rather a practice that evolved during the British colonial endeavour, and therefore its ideological foundations lay not so much in any rigid codes, but in a worldview shared by the people who applied it. The colonial bureaucrats' outlook reflected the evolutionist model of human development that was characteristic of early twentieth-century social and political thought, and their decisions derived from and realized that model, one which assumed that the development of each individual and every society invariably repeated a single, linear evolutionary sequence. Thus the "primitive society" of backward African tribesmen would ultimately develop into a "civilized society" governed by rational thinking (Kuklick 1979, 44–48). The responsibility of the colonizing power was to safeguard and to a certain extent regulate this process. The change had to be gradual and any sudden, revolutionary leaps in progress were considered hazardous. As one of the chief advocates of indirect rule, Lord Lugard (1922, 211), put it, in order to "accord with natural evolution" the methods and institutions of the colonial

rule had to be deep-rooted in the "traditions and prejudices" of African peoples. Consequently, it was established that the forms of government best suited to Africans were those they had created for themselves. Traditional institutions should be modified by the colonizing power only when necessary for the main purpose of colonialism, the exploitation of the colonized country, or when the traditional institutions were repugnant to European morality (Crowder 1968, 168–169).

The evolutionary view was consistent with the contemporary folk-political theories to which the colonial rulers adhered, therefore it is best to start ideological consideration with a brief overview of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century British perceptions of state, society, and conquest. As Henrika Kuklick (1984, 60–61) has pointed out, during that period two "ideal-typical models" of political organization dominated the debates on the legitimacy of colonial rule as well as the fundamental nature of "primitive society". The conservative viewpoint assumed that the capacity to rule other people was an inborn talent only possessed by a small number of individuals; social integration took place as the masses, led by the talented few, cooperated in order to achieve collective ends, while statuses and material rewards were distributed unevenly in society according to the unequal talents of individuals. Consequently, the legitimate form of government was a centralized state, ruled by a hereditary aristocracy which, in the British version of conservatism, placed a distinctive emphasis on the notion of conquest: specifically, strong polities and advanced forms of social organization were created when superior conquering peoples subjugated and consolidated inferior peoples. The foremost historical example of this was the Norman conquest of Anglo-Saxon England in 1066, which was seen as a necessary condition for the birth of the English nation. The Anglo-Saxons had been a divided group of 'barbarians', which a more highly developed 'conqueror race' united as a single nation, meanwhile bestowing the benefits of civilization. Another important reference point took the discussants a thousand years further back in history and, much like the Norman conquest, it also represented a paradigm for British colonialism:

> As Roman imperialism laid the foundations of modern civilisation, and led the wild barbarians of these islands along the path of progress, so in Africa to-day we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilisation. […] We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade, and to govern. The task in which England is engaged in the tropics – alike in Africa and in the East – has become part of her tradition, and she has ever given of her best in the cause of liberty and civilization. (Lugard 1922, 618–619)

The liberal position, on the other hand, believed that talent was distributed fairly and uniformly to all humans. Differences in status could only be based on individual achievement rather than any kind of inborn talent or hereditary order. Such meritocratic differences should never curtail the liberties of others, and the use of force to achieve political ends was

not considered legitimate. On the contrary, a legitimate government was based on a contractual agreement between individuals, and positions of leadership could be held only by the consent of those governed. From the liberal perspective, conquest and government based on force were illegal and 'unnatural'. Furthermore, according to the more radical authors, the Norman conquest had destroyed traditional Anglo-Saxon political institutions, which, they argued, had embodied true democratic ideals. The influential school of Whig history that held liberal values in high esteem sought to establish continuity in English history by arguing that although the Normans had originally triumphed through military force and established the aristocratic order, their rule of the island ultimately had to be based on the consent of the ruled. Hence an original mixture of the liberal and the conservative political models was born. Both the conservative and liberal models could be placed under the evolutionary umbrella: the difference was whether the political evolution took a "militant" form, based on conquest, or an "industrial" form based on contract (Kuklick 1984, 61–62).

The colonial administrators relied on models like these when they mapped the types of peoples who inhabited the colonies and how they should ideally be governed. Africans were, as Lugard (1922, 72) put it, "a race which illustrates every stage in the evolution of human society, from […] the lowest type of cannibal, to the organised despotism and barbaric display of a negro kingdom". In the taxonomy of indirect rule, the latter belonged to the category of "advanced communities", which should be granted self-government (ibid., 196–213), while "primitive tribes", the type to which the former belonged, were not yet ready for that; rather, it was advisable for the administration "to hasten the transition" from the tribal stage by making them accept centralized chiefly authority (ibid., 214–217). In the case of colonial Ghana, the Akans were seen as one of the "dominating races", while the acephalous societies of the Northern Territories were considered to be in the process of amalgamation into larger tribal units under centralized government (see, e.g., TNA CO 96/688/11a). In the beginning of the interwar period, the colonial administrators presumed that increasing centralization of political organization was the commanding feature of social evolution. Therefore, administrators were urged to form new 'native states' by amalgamating previously distinct communities. If pre-colonial precedents, or ethnic or linguistic links could be provided to support that trajectory, it could be maintained that the government was merely accelerating or continuing a natural development, which had been slowed down or interrupted by the early stages of colonial take-over (see, e.g., TNA CO 96/624a). The historical existence of pre-colonial empires like Asante, which had expanded through the conquest of its neighbours, was seen as a confirmation of the evolutionary model: the larger were taking over the smaller even before European rule (Kucklick 1979, 47–51). This line of thinking, which subscribed largely to the conservative state model, underwent significant modification towards the end of the interwar era as official support for those chiefs perceived as "autocratic rulers" was widely criticized and the concerns of the ruled became part of the legitimizing discourse. The chieftaincy institution was still considered essential for self-

government, but sponsoring incompetent or corrupt chiefs against the popular will was acknowledged to be an administrative problem. From now on, it was important to assert that there were checks and balances on chiefly power, and any kind of democratic tendencies considered to be inherent in traditional political systems were to be cherished (ibid., 55–58). Hence the conservative understanding of traditional society, with its references to conquest states and hereditary aristocracy, was given a liberal component.

The liberal in the feudal

During the early twentieth century the Asante kingdom and other Akan polities were fitted into the models dominant in the metropolitan discourses about origins, development, and functions of the state. It is noteworthy that the first to attempt to do so were actually African intellectuals. Two Western-educated lawyers in particular, John Mensah Sarbah and J. E. Casely-Hayford, who were based on the Gold Coast, wrote extensively on Akan chieftaincy from the perspective of Western legal and political theories. They were both key members of the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society, which was founded in 1896 in order to oppose new colonial land legislation and fight for the cause of self-government (see, e.g., Kimble 1963, 330–357; Edsman 1979). Sarbah's and Casely-Hayfords's texts represent a major scholarly enterprise but, more importantly at the time, they were critical contributions to a political debate. They sought to demonstrate that the indigenous inhabitants of the country had their own political and legal institutions, which did not deserve to be abolished and replaced by colonial versions, but which should rather be modified to meet the standards of a new era. More specifically, by drawing analogies between Western and Akan institutions, they wanted to convince their readers that Akan polities were basically democratic constitutional states (Edsman 1979, 55–56; Rathbone 2008, 478–479). This was a crucial departure from the nineteenth-century European accounts which, for instance, described the Asante kingdom as a system of "military despotism" (Bowdich 1966 [1819]), 65). Since the Gold Coast barristers called for the adoption of a "healthy imperial policy", which would entail recognizing "the authority of the Kings and Chiefs, strengthening their influence, and working through them" (Casely-Hayford 1970 [1903], 114), they needed to prepare studies of the "aboriginal State System" and its "Constitutional History" (ibid., xi–xiii), a task which was performed with reference to liberal Western models. Instead of referring to traditional stool histories and the spirit world, the origins of political and legal institutions were traced to the human nature innate in every individual, and from which everything evolves. For instance, Sarbah quotes scholars and statesmen of both antiquity and modernity when hypothesizing about the origins of the decision-making bodies of Akan communities:

> It is universally admitted that wherever there is an assemblage of persons united together for common purposes or ends, there must be some notion of law; for mankind have, as Cicero observed, a genius for law. "That there must be

> a supreme power in every state or in every self-dependent community," says Paterson, "is an axiom which cannot be explained, but which must nevertheless be assumed. Even in the rudest forms of state there is a similar power, whether lodged in the patriarch or the elders of the tribe, and it is usually found to assume by turns a legislative, a judicial, and an executive phrase. This supreme power is only a synonym for that human voice, which cannot be resisted by any one individual or by any minor combination of them short of the majority; for whenever one resists it, all the other individuals readily combine consciously or unconsciously to uphold it."
>
> The family group being the unit of society among the peoples on the Gold Coast, Asanti, and neighbouring states, in the head or patriarch of the family resides the supreme power. The towns scattered over the country have grown from villages originally founded and occupied by single family groups, the members whereof, bound together by ties of kindred, possessed rules of life naturally simple, which were observed more because they were in accordance with the general notions, views, and convictions obtaining or current among them, than from any undesirable results their violation or breach may cause. As the family group gets larger, and the village community grows, and the households increase in number, the public or general affairs of the community are guided by the patriarch of the family, now the headman of the village, who acts with the assistance of the village council composed of the heads of the other family groups or households and others, usually old men. The village council thus represents the fountainhead of the common life, and its determination finds expression in the popular voice. (Sarbah 1904, 20–21)

Here chieftaincy arises from a need to prevent social disorder and not from the necessity to engage in sacrificial exchanges with the ancestors and gods, and, similarly, power emanates from the community that the chief represents and not from the spirit world. Both Sarbah and Casely-Hayford drew attention to the councils at every level of political decision-making and emphasized how the rulers of every grade were always responsible to these bodies for their activities. Therefore the chief is not "a despot or other irresponsible person, but is, as a matter of fact, the first among his equals, and controlled by them in the Council which represents the whole people and expresses their will" (Sarbah 1968 [1906], 235–236). Thus the councils for the "aborigines" should be what their parliament is for the British (ibid., 236). Ultimately, if these principles are guarded and followed faithfully one would have "a perfect system, which, properly developed and worked, would usher in a new civilization" (Casely-Hayford 1970 [1903], 254). However, in this reformist vision, this system of chiefly rule would be applied only to local-level governance. The native government would be encompassed by "a well-informed central government, with a Science Department" that would encourage foreign investments, electrification programmes, and introduce all sorts of "modern conveniences" (ibid., 115).

At certain points in their ethnographic and historical descriptions the Gold Coast reformers do address the all-embracing nature of religion in traditional society. For instance, Casely-Hayford states very plainly that "[o]vershading and permeating the political, judicial, and social economy

of the Aborigines is that system of faith and worship known as Fetishism" (ibid., 101) but he does not elaborate on how fetishism is actually present in those social domains. Similarly, he asserts that "[t[he King, in the Native State System, is the Spiritual Head of his people" (ibid., 106) but does discuss how the system could be seen as being built on spiritual ideas. Sarbah (1904, 15–16) touches on the same subject when he talks about how a person's rights are in "no way forfeited, diminished, impaired, or affected by change of religious opinions", except if he "forsakes heathenism for Christianity", whereupon he will not be able "perform the necessary stool ceremonies" and thus will not be able to ascend to a traditional stool. The manner in which religion is perceived as an "opinion" of a person-cum-citizen suggests that the Gold Coast barristers were the first to offer some sort of a theoretical model, even if a meagre one, for the separation of religion and politics. Since the "new civilization" that they strove for resembled a modern secular state, the religious significance of chieftaincy is minimized in their ethnographic descriptions and theories. The close link between chieftaincy and religion is acknowledged but it is enveloped by the larger idea of a secular political community that relies on representation, science, and capitalist economy.

Ultimately, this model belongs to the same liberal tradition that provided the intellectual background for the practices of administrators, missionaries, and catechists who drew the lines of demarcation between religion and politics in the convert communities of rural villages. But more importantly, what was established was a prominent reference point for twentieth-century discussions of chieftaincy, where it was increasingly perceived as part of politics. As Richard Rathbone (2008, 479) puts it, the Gold Coast lawyers provided "a rough template" of Akan society for subsequent scholars and administrators. In particular, they were an inspiration for those Ghanaian nationalists, most notably J. W. De Graft Johnson (1971 [1928], 35–41) and J. B. Danquah (1997 [1961], 18–33), who maintained that a modern nation-state could draw on indigenous political traditions.

The indirect rule system incorporated chieftaincy into the colonial administration but as an administrative arm rather than a representative institution. Nevertheless, as indicated above, the conception of chiefs as elected leaders who represented their people was ideologically valuable for British colonialism in Ghana and many of the original ideas of Sarbah, Casely-Hayford, and others were discovered and studied by the administrators; complemented and supported by the work of government anthropologists such as Rattray, who was thoroughly familiar with, and often referred to, the writings of the Gold Coast lawyers, and who provided the fullest ethnographic description and theoretical interpretation of what he called "the Ashanti constitution". His approach combined evolutionary thinking with the conservative and liberal folk models typical of his time. Rattray's remarks echoed what Sarbah had written a little less than three decades earlier, when he posited the "family" as the basic communal unit under the headship of the patriarch. From there "[t]he family had expanded into the clan, both had merged into the tribe, now the tribes were to merge into the nation under a King" (Rattray 1929, 74). Correspondingly, the king and the chiefs at different levels stood in a similar relation to their domains

as the family elder stood to his household. According to Rattray, it was the "quest of common safety" that had made these groups form unions; beyond that, they were allowed to preserve their autonomy, and they forcefully resisted any intrusion into their internal affairs from any external authority. Hence, Rattray ultimately described the kingdom as a "loosely bound confederacy", where the principle of decentralization prevailed (ibid., 404–405). Historically what had taken place was analogous to the dawn of feudal England:

> Osai Tutu, Chief of the Territorial Division at Kumasi, and hitherto holding a position similar to that of any of the surrounding chiefs, (Mampon, Kumawu, Offinsu, Juaben, Assumegya), now became more than a primus inter pares, which at most he may already have been: he became Asante Hene (King of Ashanti). He succeeded to a tribal organization which he strove to form into a state. The Territorial Divisions of many tribes became a kingdom, the men of many tribes became its citizens; the oath of allegiance superseded the kindred tie which had hitherto alone 'conferred the privilege to command obedience and alone imposed the obligation to obey commands'. A silent and unnoticed revolution took place with regard to land tenure which was in conformity with the main characteristic of feudalism. A kind of multiple proprietorship arose. The King became the superior owner of all land, i.e. soil, in the kingdom, but this claim coexisted with many grades of inferior ownership right down a descending scale until the inferior property of the family land-holder was reached. There were other analogies of the feudal system. Like William I, after Hastings, Osai Tutu found himself surrounded by a number of powerful lords, and a host of notables in his own territorial division at Kumasi, who demanded recognition for their services. Mampon was made Chief of the 'Silver Stool'. Kumawu and Assumegya were accorded certain privileges. (Ibid., 76)

The events and agreements that in the stool histories of various chiefdoms were linked to the sacrifices to the spirit world that preceded the war against Denkyira (as discussed in Chapter 2) were now translated into the logic of conquest theory, where a victorious warring king redistributes the rewards of his conquests to his aristocratic allies.

However, there was something profoundly liberal in the feudal. Although the king was seen as the founder of his kingdom and the owner of its lands, his position was ultimately considered to depend on the consent of his people. Accordingly, Rattray emphasized the importance of councils as decision-making bodies but, even more radically, he concluded that the individual citizen was really the focal point of the whole system and that the political process among the Asante was democratic in the full sense of the term:

> We pride ourselves, I believe, on being a democratic people and flatter ourselves that our institutions are of a like nature. An Ashanti who was familiar alike with his own and our Constitution would deny absolutely our right to apply this term either to ourselves or to our Constitution. To him a democracy implies that the affairs of the Tribe (the State) must rest, not in the keeping of the few, but in the hands of the many, i.e. must not alone be the concern of what we should term

> 'the chosen rulers of the people', but should continue to be the concern of a far wider circle. To him the State is literally a *Res Publica*; it is every one's business. The work of an Ashanti citizen did not finish when by his vote he had installed a Chief in office. […] The rights and duties of the Ashanti democrat were really only beginning after (if I may use a homely analogy) the business of the ballot-box was over. In England, the Government and House of Commons stand between ourselves and the making of our laws, but among the Ashanti there was not any such thing as government apart from the people. (Ibid., 406–407; italics in the original)

Even though Rattray's theory of the history and disposition of the "Ashanti constitution" was thoroughly political, he wrote extensively on the chief's role as an intermediary between people and the spirit world and the ritual duties involved. He even claimed that the efforts of the government to sponsor chieftaincy would fail if, at the same time, policies that undermined "old religious beliefs", like promoting Christian missionary work, were endorsed (ibid., 405–408). During his tenure as the government anthropologist Rattray's ideas and expertise were not enthusiastically welcomed by those of his colleagues who were conducting the actual administrating (see, e.g., TNA CO 96 667/2a). However, his key propositions about the decentralized and democratic nature of the Asante polity were revived in the mid-1930s when the colonial government decided to restore the "Ashanti Confederacy" to the form it was presumed to have had before 1874.

Secular origins?

The political history leading to the "restoration" can be outlined as follows. The pre-colonial Asante kingdom that had grown powerful through warfare and trade during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see, e.g., Arhin 1967; McCaskie 1980b; 1984; 1995; Wilks 1975; Yarak 1990) was severely weakened by the British military invasion in 1874 (Lewin 1978, 43–47). The British retreated back to the coast, but the previously overwhelming authority of the Kumasi officeholders was now challenged by "secessionist" chiefdoms (ibid., 85–109), disgruntled commoners (see Wilks 1975, 534–543), and "cultic movements" (see McCaskie 1981, 129–133; Akyeampong and Obeng 1995, 502–504). Finally, after the death of *Asantehene* Kwaku Dua Kuma in 1884, the kingdom was plunged into a long and brutal armed conflict between the supporters of two rival candidates for kingship, namely Agyeman Prempeh and Yaw Twereboanna. Agyeman Prempeh emerged victorious in 1888, but had to redistribute a number of villages, honorary titles, gold, and ceremonial objects as rewards to his chiefly allies (McCaskie 1984). The young ruler sought to restore the kingdom to its former greatness and waged wars against the rebellious northern chiefdoms (Lewin 1978, 135–176), but a British military expedition sent to seize Kumasi in 1896 put an end to his efforts. The Asante capital was ransacked and Prempeh and some of his senior chiefs were taken prisoner and later sentenced to prolonged exile in the Seychelles Islands from which the survivors returned

only in 1924, and only in the capacity of "private individual" (Boahen 2003a; McCaskie 2003). In 1900 the occupation was disrupted by a period of insurgency (McCaskie 2000a, 76–79; 2007, 158–161) or "the last of the Anglo-Asante wars" (Boahen 2003b). After suppressing the uprising in 1901, the British officially annexed the territories "heretofore known as Ashanti" to "His Majestys's dominions" (Wilks 1975, 661–662).

The Asante kingship was now abolished, and the kingdom disbanded, to be replaced by a number of independent 'kingdoms' or 'states' (see, e.g., Tordoff 1965, 82–321). At the outset, the objective of colonial rule was to isolate Kumasi from other chiefdoms, thereby negating its position as the capital of the former kingdom. In the words of the then Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, "[t]he officious, unjust, and often cruel interference, in the past, of the Coomassie chiefs with the internal affairs of the outlying tribes having been the cause of perennial dissatisfaction, the obvious policy of the Administration was to break off all political connection between the two" and therefore the Kumasi chiefs were "strictly forbidden to obtrude in matters that did not concern their proper territories" (Fuller 1921, 253). The insurgent chiefs who had been removed from office, imprisoned or killed were now replaced by "British clients", many of whom might not have been eligible for the offices they came to occupy (see McCaskie 1986, 8–17; Tordoff 1965, 148–159). Similarly, those chiefdoms that had taken active part in the insurgency were punished and those who had been 'loyal' to the British were rewarded: the former lost subjects and territories that were redistributed among the latter. Furthermore, a number of 'sub-chiefs' had their stools elevated to a higher rank than that which they had previously occupied, thereby being separated from their former superiors and becoming chiefs of independent divisions of colonial Ashanti (PRRAC 1984, 18).

By the early 1930s, however, the colonial administration had come to the conclusion that the policy of disintegration had been a mistake and plans for its reversal were drawn up (TNA CO 96/715/3b). Stool debts, succession disputes, destoolments, and abdications were a growing problem and according to the colonial governor, "more disturbances [were taking place] in Ashanti than in any other administrative area of the Gold Coast" (TNA CO 96/711/16a). Such troubles appeared to be especially serious in those chiefdoms that had been created by the administration, which, according to the annual administrative report of 1934, suffered from "either lack of knowledge of, or a lack of respect for, the Customary law of Ashanti". In the "old system" these problems had been dealt with by the *Asantehene* and now it was seen as urgent that "some central authority" be established to "ensure that customary law […] is strictly observed" (TNA CO 96/718/4). The Great Depression of the 1930s played no small part in these developments. It had already been one of Lugard's (1922, 230) tenets that the indirect rule system had to enjoy "some measure of financial independence" and now that the coffers in London were emptying (see TNA CO 96/702/3) this tenet had to be taken very seriously. In other colonies earlier experiments with introducing a poll tax system operated by government employees had failed and now it was admitted that the task of collecting taxes should be assigned to traditional authorities (TNA CO 96/700/14a). In Asante this was seen as

only natural as "[t]he essence of their former system of Government […] was based on the right of the chiefs to claim monetary and social support from their subjects in return for the lands which they held from the stools" (TNA CO 96/662a). Following Lugard's (1922, 230–255) proposal of direct taxation, the chiefs would collect taxes from their subjects and the revenue would be used pay salaries to their personnel and to "inaugurate schemes of development". Separate "Stool treasuries" for the chiefs had been established, but someone was needed to supervise the taxation to ensure that levels were not excessive and that resulting revenue was used for the benefit of the community (TNA CO 96/711/16a). Meanwhile, it had become clear that in those chiefdoms where the "traditional allegiance" had been altered by administrative rearrangements following the conquest, there was no willingness to pay taxes. Therefore making the indirect rule system financially sustainable in Asante was seen to require its reunification (TNA CO 96/706/7a).

As a solution for administrative problems, the colonial government proposed the "restoration of the old Ashanti Confederacy". The detailed construction of this "colonial hybrid", as McCaskie (1990, 62) has called it, and its implications have already been discussed extensively by others (e.g. Busia 1968 [1951], 165–217; Tordoff 1965, 286–401; Berry 2001, 35–102) and it is not necessary to review those works here. At this juncture all I wish to highlight are two aspects of the restoration that are particularly interesting for the topic at hand. Firstly, I examine why the colonial administration deemed it necessary to 'remake' the social contract that they thought had brought the pre-colonial kingdom into existence, and secondly, how chieftaincy was defined almost exclusively in political and legal terms, while its religious foundation was pushed to the background and religion in the new polity became a matter of citizens' 'opinion'.

As many historians have pointed out (e.g. McCaskie 1995, 398), and even some contemporaries conceded (e.g. TNA CO 96 705/17a), it is rather questionable whether the government actually restored anything when they installed Agyeaman Prempeh's nephew, Osei Agyeaman Prempeh II, as the new *Asantehene* in 1935 and claimed to have brought back "ancient political institutions" (TNA CO 96/715/3c). After all, the Asante chiefs had already recognized the old king as the *Asantehene* when he had returned from exile in 1924 and he had even performed many of his royal ritual functions although converted to Christianity (Tordoff 1965, 205–212; see also Akyeampong 1999, 300–305; McCaskie 1983, 198–199; 2005, 507–508). The administrators, however, did not acknowledge such a continuum, maintaining that they had actually been capable of bringing an obsolete kingdom back to life in a modernized form. As already indicated above, the idea of a confederacy was consistent with Rattray's notion of decentralization and democracy as constitutive principles of the pre-colonial polity, a formulation which of course had its precedents in older Gold Coast ethnographic and historical traditions. The administrators followed Rattray in assuming that the kingdom had initially been a military alliance of independent tribes, which had then developed into a permanent polity presided over by a king. The chiefs of different tribes had taken an oath of allegiance to the king and

become his advisors. The system was characterized as "ultra-democratic", since everyone starting from the level of households had a say in collective matters. The chiefs of different ranks jealously guarded their autonomy, and the "federal principle" that brought the chiefdoms under the direct authority of the king became active only in times of war and national crises. According to a government memorandum, the task of the administrators was now to convert "what was mainly a military organisation of intermittent activity into a civil institution with regular administrative and judicial functions" (PRRAC 1984, 7–8).

Since the kingdom had originally been a "voluntary confederation" it was necessary for the administrators to inquire the chiefs and elders of each 'native state' in colonial Ashanti whether they wished to join the confederation or not. Altogether twenty five chiefdoms produced their answers in writing and almost one third of them were in the negative (see ibid., 45–104). [64] The majority of the objections were overruled by the government on the grounds that the chiefdoms resisting the new union were not ethnically "true Ashanti" and therefore their consent was not indispensable. The refusal of three "true Ashanti" chiefdoms posed a bigger problem, but that too was circumvented by a rather unusual calculation, in which the written consents and refusals given by the chiefs and elders were transformed by colonial officials into the votes or 'opinions' of individuals living in the chiefdoms. Thus they summed up the populations of two "dissident chiefdoms" and then added to this number a half of the population of the third dissident, in which they said existed a significant pro-confederacy opposition. When this figure was considered as a proportion of the "total true-Ashanti population", the outcome was that only 7.44 percent of the Asante opposed the confederacy. The government concluded that their decision was guided by majority democracy:

> The significant fact about these figures is not that the opponents are so many, but that they are so few. It must be emphasized that no pressure of any sort has been brought to bear on the chiefs to give their vote in favour of the restoration […] [T]he documents as a whole reveal the burning desire of the people to receive back their nationhood […] This being so, it would not be just that the ambitions of the great majority of the people should be thwarted by the local jealousies of the few. The recommendation of the Government […] therefore is that the dissident voices should be disregarded and […] the confederacy should be restored under an Asantehene. (Ibid., 16–17)

Curiously enough, the colonial state felt that it had been able to make history repeat itself as the people under its rule had given their consent through their representatives and reaffirmed the social contract formed by their ancestors.

64 The content and style of the letters from various chiefdoms differ drastically. Some are merely cordial but laconic acceptances of the proposition, while some include long accounts of kinship relations, land boundaries, ceremonial objects, gift exchanges, etc. The matter of human sacrifices preceding the formation of the kingdom is brought up in a letter from Edweso, where the arrangement is described at length and the *Asantehene* is accused of violating it.

"*The Asantehene and His Excellency the Governor, Sir Arnold Hodson, K.C.M.G.*" *(TNA CO 1069/44).* Asantehene *Prempeh II was born in the late years of the pre-colonial kingdom, but was in many respects a child of the colonial era (McCaskie 1990, 61). He had a Wesleyan-Methodist upbringing but later became an Anglican, following the example of his predecessor who had converted to Christianity though the Church of England missionaries while in exile (Pobee 2009, 240).*

Finally, it was given a formal expression in a ceremony in which the chiefs took an oath of allegiance "in customary fashion" to the *Asantehene* (TNA CO 96/715/3d). After this contract had been recreated, the commissioners and the chiefs could start discussing the proper positions of the stools in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, every chief was considered as having "the natural desire" to obtain for himself "some higher place, rank or influence than his stool formerly occupied" as a reward for his support of the *Asantehene* re-installment (TNA CO 96/706/7a).

Now that the Asante polity had been conceptualized in the language of contractualism, religion and ritual were given a role in its symbolic legitimation. In the historical overview of the "old confederacy" prepared by the colonial officials, Komfo Anokye's position as the great *sacrificer* was not mentioned; rather he was referred to as the person responsible for the transition from "status to contract"; that is, he had organized the kin-based tribes into a political union:

> Under his [i.e. Obiri Yeboa's] successor, Osei Tutu, the first Asantehene, arose the Ashanti confederacy, its principal author being his minister, the priest Okomfo Anokyi. Again the organization was essentially military but Anokyi's genius introduced several civil characteristics of great importance. One of the most significant of these latter was the surrender and destruction of the old "family" stools of the Amansie tribes [i.e. allied chiefdoms] and their replacement by new "political" stools, conferred by Osei Tutu upon the various Amansie chiefs, while paramount above them all stood the Golden Stool made by Anokye for Osei Tutu – the Golden Stool which ever since has been regarded as containing the soul of the Ashanti nation. (PRRAC 1984, 6)

In the administrators' notes, the Golden Stool appeared primarily as a national symbol sanctified by religious ideas rather than a source of divine power for the Asante ruler (ibid., 13–14). Royal rituals were described from a similar standpoint: "[t]hroughout the rites the recurrence of the phrases 'Asanteman' and 'Asantehene' indicate that it is towards the Ashanti nation that the minds of the worshippers are turned" (ibid., 14). Hence, following the ideas of the Gold Coast lawyers and Rattray, the Asante kingdom was considered to have its origins in the secular: it had originally been a 'political' union, which was afterwards a given a religious seal. If the missionary discourses had been mostly 'synchronic' in the sense that they were about the definition of rights and freedoms, models like this introduced a historical perspective, which was in line with the assumptions of the modernist social sciences about the chronological relationship between religion and politics in society (see Asad 2003, 190–193).

Otherwise, the model of the Asante polity as a community of rights-bearing, free individuals, which was nascent in the petitions of the Christians, had its large-scale ideological formalization in the new confederacy. The chiefs were still referred to as the "spiritual heads" of their people, but only for those whose practice the "Ashanti religion", since religion is clearly separated from allegiance to a chief: "the people will receive, as now, the assistance of the missionary societies and there will be no interference with the teaching of religion to those who desire it" (PRRAC 1984, 4). This assurance was also given by the governor in his speech to the Asante people delivered in the restoration ceremony:

> Henceforth, the ancient loyalties of the Ashanti are to be officially recognised and sanctioned; *every man in these divisions will enjoy his rights, and render due service, under the form of government familiar to his ancestors*; all will pay homage to the Asantehene, and venerate the Golden Stool, that *symbol of unity* among you for many generations.

> In this restoration I must point out there is no new creation but a return to former institutions. There will be no alteration in the principles of justice, *no danger to any man's liberty, no interference with religious opinion or observance*. These essentials of good government will remain. The domestic affairs and property rights of properly constituted divisions will not be interfered with unless the native authorities concerned invite assistance nor will the loyalty of any Chief to the British Government be obscured. (TNA CO 96/715/3c; italics added)

The discourse about the rights and liberties of individuals, let alone electoral democracy, belonged largely to public speeches, newspaper articles, and speculative memoranda, however. A very different story emerges if one reads, for example, The Native Authority Ordinance issued by the governor at the time of the restoration. Instead of citizens, such documents talk about 'natives', who are "persons of African descent" and "subject to the jurisdiction of native tribunals". They do not mention decentralization or democracy as attributes of the native authority system, but rather list activities that fall within the native authorities' sphere of influence such as, for instance, the regulation of gambling, cutting of trees, consumption of "intoxicating liquors", or preventing the spread of locusts. While the legal parameters for the exercise of authority are explicit, the high liberal principles are left implicit in expressions used, for example, in relation to the election and installation of a chief, which should be "in accordance with native law and custom" (TNA CO 96/721/1a); naturally, the final decision on matters concerning "native law and custom" was always in the hands of the chief commissioner and the governor (TNA CO 96/753/16). However, this was not just a matter of a gap between colonial ideology and practice. The record of decisions and actions taken by the new *Asantehene* and his Confederacy Council during the late 1930s and the 40s suggest a process of concentration of political and economic power in the kingship. This was evident, for instance, in the destoolings of paramount chiefs (e.g. TNA CO 96/741/7), alterations to customary laws (TNA CO 96/753/16), and transfers of villages from other chiefdoms to Kumasi jurisdiction (TNA CO 96/813/12).

The restoration had been opposed by a group of non-Asante African nationalists and a handful of dissatisfied chiefs (see TNA CO 96/715/4; PRRAC 1984, 111–119). As the initial campaign to prevent it had failed, the dissidents later filed destoolment charges against the *Asantehene* (TNA CO 96/724/9) and attacked the king in the press (TNA CO 96/728/18a). In the words of the governor, they were propagating the view that "the Confederacy was in fact not the democratic institution which they had been led to believe in the first instance, but rather it was an autocracy with the Asantehene at its head as a powerful and despotic ruler" (ibid.). At the time, the *Asantehene* was supported fully by the colonial establishment (ibid.), but in years to come, the support would gradually diminish. So-called young

men,[65] "the teachers and clerks, traders and storekeepers, lorry owners and drivers" (Tordoff 1968, 167), felt that they were not represented in the Native Authority system and the left wing of the growing decolonization movement adopted their anti-chief cause.

The succeeding chapter explores how chieftaincy became increasingly politicized during, and right after, Ghana's independence as it was transformed into a divisive issue in party politics as well as a strong nationalistic symbol. In that context I will also discuss how Christian attitudes toward fetishism, or traditional religion, have become more complicated as some elements of what was known as fetishism have been adopted as a part of nationalistic imagery, while others are still abhorred as backwardness or idolatry.

65 The Twi term *nkwankwaa* has often been translated into English as young men. The term does not, however, refer to age but rather to commoner status in one's natal chiefdom. In the colonial period it was used particularly to refer to educated non-office holders who resented the chiefly rule (see Allman 1990, 268; Tordoff 1968, 168).

5. From politics to culture

In January 2001, when I interviewed the late *Amakomhene* Akosa Yiadom II in his palace, I showed him a copy of the Amakom stool history recorded in 1963 by the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. I had photocopied the document in the archives and at that point I understood very little about its history and significance. The elderly chief first took a quick glance at the cover to see who had authored the history, and then started reading it, turning the pages hurriedly and forcefully. After finishing it, he raised his eyes from the paper and said to me: "These are all lies. This must be corrected." In 1961 his uncle, *Amakomhene* Mensa Yiadom, had been removed from office, imprisoned, and had his properties seized by the government because he had opposed the ruling party of independent Ghana headed by President Kwame Nkrumah. The history at hand had been produced to legitimate the succession of a government-sponsored candidate to the Amakom stool (see Kallinen 2004, 58–62). Now, four decades later, the *Amakomhene* reminisced about how he had thought of challenging the ruling party candidate back then and making a bid for the stool vacated by his uncle. Ultimately he had decided against it, as he had been "very young, just graduated from college". Ghana's first *coup d'ĕtat* in 1966 had eventually overthrown the Nkrumahist chiefs, and Mensa Yiadom, among others, had been re-installed. The *Amakomhene* concluded our conversation by stating that "all governments of Ghana, from Nkrumah to Rawlings, have tried to destroy the Asante kingdom". On the one hand, it could be expected that an Asante chief would mention Nkrumah and J. J. Rawlings as examples of heads of state who had promoted anti-chief or anti-Asante policies (why this is so will become evident below), but on the other, the two names can also be associated with two distinct but interwoven discourses about chieftaincy. In the first case, chieftaincy was integrated into the clientelist system of a one-party state, while in the second, chieftaincy was increasingly defined as a part of 'national culture', which had to be kept separate from 'politics', not to mention 'religion'. However, both discourses are distinctively post-colonial, in the sense that whatever meaning or value chieftaincy was understood to have, it had it in relation to the post-colonial state.

During the first decades of independence the strong colonial state was replaced by authoritarian governments, often convened by the military, and the chieftaincy institution was encompassed by state power and ideology. Scholars like Mahmood Mamdani (1996, 8) have asserted that in many African countries the new post-colonial state apparatus in fact continued

the legacy of indirect rule. This meant that the old structures of power were "reproduced by the postcolonial state's support of chiefships and its investment in 'traditional' culture" (Piot 2010, 6). In ideological terms this implied an ambiguous position for chieftaincy both as an adversary and an ally. On the one hand, it could be seen as a relic of a 'tribalistic' or even 'feudal' past and thus an enemy of progress and development; furthermore, the chiefs themselves were viewed as collaborators with the former colonial masters. Hence the institution was to be reformed with a strong hand by the state authorities, who sought to gain better control of the rural communities through it. On the other hand, on a more abstract level, chieftaincy was understood as a symbol of what was distinctively Ghanaian or African. It offered an ideological bridge that crossed the divides of colonial conquest and decolonization, enabling contact with what was considered to have been pure and harmonious traditional culture. In this scenario, chieftaincy was an important part of national culture that unified the citizenry and therefore it should not be allowed to become tainted by partisan politics.

In this chapter I discuss post-colonial-era chieftaincy as a 'politico-cultural' institution, using the policies of Nkrumah and Rawlings regimes as examples. Thus my intention is not to write an entire 'political biography' of chieftaincy in the post-colonial period, reviewing all the changes in policies and legislation of the different governments (for such treatments see, e.g., Arhin Brempong 2001), nor to investigate thoroughly the manoeuvrings of particular chiefs or politicians (for those see, e.g., Rathbone 2000). However, by concentrating on these two regimes I hope to shed light on the two-sided ideological nature of traditional political institutions that has been considered characteristic of Cold War-era Africa. The last part of the chapter returns to the problems of secularization, describing how the concept of national culture, and chieftaincy as part of it, has come under attack from the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches who have assumed a critical stance toward both traditionalism and secular politics.

'Comrade chief'

In his philosophical and political writings Nkrumah subscribed to the notion of traditional African society as a site of humanism and egalitarianism, but he undoubtedly regarded the chieftaincy of his own time as a colonial invention. If liberal-capitalist ideology had posited an individual who was selfish and competitive by nature, and had to form contracts in order to protect himself from the selfishness of others, African socialism, as it was envisioned by Nkrumah, was based on an idea of man as "a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain inward dignity, integrity and value" (Nkrumah 1964, 68). To him this view of human nature was "refreshingly opposed to the Christian idea of the original sin and the degradation of man" (ibid.), while traditional African society of pre-colonial times had been a realization of this principle. Indigenous institutions, such as the clan, had emphasized the initial equality of all men and society's responsibility for its every member. In this condition, the formation of classes in the Marxist

sense was impossible. Therefore, in traditional society, "no sectional interest could be regarded as supreme; nor did legislative and executive power aid the interest of any particular group" (ibid., 69). However, all this was changed when colonialism introduced inequality to the black continent. The colonial system corrupted the Africans by privileging certain groups of people, among whom were "certain feudal-minded elements" who had been able to convince "the exploiter administration" that they possessed virtues that made them suitable for positions of power and authority (ibid., 69–70). Socialism in Africa meant a return to its egalitarian principles (ibid., 76–77) and those chiefs who had been "in league with imperialists" had to leave their offices (quoted in Rathbone 2000, 22–23).

Nevertheless, chieftaincy itself could not simply be abolished. Even though Nkrumah (1963, 63) explicitly identified chieftaincy as one of the "traditional forces that can impede progress" (ibid., 83), he had to admit that the institution was connected to Ghanaian society so closely and in so many ways that eliminating it by force would probably cause more harm than leaving it be. Instead, he was content to predict a "natural attenuation of chieftaincy under the impact of social progress" (ibid., 84). In the meantime, however, chieftaincy could be used by the government to "encourage popular effort" (ibid.). On the level of policy, this had two major consequences: the usage of chiefly offices as rewards in building and maintaining patron-client networks and the 'detribalization' of chieftaincy.

During and immediately after the dissolution of the colonial system the radical nationalist rulers of Ghana launched a number of regional and local government reforms that aimed to undermine the power of the chiefs. The very first local government reform in 1951, preceding the formal independence of the colony, created new decision-making bodies at the local level – local and district councils – which were meant to be "efficient, modern and democratic" and "wholly distinct from the traditional councils" of the chiefs; this meant, in the words of the then Minister of Local Government, a "transfer of power from the official and the chief to the common man" (quoted in Rathbone 2000, 30–31). Only two years later, the Asanteman Council compiled a memorandum for the Governor of the Gold Coast, wherein the chiefs stated that despite verbal assurances from the new government that it would maintain chieftaincy, the institution was actually "being divested of all of its influence and dignity" (PRAAD ARG 2/2/68a). However, by this time the colonial officials had given up their commitment to honouring 'ancient traditions' and made administrative efficiency a priority. For example, a colonial civil servant processing a paramount chief's complaint against the *Asantehene* in 1948 considered references to traditional histories or "Ethnological studies" as the basis for a successful case simply old fashioned:

> But the question cannot be decided on the grounds of historical rights alone, although the local people approach it in this light. *The Administration revived the Ashanti Confederacy, not because of historical rights, but as a convenient organization for local administration.* Contemporary local government policy places new emphasis upon transforming traditional institutions and rights into

> more modern administrative forms. Therefore the importance of traditional and historical claims is rapidly decreasing. (TNA CO 96/785/3a; italics added)

Similarly, the Confederacy Council had been told in 1949 in an "Emergency meeting" that "the Home Government would be strongly behind any movement for increasing representation of the people in the local government"; thus the chiefs and their elders who only a decade earlier had been considered the true representatives of the people would now have to make room for the 'young men' in the Native Courts (TNA CO 96/791/2a). This initiative was in agreement with large-scale policy changes. For instance, Lord Hailey (1956, 526–527) in his famous *African Survey* assumed that the "political element" in the Gold Coast wanted to replace traditional institutions everywhere with local government based on popular elections, confining the chiefs "to the exercise of the ceremonial or ritual functions dictated by custom". (This, again, reflects the view according to which 'political' is the core and 'ritual' the surface.) In Hailey's opinion, there was really no other way as the Native Authority reform had been introduced too late and not efficiently enough to take root. Now that the colonial administration had started to withdraw its support for chiefly rule as it prepared for the handover of power, the traditional rulers were at the mercy of the 'political element'. The Asante chiefs' response was to join forces with the regionally-based opposition party, the National Liberation Movement (NLM), which had actually been founded by 'young men' who had previously held strong anti-chief stances. The chiefs, the *Asantehene* and the Golden Stool became powerful figureheads for the short-lived movement that called for Asante autonomy within, and later secession from, the future nation-state of Ghana. However, although gaining support in Asante, the party lost the national elections leading up to independence, and its agenda was not favoured by the colonial masters who were supervising the process of political independence either. Right after the formal independence a law was passed to prohibit all political parties "based on tribal or religious allegiances" and the *Asantehene* and most of chiefs retreated (see Allman 1990, 272–279; 1993, 162–192) .

When in power Nkrumah's socialist government sought to convert the chiefs into becoming supporters of the ruling party, the Convention People's Party (CPP) (see, e.g., PRAAD ARG 2/2/115a). This was achieved mainly by paying monetary allowances to chiefs loyal to the new regime and granting the status of "traditional state" to their chiefdoms or villages meaning that they would thus become equal with, or even outrank, their former overlords (see PRAAD ARG 2/2/105). Chiefs who supported the CPP were also rewarded with governmental positions: for example, positions on the boards of directors of government companies and appointments to Ghana's foreign missions (Arhin Brempong 2001, 41). Those who resisted, and had been members of the NLM, were silenced by public humiliations and outright threats (Rathbone 2000, 110–112). The *realpolitik* nature of the chieftaincy policies of the young post-colonial state is laid bare in a regional administrator's letter to the Ministry of Justice reflecting on the creation of new "traditional states":

> …in the event consideration was given to the elevation to paramountcy of those chiefs who were active supporters of the Party or other such private persons who subsequently became chiefs. Initially, therefore, the new elevations served a twofold purpose – firstly as a reward to the chiefs concerned for their loyalty to the Party and secondly through them to bring party ideological education to the Ashanti Region House of Chiefs. […] The Asantehene has never been happy about the new creations and […] it would be wrong to interpret his silence on the issue as consent; he has only been forced to acquiesce in a policy which he was powerless to oppose. (PRAAD ARG 2/2/105b)

As chiefly offices had become rewards for faithfulness to the party and the state, their uneven distribution among party members started to cause concern. When Nkrumah visited Kumasi in March 1962 he pointed out that "in Ashanti, and to some extent, in other parts of the country, matters relating to chieftaincy are causing a great deal of unrest and strife in our Party". Apparently, for some people becoming a chief had become more important than being a loyal cadre:

> Here and there a chief's stool becomes vacant. Two Party comrades contest for enstoolment. One succeeds. Immediately the loser of the stool contest becomes aggrieved and turns against the Party and Government. Not only that, he at once sets out to undermine the successful comrade who has been enstooled. Both of them have supporters on their sides so unnecessary strife ensues and the Party splits over this issue of chieftaincy.
>
> In future the Party and Government will take a very serious view of such matters and adopt very drastic measures to correct this state of affairs in our towns and villages. Government will for instance quickly remove any person from a traditional area who indulges in such disruptive activities and thereby tends to undermine not only the progress and prosperity of the villages and towns but also the solidarity of the Party. (Nkrumah 1962, 1–2)

Instead of trying to abolish chieftaincy, the Nkrumah regime ultimately created a system of clientelist chieftaincy, often considered typical of post-colonial Africa (Mamdani 1996, 287–290). Just as in the colonial period chieftaincy was encompassed by a modern state apparatus, the crucial difference was that now both the politicians and civil servants that ran the apparatus, and the chiefs who presided over the traditional councils, were considered citizens of the nation state. This enabled the kind of "elite assimilation" that Jean-François Bayart (1993, 155–176) has described in many parts of the continent: a party comrade could become a chief and a chief a party comrade.

In addition to eradicating the remnants of 'feudalism' and colonial rule, Nkrumah's major concern was tribalism. He advocated a secular state, where no religious institution or group would have a privileged position (Addo 1999, 194), and sought to repress all movements which expressed ethnic nationalism (Coe 2005, 60–61). This was also visible in the chieftaincy policies of his time. The government created separate bureaucratic bodies for the chiefs called Regional Houses of Chiefs that had the "power to consider any matter referred to it by a Minister or the [national legislative]

Assembly and at any time offer advice to any Minister" (PRAAD ARG 2/2/114a); mostly, however, their task was to handle appeals from chieftaincy disputes at the local level (ibid.). Thus chiefs who belonged to various ethnic groups and traditional kingdoms, but resided in a single government-created administrative region, were to convene to discuss matters of customary law. In the case of the Asante kingdom, however, this meant a breakup, since the Nkrumah government had decided to split the old colonial entity of Ashanti into two administrative areas, the Ashanti Region and the Brong-Ahafo Region. In principle, the split was not supposed to have any effect on the traditional allegiances of the chiefs of the two regions, but it was generally understood that by doing so the government sought to "break the back of what it considered as dangerous Asante nationalism" (Drah 1979, 147).[66] Through these measures the post-colonial government wanted to ensure that chieftaincy was 'administrative', and definitely not 'ethnic' or 'tribal', thereby recognizing chieftaincy, rather than kingship; and in a strict legal sense the *Asantehene* was now a chief *in* (not even *of*) one administrative region.

Chieftaincy and national culture

The place of 'tradition' or 'heritage' in the national culture of the modern Ghanaian state has been a controversial issue ever since the time of the independence for several reasons (see, e.g., McCaskie 2009, 138–143; Monfils 1977), and anthropologists have written about the topic extensively in a number of different contexts (see, e.g., Coe 2005; Schramm 2000; Steegstra 2005). On the whole, the problematic question with regards to national culture has been its idealized quality as a unifying category that transcends religious, political, ethnic, and linguistic divisions in society, but also something which is simultaneously in constant danger of becoming corrupted by 'partisan' ideologies. In fact, its origins can be traced to the missionary era, when 'culture' was demarcated as a religiously neutral sector of social life that did not pose a threat to the converts. Although the early missionaries labelled indigenous cosmologies as fetishism and the converts were cautioned to avoid traditional rituals in any way they could, paradoxically, the missionary project was also dependent on them. In order to make Christian teachings intelligible for their audiences the missionaries had to find indigenous terms to convey their message. Accordingly, there had to be cultural correspondences that helped the translation: for instance, a decision was made to start calling the Christian God by a name that was previously assigned to the creator god of the indigenous cosmology. In this way, Christianity and the indigenous cosmologies were seen as comparable and compatible – even though the latter was ultimately to be rejected (Meyer 1999, 52–62). This operation rested on a referential semiotic ideology, where

66 Even nowadays the composition of the kingdom is not compatible with the regional boundaries. The chiefdoms of the kingdom are located in the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Regions, but there are also Asante 'islands' in the Eastern and Volta Regions. Hence, there are Asante chiefs in four different Regional Houses.

words are understood as names of things and the link between the word and the thing is arbitrary, contingent on agreements made by the speakers (see Lambek 2013); it allowed for there being a local language and a culture – separable from religion – that could be directed to communicate the universal message of Christianity (see Keane 2007, 83–112).

Moreover, the missionaries had brought with them the European idea of a nation based on a common language, ethnicity, and history. Although the original vision had been one of separating the Christian community from traditional society, especially its rituals, this uncompromising attitude gradually started to change. Eventually, the ideas and practices of traditional society became distant and abstract for the Christians living in their own Salems or in the urban centres, and they began to evaluate them as parts of an objectified culture, removed from their original social context. In the course of this, many educated Christians concluded that not everything in the 'pagan past' was sinful and, correspondingly, not all of the Westerners' habits were worth adopting. So, when a new modern national identity was created, first Akan or Asante and later Ghanaian, some of the 'old customs' were used as its building blocks (Coe 2005, 29–52). This led to the cultivation of a national language, history, folklore, costume, and the like (see Peel 1989), but many traditional ritual forms were also incorporated. Consequently, pouring libations for the ancestors, drumming, and dancing could be considered 'Ghanaian cultural performances' separated from their earlier fetishist associations. A Christian person watching or listening to them as a member of the audience or even taking part in them as a performer would not be perceived as someone committing a religious act, and thus compromising his / her religious conviction, but rather as someone expressing his / her Ghanaian cultural identity. That has allowed such practices to become a part and parcel of all sorts of nationalistic events including Independence Day celebrations, political party rallies, and sporting competitions. Similarly, some elements of local ritual calendars have been promoted by the state as 'Ghanaian cultural festivals'. In a certain sense, they have become secular rituals connected to nationalist ideology, and more recently, also to tourism and commercialization (see Adrover 2013; Schramm 2004). Their exterior form might in many cases be very similar to traditional 'religious' rituals, but they are very different in the sense that the principal instigators of, and agents in, the rituals are the people who are considered to be performing them as a result of free will (in order to express identity, preserve heritage, and so on) and not under an ancestral or divine obligation (see Keane 1998, 19–23; 2002, 69–74).

Although its historical origins lie in missionary Christianity, the endorsement of national culture became the responsibility of state institutions in the post-colonial period (Coe 2005, 52) and hence has been understood to be mostly a secular state project. It was a priority for the Nkrumah regime which saw it as a potent weapon against tribalism (ibid., 60–65), but it was expanded to its fullest during the government of J. J. Rawlings in the 1980s and 1990s, when, for example, "cultural studies" became a compulsory subject in Ghanaian schools (ibid., 75–82). This endorsement of national culture was accompanied by legal reforms that

barred chiefs from participating in partisan politics at both grassroots and national levels. Rawlings had come to power by leading a military coup–cum–populist-socialist revolution, which was supposed to eradicate corruption and crime in the country. (These events are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.) In Rawlings' 'revolutionary ideology' the chiefs were perceived as elitists who should not have any important role in the politics of the country, and during the time of the coup many chiefs were subjected to violence by the military (Boafo-Arthur 2003, 127). Finally, when the period of military rule came to an end in 1992 and Ghana assumed a multiparty system, the new constitution stipulated that "[a] chief shall not take part in active party politics; and any chief wishing to do so and seeking election to Parliament shall abdicate his stool or skin" (CRG, Chapter 22, Article 276). However, chieftaincy was no longer greeted with antagonism – it was, rather, simply transferred from the category of politics to that of culture.

In its public contentions, the Rawlings government emphasized the meaning of chieftaincy as a cultural institution in which the ideals and virtues of traditional society were still preserved. For instance, in a public speech in 1999, Rawlings claimed that "being a chief is neither a profession nor an occupation but a mission to serve the interest of the people". He also promised "that the government will do everything possible to enhance and sustain the sanctity of the chieftaincy institution" (Nyinah 1999). To a certain extent, as part of a national culture that belonged to all citizens, chieftaincy was seen to be above the fights and bickering of day-to-day politics. Since the early 1990s chieftaincy affairs have been assigned to the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture in the institutional framework of the state. The "vision" of the ministry is to "preserve, sustain and integrate the regal, traditional and cultural values and practices to accelerate wealth creation and harmony for total national development" (Ghana Government Official Portal). The Regional Houses of Chiefs are its member organizations along with, for instance, the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, the National Theatre of Ghana, and the Pan-African Writers Association (ibid.). Hence, chieftaincy has become in some sense comparable with fine arts such as architecture, drama, and literature. In the new constitution the National House of Chiefs, a government body already established before Rawlings' time, was given the position of 'reviewer' of traditional culture:

> The National House of Chiefs shall […] (b) undertake the progressive study, interpretation and codification of customary law with a view to evolving, in appropriate cases, a unified system of rules of customary law, and compiling the customary laws and lines of succession applicable to each stool or skin; (c) undertake an evaluation of traditional customs and usages with a view to eliminating those customs and usages that are outmoded and socially harmful. (CRG, Chapter 22, Article 272)

Here a modern bureaucratic body is entrusted with a task of rationalization and 'purification' of the chieftaincy institution. It is expected to create and maintain 'national standards' for chieftaincy and at the same time abolish those of its characteristics that could offend modern sensibilities.

As one might expect, the exclusion of chiefs from politics by putting them on the pedestal of culture has not worked perfectly. The notion of 'cultural' chieftaincy has been challenged by those who think that the chiefs, as citizens of the nation state, should be accorded the same political rights as other Ghanaians, as well as by those who are sceptical about the chiefs actually staying out of politics; the former opinion is mostly expressed by the chiefs themselves (see Boafo-Arthur 2003, 144). The doubt about the political impartiality of the chiefs is a recurring topic in Ghanaian public debates. For instance, during the 2000 presidential elections, the people with whom I discussed party politics had a firm awareness of the *de facto* partisanship of chiefs. In Asante there seemed to be a shared understanding that the *Asantehene* and most of the paramount chiefs supported the opposition party candidate John Kufuor, who eventually won the elections. Kufuor himself is an Asante and a royal of the Kumasi Apagya stool. I saw him taking part in public ceremonies in the *Asantehene*'s palace on several occasions, and each time the crowd cheered him enthusiastically. Likewise, almost everyone could tell me who the 'NDC chiefs' were, that is, those few Asante paramounts that were considered to support the ruling party candidate. Of course, none of the chiefs expressed such views in public and sometimes the speculations about their political leanings were based on fairly superficial and doubtful observations; for instance, the way a chief and a candidate greeted each other in public might be read as a sign of support or opposition. The political press took part keenly in these discussions; for example, based on the assumption that the chiefs have a major influence on the voting decisions in their localities, the press would produce headlines about alleged declarations of support from the chiefs for particular candidates (see, e.g., Amoako-Attah 2000; Fredua Agyemang 2000). Most recently, the *Asantehene*'s alleged influence in the result of the 2012 presidential elections has been a heated topic (see e.g. Modern Ghana, 15th September 2013). Despite this kind of controversy, however, it is important to remain aware that the notion of national culture, and chieftaincy as a part of it, is not being directly challenged; it is really only the possibility of cleansing chieftaincy of mundane politics that is being problematized. Outright rejection of the idea of chieftaincy as culture has, in fact, come from certain Christian quarters.

Culture and religion

As discussed above, some of the ritual forms integral to traditional chieftaincy have become associated with Ghanaian national culture and in this respect they have developed secular meanings, shifting them from the domain of religious rituals to categories of 'ceremonies' and 'festivals', and thus becoming acceptable to members of mainstream Christian churches. However, simultaneously, they have also reconnected to religion. From at least the beginning of the twentieth century, the missionary view of indigenous

religious ideas and practices as 'heathenism' was disputed,[67] and, particularly from the 1960s and onwards, African theologians and intellectuals started to call for an 'africanization' or 'indigenization' of Christianity, which meant practising one's Christian faith without losing one's cultural identity. In practice 'africanization' has entailed such things as incorporating drumming and dancing into the church liturgy as well as giving Christian meanings to certain traditional concepts and symbols. However, it was always thought that this should never compromise the core message of Christianity and give way to syncretism, which the reformers thought had happened in many of the so-called African Independent Churches (Meyer 1992, 98–103). In Asante, a long-term proponent of such ideas has been the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kumasi, Peter Sarpong, who has reapplied chiefly titles, 'praise poems', and regalia to God, Christ, and the church functionaries (Obeng 1996, 129-130); but, maybe more controversially, he has made a number of positive statements about the pouring of libation, which is basically a ritual offering made by chiefs and traditional priests to the spirit world. According to Sarpong, it should have a central place in public functions, because it is "not demonic or evil, as some perceived, but rather it sought for blessings and other beneficial graces for the nation, its leaders and the entire population" (Modern Ghana, 10th March 2011). Hence, its overall favourable meaning should overshadow its non-Christian origins. We can, of course, see here the importance of the cultural continuity that the post-Vatican II Catholic Church has actively promoted,[68] but more specifically, it is obvious that the 'africanized' forms of Christianity have kept pace with nationalist ideology, as the Christian worshipper is perceived as a Ghanaian (or an African) and the rituals involved are considered to express that identity as well as bringing God's blessing to the nation and its representatives. Hence, the modern 'africanized' variants of Christianity seem to match the blueprint of religion in a secular nation-state: a person's first loyalty in 'this-worldly' existence belongs to the nation (see Asad 2003, 192–194).

Such incorporations are not possible for all Ghanaian Christians. Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, a movement that gained a strong footing in Ghanaian society during the 1980s and 1990s, sees the value of culture very differently. Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has been characterized as a 'cult of transformation' but also a 'cult of discontinuity',

67 In his political writings Casely-Hayford (1970 [1903], 104–106) called for a "national Church" and saw it as a convert's right to "sing his own native songs, and play his native airs in church".

68 II Vatican Council was an ecumenical council convened by Pope John XXIII between 1962 and 1965 which has been characterized as "the symbol of the church's openness to the modern world" (Hennesey n. d.). It promoted larger communal participation by giving a central role to local cultural forms in the church and establishing common ground with non-Christians (ibid.). It is said that after the council the Catholic Church's public role also changed from that of staunch critic of secular modernity to endorser of human rights and development ideologies. This had a major impact on church policies in many African countries (see Hinfelaar 2011).

because the converts are expected to make a complete break with their pre-conversion lives. Once the break has been made, the converts are to keep themselves separate from the surrounding social world by adhering to an ascetic moral code that prohibits most of its pleasures, and figures it as a domain governed by the devil. As noted in the beginning of Chapter 3, all forms of Christianity emphasize the importance of rupture and change in one way or another and for Ghanaian Pentecostals an important question is how to distance themselves from traditional 'pagan practices'. The interesting point is that pre-conversion ontologies are not abandoned as lies or delusions; rather, they are preserved and regularly engaged with. Consequently, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity accepts the cognitive claims of traditional religion concerning the existence of spirits and their powers, but it does not agree on the moral values attached to them. It demonizes the indigenous spirit world and urges the followers of true Christianity to combat the spirits as representatives of the devil (Meyer 1998a; Robbins 2004b, 127–129). From the Pentecostal perspective, connections to ritual performances such as pouring libation, and ritual objects like chiefly ancestral stools, bring people under the influence of evil spirits. According to this logic, contemporary Ghanaians who have been able to make 'paganism' a thing of the past should not readopt it in a new innocent-looking form because, notwithstanding the veneer, they will become 'cursed': punished by God for their participation (Meyer 1998a, 323–324). A Pentecostal pastor warned people of this danger in a religious pamphlet:

> . . . if you also partake in idol worship with its attendant rites like pouring of libation […] and a host of witchcraft practices, enshrined in our traditional festivals, which have been *cunningly put under the umbrella of 'culture,'* then know that you are extending the expiry date to another four generations. If your children also continue in your footsteps, then the curse will continue perpetually. This is the reason why it is imperative for this present generation in Ghana to do away with idol worship. (Quoted in ibid., 326; italics added)

Here culture is perceived as a 'Trojan horse' inside which fetishism is smuggled back into society and, what is worse, also allowed to contaminate Christianity. As Birgit Meyer (1992) has pointed out, even mainstream churches live with the risk of fragmenting because of convictions like this. Furthermore, along with its culture, the whole idea of a nation has been revalued by the Pentecostals. They increasingly perceive Christianity as a global movement, which the authority structures of the post-colonial state should not limit. The horizontally tied informal networks of churches throughout West Africa and beyond make this idea a reality. Growing migration to Europe and North America as well as new high-tech communication and media networks have further amplified the processes of 'de-territorialization' and 'de-nationalization' of Pentecostal culture. In this movement a person's primary identity is Christian and not national, let alone ethnic. Thus Pentecostalism sees itself as translocal rather than indigenous (see e.g. Marshall-Fratani 1998; Englund 2003; Piot 2010, 53–76, 91–94). As a result, it seems directly to negate the basic assumption of modern secularist ideology, according to which an individual's primary

allegiance is to the nation and this should not be compromised by secondary religious loyalties.

For many Pentecostals chieftaincy is inseparable from 'pagan religion' and thus re-introducing it as culture cannot be anything else than a diabolical hoax. Consequently, some Pentecostal churches view traditional institutions with similar zeal as the early Christian converts and are frequently in confrontation with chiefs and other so-called traditionalists. This situation has also produced a secularist backlash in which Christians are told not to confuse culture with religion. For example, a web columnist asks why the idea of cultural heritage seems to be problematic only to African Christians:

> I have never heard a white Christian Pastor condemn Julius Caesar or any of the Roman and Greek gods. Rather, the collapsing temples of Greek and Roman 'idolatry' are promoted as national treasures, visited by Popes, Cardinals, Pastors, Christians and countless tourists. I wonder if one cannot be an African Christian, and yet remain respectable [sic] of what his ancestors accomplished, just as Europeans seem to have done. Why should some African Christians view Chieftaincy and its regalia as idolatrous, when the white missionaries who converted Africans to Christianity were sent to do that job with the blessings of their Queens and Kings? (Ellison 2005)

Although Christianity can be characterized as the majority religion in present-day Asante and many chiefs are practicing Christians, conflicts between churches and traditional rulers surface occasionally. Traditional rulers are still expected to perform many of the ritual duties of their pre-colonial predecessors and one of the fiery topics of discussion is whether Christians can assume traditional office, and if so, to what extent they can perform the rituals linked to the office without compromising their religious convictions (see, e.g., Gilbert 1995). Similarly, the participation of Christians in collective traditional rituals remains a contested public issue. Everyone following Ghanaian news media is familiar with complaints about either chiefs 'imposing pagan customs' on Christians or Christians 'violating traditional norms'.[69] These debates are also becoming more and more aligned with the ideas of international human rights (Atiemo 2006). As some Pentecostal-Charismatic churches disapprove of both the idea of national culture and the primacy of the secular state, they are not willing to accept chieftaincy either as 'politics' or 'culture'.

69 Perhaps the most publicized incidents in recent times have been connected to the so-called drumming ban decreed by the Ga Traditional Council in the Accra area. The Ga people, who are the indigenous inhabitants of the capital, celebrate an annual ritual 'festival' called Homowo presided over by the paramount chiefs of the area. During some phases of Homowo drumming, dancing, and loud noises are tabooed. Some Pentecostal churches of the city have been (intentionally or not) indifferent to this ban and continued playing music in their services, which has led to conflicts between the church members and Ga traditionalists (see Van Dijk 2001). Some Asante have viewed this as evidence of what they see as the sorry state of Ga chieftaincy. According to them, no church in Kumasi would ever dare to challenge the *Asantehene* in a similar manner. Comments like this have also led to heated exchanges in the media between representatives of the two ethnic groups (see Atiemo 2006, 374).

6. Toward a neoliberal kingdom?

In his recent book Charles Piot (2010) argues that the last decade of the twentieth century was marked by the crumbling of the post-colonial order in Africa, calling attention to the ways in which the centres of power and chains of authority that defined relations between the rulers and the ruled have been called into question in the post-Cold War world. On the global level, he observes, power is no longer exercised through the structures of the "old order", the nation states and their organizations, but rather through the horizontally-linked signature institutions of the neoliberal world order such as the World Bank and the IMF. Based on his material from Togo, Piot also claims that in rural Africa the state-supported chieftaincy and the gerontocracy attached to it are losing ground. In Togo, for example, there appears to be no trace of a resurgence of chieftaincy; on the contrary, the local political field has been taken over by such 'anti-traditional' actors as the Pentecostal churches and NGOs. For Piot this has meant the end of the hundred-year history of indirect rule.

In the previous chapter I have already discussed how in Ghana the state-sponsored ideology of national culture, with chieftaincy as part of it, has been powerfully criticized by the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian movement that has assumed a strong transnational identity. Considering the Pentecostal critique and the global developments described by Piot one would certainly expect that Ghanaian chieftaincy would also be fading away, together with the weakening nation-state and its meagre resources; sidelined from politics and suspect as a cultural symbol the future would not seem to have much to offer. However, at the beginning of the new millennium the chiefs seem to be more than ready to exploit the opportunities of the post-Cold War age and have been finding recognition and support from new, unexpected sources. They are also emerging as transnational actors and this has quite dramatically altered their relationship to the post-colonial state and the nationalism propagated by it. In this chapter I discuss these developments and, in particular, the unique relationship between the World Bank and the present *Asantehene* which has been established in recent years. The most striking feature is that chieftaincy seems to be breaking away from the control of the nation-state while establishing new kinds of 'indirect rule relationships' with the horizontal institutions (see Berry 2004, 97–98); meanwhile it is being legitimated by an ideology, very similar to that of the colonial era, that portrays chieftaincy as an indigenous form of liberal democracy.

Chiefs and civil society

Ghana of the 1990s was not only a developing or Third World country, but also among the 38 poorest countries in the world. As such its economy was (and still is) heavily dependent on a host of donor organizations such as the World Bank with the result that many of the policies of the Ghanaian government have been steered by the preferences of the donors (see Boafo-Arthur 1999). Previously, the World Bank and other international development organizations, which operated within a neo-classical economic framework, had ignored traditional institutions. Their approaches were state-centred and the contribution of traditional institutions to the development of Africa was seen as either insignificant or negative (see Adi 2005). By the 1990s, however, many international donors had become disappointed with states as partners and were seriously reconsidering the fundamentals of development aid. A World Bank report published in 1995, for instance, argued that a major obstacle to the development of Sub-Saharan Africa was that the majority governments in the region had been for most of the post-independence period "captured by small groups of elites, usually ethnically bound" who had not been accountable for their decisions or dealings to the people they governed; consequently, the infrastructure of African countries had remained undeveloped or had been allowed to deteriorate, which also directly impeded the work of the aid organizations. The initial solution to the problems had been to send in "tens of thousands of expatriate technical assistants", but the end result was poor (World Bank 1995, 62).

Before long, Western donors started to talk about the crisis of the African state and its institutions, taking into account that the plight of the continent was not simply the outcome of the greed and irresponsibility of its rulers: it was first and foremost a structural crisis. To find their way out of the predicament and put an end to so-called Afro-pessimism, the World Bank launched a research program titled *Africa's Management in the 1990s* (AM90s), in the course of which its analysts traced the root cause of the crisis to the colonial legacy. According to them, at independence most African countries had inherited "a hybrid and disconnected system in which modern governance and public administration systems were superimposed on the traditional institutions and the indigenous management system of civil society" (Dia 1996, 43). The colonial state had been created to serve the political and economic needs of the European metropoles and not the development of the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies with the result that there were no channels through which local populations could effectively take part in political decision-making or prevent abuses of power. This model of administration had not changed much after the end of the colonial era and continued to be "powerful, isolated, repressive, and locally alienating" (ibid.). At the same time, however, there had existed a great variety of traditional institutions at the level of civil society that the Africans themselves had developed for their own needs, but which were now suffering from scarce resources and lack of official recognition (ibid., 36–44). This gap was to be bridged by modernizing traditional institutions, on the one hand, and better integrating modern institutions into local society, on the other,

which would then create improved conditions for economic growth (ibid., 28–35). In practice, this has meant public sector reforms whereby many government functions have been outsourced to private enterprises, NGOs, and traditional authorities like chiefs (World Bank 1995, 62–66), initiatives which reflect the neoliberal policies that have dominated the Western powers' approach to development since the 1980s (see e.g. Ferguson 2006, 1–49; Harvey 2005, 87–119).

As the analysts of the AM90s program were convinced that the institutional and legal framework of African states had to reflect "societal norms and behavior, as enshrined in indigenous and informal institutions", they turned their attention to those countries where they thought reconciliation between formal and customary institutions had been achieved (Dia 1996, 105). In Ghana chiefs were said to provide important public services to local communities and were, in fact, closer to the people than any other institutional actors. Furthermore, chieftaincy had shown remarkable flexibility as it had been tested by time and it was still able to attract highly educated professionals to become traditional rulers. The role of Asante chiefs as judges and land administrators was used as a prime example by the AM90s analysts. The paramount chiefs and their councils were said to constitute the law courts of local communities, which were now busy handling cases that had been withdrawn from government courts and brought to chiefs' courts; according to the Bank's estimation, in no less than 90% of cases people accepted the decisions of traditional rulers and did not appeal to higher courts. As administrators of stool lands the chiefs allocated land for farming, building, and development projects and occasionally also generated money income for their communities by selling some of their holdings (ibid., 105-110). Although African chieftaincy systems traditionally had a hierarchical structure they were seen to be "generally governed by consensus and broad participation" (ibid., 39). This was manifested in the ways the chiefs were elected to their offices by their people and the systems of checks and balances on possible abuses of power. Again, the popular destoolment process among the Asante was mentioned as an example (ibid., 39–41).[70] The researchers concluded that the traditional institutions can "adapt to the requirements of modern management" and that "the continuing and important role and the contributions of the chieftaincy institution need to be recognized by both donors and national governments interested in promoting sustainable local community development" (ibid., 109–111). It was not only that chieftaincy was an important "additional governance institution", easing the workload of formal institutions, but enhancing and supporting it was now also seen

70 The legitimacy of traditional political institutions was also studied by using quantitative research methods in the Volta Region. The study indentified five different "chieftaincy functions" (judicial, religious/cultural, legislative, symbolic, and military/security), after which survey participants were asked to grade how effectively the chiefs were able to fulfill these functions. The results of this "citizen performance rating" indicated that chieftaincy in the Volta Region of Ghana had a very high 'legitimacy rate', higher than, for instance, the central government of Zambia (Dia 1996, 110–111).

as the most effective way for "greater empowerment of local communities" (ibid., 106). Thus chieftaincy, not so long ago labelled as 'feudal' or 'elitist', was now talked about as an essential part of democratic civil society in Africa. The irony of it all is, of course, that the views of the World Bank researchers of the 1990s were very similar to those of the colonial administrators of the 1920s and 30s, while it was concurrently being maintained that the colonial state structure was the root cause of Africa's current problems.

King of the World Bank

The best example of the new role of the chiefs is the co-operation between the World Bank and the Asante Kingdom which commenced in 1999 on the initiative of the newly installed *Asantehene* Osei Tutu II. In a meeting with the then Ghana Country Director of the World Bank, the *Asantehene* had expressed his concern about how traditional rulers had been left out of the planning and management of development projects at the community level. The negotiations later led to the establishment of a World Bank-funded project titled *Promoting Partnership with Traditional Authorities Project* (PPTAP) (Osei Tutu II 2004). Through the project the World Bank granted a "learning and innovation loan" of five million US dollars to provide infrastructure for basic education, create health education modules for traditional authorities especially with regards HIV/AIDS, build the management capacity of traditional authorities, and preserve local cultural heritage; the Asanteman Council, successor to the colonial Confederacy Council, was the project's "responsible agency" and principal implementer (World Bank 2003). On two occasions the Bank also invited the king to its headquarters in Washington DC where he was able to secure funding for water and sanitation facilities for 1,000 communities in Ghana (Osei Tutu II 2004). According to some sources, the *Asantehene* received in total more than 50 million dollars from the World Bank for promoting community-based development projects during the early 2000s (see Akosah-Sarpong 2004). While, in terms of international development aid in general, the sums received were quite modest, the remarkable thing here is how the aid has been directed. It has not been channelled through governmental institutions, or even NGOs or religious bodies, but through a king and his council who, in the legal framework of the state, should not even exist. The government of Ghana which, after all, is listed as a borrower in the loan documents of the PPTAP (e.g. World Bank 2003), has been relegated to the role of spectator, while functions of education and health care are being 'outsourced' to the chiefs by a powerful horizontal institution.

In addition to monetary aid, the World Bank has also been involved in programs that aim to strengthen the adjudication capacity of traditional leaders in Asante and elsewhere in Ghana. The World Development Report 2002, titled *Building Institutions for the Market*, claimed that economic growth and poverty reduction had been achieved only in countries with efficient and inclusive markets: swift and affordable dispute resolution was listed as one of the main institutional requirements for the growth and

functioning of markets (World Bank 2002). In the case of Ghana, the Bank was concerned about the large number of court cases relating to ownership of land that were pending in government courts and retarding Ghana's growth prospects. Therefore, it was suggested that the traditional authorities should have a central role in the delivery of justice and thus enable "Ghana to achieve its developmental objectives" (Gonzales de Asis 2006). In the discussions about the necessity for justice reforms the effectiveness, inexpensiveness, and familiarity of the traditional institutions were very openly juxtaposed with the alleged ineptitude of state institutions. For instance, at a seminar titled *Leadership Dialogue with Traditional Authorities* organized in a luxury hotel in Kumasi in December 2005, the then Senior Vice-President of the World Bank told his chiefly audience that African customary law systems "evolve naturally with the communities" and thus remain important, while "the States in many countries have failed to provide access to justice to most of the population". Therefore it had become impossible to talk about justice in Africa without taking the traditional institutions into account: the question was "how, not whether, to support them, and how best to integrate them with the formal system" (Dañino 2005).[71]

The bank loans and market-friendly legal reforms have been accompanied by a discourse about Ghanaian chiefs as 'managers' or 'business executives' (see Abdulai 2006). In April 2000 the *Asantehene* spoke to the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs about attracting investors to their localities:

> It's no good just selling the land and pocketing the proceeds. But arranging for equity share in an investment, you create confidence in the investor because he knows you are involved in the business. You may even become a director and this will ensure your future well being. Additionally, you create job opportunities for your people and the economic prosperity of your area. (*Kumasi Mail*, July 25 – July 31, 2000)

Here the traditional ruler has to consider land first and foremost as a resource that can be employed in money-generating activities with corporations. The *Asantehene* himself has also set up a development business, Golden Development Holding Company Ltd., to "undertake multi-sectoral regional development projects to accelerate the economic and social growth in Asanteman through subsidiary companies under health, education, tourism and infrastructure, banking and financial services, agriculture and agro-business, land and forestry sectors" (Modern Ghana, 21st October 2001). Accordingly, promoting external investment has become an important part of his representative tasks both in Ghana and abroad. Visiting trade

71 One chief who participated in the "Leadership Dialogue" told me that he does not think that there is a single chief in the country who would object to the idea of chiefs having more power and hence they would at least in principle support the World Bank reforms. However, when we started discussing how the traditional courts could actually be incorporated into the state justice system, he was quick to point out a number of incompatibilities that would be almost impossible to overcome.

exhibitions, receiving business delegations, and inaugurating commercial buildings, among other similar activities, now top his itinerary (see e.g. *Ghana Review International* 2004). This can be viewed as a part of a global trend, wherein traditional communities are expected "to 'become business-like,' to 'market' themselves, to 'manage' their symbolic and material assets" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 8; see also Cattelino 2011; Cook 2011).

Although there are striking similarities between the ideas of the architects of indirect rule and the development theorists of the World Bank, the twenty-first-century situation differs in many ways from that of the colonial era, a major example lying in how the chiefs define themselves. During the colonial period the public discourse about the democratic nature of chieftaincy was mainly directed at the policy-makers and the anti-colonial opposition in the metropolitan country, and, to some extent, the African intellectuals in the colony, but the chiefs themselves, at least in Asante, took very little part in it. The current situation is quite different: the chiefs are familiar with global development debates and recognize the relevance of them to their own positions, and some participate in them at least as fluently as Western bureaucrats or academics. The introduction in the *Asantehene*'s keynote address at the Fourth African Development Forum (ADF IV), in October 2004, titled *Traditional systems of governance and the modern state*, that echoed the sentiments of the 'liberal tradition' is an illuminating example:

> African societies, throughout the centuries, have been organized on the basis of a social contract whereby people come together to form a state or nation because they believe that, through their combined efforts, they will be more able to realize their common aspirations for peace and security, which are essential for their physical and spiritual welfare and progress, both as individuals and as a community. It is to achieve these objectives that the people agree collectively to surrender to a king or ruler the power to control their lives and to organize and regulate activities within their society. In the process, they have always had clear understandings and agreements regarding the ideas and principles that underlie their political systems and on the basis of which power and authority are to be exercised by the various elements of government. By traditional systems, I refer to genuine traditional institutions, uncontaminated by colonial or post-independence modifications or distortions. (Osei Tutu II 2004)

Here the underpinnings of a political community are found in the individual incentive to unite for the common good – very much like in the theories of the early Gold Coast nationalists or in the petitions of the Christian converts. Furthermore, in his address the *Asantehene* claimed that in Africa the majority of citizens live in rural areas and are hardly touched by "the sophisticated constitutional and legal structures or the official court systems" and hold "a traditional worldview and look to their chiefs and elders for development, settlement of disputes, allocation of land, financial support to the needy and other elements of social insurance". He also maintained that the traditional rulers' concern about issues of development is more consistent and long-term than the politicians', because the chiefs' "social

contract" with their people is forever and not merely until the next election. Thus the chiefs "can and do play a vital role in development, which at once enhances democracy and sustains good governance" (ibid.). The speech is a perfect example of how the chiefs are now able to portray themselves as the genuine representatives of the people, or at least that silent majority that is not familiar with the complexities of the post-colonial state. The state in Africa is seen as something 'imposed' or 'transplanted', whereas chieftaincy is considered something 'natural' and 'familiar'. Similarly, the *Asantehene* does not present chieftaincy to his international audience as an institution that has a religious foundation, its structures culminating in sacrificial rituals, but rather as the 'authentic political institution' which it represents in the eyes of Western sponsors. This talk about contract and consensus is, however, a departure from the authoritarian tone sometimes used in domestic circles: for instance, when it is declared that every chiefly office in the kingdom belongs to the *Asantehene* and he has the "powers to take over any stool whose disloyalty is suspect" (*Kumasi Mail*, October 10 – October 16, 2000), or that "he would not hesitate to take over lands [from the chiefs], which are lying fallow and not benefitting anybody" (*Kumasi Mail*, July 25 – July 31, 2000).

For the donor organizations, chieftaincy's new self-definition has offered a valuable confirmation of the validity of their vision. During a lecture at Metropolitan Washington Trinity College in 2004, James D. Wolfensohn, the then President of the World Bank, was asked whether the imposition of a free market economy would eventually lead to any positive results in the Third World. In his reply Wolfensohn denied that the World Bank was trying to impose any economic or political models on anybody and brought up the Asante case:

> Less than five days ago, my wife and I were in Ghana, and we visited the Ashanti tribe and visited the Asantehene, the leader of the Ashanti Tribe, which is 8 million people. And we were received with the music of horns […] and drums, a system of absolute beauty in terms of tribal customs. And we're working with the Ashantis to help them build the sort of society that they want. And the leader of the Ashantis is anxious to ensure that the rural community develops as he wants, but he wants to bring in also some industry and he wants to bring in computers and he wants to bring in modern education for his people. And this is not something which we're imposing. This is a decision which the tribal leadership has decided it wants to do, and I think that is the way that it should be done. I don't think we should go to countries and insist that they should follow one political framework or one economic framework if they want to follow another. (Wolfensohn 2004)

Without going into any detail concerning the local political or economic framework, it is assumed that the *Asantehene*, "the tribal leadership", and the "tribe" have a consensus about "the sort of society that they want". A similar view is prevalent in the World Bank's own project descriptions, where traditional institutions are characterized as 'popular' or 'user-friendly'. Here the presupposed antiquity and authenticity of the traditional institutions are also interpreted as evidence of some kind of 'direct democracy'. However,

this line of thinking elides the fact that even though the *Asantehene*'s initiatives and projects have been received enthusiastically by many, there are also some Asante people who have been very critical of his policies and dealings with the World Bank. For instance, an open letter to the President of the World Bank was published on both Ghanaian and American internet sites in which the writer, a Ghanaian journalist, demanded a thorough external investigation of the *Asantehene*'s projects, because he had reason to believe that some of the funds had been misappropriated (Poku 2005). The critics have found it hard to accept that chieftaincy, which was not long ago defined as 'cultural', is all of a sudden becoming 'politicized' (see, e.g., Yarrow 2008, 234–235).

The views promoted by the chiefs and the World Bank suggest that the traditional institutions embody ideals that are widely considered universal and hence their legitimacy does not depend on state recognition. As we have seen, liberal ideas about the contractual or democratic foundations of chieftaincy are already a hundred years old, but the most novel characteristic here is rather the global or transnational nature of chieftaincy, distinctive to the neoliberal era. Not only does the *Asantehene* by-pass the Ghanaian state and deal with the horizontal institutions directly – for example, by holding talks in the World Bank's US headquarters – he is also in permanent contact with Asante and other African communities in diaspora, seeking to get them involved in the development projects (see, e.g., Ghana Business News, 10th June 2010). However, what is more interesting is his work in promoting chieftaincy in other countries in the region. The civil-war torn West African state of Sierra Leone, where international donor organizations initially adopted completely different approach to traditional political institutions, is a case in point. Chiefs were blamed for the social and economic inequalities of the rural areas, which were seen as a major cause of the civil war, and therefore aid organizations, the World Bank among them, were reluctant to include them in any post-war rebuilding programs. Some even discussed the option of abolishing chieftaincy altogether as 'corrupt' or 'unsustainable' (Fanthorpe 2005). In response to this, the *Asantehene*, who had already in his 2004 speech noted that "the absence of strong traditional systems" had significantly contributed to the instability in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire, has since been appointed by the Sierra Leonean government as the "principal resource person" for a program to restructure the chieftaincy institution (State House, 28th April 2010). During his visit to the country in April 2005 he held talks with the then president and spoke to a meeting of all the 149 paramount chiefs in Sierra Leone. He reiterated his views on how conflicts in Africa could have been prevented if "we had held solidly to our God-given traditions and customs" and how traditional systems "held the key to peace, stability and development in the continent" (Yeboah 2005). Thus, it seems that horizontal networks of chiefs are now in the making.

Osei Tutu's 'neoliberal kingship' is not discussed here at length because it might appear to constitute an end point to the secularization of chieftaincy that started more than a century ago as a result of Christian conversion and the conflicts that had followed. The great *sacrfier* has not been reduced

to a business manager. On the contrary, Osei Tutu still diligently observes many of the same rituals and taboos as his predecessors. Therefore we could rather say that now, in addition to the spirits of his warrior ancestors and the Golden Stool, the power of the *Asantehene* is also backed by the World Bank. But what is more, the *Asantehene* and his 'managerial chiefs' are also agents in that post-Cold War landscape described by Piot. In similar ways to the Pentecostal churches the chiefs of Ghana are also becoming translocal. They are not withering away with the post-colonial state, but are rather assuming new identities, functions, and principles of legitimation, which in turn resonate with the notions of the colonial era, when chieftaincy was defined as, and shaped toward becoming, a secular institution.

III Problems of purification

Secularism has not been solely about the separation of the social categories of religion and politics. It has also entailed a "dematerialization of religion", in the direction of something that ought to be understood primarily as mental or spiritual (Keane 2013). This has had certain political consequences which will be explored in this final part of the book. Decreeing administrative rules for separating individual 'religious conscience' from politics was one thing but to cast the indigenous belief system in the mould of an individualistic religion was quite another. The early missionaries had concluded that Africans had no religion – merely fetishes and superstitions which did not deserve to be included in that category (Chidester 1996, 11–16), a perception that was later challenged by 'indigenist' missionaries' discussions of African metaphysics, and colonial administrators' ideas of 'tribal religion'. In the former, the all-embracive nature of religion in traditional society was given a peculiar individualist interpretation. Since a great variety of 'religious practices', like pouring libation to ancestral spirits, observing dietary taboos, or preparing medicines, was a part of everyday life for the Africans, this had to be evidence of their deeply religious nature. The problem was that this estimable characteristic was misdirected to the superficial and superstitious. Fortunately, in the 'depths' one was able to see elements or traces of high religion; for example, in the belief in a creator or supreme god. The task of the missionary was, therefore, to suppress the superficial elements and develop those which were more profound (Fabian 1990, 350–351).

The determination to cleanse African religion of superstition was shared by the administrators, although their motivations had less to do with theology. It was deemed that an African 'tribe' had its own distinctive language, culture, political system, and religion, all of which separated it from other units at the same level. While tribal religion legitimated the authority of the traditional rulers and therefore supported the indirect rule system, certain aspects of it did not fit this design and had to be marginalized or suppressed: anti-witchcraft 'cults' that travelled across both tribal and colonial boundaries, for instance, or prophetic revitalization movements that questioned the authority of the chiefs were seen as such. Consequently, they were excluded from the category of religion and demoted to the class of superstition (Ranger 1993, 68–69). In the case of the Asante, the

administrators, missionaries, and even anthropologists alike aspired to sweep "their Pantheon clean of the fetish" (Rattray 1959 [1927], v–vi), while saving everything that was valuable in the traditional religion (Rattray 1929, vi–xiii).

Reforms in this vein have also taken place all over the globe in relation to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, as well as different forms of Christianity (Keane 2007, 78-79). Webb Keane has analyzed such processes in Indonesia via his innovative use of Bruno Latour's concept of purification, an idea originally developed in a different context. In order to understand how modern natural and social sciences acquired their own separate spheres of study, Latour discusses how nature and society are separated from each other as pure forms; consequently the phenomena studied by the different disciplines have to be defined so that they belong exclusively to one or the other. Thus purification produces two distinct "ontological zones": that of human beings and that of non-humans, each functioning according to a different set of rules (Latour 1993, 1–29). From the point of view of modern sciences, traditional societies that personify or deify nature have made "a horrible mishmash of things and humans" that needs to be sorted out (ibid., 38–39). However, the difficulty with purification is that it is inevitably accompanied by processes of translation which create hybrids that are mixtures of nature and culture, making purification a never-ending task (ibid., 49–51).

Keane also brings up the idea of purification when he discusses individual agency as the link between Protestant Christianity and the idea of modernity. In his study he shows how it was a central preoccupation for the Dutch Calvinist missionaries to convince the Indonesian converts that God, Christ, and human beings possessed agency, in their own respective ways, while sacrificial offerings, ritual recitations, and spirits, for example, did not (Keane 2007, 54). In the missionary parlance fetishism became a derogatory term directed at those who had "purportedly confounded the proper boundaries between agentive subjects and mere objects". This accusation entailed a similar ontological division as that present in modern thinking in Latour's description: material objects that obey the laws of nature, on the one hand, and mental and / or spiritual subjects that have their own will, on the other (ibid., 77). Hence the missionaries were purifiers in the very sense that they sought to detach agency from things such as the words in a prayer (ibid., 181–185), or the food shared in ceremonial meals (ibid., 237–248) in Keane's Indonesian examples. Then again, even though the goal of Protestant purification was an immaterial and transcendent religion, it could not have existed or been transmitted socially without some sort of symbolic and material instantiations. Hence, one needed books, buildings, songs, and gestures, among other things, which nonetheless were always at risk of becoming fetishized and thus turning into hybrids (ibid., 79–80). Lastly, Keane points out that Latour's discussion of purification primarily concerns the relationship between science and society, and that it does not fully explore the driving force behind the urge to purify (ibid., 23–25). Why is purifying a moral imperative for modern reformers and what exactly threatens us if the agency of humans is projected onto mute objects?

Keane's answer has to do with freedom and responsibility. To many the idea of modernity presents itself as a "narrative of liberation", in which human subjects are becoming increasingly aware of their own agency and freeing themselves of superfluous material or social constraints. According to this line of thinking, purification is absolutely necessary in order to achieve individual autonomy, since false perceptions of things acting on the subject compromise his / her freedom (ibid., 54–55). Conversely, the acceptance of any kind of fetishist ideas cannot be viewed as a morally neutral choice or even a simple mistake, because by submitting personal agency to material objects, words, or fantasies, a human being is transferring his / her responsibility for real actions and events to mere things. Therefore, from the modernist perspective, fetishism is "a source of political self-betrayal" (ibid., 77).

Here I adopt Keane's formulation of purification, understanding it to mean the determining of what will count as possible agents and what as possible actions. As Keane argues, attempts to establish the real place of agency in the world have important consequences in every sector of society (ibid., 80–81). Accordingly, in the final part of this book, I discuss the importance of complicated negotiations and contestations over political agency in colonial and post-colonial Ghana. What happens when 'things' like local deities, witchcraft, and sacrifices are not recognized as agents and actions by modern state authorities, while they remain very much so for the people being governed? How have Pentecostal Christian ideas about the agency of God and malevolent spirits in the workings of secular politics spread to the public sphere and with what consequences? When modern thinking removed God from both nature and society, holistic ideologies about states transcending themselves, or existing for a higher cause, were overthrown. However, as Latour (1993, 31–34) points out, in modern religion God is "doubled" in a curious way. On the one hand, God becomes transcendent, neither influencing real relations between human beings living in a society nor the mechanisms of the material world. On the other, however, this does not lead to overall secularization, because God is still present in the "private hearts" of individuals, which allows them to form opinions about society and nature that are in accordance with God's will. Nonetheless, although religion might not have disappeared from society, God and other kinds of spiritual beings are not regarded as valid political agents. This makes it entirely reasonable, for instance, to criticize political leaders for being ungodly, or to pray that they benefit from spiritual guidance and direction, but pointless to think that one could become a leader oneself by making sacrifices to spirits, or to petition the spirits to remove an unpopular leader from office.

In this section of the book I concentrate on the problems involved with this kind of duplicity: how it is enforced by colonial and post-colonial states and how the subject populations are either indifferent to it or critical of it. In Chapter 7 that follows I discuss witchcraft as an object of purification. During the pre-colonial period malevolent witchcraft had been among the state taboos in Asante and its suppression was explicitly the duty of the chief. The colonial administration banned the conventional methods of witch-finding and chiefs were stripped of their powers to sentence accused witches

to death or slavery. For the administrators witchcraft beliefs and anti-witchcraft activities represented a tradition that was not only irrational but also inhumane and hence it should be abolished and certainly not valorised as a part of 'native religion'. Hence, the transformation of witchcraft into a category of superstition was a product of secularization. At the same time the administrators were forced to cope with a number of rather different problems related to witchcraft, as they were simultaneously witnessing the rising popularity of new, country-wide, anti-witchcraft 'cults'. There was no acceptable place for 'unreal' witchcraft beliefs in the modern colony, but, nonetheless, they constituted a 'real' force to be reckoned with. The Ghanaian post-colonial administration has inherited this dilemma as it too combats anti-witchcraft violence, now defined as a human rights problem. Chapter 8 focuses on different perceptions of two military coups staged by army officers with leftist leanings in the late 1970s and early 80s. In their propaganda the officers and their supporters labelled the military takeovers as "revolutions" – fundamentally a modern concept that puts human agency at the centre stage of history in place of divinely ordained cycles of nature or the successions of royal dynasties. Furthermore, the coups were expressly secularist as it was emphasized that all religious associations in the country were to accept the new order and remain loyal to it. Despite this, some coup-era policies were openly defied by Christian churches, while, interestingly, other groups gave the coups a religious interpretation in which it was claimed that the officers had gained power from the spirit world in exchange for sacrifices. Thus, in the eyes of some of the subject population a secular revolution had become enchanted.

7. Witchcraft as the residue of religion

Although tribal religion was seen to support the chiefly rule and was thus beneficial to the colonial order in Africa, it also posed a serious problem for the administrators. The anthropologists of the era had stated that the European governments were able to replace the chiefs in their "secular capacity", but they were never able to assume those credentials of the chiefs that were considered "mystical" and "derived from antiquity" (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1969 [1940], 16). There was always going to be the secret, esoteric, and spiritual sector of society that was out of their reach. The colonizers could never enter these "sacred precincts" and, as a result, their administration was inevitably perceived as something that was forced on the subject populations from the outside. The most efficient way to overcome this problem was the establishment of a hierarchy of knowledge in which scientific rationalism was regarded as universal and true and indigenous knowledge as local and relative. The administrative machinery was to be operated according to the rules of the former, whereas the latter was to be left for the 'natives'. Yet throughout the colonial period and in all colonial empires, the "sacred precincts" were constantly intruded upon by the European rulers who, for instance, reformulated customary laws, judged chieftaincy disputes on the basis of origin myths, and created new "traditional" offices (Palmié 2002, 71–72). They were dragged into sacred domains by what were regarded as the more pressing administrative concerns of 'upholding the peace', 'restoring order', and so on, but also by the agency of the colonial subjects. Hence, even though the administrators acknowledged that 'native religion' was not their area of expertise, they were constantly debating the acceptability of its content and the correct interpretation of its norms. This inconsistency was also the legacy that the administrations of the post-colonial era inherited from the European colonial governments despite their otherwise vast ideological differences. In the name of 'modernization' or 'development' the rulers of independent African nation-states adopted a European-based concept of how a state should collect and use knowledge, thereby renouncing the validity of indigenous forms of knowledge (Cooper and Stoler 1989, 612), but they too have faced constant pressures to interfere with local epistemologies.

Witchcraft beliefs do not fit the modern blueprint of religion which centres on the individual believer's spiritual conviction and experience,[72] and one of the tasks assumed by modernist reformers in Africa since the colonial period has been to separate witchcraft beliefs from so-called indigenous African religions as well as African culture, thereby producing a residue that should be disposed of. This chapter discusses the ritual suppression of witchcraft, and official attempts, both colonial and post-colonial, to eradicate or control witchcraft beliefs. Two separate cases are discussed. The first concentrates on the difficulties met by colonial administrators in the 1920s and 30s who investigated and sometimes abolished anti-witchcraft movements that were considered dangerous. The second part explores how witchcraft suppression has become a human rights issue in contemporary Ghana. This is discussed in relation to the reaction of post-colonial governments to refugee camps in northern Ghana that are populated by suspected witches banished from their home villages. Both cases illustrate how witchcraft is not granted any sort of agentive status in society, while the systems of knowledge related to it are persistently disqualified from the public sphere by administrators, legislators, and educators. This, in turn, impairs the authorities' ability to function. The concluding section discusses the hybrids formed on those occasions when modern states assume anti-witchcraft functions. Before considering the cases, however, it is useful to look at the logic of witchcraft and the different forms of its suppression.

Witches, gods, and angels

The anthropological studies of Ghanaian anti-witchcraft 'cults'[73] in the twentieth century have largely concentrated on the chronological perspective. Some authors have maintained that beliefs and fears related to witchcraft are a relatively recent phenomenon in Akan societies, caused by the social ills resulting from rapid changes in the colonial economy. Thus the so-called 'savannah cults' that originated in the grasslands of northern Ghana and were introduced to the south in order to combat witchcraft were actually an innovative response to new kinds of problems (Field 1940). Others

72 As Peter Geschiere (1997, 225) has pointed out, terms like witchcraft and sorcery are clumsy translations of indigenous African notions with much broader meanings. However, they are nowadays used by Africans throughout the continent (in public discussions, mass-media, etc.) and therefore it is very difficult to do without them. I do not find supposedly more neutral terms like "occult forces" or "occult practices" any better. For instance, in Ghana the Christian population sometimes use the term "occult" for some traditional ritual practices, which they contrast to their own "church religion". People living in rural communities, practicing 'traditional religion', do not subscribe to such dichotomies.

73 Martha Kaplan (1990) claims that in colonial societies movements that departed from the established and officially approved 'custom' and were thus potentially subversive were easily branded as 'cults'. Accordingly, she finds the term "to be more a category of colonial discourse and practice than an analytic window into the complexities of the making of history in colonized societies" (ibid., 4–5).

Atia Mframa is celebrated annually in the village of Bredi No. 1. Okomfo Ankomah Adjei, the son and successor of the founder of the community, is paraded through the village on a lion-shaped palanquin.

maintained that witchcraft and witch-finding were long-standing concerns in Akan societies and the proliferation of new 'cults' had more to do with the colonial administration's prohibition of some of the older methods of witch-finding (Goody 1957). The historians have also contributed to these discussions by pointing to important continuities and discontinuities between the witchcraft discourses of different eras (see McCaskie 1981; Allman and Parker 2005). Some of the colonial era movements, like Tigare, Tongo, and Bra Kunde, are still active in the present day Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Regions, although they do not command the same popularity as they did in the early and mid-twentieth century. However, new ones have also appeared. The following description is based on several visits to three different shrines of Atia Mframa in Nkoranza, where I attended sessions of witch finding and observed the preparation of protective medicines and charms.[74]

Witches (*ɔbayifo*, pl. *abayifoɔ*) are people – mostly women, but it is understood that a man can also be a witch – who control a spiritual power known as *bayi* in order to harm other people. *Bayi* itself is understood to be a morally ambivalent force which can be used for either good or evil, with traditional priests claiming to use *bayi* for good purposes; for instance, in protective magic. In popular stories witches have been described as ripping unborn babies from their mothers' wombs, eating human flesh, and drinking blood, but they are also held responsible for more commonplace, yet very serious, problems like poor harvests, failed business deals, ill health, or unexpected deaths. Among the Akan witchcraft is believed to operate only among lineage relatives; therefore, as witches are said to drink the blood or eat the flesh of their matrilineal relatives, they are envisaged as individualistically consuming the shared substance upon which the very existence of the kin group is dependent. Thus they are perceived as people

74 Atia Mframa has many of the common characteristics of a 'savannah cult'. It was brought from Northern Ghana to the village of Bredi No. 1 in Nkoranza by the local priest, Okomfo Kwadwo Adjei, and its current 'headquarters' are located there. It has gained popularity as a powerful 'witch-hunter' and hence many priests from different localities in Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo have travelled to Bredi in order to obtain it for their shrines.

who have put their own passions before the continuation of the group and are consequently guilty of extreme selfishness. Witchcraft is seen to be fuelled by jealousy and envy between relatives, which signals disunity and departure from the solidarity demanded by moral and traditional norms (Fortes 1969, 179–183): fears and anxieties typical of holistic societies (see, e.g., Kapferer 1988, 7–15). As a result, the 'clients' of anti-witchcraft shrines are often people who fear that their success in life, especially in the economic sphere, has attracted the attention of their envious witch-relatives (see, e.g., Parish 1999, 431–432). Conversely, in the confessions of witch suspects the victims of their witchcraft are depicted as persons who have exploited the goodwill and helpfulness of their relatives earlier in life but neglected them after becoming successful (see, e.g., Ward 1956, 52–55). Suspicions and speculations about the activities and identities of witches are part of everyday life in Akan communities and mostly they do not lead to any dramatic consequences, let alone homicidal violence. Although the subjective points of view differ according to situation, it can be said that the witchcraft discourse as a whole is primarily about "moral personhood" (Englund 1996, 273). This is underpinned by perceptions of the unity of the kin group and the inseparability of the individual. For modern purifiers, of course, witchcraft discourses are an enormous worksite as they confound relations between human beings, mechanisms of nature, and spiritual interventions.

Witches are detected and suppressed with the help of charms, medicines, forest-monsters, dwarfs, ancestral spirits, and local gods. So-called anti-witchcraft movements usually develop around certain charms or the shrine of a god which has a reputation as an efficient witch-hunter. The shrines are maintained by traditional priests possessed by the god who can speak through them. As indicated above, sometimes the deities and charms have been imported to their current location and it is often said that the most powerful witch-hunters have come from northern Ghana or even as far north as Burkina Faso or Mali (see McLeod 1975, 113). However, many locally-born deities are also known for their potency in fighting witchcraft.[75] Those gods and their priests that are known to perform well

75 Scholars have speculated on the reasons why southern Akan groups have perceived the northern savannah gods to be the most potent weapon against witches. It has been suggested that the Akan did not consider their own local *abosom* to be effective against witchcraft, while the North, which represented the uncivilized 'other' to the Akan, was seen to possess the strangeness and ambivalence needed to combat the forces of witchcraft that were antithetical to Akan society. Furthermore, their power was evidenced by the Akan understanding that the northern peoples were not anxious about witchcraft (see McLeod 1975, 112–113; Allman and Parker 2005, 106–142). The priests I talked with usually spoke about the relationships between different spirits, both northern and local, by using a kinship idiom. Although they made many distinctions between different kinds of spirits, they seldom posited any stark dichotomies between them and more often cultivated expressions like "they are a family of spirits" or "all the spirits are one". They readily admitted that many of the northern spirits are 'popular' because they are good at catching witches, but categorically denied that the local gods were not capable of doing the same.

may earn a nation-wide reputation and people from faraway places often come to consult them. I have been told that some Ghana-based deities are consulted by visitors from neighbouring countries and as far away as Nigeria. Sometimes the priests travel abroad and offer their services to the members of the Ghanaian immigrant communities in Europe and North America and permanent shrines also operate in the metropolitan centres of the global north (see Parish 2011; 2013).

People consult the gods in times of anticipation, risk-taking, trouble, and confusion. Sudden sicknesses, deaths, missing people or property, quarrels with other people, pending visa applications, and future economic ventures are all concerns that may provide a reason for seeing a traditional priest. At times people may already be under the impression that they have fallen victim to witchcraft and might have a number of suspects in mind. Alternatively, in order to prevent witch attacks in the future, they may see the priest to ask for a charm or a medicine (*aduro*, pl. *nnuro*) that will protect them from the powers of the witches in the future. On their arrival the visitors are formally welcomed, after which they introduce themselves and their problem to the priest and his / her attendants. From there the case is taken to the god and at this point a gift, for example, a bottle of strong alcohol and a small sum of money, is presented. The god is consulted when the priest has fallen into a trance-like state called *akom*, marked by shaking and twitching of the body, reddish eyes, and changed voice. In *akom* the god speaks through the priest and its messages are communicated to the audience by an attendant of the priest. Alternatively, instead of going into *akom*, some priests throw cowries, beads, or bones on a circular area and read the patterns they form as signs from the god. If witchcraft is diagnosed as the cause of the problem in question, the god will give instructions about how the witch can be 'caught' and, usually, some specific rituals have to be performed in order to unleash the powers that will do so. For instance, I once witnessed a case where a list of suspects written on a piece of paper was wrapped inside a bundle of poisonous skin-irritating plants according to the detailed instructions of the priest. The actual witch was supposed to feel the sensations caused by the plants and would subsequently need to confess in order to get relief. The deity might also reveal the identity of the witch directly and order him / her to be brought to the shrine house. Nonetheless, it is believed that the spiritual powers of the god are potent enough to force witches to confess when they are responsible for misfortune as they are thought to experience physical pain, abnormalities, and mental strain until they plead guilty. A priest of Atia Mframa described this to me in the following way:

> You have to confess! If you don't confess the spirits will surely kill you. I have seen horrible things happen to those people who wouldn't confess. Right in front of this place [a room where suspects are kept] I have seen a person beaten up by invisible hands. The person was screaming and writhing with pain on the ground, but you couldn't see anybody there doing the beating. And it wouldn't stop before the person promised to confess.

The confessed witches can be ritually 'cured' or 'cooled' by the traditional priests, after which they can go on with their lives in their own communities. Those who refuse to confess may become ostracized, driven into exile from their villages, or even subjected to violence. Customarily, those who have been helped by the god should indicate their gratitude by bringing gifts to the shrine, which may include money, drinks, farm animals, or luxury items.

According to the historians, curing witchcraft was actually the innovation that the new movements had introduced since the late nineteenth century (see McCaskie 1981, 129–130). During the pre-colonial era witches had been often sentenced to death by chiefly authorities and, even if their lives were spared, they were banished from their natal lineages which meant a loss of 'jural personhood' and degradation to slave status (see Rattray 1929, 19, 313). Witch-finding methods of the pre-colonial era included poison ordeals, and the practice of "carrying the corpse", as the dead body of a witchcraft victim was believed to be capable of showing the way to the home of his / her killer, although these methods were prohibited by the government during the early stages of colonial rule (Rattray 1959 [1927], 31, 167–170). The relationship between the 'cults' of the colonial era and the traditional rulers varied. At times the 'cults' became associated with local destoolment movements, but in some instances chiefs sought to incorporate them into their offices in order to gain popularity among their subjects, or even to regain the power to punish witches which had been taken away from them by the indirect rule system (e.g. Parker 2004, 409–410): as their 'political' powers were secularized, they sought to enhance their spiritual powers in the sphere of anti-witchcraft activities (see also Fields 1985, 65–66). Nowadays, it seems that in some localities the indigenous deities connected to the chiefly stools, and the witch-hunters of outside origin, have merged into a single ritual complex. Hence, those traditional priests who are the caretakers of the shrines of the 'state gods' are also often involved, or at least in close relations, with the witch-finders.

Some Christian churches are thought of as powerful agencies in the finding of witches and their subsequent exorcism. These movements, a few of which had already been founded before World War I, are often referred to as "healing churches" (see Debrunner 1961, 149–162); some of the oldest and smallest of these groups have died out or lost most of their following, while new ones are constantly appearing. For instance, in 2005–2006 when I conducted fieldwork in the rural Brong-Ahafo Region I studied a locally-founded church that practiced witch-finding using methods that closely resemble those of the traditional priests. Instead of local gods or charms, the pastors of the congregation become possessed by 'angels' (*abɔfoɔ, sing. ɔbɔfo*) who are able to identify witches and also to force confessions. The movement had become more and more popular during the early 2000s and also gained a foothold in urban communities. Moreover, many of the churches belonging to the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement are dedicated to fighting witchcraft (see, e.g., Meyer 1999, 175–179; Newell 2007). Although some European missionaries of the colonial era denied the existence of witchcraft (Debrunner 1961, 135–136), many associated it with the evil powers of the devil, thereby indirectly confirming its existence

(ibid., 143–144). Hence, it appears that even the adoption of a new religion has not been able to secure the demise of the 'superstitions' of the old.

Investigating a cult

As discussed in Chapter 4, the architects of the British indirect rule system sought legitimation from evolutionary thinking, asserting that the subject societies should be left to develop on their own. However, there were certain exceptions to the rule when an intervention on the part of the colonizing power was deemed necessary; a common example comprised those cases where traditional institutions or practices were considered "repugnant to natural justice and humanity", that is, European moral ideas; the conventions of African witch-finding fell into this category and they were to be suppressed as dangerous superstitions (Lugard 1922, 563–564, 617). The colonial government's position on witchcraft beliefs demonstrated very plainly the paradox inherent in the ideology of indirect rule: on the one hand, society was seen as a 'natural occurrence' that developed along its own course, but on the other, it needed to be improved and redefined by its rulers (see Kuklick 1979, 43–50).

The first anti-witchcraft 'cult' that was prohibited by the colonial administration in the Akan area of Ghana was called Aberewa (lit. 'Old Woman'). It had originally been imported there from the French Côte d'Ivoire and despite protests from missionaries it had been allowed to remain for several years because it was deemed safe, or even helpful, by the administrators, who considered it a part of tribal religion. Nevertheless, the official opinion of Aberewa started to shift when some prominent chiefs complained about the movement's uncontrollability, while the practice of mutilating the corpses of those persons believed to have been killed by the god as punishment for practicing witchcraft was found shocking. Consequently, Aberewas's prohibition was announced in 1908 and the colonial police force systematically demolished all of its shrines, to be followed in the 1920s and 30s by numerous similar 'cults', many of which were investigated and some of them stamped out by the colonial administration (Allman and Parker 2005, 128–148). Interestingly, from the point of view of the indirect rule system, what Christianity and anti-witchcraft 'cults' had in common was that they were both 'pan-tribal' and both posed potential challenges to the authority of local chiefs, making them politically suspect (see Ranger 1993, 67–72). Of course, actions against 'cults' were easier to justify since they were aberrant and superstitious by definition.

Another example is provided by a movement that developed around a god called Kukuro (lit. 'Lift it up') in the late 1920s. Its specialities were healing sicknesses and helping infertile women, but its new popularity was mainly based on its capacity to find and heal witches and offer powerful protection against witchcraft. Those who sought its help were thought to have put their own lives at risk since Kukuro was believed to keep a close watch on its followers and punish their bad deeds. A colonial administrator who had visited the shrine wrote:

> I was informed that if an adherent of Kukuro even in a distant place does anything bad Kukuro "catches" him and he falls sick. In which case he confesses his evil deed. He then comes to Kukuro and makes an offering (The amount is entirely voluntary – no specific fees are charged) whereupon he is cured. On further enquiring what bad thing he might do, I was told he might use bad medicine, practise witchcraft, bury money underground or contemplate murder. It would not affect him if he were guilty of seduction or stealing – unless the injured party especially invoked Kukuro. (PRAAD BRG 28/2/7a)

The shrine of Kukuro was located in the village of Nkyeraa in the Wenchi District of the Western Province of Ashanti (now the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana). Kukuro itself was very old and the oral traditions of the area associate it with events dating back to the first half of the eighteenth century (see Meyerowitz 1974, 58; see also Allman and Parker 2005, 124), although the district commissioner of Wenchi heard about it for the first time in 1925, at which point Kukuro was considered an ordinary "village fetish" with a modest following (PRAAD BRG 28/2/7b). As its reputation as an efficient witch-hunter spread, visitors started to arrive from all over central and southern Ghana and several high-ranking chiefs were said to have consulted it (PRAAD BRG 28/2/7c). Three years later, in 1928, its activities first came to the notice of government officials in the capital of the Central Province, Kumasi, when complaints were made about its 'immoral behaviour'. Allegedly, Kukuro had started killing people arbitrarily and extorting money from those who wished to be spared and the complainants appealed to the authorities to abolish the 'cult'. What made these complaints problematic was that the supposed victims of Kukuro had died by natural causes and in localities far from the shrine. For instance, the paramount chief of Adanse, an area roughly 170 kilometres from Nkyeraa, had reported to his provincial commissioner that Kukuro is "thoroughly bad and that a number of his subjects (he states 100) have died after visiting it while others have had to pay over large sums of money to the Fetish" (PRAAD BRG 28/2/7d). Similarly, a European Roman Catholic missionary stationed at Kumasi, 130 kilometres from Nkyeraa, claimed that some members of his congregation had been put under the protection of Kukuro by their non-Christian relatives and they were now being killed by Kukuro who supposedly did not approve of Christianity (PRAAD BRG 28/2/7c).[76]

Since the accusations made against Kukuro were exceptionally serious and came from influential quarters, the local district commissioner was sent to Nkyeraa to investigate the activities of the notorious witch-finder. In the village the commissioner interviewed the priest of Kukuro, his attendants, and visitors who had come there for consultation. He also witnessed

76 Some missionaries were convinced that witchcraft was not merely a 'pagan fallacy' but that it was in some very real way connected to the devil (see Debrunner 1961, 143–144). For instance, a Methodist missionary who had treated a mentally ill woman suspected of witchcraft diagnosed her to be, among other things, "spiritually damaged" (PRAAD BRG 3/1/1a).

a thanksgiving ceremony, in which Kukuro's followers were bringing offerings to it in order to show their gratitude for its overpowering their enemies:

> ...a young man came forward. After handing his chicken [a mandatory gift to Kukuro on consultation] to the servant he said: "I came to you for the protection of my cocoa farm. This person who wrought me mischiefs [sic] has been revealed to me and I have seen a sign of progress in my undertakings. I come to redeem my promise and to thank you with a sheep and a bottle of rum". (PRAAD BRG 28/2/7b)

The priest of Kukuro and his attendants were not aware of the killings of which the god was charged, but as for killing people in general, they admitted that their god was capable of that although they did not exactly know how that happened:

> Some people it is stated who consult the fetish and ask for protection against persons who have tried to do them harm will return to the fetish and tell it that they have come to thank him for his protection. They have discovered their enemy and he is dead [...] But the fetish does not know if such a man [i.e., the dead enemy] existed, or if he is dead or indeed anything about him. It has simply to rely on the statement of the person making it. The servants of the fetish acknowledge that they can't prove how the people are killed. They are aware of the death only from the confessions made. Apparently all people dying must confess what they know or imagine to be the cause of death. (Ibid.)

Basically, Kukuro's people were admitting to the commissioner that their god was indeed killing people, or "evil doers", as they put it, but their 'confession' did not meet the standards of administrative rationality. In addition to that, there was absolutely no material link between the shrine and its assumed victims: "Certain it is that they do not give any medicine to its [Kukuro's] devotees, nothing is passed from the fetish to the consultants and nobody touches the fetish" (ibid.). Thus the possibility of poisoning, for instance, had to be ruled out. The administrators had to accept that according to their criteria there were really no crimes to investigate:

> It is to be observed that both the Omanhene of Adansi [i.e., paramount chief] and the Missionary allege that the fetish has caused the death of many people, but unfortunately neither quotes a particular case. If one concrete case of death resulting from a visit to the fetish or indeed of any ill effects endangering human life can be proved then I think that one case alone would be sufficient to warrant its suppression. (PRAAD BRG 28/2/7e)

Consequently, the case against Kukuro was dropped and its 'cult' was never abolished, although it was investigated once again in 1931, but that time for involvement in a destoolment case (see PRAAD BRG 28/2/7a). During my fieldwork in Ghana in 2006, Kukuro's 'cult' was still active in Nkyeraa although it did not have the same popularity that it had roughly eighty years

earlier. The Kukuro case is a good example of the colonial administrators' inability to address the concerns of the colonial subjects because of the division they had created between themselves and those they ruled. The administrators were not methodologically, conceptually, or in any other way equipped to investigate murders that took place in the spiritual realm – even though maintaining law and order in the colony was their most solemn duty.

Kukuro was not an isolated case and throughout the 1930s and 40s the colonial administrators in Ghana received numerous complaints about local "witch-finding fetishes". In the 1930s a "Native Customs Order" banning "the practice of witch or wizard finding" was introduced in colonial Ashanti (PRAAD BRG 3/1/1b), but even the legislators themselves did not believe that it would put a stop to, or even restrain the phenomenon in any significant way. In fact, they sought to interpret the phenomenon according to Western economic rationality, which partly convinced them that they were dealing with something unstoppable. This is how one commissioner saw it:

> It is to be feared that the practise of Witch finding is so lucrative and the general belief in the powers of witches is so universal, that nearly every Fetish, however harmless may be its original pretensions, finds it difficult to refrain from taking up this profitable and popular line of business.
>
> There can be little doubt that the survival of this practice in spite of the suppression of a series of Fetishes on account of such activities is the result of a popular demand created by the almost universal belief in the supernatural powers of those "possessed of a devil".
>
> In such circumstances it cannot be expected that the practise of Witch finding can be put an end to by the enactment of law. (PRAAD BRG 3/1/1c)

Conversely, it was likely that such measures would create tensions of a different kind. For example, as Natasha Gray (2005) has shown in her treatment of anti-witchcraft movements in Gold Coast, the members of the outlawed 'cults' found themselves in a double predicament, where they were forced to risk either being punished by legal fines for taking part in unlawful rituals, or suffering the punishment of the gods for not fulfilling their ritual duties. Furthermore, from the point of view of the colonial subjects, practicing witchcraft, which had previously been classified as a violation of state taboos and punishable by death in a chief's court, was now removed from that status and relegated to the colonial category of superstition, while anti-witchcraft activities, which had been traditional methods of investigating and punishing the transgressions, were now criminalized (see also Fields 1982, 576–577). Consequently, the ban on witch-finding could not be enforced for very long. The priests of the anti-witchcraft movements had also found a way to bypass the bans by assuming a new professional identity as 'native physicians', who claimed to treat witchcraft suspicions and confessions as symptoms of psychic disorders. In practice, however, they used their conventional methods. This new biomedical discourse eventually met with the approval of the colonial administrators, who probably considered it a painless way out of an awkward situation. The chiefs also regained some of their previous powers in this field as the Ashanti Confederacy Council

was put in charge of licensing the physicians (Allman and Parker 2005, 174–180).[77]

The police investigations and legislative measures related to witchcraft are an extreme example of how purification affects the administration of justice. The scope of charges and punishments is limited by the number of possible "responsible actors" or types of actions (Keane 2007, 80) and, because witch-finding spirits and witchcraft are not among them, the crimes reported to the authorities cease to exist. However, at the same time the authorities have to come to terms with the limitations of their own agency: although they maintain that witchcraft is false therefore not worthy of knowing, they have to recognize their incapacity to regulate a society that does not share this position.

Public witchcraft

These days it has become a more or less commonplace notion that in Africa witchcraft does not only appear in the traditional societies of rural areas, but that it is also found in urban settings and in modern sectors of society. In addition to villages and farms, the witches of today are also thought to operate in intrinsically modern surroundings such as global credit institutions, gambling casinos and international football tournaments, among others. During the 1990s, this observation brought witchcraft topics back to mainstream Africanist anthropology. One of the contentions in this literature has been that witchcraft discourses are critical commentaries on the downside of modernity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, xxvii–xxix). Hence, instead of fading away or disappearing as Africa 'develops', witchcraft has actually been on the increase in recent times (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 310). For example, the Comaroffs (1999, 279) maintain that post-apartheid South Africa has experienced a dramatic rise in "the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends", which has in many places led to "violent reactions against people accused of illicit accumulation". According to them, both the magical means and the violence against those who use them are local attempts to cope with the changes and contradictions entrained by global, "millennial" capitalism (ibid., 284–

77 After the independence of Ghana the Nkrumah government removed the regulation of "traditional medicine" from the jurisdiction of the chiefs to a government-sponsored body called the Psychic and Traditional Healing Association. In the succeeding decades a number of new "medical associations" were formed (Allman and Parker 2005, 225–226). In the 1960s and 70s government projects concerning "traditional medicine" focused primarily on the scientific study of medical plants, and "faith healers" and "spiritualists", who claimed the "supernatural" as the source of their healing powers, were reluctant to work with them (Twumasi and Warren 1986, 121–125). The priests that I have studied with in Brong-Ahafo are active members in medical associations and some have held important positions in them; however, in their daily work at the shrines they do not use the vocabulary of the modern medical profession or Western parapsychology. For instance, I have never heard anyone refer to themselves as a 'psychic'.

285). Similar observations have also been made with regards Ghana about a new, rising interest in the occult and its connections to global capitalism. For instance, Meyer (1995, 250) has discussed how Ghanaians use occult imagery to "diabolise negative aspects of the capitalist world economy" such as individualistic accumulation and indifference to the collectivist ethos. Such views, however, cannot be accepted without certain reservations. First, the modernity of witchcraft seems to be relatively old. In the late colonial era, in the 1940s and 1950s, anthropologists were already claiming that the preoccupation with witchcraft in Ghana was essentially a modern phenomenon resulting from rising tensions in social relations caused by the ups and downs of the recently introduced cash-based cocoa economy and the individualistic ideologies of capitalism and Christianity (e.g. Ward 1956). Although the theories and conceptualizations of the earlier scholars were markedly different from those of, for example, the Comaroffs and Meyer, the same basic understanding was held that witchcraft could not be studied without reference to modernity. Second, as the Comaroffs (2000, 310) themselves acknowledge, it is difficult to "quantify the occult" and hence make any definite assertions about its proliferation.

However, what is clear is that, in Ghana, witchcraft discourses have now made their way into the public sphere of the modern state. The subject is now much more visible than it was, for example, in the mid-1990s, when I encountered it for the first time in my field research, something which has much to do with the lifting of state censorship and increasing privatization of media brought about by the democratization process of the 1990s (see, e.g., Meyer 1998b; 2004b). Free and commercial media has truly become the playground of the occult. Nowadays, both tabloid and mainstream newspapers regularly report on witchcraft accusations, confessions, and violent attacks on suspected witches. Witchcraft themes suffuse Ghanaian and Nigerian-made movies, which are shown by commercial TV stations and distributed on video cassettes and DVDs. Ordinary people write letters to daily newspapers and call in to live radio shows to complain about problems caused by witches. The ubiquity and hugely increased visibility of witchcraft themes must pose a serious problem for the modernist legislators and educators; after all, as will become evident below, their core message has been that witchcraft is not real, yet the pressure to deal with anti-witchcraft activities through official means is probably bigger than it has ever been.

Witchcraft as a human rights issue

The post-colonial government's position on witchcraft is in a very important way connected to the redefinition of the society that it rules. While the colonial government ruled 'natives' who were considered 'traditional' in essence (that is to say, for example, members of their 'tribe', subjects of their chiefs), post-colonial society is thought to consist of individual citizens who have systematically defined rights and duties, and the idea of a fundamental difference between rulers and ruled has been dispelled: the British colonial

lawmaker and the African subject were thought to live in completely separate normative realities, the African legislator and the villager share the same status of citizen. In this construction 'traditionalism' appears as an aspect of citizenship in a modern state. The democratic constitution in 1992, after two decades of military rule, secured the "fundamental human right and freedoms" for every person in Ghana, including the freedom "to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the provisions of this Constitution". As a provision, it was added that "all customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person are prohibited" (CRG, Chapter 5, Article 26, paras 1–2). This view relies on an ideology wherein a social whole, in this case the nation state of Ghana, is constructed of individuals; thus the main concern is the integrity and autonomy of individuals and their capacity to act freely. Consequently, public discussion of anti-witchcraft activities revolves around their supposed nature as a 'dehumanizing customary practice' that violates the rights of its victims. Hence the problematic aspects of witchcraft beliefs have been reduced to a conflict between individual freedom and public good. As a Ghanaian journalist summarized it: "freedom of conscience is enshrined in the constitution, therefore no one will have any qualms about whether anyone believes in witchcraft", but it is "disgusting to allow someone to suffer because another person thinks he or she is a witch or a wizard" (Vanderpuye 2004). For a person who 'believes' in witchcraft such a statement has to sound absurd: one is free to believe that someone is out there killing others through spiritual means, but strongly prohibited to do anything to stop it.

Since anti-witchcraft activities are now seen mostly as a human rights issue, they are, as a result, also a global issue because Ghana's human rights situation is constantly monitored from the outside. NGOs like Amnesty International and government bodies like the U.S. State Department publish annual country reports on Ghana (and other countries) where they list major human rights violations and evaluate the situation in general; attacks on suspected witches are frequently mentioned in the reports. (e.g. U.S. Department of State 2005). Western governments also produce these reports for the use of those of their officials who are involved with asylum cases. "Traditional practices", a category that includes witch-finding and suppression activities, are nowadays also raised in asylum claims (see UK Home Office 2002). All this understandably makes the Ghanaian government even more concerned about the country's human rights record since promotion of human rights is high on the agenda of those donor organizations and Western governments that are the major source of Ghana's development aid (e.g. World Bank 1998).

In 1993 the Ghanaian parliament established a government agency titled the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) which is charged with investigating alleged violations of human rights and taking action to remedy proven violations. The Commission also holds workshops to educate the public, traditional leaders, the police, and the military on human rights issues (see CHRAJ 2003), and investigates anti-

witchcraft activities. Probably the most well-known case of the latter has been that of the witch camps of northern Ghana which have received considerable publicity in the country and elsewhere, even making their way into the pages of Western travel guidebooks (e.g. Briggs 2004, 374–375). The camps are basically asylums for women who have been banished from their home villages by traditional authorities or by their own relatives for suspected witchcraft. Most of the accused are older women and they fear that they may be beaten up or lynched if they try to return to their homes; meanwhile the camps are led by local headmen or ritual specialists who claim they are able to "cure" witchcraft (CHRAJ 2003). Estimates concerning camp populations vary from source to source, though it is suggested that it might have grown from 850 in 2002 to 3,000 in 2006 (see UK Home Office 2002; U.S. Department of State 2006), while the most recent reports indicate that the numbers are currently decreasing slowly (UK Home Office 2013). The Commission has sent its field agents to inspect the camps and concluded that closing them down and repatriating the residents would not be a viable option. In the CHRAJ Annual Report released after the camp inspections it was stated that

> [the women] share the same view with their caretakers that the camp is not a prison for witches but a safe haven. It is a refuge centre where women whose lives are threatened come for protection after going through a "dewitching" exercise. They see the Tindana or the Tilana [i.e., the ritual specialist] […] as a protector. In fact none of the "witches" interviewed was prepared to return to their communities even if the Commission guaranteed their safety. They do not believe they will be accepted back and are convinced they will be lynched to death. (CHRAJ 2003, 28)

The main stress has now been laid on the eradication of anti-witchcraft activities through education. The Commission, together with some local NGOs, has launched campaigns to educate the Ghanaian public about the destructive consequences of witchcraft accusations and the human rights of the accused, handing out leaflets and getting air time with local radio stations. The focus of the campaigns has been on rural people "who find themselves prone to such [anti-witchcraft] practices" as one campaigner put it (Orhin 2003). The educational content is based on the modernist agenda of the state and is in accordance with knowledge hierarchies that do not differ greatly from those of the colonial rule: witchcraft beliefs are said to be damaging, not only because they engender conflicts and violence, but also because they are fallacious and traditional in an undesired way; in addition to emphasizing the falsehood and irrationality of witchcraft beliefs by categorizing them a superstition, it is also reiterated that they have no place in the modern legal system. When speaking to the press in connection with the campaigns, the head of CHRAJ stressed that "witchcraft is not a crime known to our law and no person has the right to take punitive action against anyone suspected of being a witch" (Vanderpuye 2004).

Furthermore, because the majority of the accused are women, anti-witchcraft activities are often currently discussed as a form of gender abuse

(see Osam 2004). For instance, a Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Welfare described witch suppression as a "discriminatory practice", which is "bad, obnoxious, and a violation of the rights of the women" (Vanderpuye 2004). The redefinition of anti-witchcraft activities as "gender based violence" has also captured the attention of organizations such as International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAW), which has insisted that the Government of Ghana should "enact legislation that criminalizes banishment of old women from their homes on allegations of witchcraft". These organizations compare anti-witchcraft activities with female genital mutilation and other practices that are perceived as violations of the human rights of girls and women (IWRAW 2006).[78]

In addition to the CHRAJ and some other government agencies, several Ghanaian NGOs are trying to improve the living conditions of the witch camps. Various organizations have provided food, medical care, and other forms of support to the residents of the camps (CHRAJ 2003, 27–28) and the NGOs and their donors seem to share the modernist views of state officials. One example is the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), an organization that raises money for NGOs that promote women's rights in Africa – including a local NGO called Timari-Tama Rural Women, which is, among other things, "embarking on sensitization, awareness campaigns through workshops, media publications, traditional rulers, opinion leaders, religious bodies and the health sector" (AWDF 2005). In their campaign letter they describe their strategy to eradicate witchcraft beliefs as follows:

> Research has proven that in communities where poverty is rife and illiteracy is high, people tend to be superstitious. It is, therefore, not surprising that they attribute their misfortunes to witchcraft and sorcery. Superstitious beliefs are so intricate and difficult to eradicate because they are deeply rooted in the people's traditional beliefs. However, when people are educated, rather than attributing their problems to superstitious beliefs, they are armed with the information to explain issues normally regarded with superstitious eyes. Perhaps further research could be undertaken to ascertain that poverty is indeed the driving force, which causes people to accuse old women of witchcraft and their consequence incarceration to witches camps. (Ibid.)

The quote exemplifies the modernist view that sees purification as a moral necessity and a requirement for the full attainment of citizenship. For persons to act as free autonomous individuals in an ordered community, they need to share an understanding about the possibilities of agency (see Keane 2007, 55, 77). If we agree with Latour's (1993, 10) suggestion that modernity implies a break in time between a stable archaic past and

78 Female genital mutilation was criminalized in Ghana in 1994. In 1998 the parliament passed legislation that amended the 1960 Criminal Code to provide additional protection for women and children. This legislation also banned the practice of "female customary servitude" known as *trokosi* (UK Home Office 2002). Prior to that, the international public was informed about *trokosi* by the American investigative television program *60 minutes*.

progressive revolution, and similarly a battle whose outcome separates winners and losers, then one rarely sees these ideas anywhere articulated as forcefully as in the modernist discourses about witchcraft, which rest largely on claims of the failure of those people who believe in witchcraft, and the necessity to obliterate their beliefs.[79]

The way of conceptualizing witchcraft by government agencies and NGOs reproduces the epistemological order established in the colonial era. Witch suppression is defined as a problem of people who are poor, rural, traditional, and uneducated and consequently their beliefs and worldview become graded as the lesser knowledge of lesser people. Similar definitions could not be used in explaining the witchcraft beliefs of the wealthy business elite (see Parish 2000) or the higher ranks of academia (see Onyinah 2001). One does not often hear about businessmen or university professors beating up or lynching their 'spiritual adversaries', but then again they are the people who can afford the best protective charms and medicines money can buy.

Hybrid laws

The problems that states have with witchcraft tell us about the failures of authoritarian modernism. As James Scott (1998, 89-94) argues, the point of "the Enlightenment view of legal codes" was not so much to reflect the distinctive customs and practices of a people but rather to create a new community by refining, amending, and codifying the most rational of their customs and suppressing the more "uncivilized" ones. To put this in Latour's terms, the modernization of a state's legal order meant that it was purified from superstitions like witchcraft. However, when witchcraft beliefs and anti-witchcraft activities remain prevalent and persistent, and will not disappear through education or 'raising awareness', the purification process starts to turn against the objectives of political projects. The administrative and legal apparatuses that refuse to engage, or are incapable of dealing, with local knowledge fail in their function of regulating society. The alternative

79 Academic literature on witchcraft has faced accusations of neglecting the human suffering connected to it (see Schnoebelen 2009, 2). Accordingly, it should be emphasized that the goal of this chapter has not in any way been to offer justification for violence or trivialize the hardships of those charged and punished for witchcraft. On the other hand, this is an accusation that in its own way reproduces the epistemological hierarchies that are under scrutiny here. In Western culture one is still relatively free to discuss science without making apologetic references to the millions who have suffered and lost their lives as a result of projects relying on science. This is made possible through processes of separation, where certain parts of science, like racial theories, have been bracketed off as distortions or contaminations of 'real' science (Visvanathan 1988). Obviously, witchcraft does not enjoy that same privilege. Nothing redeemable is seen in it and every victim of every 'witch-hunt' is considered to have suffered in vain.

is to introduce legislation that prohibits both witchcraft and anti-witchcraft activities.[80]

The colonial precedents and experiences from sub-Saharan Africa are not encouraging. In Tanzania both witchcraft accusations and practicing witchcraft have been illegal since the colonial period. However, in some areas government officials are reluctant to take cases to the magistrates and rather try to persuade the accused to undergo the rituals that are needed to "cure" witches. Moreover, officials openly support witchcraft-suppression institutions and consider them invaluable for the maintenance of peace. In localities where officials have adopted a more assertive stance, court cases have dealt mostly with witchcraft accusations and not with practicing witchcraft. Although the latter is regarded as equally illegal, evidence fitting the court requirements is virtually impossible to obtain (Green 2005, 12–15, 19). In parts of Cameroon since the end of the 1970s, state courts have convicted witch suspects on the basis of the knowledge of traditional healers who have assumed the role of expert witnesses, becoming less concerned about healing the accused who, in turn, may then be condemned to long prison sentences. Since the proof in these cases depends on the expert opinion of the healers, they have become feared disciplinary figures in their communities – a situation they have been ready to exploit. Indeed, the state's involvement in these activities has further reinforced faith in the power of witchcraft in general (Geschiere 1997, 169–197). In post-Apartheid South Africa, where only witchcraft accusations are illegal, the state has been under growing popular pressure to intervene in the practice of witchcraft itself to avoid being perceived as a protector of witches (Ashforth 1998, 525–531).

The admission of so-called superstition into legal rationality compromises the power of the state. The modern institutions are formally in charge of controlling witchcraft, but in practice they have been forced to delegate this function to traditional institutions and specialists or, alternatively, to leave some aspects of it outside the official process. In a way, the witchcraft laws are an example of a hybrid in the Latourian sense. As a colonial category witchcraft is the residue that was left when the category of tribal religion was created. Since witchcraft has no place in the order of modern society it is constantly an object of purification: it needs to be removed from contact with some 'pure category' that it stains – be it religion, culture, kinship, or whatever. When states decree laws that prohibit witchcraft and require investigations, examinations, and judgments according to the premises of legal rationality, they produce hybrids that will inevitably create the need for further purification.

80 In Ghana there is currently no specific legislation concerning witchcraft. In its absence the courts have in recent years started to set warning examples. For instance, in 2003 Tamale High Court in northern Ghana sentenced a 28-year-old man to death after he and his father had clubbed a witch suspect to death in their home village. The harsh sentence was meant to be a message to the public. The judge presiding over the trial said afterwards: "The court will not spare anybody caught taking the law into their own hands to mete out instant justice to people especially women perceived as witches" (Orhin 2003).

8. Gods and Coup D'États

The permeating character of magic and witchcraft in the politics of post-colonial Africa has received a great deal of scholarly attention over the last two decades. Some authors connect such phenomena to a continent-wide resurgence of religion in which the political is becoming inseparable from the religious, claiming, therefore, that what is happening on the African political scene nowadays cannot be explained by reference to conventional political theory. Furthermore, African politicians are assuming roles that do not fit the secular offices they occupy and increasingly operating in spiritual arenas (Ellis and ter Haar 2004; 2007). Such observations seem to deal the final blow to grand narratives about secularization, relegating them to the class of "myths about modernity" (see Cannell 2006, 31–32). Whether we have been living in an era of re-enchantment or not, I do believe that studying the relationship between the 'occult' and politics helps us to understand the reality of secularization in Africa.

In this chapter I discuss the limits of secularization by analyzing two sets of perceptions of the violent aftermaths of military takeovers in 1979 and 1981 perpetrated by Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, who set his regime a major goal: promoting a "people's democracy" of mass participation which would overcome the limitations of the older "bourgeois democracy", and changing the class structure of the country. The implementation of these reforms resulted in authoritarian rule, political violence, and the seizure and nationalization of private property (Boafo-Arthur 2006, 257–263). I will show how two groups of people – the traditionalists of the rural town of Nkoranza, and groups from Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic churches – have interpreted these events in terms of religion and ritual. In terms of religious factionalism in contemporary Ghana, these could be seen as two opposed camps; however, what both interpretations have in common, in deep contrast to the secularist agenda of the modernist left-wing revolution, is that they see the spirit world as the origin of all power, which may be controlled through ritual. This discussion provides a fitting finale to the book because, by using ethnographic material, it shows how the 'religious successors' of the two groups that were opposed a hundred years ago view the secular project now. Thus both the method and the goal are representative of the study as a whole, which, in its own way, is a response to the need to study the "actual, lived situations [...] in which local peoples enact their understandings of, interest in, or perhaps total indifference to the secular and the religious" (Cannell 2010, 97).

Ritual and politics in post-colonial society

The recent Africanist literature on ritual and politics in post-colonial Africa offers two main perspectives which could be seen as complementary. The first discusses the part played by ritual symbolism in the manipulation of identities, an approach that draws on the claim that post-colonial societies are not made up of one coherent public space, organized according to a single principle, but rather comprise a plurality of spheres, each having its own logic. Therefore, post-colonial rulers as well as their subjects mobilize several identities in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and effectiveness (Mbembe 1992; Werbner 1996). Identity is thus understood as a situational or contextual product of various competing discourses, and it is invoked to highlight the unstable and fragmented nature of post-colonial societies (Cooper and Brubaker 2000, 8). Scholars using this approach have discussed how post-colonial rulers have selectively employed and transformed traditional symbols and values related to ritual rulers in order to give form to their aims and legitimize their status. For instance, in some cases the ritual secrecy that surrounds the divine king is assumed and used by the post-colonial rulers to cover up political violence and other unlawful activities. Or, more openly, cases of theft, corruption, extortion, and misappropriation of funds are represented under the guise of a gift economy, in which the politician-cum-chief receives tribute from his subordinates as well as redistributes wealth to his allies in public rituals (De Boeck 1996, 80–81). Correspondingly, traditional rulers seek to integrate symbols of the modern state into the traditional discourse and practice of power and authority. On the one hand, the traditional and modern leaders compete and intrude on each others' political spaces, but, on the other, there seems to be a silent mutual agreement on the rules of the game they are playing (Werbner 1996, 13–17). For example, to quote Richard Werbner:

> On one side, the kings are flown to the presidential palace, invited to party congresses and rallies, and given cars and residences at the capital. People's representatives, party functionaries and high officials of state attend upon king's shrines, their enthronements and other meetings at court, on the other side. Neither side can or does any longer monopolize access to the space of the state or of the kingdom; each side is on the move, not settled down for the convenience or stability of the other. (Ibid., 17)

Here, it is claimed that the links between established signifiers and what they stand for are cut off and reconnected to different meanings. Taken to the extreme, this "perversion of tradition", accompanied by dysfunctional state institutions, leads to a reality marked by a "crisis of meaningfulness", in which the meanings of the everyday political lexicon are continuously shifting or become totally void (De Boeck 1996, 91–93).

The second approach is provided by those anthropologists who stress the importance of theorizing enchanted perceptions of politics in order to understand modernity (Pels 2003, 15–16). Some of their studies discuss the ways in which ritual activities and witchcraft discourses have been

creatively used to evaluate the morality of politics and the persona of the politicians. These studies have analyzed, for instance, the widespread idiom in contemporary Africa in which poverty, corruption, injustice, and domination are represented as 'forms of terrible enchantment'. In popular political discourse this idiom takes the form of rumours about evil spiritual arrangements between ritual specialists and politicians (or other powerful persons), which transform the latter into highly potent practitioners of malevolent magic or witchcraft (Shaw 1996, 30). According to some, such rumours may be grounded in the reality of post-colonial politics. Specifically, it is claimed that many African governments are characterized by the existence of a 'shadow structure of power' which surrounds the official occupants of state power and consists of people who are relatively unknown, often with no official title or position, but who are able to exercise significant political influence and whose operations lie behind and beyond the legal edifice of the state, thereby effectively undermining the autonomy of established political institutions. These hidden power-brokers include, for example, leaders of paramilitary organizations, crime gang bosses, and smugglers, but also very often practitioners in spiritual matters (Bayart et al. 1999, 20–23). Hence the discourses on evil magic as well as the ritual practices required to counter it are seen as local attempts to recognize and confront the power of the shadow structures (West 2005, 265–266). More generally, it is maintained that ritual, as "an experimental technology intended to affect the flow of power in the universe", is a predictable reaction to problems brought about by processes of change. Therefore, it is precisely the language of ritual through which the promises and disappointments concerning modernization, development, and such projects are evaluated (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, xxx).

In addition to their references to modernist projects, these situations are post-colonial in the sense that a certain parallelism is understood to exist between traditional rulers on the one side and modern politicians on the other. Kings and presidents are perceived as political figures, although in differing ways, and it is possible for them to visit, or intrude upon, each others' 'spaces', and for the people to evaluate their actions and movements according to both registers. Thus, the modern politicians are not like the colonial administrators who were banned from the "sacred precincts". The two approaches discussed above concentrate on different ends of the power structure: the first on the way that post-colonial rulers manipulate identities in order to expand their power, while the second examines how these manipulations are dismissed or re-manipulated by their subjects – operations that take place simultaneously and are reflectively linked (see, e.g., Taylor 2004). In what follows, this is discussed as a problem for purification in that a political leader who explicitly separated and hierarchized religion and politics was persistently viewed as a ritualistic figure. The objective is to demonstrate that modernist ideas of a transcendent God and the 'proper place' of religion in society are not relevant to people who see politics as a field occupied not only by humans but also spirits.

Powerful people

As pointed out earlier, the Akan cosmology sees Onyame, the creator, as the source of all power. Thus the power that animates the bodies of humans, animals, and plants is derived from this superior being, while the powers of spiritual beings, objects, and substances stem directly or indirectly from the same source. Although the human faculties are restricted both by Onyame's creation and the physical and spiritual characteristics individuals have inherited from their predecessors, there are ways to obtain 'extra-human' abilities. A human being can acquire the qualities of other living beings (e.g. 'the strength of a lion', 'the dexterity of a cat') by studying the ways of the animals or by appropriating animal body parts for the preparation of medicines and charms. But more importantly, humans are considered to be able to acquire and / or make use of the powers of the spirits (*asunsum*, sing. *sunsum*). People who are perceived as 'powerful' (*wo tumi* or *wo sunsum*) are thought to have established a close relationship with the spirits, and their success and accomplishments are integrally linked to that connection, a relationship takes the form of exchange in sacrifice.

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, spiritual powers have a central role in many oral traditions concerning the foundations of Akan settlements, in which the present-day home is depicted as a place where the ancestors first met the spirits or where they had been led by them. Correspondingly, traditional accounts about the creation of the greatest of all Akan polities, the Asante Kingdom, describe massive chiefly sacrifices to the 'state gods' in order to obtain the power needed to overthrow the overlord at the time. The office of the chief is always backed by spiritual powers, and one of his principal duties is to make offerings to the spirits on behalf of his community, whose present well-being and future success is considered to depend on the spirits as they have the power to make the farmland fertile, fill the forest with animals for the hunters, and help people to give birth to new generations. Therefore chiefs, together with priests and other officeholders of the community, are seen as responsible for establishing and maintaining good relations with the spirit world. An elderly queen mother described the relationship between the traditional officeholders and the local deities in a following way:

> The gods are here to protect us. That is why we entertain them. The chief and the queen mother are like father and mother to the people and that is why they always have to be present when any customs for the gods are performed. This is so even if there is nothing special for them to do. Whenever there is a custom for a god, we consult them. That is our tradition. Everybody has a chance of consulting them, but the chief and the queen mother have to do it first, because those messages that concern the whole town are directed particularly to them. Sometimes the gods even ask specifically for them. For example, Ntoa [the main god of her town] calls me his wife. Hence, he often asks: "Where is my wife?" Sometimes the gods already have a message for you. Sometimes you might have a question for them, even something personal. For example, the gods may tell you that there is an epidemic coming and you must do such-and-such things to protect your people. Or, on the other hand, if you are feeling sick, you might ask the gods about the cause of the sickness.

Although the traditional officeholders are seen to hold a privileged position in relations with different kinds of spirits and their powers, it is well understood that anybody with the correct knowledge about the means of access can obtain some of that power. Consequently, people from all walks of life consult the shrines of the spirits on all matters imaginable. Meanwhile, the idea of the chief as a divine ruler is again extended to modern politicians, as they too are considered to have greater spiritual backing, resulting in numerous stories about politicians obtaining 'jujus' that make them bullet-proof, knife-proof, immune to traffic accidents and wealthy, among other attributes. Similarly, their relationships with certain traditional priests, pastors, herbalists, and so forth are a popular topic of gossip, while murders, suicides, mutilations, and other violent crimes are frequently associated with human sacrifices in the popular press and often a connection is made to politics. Of course, one can argue that much of this is just gossip and sensationalism, and hence mostly a product of the imagination, but what is important is that these stories are significant and understandable – by virtue of cosmological ideas that link power, leadership, and the spirit world – to the people who share them through numerous re-tellings. In Ghana popular rumours have associated all political leaders with spiritual arrangements, regardless of their own publicly voiced religious and ideological convictions. For instance, Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, and his Convention People's Party used Christianity to popularize and legitimate their anti-colonial ideology by portraying Nkrumah as an African Messiah and the organization as the Party of God (Simms 2003). The president described himself "a Marxist-Leninist and a non-denominational Christian" but, in contrast, he also assumed titles normally reserved for chiefs, traditional priests, and indigenous gods (Gifford 1999, 496). Accordingly, his alleged dealings with the spirit world were a constant subject of speculation in people's informal conversations as well as in opposition propaganda, and rumours even circulated about the magical powers contained in the walking stick and white handkerchief that he carried with him. Popular sources also claimed that Nkrumah had a secret chamber in his residence where he kept his 'juju', Kankan Nyame, which was said to be the dead body of a pregnant woman. Similarly, the military coups of 1979 and 1981 masterminded by Rawlings were shrouded in mystery. However, before describing the 'spiritual warfare' associated with the early Rawlings era, I will briefly outline what conventional political history has to say about the events that made an unknown junior officer the longest-serving head of state in Ghana to date.

Revolutionary violence

In 1979 Ghana was ruled by a group of military officers known as the Supreme Military Council (SMC). At the time, the country was spiralling into poverty: its institutions were rapidly declining through neglect and corruption; people did not have enough to eat; and the value of money was being eroded by inflation (Jeffries 1989, 77–78). Strikes were widespread and the SMC had declared a State of Emergency. This was the context in which Flight-

Lieutenant J. J. Rawlings, together with six other soldiers, planned a military takeover that was supposed to 'cleanse' the armed forces of corruption. The plan was put into action in May 1979, but it proved unsuccessful and Rawlings was arrested and charged with mutiny. Surprisingly, the young pilot was given a public trial, during which his oratorical skills and fearlessness in challenging his accusers made a great impact on his audience. Before he could be sentenced, on 4th June 1979, a group of soldiers forcibly released Rawlings from custody, reorganized the aborted coup, and made him the chairman of the emergent Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) (ibid., 83–84), which spent only four months in power before handing over to a short-lived civilian regime led by President Hilla Limann (ibid., 88–89). Tensions soon developed between the Limann administration and Rawlings. As the Ghanaian economy continued to deteriorate, Rawilings reassumed power on 31st December 1981, now supported by a group of young Marxist intellectuals, mostly students and academics, but also some junior army officers and activists in the labour movement. The Marxists' aim was to achieve a socialist Ghana, but they failed to create any constructive or realistic economic plan and, when support was not forthcoming from any of the Soviet bloc countries, Rawlings finally abandoned the leftists and turned to the IMF and World Bank for an economic recovery program (ibid., 92–95). Subsequently, the conditions imposed by Western donors, along with growing internal opposition, made Rawlings agree to a return to civilian rule in the 1990s (Oquaey 1995).

The 1979 coup was by no means bloodless, as the AFRC carried out a 'house cleaning' exercise aimed at purging the Ghanaian army of corruption. During the first weeks of military leadership, three former coup makers-cum-heads of state, Generals Akwasi Afrifa, I. K. Acheampong, and Frederick Akuffo, were executed together with five other senior officers. Several officers were taken into custody and those who had held political offices were later put before the newly established People's Courts and imprisoned after conviction. The 'house cleaning' was also extended to other public institutions. Many high-ranking civil servants were dismissed and their property and assets confiscated by the state. Some of them were also sentenced to various terms of imprisonment by the People's Courts. In the general civilian population, wealthy traders and market women suspected of collaborating with the former military rulers, or even persons who merely appeared to be affluent or 'bourgeois', were attacked on the grounds of their being the cause of Ghana's economic hardships (NRCR, Vol. 4, Chapter 1, 47–50). Rawlings' so-called second coming was also marked by violence. In June 1982, three high court judges and a retired army major were abducted from their homes. Their half-burned bodies were later found near the country's capital, Accra. The new government, titled the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), announced that the murders had been orchestrated by 'enemies of the revolution' and the killers were caught and swiftly convicted, but many details of the case suggested top-level political involvement. The abuses did not only target the rich and powerful: soldiers harassed ordinary people, seizing goods in the markets and shops, and at road blocks; private vehicles were also confiscated, allegedly for

"operations"; some soldiers entered homes by force to extort money or to search and seize personal goods; killings were rampant and mostly carried out by trigger-happy men in uniform (NRCR, Vol. 4, Chapter 1, 55–63). During my fieldwork in Kumasi in 2000–2001 I lived with a shop-keeping family whose properties had been seized in the 'house cleaning', while some of their close relatives had been arrested and imprisoned by the military government. One of the latter, an elderly trader, had died in prison, while another was released only when Rawlings was stepping down in 2001. Their view was that the Asante people in particular had been targeted by the violent measures, because they were 'business-minded' or 'industrious' and thus generally better off; indeed, antipathy to Rawlings and what was seen as his 'tribalist' government remained intense on the part of most Asante people to whom I talked (see also Jeffries 1992, 222). They recollected the public humiliations, seizures, and killings of the coup days with dread, but also with a certain irony when referring to the military regimes' arbitrary anti-corruption and anti-hoarding measures that sometimes bordered on absurdity.[81]

Rawlings himself has always refused to be characterized as a coup-maker or leader of a military junta. On the contrary, he insists that both of his coups were popular revolutions and consequently the 'house cleaning', political executions, and other high-handed measures of the AFRC and early PNDC eras should be seen as "excesses of revolution", which were ultimately outweighed by the positive aspects of the revolutionary process (e.g. Shillington 1992, 89–97). In 2000, after Rawlings had been voted out of power, the newly elected President John Kufuor of the former opposition group, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), faced widespread demands that the government address the injustices of the past. The 1992 republican constitution prepared under the supervision of Rawlings' government had indemnified all military personnel from judicial scrutiny, making it unfeasible for those wronged to seek legal redress. To get around this, the new regime established the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) to compile historical records of all past human-rights violations by providing a formal forum in which victims could tell their stories. During his brief appearance in front of the commission in 2004, which lasted thirty minutes and was broadcast live on national radio and television, Rawlings was questioned about the political executions. His testimony did not reveal any new evidence and, afterwards, his interrogation was characterized mainly as a "symbolic victory" (Valji 2006, 12–16, 31–35).

81 For example, a close friend of mine, who was a secondary school student at the time, often tells a story about how he was stopped on the street and questioned by the military because he had an egg in his lunch box. According to the logic of his interrogators, possession of a single egg could indicate that he or someone else was hoarding them in bulk somewhere. Incidents similar to this fuelled strange rumours about the goals of the 'house cleaning' operations. One popular story in Nkoranza describes how people were burying empty glass bottles in their backyards because the rumours preceding the soldier raids claimed that "this is what they are looking for".

Secular revolution?

Although Rawlings' governments resorted to religious rhetoric from time to time and the preservation of traditional culture had a central place in their propaganda (Meyer 1998b, 27), Rawlings himself did not try to manipulate traditional or religious symbolism as extensively as some of his predecessors. He likened himself to such contemporary revolutionaries as Fidel Castro and Muammar Gaddafi, and not to great chiefs or religious leaders, a stance which was further accentuated by his appearance in the simple service uniform of the Ghana Air Force with scruffy beard and mirrored sunglasses. He preferred to represent himself as a "man of the people" or "pragmatist", who thought that theories and ideologies were better left to the Western intellectuals who could afford them (e.g. Jeffries 1989, 87).[82] Furthermore, revolution implied a fundamental reorganization of society and eradication of the old order (see West 2005, 151–152), something highlighted in the propaganda of the military junta, and sometimes in radically anti-social tones.[83] In this context, all resistance against the revolution, no matter from what sector of society it arose, was aggressively suppressed.

One incident often recalled, and referred to by some as evidence of the military regime's disregard for everything sacred, was the murder of Prophet Asare, the founder of The Lord is My Shepherd Church in Kumasi. The church members had come into conflict with an army officer who had interrupted their Sunday service and ordered them to participate in road construction work. In the scuffle that followed the officer's gun went off, wounding one of the church members, and the officer himself was then attacked by the angry congregation and beaten to death. His military comrades then retaliated by burning down the church building and the houses of several known church members. Four people were killed, including Asare himself; ten others were detained and tortured or beaten up; and Asare's body was later burned at the Kejetia lorry park in central Kumasi (NRCR, Vol. 2, Chapter 8, 1–5). Although Asare was only one among many victims of coup-era violence, it is very often the image of his burning body that is summoned up when these events are discussed: "Imagine, they burned a Christian pastor to death," as one person, who was convinced the prophet was still alive when brought to the lorry park, ended his recollection to me. Asare's murder took place in February 1982 and immediately afterwards mainstream Christian

82 However, as both Birgit Meyer (1998b, 27–32) and Paul Gifford (2004, 40), have shown, Rawlings' attitude toward Christianity, especially Pentecostalism, changed dramatically in the 1990s. Recently Rawlings has even described the 1979 coup as a "divine intervention" and compared it with "what Jesus Christ did in the temple when people were gambling and selling in the church" (Modern Ghana, 5th June 2010).

83 According to the reports of the NRC, copies of Sergey Nechayev's *Catechism of a Revolutionary* were distributed in the barracks during the AFRC era. This manifesto characterized the revolutionary as a man who "has broken all the bonds which tie him to the social order" and whose object is to destroy "the whole filthy order" (NRCR, Vol. 4, Chapter 1, 70–74).

groups started to openly protest against PNDC rule. Both the Christian Council of Ghana (a national organization of Protestant churches) and the Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a number of statements in which they condemned all violence perpetrated by the security forces (NRCR, Vol. 4, Chapter 9, 440–441).

The government reacted by warning the religious leaders to stay out of politics. In a rally widely reported in the national press a PNDC regional secretary stated that the "[f]reedom of worship will not be allowed to infringe upon the interests of the state … religious bodies, like other associations, [should] subordinate themselves to the state" (quoted in Haynes 1991, 417). Finally, in 1989, the Rawlings regime promulgated a law that required all religious bodies in Ghana to be registered, and in the same year four religious groups, including The Lord is My Shepherd Church, were prohibited. The Christian organizations considered the law a violation of human rights and boycotted it widely (NRCR, Vol. 4, Chapter 9, 442); meanwhile, demands from the same quarters for a return to multi party rule and elections escalated (Meyer 1998b, 27).

Rawlings' project was clearly founded on a modernist ideology with distinctions between public and private, and politics and religion. In revolutionary Ghana religion was supposed to be a private matter and thus not concern public politics. Overlap was not tolerated and those who were seen to muddle the categories were treated as transgressors. However, paradoxically, and regardless of Rawlings' secularism, his name became connected with all sorts of ritual manoeuvrings, including human sacrifices in order to attain power, from the very moment he took the political stage in Ghana.

Dreams of revolution

The town of Nkoranza, located in the Brong-Ahafo region of central Ghana, also received its share of revolutionary violence although what actually happened in the town during the coup days has not been recorded, apart from the few petitions that were made to the NRC (e.g. NRCR, Vol. 2, Chapter 9, 17, 19). Therefore, what remain are mostly the memories of those people who lived through those perilous times. As can be expected, the exact dates and sequences of events are not fresh in remembrance after three decades and, for example, the two coups with the short interregnum in between, are often merged into a singular 'coup time' in people's memories. However, most people seem to agree that "over here it wasn't as bad as it was elsewhere, like in Kumasi". Many people are also quick to point out that the soldiers did not kill anybody in Nkoranza as they did in some of the neighbouring towns. Nonetheless, soldiers and members of the so-called People's Defence Committees (PDC) set up by the military government did seize property from homes and businesses in Nkoranza, and the fear of being looted, arrested, or beaten up by a bullying band of soldiers takes a central place in many people's recollections. One oft told story probably relates to PNDC's efforts to "evacuate" cocoa, coffee, and food stuffs from

the rural areas to the coastal ports, whence they could be exported in order to procure foreign currency for the empty coffers of the government (see Shillington 1992, 85–86). This operation proved difficult to facilitate, and in some localities the soldiers used coercion to get the required vehicles and manpower (see, e.g., NRCR, Vol. 2, Chapter 9, 41–43). As one of my informants recalls, it had been planned that Nkoranza would become a source of the latter.

> The soldiers had confiscated the rich people's cocoa farms in Sefwi-Wiaso [cocoa growing district in the Western Region]. Over there they are many, our family has some there too. They needed men to carry the cocoa sacks. Nkoranza was the place where they thought they would get the carriers. That's why they rounded up all the young men of the town to the lorry station. When they got them there they fired their guns in the air and told everybody to shut up and sit down on the ground. Then they started walking around and choosing the carriers. If you were small and skinny, then they just passed you, but if you looked strong then they picked you and told you to go to the back of the truck. Agyengo [a mutual friend] was one of them. You see, they wanted strong men who would be able to load the trucks with cocoa.

Here the townspeople were powerless in front of the soldiers and their guns. However, as the story continues, the captured young men of Nkoranza were saved by an intervention from the spirit world. My informant continues:

> They never got to Sefwi-Wiaso. The whole operation was led by two soldiers who died in a car crash on their way there. In that same car there was a third passenger who had nothing to do with the operation and he survived the crash. He was then able to report exactly what had happened. He said that they were driving along a straight road when suddenly, without any special reason, the car bounced off the road and landed on its roof. The two soldiers died instantly, but the third man didn't have a scratch on him. When the commander of the army unit that had been sent to Nkoranza heard about this, he shot himself. You see, he was originally from Nkoranza, so he knew immediately what had really happened. They had angered the spirits and they were now killing them. He knew that the same destiny was waiting for him too and decided to commit suicide.

According to this story, the town was effectively protected by its guardian spirits and the soldiers had been made aware of the town's spiritual backing the hard way. Another story that I also collected during my fieldwork in Nkoranza reveals the idea that the revolutionaries also had their own spiritual advisors and that they actively tried to cancel out the powers that were stopping them from completing their mission:

> The soldiers had their own spiritual men. I don't know who these men were, but I guess they were somebody from the south and the soldiers had talked to them before coming to Nkoranza. These men had told the soldiers about a tree in the Nkoranza market, which was also a god that protected the town. The soldiers decided to burn the tree and so they gathered a lot of dry fallen branches around it. When one of the soldiers was about to set the branches on fire, he suddenly started shitting uncontrollably. He was first taken to the toilet, but it wouldn't

> stop. Then he was taken to the hospital, but they couldn't do anything to stop it there either. It didn't stop until all the branches around the tree had been cleared. From that moment on, no soldier dared to go even close to that tree.[84]

In all of the accounts above, it was concluded that these events were 'mysteries' (*sunsum mo asem*) steered by the spirits. However, the human agency of the chiefs, traditional priests, and other office-holders, who are normally considered the defenders of the community, both in the physical and spiritual sense, is missing, although the people who told these stories seemed not to know or were perhaps unwilling to comment on that aspect to an outsider. It was not until I talked to a senior traditional priest called Nana Duodu that I got to know about the 'ritual resistance' of Nkoranza. This topic came up by coincidence when Nana Duodu was telling me about the importance of monitoring one's dreams (*ndae*) which, according to him, contain 'omens' (*yikyerɛ*) given by the spirits. Humans can provide only superficial interpretations of dreams: for example, by referring to a distinction between signs that are generally considered good, such as a clear path or a white dove, or bad like a palm tree or a snake.[85] In order to find out what the omens mean precisely and to whom they are actually directed, one has to consult the spirits (*bisa abosom*) (see also Rattray 1959 [1927], 192–196). Nana Duodu stressed that one should never, under any circumstances, overlook the signs appearing in dreams because such neglect might have disastrous consequences. To emphasize his point he gave me an example that had to do with Rawlings' first coup:

> Just before the coup I had a dream with some bad signs in it. I asked the gods about it and they said that a great misfortune is ahead of us. They said that this misfortune is so big that it doesn't concern Nkoranza alone but the whole country. After hearing this I immediately contacted the chief and told him about it. I said to him that he has to perform some customs. Even if we can't stop this misfortune completely, something has to be done so that at least Nkoranza could be saved. The soldiers killed a lot of people all around Ghana. Just here in Techiman [the neighbouring town] they killed somebody. But Nkoranza was protected by the gods and nobody was killed here. Exactly the same thing happened when the Ghanaians were deported from Nigeria.[86] It was a dangerous journey and not everybody made it home alive. However, all the Nkoranza people there got home safely because of the gods.
>
> Sometimes the chiefs have a hard time believing what they hear when the gods tell the future. What they are saying sounds so incredible. In such cases the gods just tell them: "Everything we say will come true. If it will not be so, you can take Nana Duodu and slit his throat." I hate it when they say that [laughter].

84 In the town of Nkoranza there are several trees that are considered to be deities. The story told here is also linked to a larger body of narratives about the 'evil fortune' of those people who have violated the sanctity of the trees.

85 Apparently, the dream symbolism has been influenced by Christian imagery.

86 This must refer to the mass expulsion of Ghanaian citizens from Nigeria in 1983 (see, e.g., Brydon 1985).

The late Nana Duodu photographed in front of his shrine house in April 2006. I was told that the car behind him on the right was a thank you gift from a Christian pastor whom "he had made great".

Just as in the case of the divine tree, Nana Duodu's reputation had also spread all the way to the capital and he too had to face the counter-measures of the coup-makers. He continued his recollections:

> The soldiers had heard about me. One morning when I was just about to leave my house two soldiers arrived on a motorcycle. I welcomed them first and then told them that I didn't have much time, because I had to go to a meeting. However, I invited them to have a drink with me before leaving. The soldiers just looked at me and said: "So, you are the man who has made this juju. We are not going to drink with you. We have our orders to take you to Accra." I told them that in that case they should at least permit me to pour libation to the spirits before leaving. They allowed me to do that. When I was pouring the libation the gods suddenly took me. I turned to the first soldier and said: "You are called so-and-so, an Asene man from Antoa". Then I revealed the name and village of the other soldier. After that I continued revealing the names and villages of their superiors, including that officer in Accra who had ordered my arrest. The gods spoke through me and explained to the soldiers that this priest in front of you has never met you before or heard about you, but we know who you are. They said: "This is a warning to you. If you take this man with you, all of you whose names we have mentioned will surely have to pay for it later." The soldiers got frightened and said that they are not going to take me anywhere. They then apologized and asked for my protection. I said that I could pour libation on their behalf.

When putting all of these narratives together, a very familiar theme emerges. The traditional histories of the Nkoranza chiefdom are filled with accounts of how one chief after another was able to overpower his enemies with the help of their war gods; in consequence, the subdued chiefdoms were incorporated into Nkoranza as tributaries and, in the same way, their gods and their powers became associated with the new overlords. Nowadays, these wars are remembered and also partially re-enacted during annual thanksgiving rituals to the gods; similarly, the oral traditions mention several occasions where the enemies of Nkoranza were getting the upper hand and the chiefdom was saved in the last moment from total destruction by a miraculous intervention of the gods. The officers' car crash, the unsuccessful tree burning, the dream of the priest, the ritual performed by the chief, and

finally the surrender of the two soldiers can be, and actually were, fitted into that same context by the narrators, thereby conveying a renewed continuity with the time of the ancestors and the history of the chiefdom.

Christian soldier

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Pentecostal and Charismatic varieties of Christianity became increasingly popular in Sub-Saharan Africa during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Thus in Ghana it was during the Rawlings era that this now very powerful movement started to challenge the mainstream churches (Gifford 2004, 23). The various Pentecostal churches in Ghana relate to political matters differently, but what all of them seem to have in common is that they tend to think and talk about politics in terms of "spiritual causality" that posits a powerful agency for God and Satan in the affairs of the state (ibid., 161). That is to say, the political situation is invariably a consequence of people's relationships to divinity, and not of relationships between people. Some churches claim that phenomena like political violence, impoverishment, and 'under-development' are caused by demons, evil spirits, or curses, which are very often depicted by using the imagery of traditional religion. According to this line of thinking, the people responsible for the suffering of Ghanaians are both the 'pagan ancestors' and contemporary traditionalists who have summoned the evil spirits to the African continent and entertained them through heathen worship. Another understanding is that Ghana's political difficulties are a divine punishment for Ghanaian leaders' failure to obey God. Here God is seen as the source of powers that could heal the country and free the people, but these powers cannot be released before the people's representatives devote themselves to him. Therefore, Ghana will not be able to solve its political problems unless the country is ruled by born-again Christians, whose spiritual backing is provided by the Almighty. Conversely, a final downfall is imminent under a leader who relies on occult forces (ibid., 161–164). This discourse also entails a critique of Western secular society, considering, for example, that recent trends such as the public acceptance of same-sex unions in the West are dangerous aberrations (Essien and Aderinto 2009). In some respects this situation resembles the anti-secularism of North American fundamentalist Christianity (see, e.g., Harding 2000, 153–181), but the perceived threats are demonic influences and the divine punishments that follow rather than immanent moral decay resulting from irreligiosity. The following quote from a web column aptly summarizes the anxieties the Pentecostals have about the secular politics of the whole post-colonial period:

> Ghanaians need to speak out against these politicians who are seeking these voodoo interventions by following Kwame Nkrumah's footsteps of killing human beings for evil powers. In addition, we all should believe that the Almighty God, who continued to serve us daily, has His hands upon his nation. So we should not allow the devil to take over our nation. If Gods anger comes upon our nation as He did against the Israelites, we all will suffer as we did for the past 30 years.

> Ghanaians should not suffer due to these sycophants' criminals politician self-interests [sic]. (Amankwah 2009)

As Meyer (2004b, 97) has put it, Pentecostal Christianity has not entered the public debate as one kind of 'opinion' about politics, but, rather, it has "rearticulated the terms of political debate in a new manner: casting Ghana as in dire need of purification through the Christian God". Thus it is not merely traditional chieftaincy with its links to fetishes that is evil – the same risk is present in modern representative politics as well.

All through the 1980s, the relationship between the Christian churches and Rawlings' PNDC government was tense. As discussed above, the mainstream churches had publically criticized the revolution and thus stood in opposition to the government. At this point, the newly introduced Pentecostal groups stayed out of politics and concentrated on preaching their message of individual salvation and success, yet the government was still suspicious of them, particularly because of their unsympathetic attitude towards Ghanaian traditional culture, which the PNDC claimed to promote. It was only in the 1990s, after the transition to multiparty democracy and the lifting of state censorship of media, that the Pentecostals' 'dualistic political theology' was voiced publicly. Although Rawlings later tried to get closer to Pentecostal churches and was accepted by some, many of them opposed him throughout his tenure of office. Popular stories about Rawlings' ritual activities during the coup time and thereafter travelled fast in Christian circles and easily connected with their discourses as instances of fetish worship and demonic influences (Meyer 1998b, 26–32; Gifford 2004, 163). For example, around the elections of 2000, one influential Charismatic leader interviewed by the opposition press described the Rawlings government as, among other things, an order of Satanism, idolatry and bloodshed (Gifford 2004, 164–165).

According to Meyer (2004b; 2006), one very significant development in contemporary Ghanaian society is the formation of a "pentecostally infused public culture"; that is, that Pentecostal expressive forms, themes, and narrative structures have diffused to the larger society through modern mass media. This has been made possible by the churches' heavy economic investments in TV and radio of money derived from members and overseas sponsors (see De Witte 2003; 2005). Individual Christians 'coming out' in public with personal accounts of past involvements with the spirit world and politics, thereby revealing the occult behind the curtain of secular government, forms a part of this phenomenon (Meyer 1998b, 29). Such stories, taking the form of a confession, underline the "inner change" of a born-again Christian as well as the public revelation of truth (Meyer 2004b, 94; 2006, 439). For instance, in 2003, during the hearings of the National Reconciliation Commission, a former close ally of Rawlings made shocking disclosures concerning the rituals accompanying both the 1979 and 1981 coups. Warrant Officer Joseph Adjei-Boadi had been a security coordinator of the AFRC and a member of the PNDC, but had resigned because he had received a "spiritual message". He had initially been invited to the hearings to respond to allegations that he had harassed and terrorized members of

a particular healing church during the PNDC era which he denied, referring to the break he had made with the military government. But what really caught the attention of the press was his statement to the Commission that Rawlings and his comrades had resorted to "adult and child sacrifices" to sustain the coups. When he was pressed to cite instances of rituals performed by the coup-makers, he claimed that the murders of the three high court judges and retired army major in 1982 were committed for ritual purposes, information that had supposedly been conveyed to him by one of the killers. As a staunch believer in God, he had no other alternative than to abandon his life in the military, taking up farming as his new source of livelihood (GhanaWeb, 5th March 2003). At that time, he also became deeply involved with a religious group called the Nyamesompa Healing Church, whose leader, Pastor Olormey Stephen Safo, was responsible for submitting the current harassment charges to the truth commission. According to Pastor Olormey, Adjei-Boadi was a former member of the church who had turned against it after the church leadership had refused to assist him spiritually in his plans to stage a coup against his ex-comrade Rawlings in the late 1980s (GhanaWeb, 3rd March 2003). The church in question had also been on the list of religious groups prohibited by the PNDC government in 1989 (NRCR, Vol. 4, Chapter 9, 440). Adjei-Boadi himself denied the pastor's testimony and summed up his position by stating: "It is never true; throughout my military life, I never knew any juju man, prophet or Malam [Islamic ritual specialist]. I believe in my own capabilities. All those stories are lies to destroy my reputation" (GhanaWeb, 5th March 2003).[87]

The ex-warrant officer's story is highly illuminating in terms of Ghanaian Christian views of politics. The sources available do not directly suggest that Adjei-Boadi himself is a follower of any specific Pentecostal group, but his testimony follows the Pentecostal 'cultural style' common in Ghanaian public debates. It directly refers to the dualistic spiritual nature of politics by offering first-hand evidence of its evil and godless nature, and of Rawlings in particular, but it also highlights the necessity of confessing one's sins, being spiritually reformed, and, in this way, making a total break with the past.

The traditionalists of Nkoranza perceived the coup-makers as 'enemy chiefs' assisted by spirits, which then could be warded off by ritual means by the traditional officeholders of the community. The political violence was thus situated in long-established indigenous categories which were indifferent to the modernist discourse of revolution. Thus the disturbing events could

87 This was not the only time the NRC had to deal with questions about the ritual arrangements of Rawlings' coups. One enquiry took up the killing of three traditional priests belonging to the Ewe ethnic group in 1982 (NRCR, Vol. 2, Chapter 8, 15–18). Outside the chambers popular rumours claimed that the priests had been Rawlings' "spiritual advisors" who had to be killed because "they knew his secrets", and similar speculations were also heard in the commission hearings (NRCR, Vol. 4, Chapter 9, 413–414). In 2006 Rawlings himself stated, in what one might call a Pentecostal tenor, that the priests had been killed because they were suspected of committing ritual murders and "to let the people know that there was no salvation in juju" (Modern Ghana, 4th November 2006).

be incorporated into the local body of history in which disasters were always followed by spiritual intervention and restorations. The Pentecostal Christians, on the other hand, had explicitly renounced both the traditional religion as well as the idea of secular politics by placing them in the demonic sphere in their dualistic worldview. However, through their recognition of the existence of the spirit world and its multiple connections to human rulers, they too saw the coup-makers as people with spiritual powers, although these were fundamentally evil. Therefore, notwithstanding the changed value, they too have subscribed to the fundamental idea that power transcends human agency. Here I am not trying to postulate a cultural continuity by claiming that, deep down, the Pentecostals are really traditionalists. I am rather arguing that the ontological notions and ideas about agency of both groups are in a certain sense similar and, most importantly, that they are both indifferent to modernist notions about a transcendental God who works only in the hearts and minds of people.

Pentecostal Christianity has been labelled a "rebellion" against a modern Christianity that has accepted the assumptions of secularism (Taylor 2007, 554). However, in places like contemporary Ghana it cannot be treated as a marginal phenomenon or an exception to the rule; on the contrary, Pentecostalism and pentecostally-oriented discourses have substantial public visibility and have also influenced other Christian churches. An interesting correlative phenomenon, however, is that some aspects of traditional cosmologies have experienced a resurrection of a sort as they are now publicly attacked as the nemesis of Pentecostalism. Thus for Ghanaian Pentecostals the 'other' is not a secular, non-religious society, as would be the case for many Western Christians (see Cannell 2006, 31–32), but rather the demonic spiritual sphere that is represented by, among other things, traditional society. In these discussions, the modern secularists often realize that they are a third party.

Conclusions

This book has demonstrated how the separate categories of religion and politics emerged in Asante society as the colonial administration sought to facilitate missionary work and conversion while also supporting the chiefs as the secular rulers of the country. Concurrently, a modern notion of citizenship was planted. It has been maintained that individual conversion had certain very powerful social consequences which the colonial officials and missionaries sought to control; in so doing, they relied on the categories of their own culture. During the early days of the colonial era the number of Christian converts was very low, but it was their radically uncompromising and direct adoption and adaptation of Christian teachings that set the transformative processes in motion. The encounter between the all-encompassing nature of fetishism and rupturally-oriented Christian individualism was of decisive importance. For the Asante, coming to terms with these processes meant a total redefinition of their society in terms of secular and religious spheres, freedom of conscience, citizenship, and the like. The two chapters of the first part of the book, which posited the exchanges between the chiefs and the spirit world in the nucleus of the pre-colonial 'political' structure, provide the template against which one is able to assess the extreme nature of this transformation: a comparative angle adopted from Dumont's project. The community of people that existed to communicate with the spirits of the dead and the gods became a self-contained system: the chief priest and *sacrifier* was transformed into an 'earthly ruler', a union of lineages following an ancestral chief became a gathering of individual citizens, and so on. At the same time, when the missionaries were envisioning their models, grand theories about Asante as a state based on political contract and representation were produced by African intellectuals and colonial ethnographers. Secularism was also a part of colonial statecraft: it was politically expedient to promote an ideology, in which a person's 'real' identity was permanently tied to the 'native state' to which he / she belonged, while 'religion' was a matter of private belief and thus liable to change and reconsideration.

Ever since the colonial-era transformation, the mainstream of discussions about chieftaincy in Asante, and Ghana in general, has revolved around

political concepts. Accordingly, the chapters of the second part of the book have outlined a biography of the institution, tracing the political career of the 'native ruler' from a purported people's representative to a client of the state, a nationalist symbol, and a businessman. Still today politicians, civil servants, development analysts, journalists, and of course the chiefs themselves argue whether chieftaincy is fundamentally democratic or aristocratic, whether the chiefs should function as local agents of the state or rather as representatives of civil society, whether their role is damaging or beneficial for 'development', and whether chieftaincy should be invested with decision-making powers or office-holders should remain as 'cultural figureheads'. The proponents of chieftaincy tend to subscribe to the 'liberal models' that originated in the colonial era, whereas opponents of the institution usually refer to modernization theories that are often associated with the intellectual climate of the decolonization period. These debates are also carried on in the various social sciences which apply the concepts and theories formulated for the analysis of Western politics. Moreover, the history of chieftaincy from the pre-colonial period to the present is discussed in similar terms. It is either insisted that an originally democratic institution based on consensus was distorted and instrumentalized by the colonial and post-colonial sovereignties, or it is accepted that the chieftaincy institution has been 'modernized' or adapted to meet the needs of the contemporary age.

The contention of this book is that none of these debates would have been possible without chieftaincy, or the traditional polity as a whole, first being secularized, and that is also the most important development in the institution in the twentieth century. Although it has also been established that the secularization process is in many ways highly problematic and incomplete, there is no doubt that a major ideological change has transpired. Therefore, it is more pertinent to discuss rupture than resilience. In this context, the major 'colonial inventions' are the domains of religion and politics. This was by no means an inevitable evolution. The secular is, after all, a historically produced idea and this book has sought to demonstrate how it came into being in one particular setting. In fact, when it comes to chieftaincy itself, we might even entertain the idea that in different historical circumstances it might have been defined a 'religious institution' in a colonial society and thus would have had a very different trajectory. Therefore I see it as vital to study the history of 'traditional institutions' from this perspective everywhere in Africa. This would not only fill in some gaps in our understanding of the impacts of colonialism, but it would also help us to comprehend better the complexities of current politics in Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, when discussing the cooperation or non-cooperation between chiefs and nation-states or chiefs and global horizontal institutions elsewhere in Africa, it would be essential to examine in detail the sort of ideological discourses about chieftaincy on which such policies rely, and their histories. In Asante, for instance, the colonial era engendered an ideology about democratic chieftaincy which was rejected by the leftist decolonization movement and 'revolutionary' military governments, but which has since found its way into World Bank research reports, academic monographs, and conference speeches by kings.

The final part of the book dealt with the problems that the secularization project has encountered. Modern religions in general accept the sovereignty of the nation-state and hence religious groups can fluently assume national identities. Modern religion may also publicly oppose the state, as was the case when the mainstream churches criticized the policies of the Rawlings' military government as violations of human rights. Thus religion can have a public role in modern society if it agrees with the assumptions of a certain kind of secular political discourse. It might even be welcomed to 'enrich' debates, offer new perspectives, and so on, but it cannot be tolerated as a political authority. The crucial question then is not whether religion should be kept separate from politics or not, but rather what kind of religion is acceptable for modern society (see Asad 2003, 181–187; Casanova 1994).

In this book I have particularly connected this issue to questions of recognized notions of agency. Based on the ideas of Latour and Keane, I have described modern religion as a system with a god who does not influence 'real-life' social relationships or the laws of nature, but instead resides in the hearts of human beings. Hence, for the modernists the only real agent in political affairs is the autonomous human individual. From this point of view, it is up to individuals themselves to decide whether they want to 'bring' god and religion into public arenas where political matters are discussed. This can then be approved or rejected by others. My argument is that for people like Ghanaian traditionalists and Pentecostal Christians such limitations of agency are not pertinent. Consequently, although in present-day Ghana the institutional separation between religion and politics has been set up as part of the construction of the modern secular state, not everyone sees this as a meaningful way to approach spiritual matters. This highlights that secularism is not only about church and state, rights of citizens, legality, and such things. It is also about the acceptance and assumption of a modern worldview and the moral concerns that come with it (see Keane 2013).

The problems that the colonial and post-colonial governments have had in their dealings with anti-witchcraft movements, as discussed in Chapter 7, constitute an extreme example of a situation where the modernist non-recognition of different kind of ideas about agency leads to a complete stalemate. Moreover, in the cases described in the final chapter of the book, it became evident that in the eyes of the Nkoranza traditionalists, the existence of their community rested on the officeholders' ability make sacrifices to the spirits and hence 'political' threats from the outside were also fought spiritually through ritual. For the present-day Pentecostals this spirit world is diabolical, but it is nevertheless seen to work behind the veneer of politics, as immoral politicians turn to 'juju' in order to gain access to power and riches. If the ideas of the Nkoranza traditionalists remain local, or maybe even marginal, and one might even say that they have, to a certain extent, resisted secularization, Pentecostal political theology has managed to challenge it. Through the Christians' substantial influence in privatized mass media, the idea of a state or a nation as something that exists for a purpose outside itself disseminates into the broader society in opposition to the modern nationalistic projects promoted by the state. A wholly individual and transcendent religion has not been realized. For the secularists the

chiefly sacrifice to ancestors and gods is understandable and perhaps even acceptable when it is conceived as a symbolic act directed at other people in order to create a sense of unity, enthusiasm, or other human emotions. In the thinking of both the traditionalists and Pentecostals, however, rituals are not perceived primarily as symbolic activities.

My assertion is that the type of religiosity the traditionalists and Pentecostals represent is not compatible with the blueprint of modern religion and hence modernist commentaries on them often fail to grasp their essence. The ongoing disputes in Ghanaian media about the proper place of the pouring of libation are a case in point. For the traditionalists it is a sacrificial exchange in which the agency of the spirits is invoked (see the oration quoted in Chapter 2, pp. 63–64); meanwhile, it is deemed repugnant by the Pentecostals who see such spirits as "the accomplices of the Devil" (Van Dijk 2001, 50). However, when it is debated whether the pouring of libation should be a part of official state functions, it takes place in a political register, where the question is reduced to relationships between religious groups (that is, the accepted political agents). For instance, during the government of the late President John Atta Mills, who in his later years became known for his close relationship with a certain Pentecostal prophet, libation pouring was excluded from the official program of the Independence Day celebrations. Some members of the secularist press attacked this decision sternly. According to one commentator, the disregard for the religious sensibilities of others shown by the Christians in this case should be compared with Islamist extremism:

> "This is a complete case of Taliban Mentality, complete Taliban…I don't think that it is an oversight. It is a clear case of religious intolerance. Once you become a President or whichever position you find yourself, you don't have to impose your religion on others. It should not be tolerated," he [journalist Kwesi Pratt] fumed. Clearly livid, the outspoken Nkrumaist failed to understand why a country which claims to espouse national culture and freedom of worship, is opposed to the pouring of libation at state functions […] "Ghana is a secular state and so we want to see libation being poured. Libation pouring is part of our national heritage. How can you promote culture, leaving out libation?" he asked rather furiously. (CitiFM Online, 9th March 2011)

It is, of course, curious that a 'pagan ritual' that in the colonial era presented a dilemma which was to be solved by secularization, is now a symbol of a secular state and religious freedom. However, I am interested primarily in the question of why statements like these are not significant to certain audiences. Here the problem in performing 'traditional rituals' is seen as a problem between people, while for the Pentecostals and the traditionalists alike, it is a question about relations between people and spirits. Of course, both the present-day Christians and the traditionalists are able and prepared to defend their cases within the confines of the secular discourses by referring to their right to freedom of religion or right to practice and maintain culture (see Atiemo 2006, 378–379), but the core question for them is not about peoples' rights in relation to each other or the state. To them the question is what kind of *real* consequences will follow from ritual exchanges with spirits.

This has been also evident in my own discussions with both traditionalists and Christians about these matters. When I have asked traditional priests their opinion about Christian pastors who preach against them, they do not usually refer to notions of religious rights or tolerance, but rather emphasize that "they [Christians] should understand that the *abosom* are also children of God". On the other hand, the Christian response to such a statement is that "these spirits are not from God".

Obviously, the stance of Pentecostalism toward chiefs and traditionalism shares much with those of early missionary Christianity, but the present-day born-again Christians have a very different stature in society. The early converts seem to have been content to have become recognized as individual citizens with a Christian conscience in a political system administered according to secular principles, whereas the contemporary born-again Christians are entertaining the idea of Christian politics. Not only is chieftaincy rejected as an idolatrous institution, but representative government without a born-again Christian leader and God's guidance is also seen as a threat to the nation. However, it is notable that the idea of Christian politics does not entail the overthrow of the institutional order of the secular state in order to replace it with some sort of Christian theocracy. As Ruth Marshall (2009, 204–205) writes about "Born-Again political theology" in Nigeria, the political project of Pentecostal churches "represents itself as providing the conditions for the redemption of the religious and political traditions which were both promised in colonial and post-colonial rule, and ruined through it". Thus the problems and failures of secular politics are not to be remedied by abolishing political institutions and structures, but rather by occupying them with born-again Christians.

From this perspective, traditional chieftaincy differs from modern state institutions in the sense that it has not been fully secularized and consequently it cannot be Christianized. Since the offices of the chiefs are still by definition related to the spirit world, it is difficult to 'redeem' them by occupying them with born-again Christians. Even many of those Christians who would not personally accept a traditional office for religious reasons, acknowledge that a chief has to be able to perform all of his ritual duties. I have talked to members of royal lineages who are born-again Christians and who therefore firmly refuse to become chiefs. The main obstacle is that they are not prepared to offer sacrifices to the ancestors and gods, because they see this as involving them with a spirit world that is ungodly. However, as persons who have been brought up as royals they do not consider ideas about 'subtracting' religion and ritual from chieftaincy relevant. On the one hand, they consider sacrifice a 'fetish practice', but on the other, they cannot imagine a chief who avoids the duty. Once I asked such a person whether he would like to become a chief if he did not have to perform sacrifices; he thought about it for a moment and then replied: "It wouldn't be chieftaincy anymore. It would be something new, something else."

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CO 1069/31 GHANA 3. Album of 40 photographs entitled 'Gold Coast Views in Kumasi; Kwaku Dua and His Court 1887'.

CO 1069/33 GHANA 5. 31 photographs in a box entitled 'Views from the Gold Coast'.

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Abstract

Timo Kallinen

Divine Rulers in a Secular State

The divine kingship and chiefship of the Asante people of central Ghana have been undergoing a shift towards secularization since the start of the colonial era. Timo Kallinen maintains that a close examination of this transformation provides us with a better understanding of secularization processes in Ghana more broadly, and in other post-colonial societies whose historical development likewise differs from that of the modern West, and which have largely confronted secular modernity through encounters with European colonialism. Throughout the volume secularization is understood as a process in modern society whereby divinity is separated from the ways in which both human society is regulated and physical nature is understood to function.

Divine Rulers in a Secular State has been divided into three thematic parts, each with a short theoretical introduction. In the first two, analysis is primarily inspired by the work of Louis Dumont, while in the third the theoretical ideas of Webb Keane and Bruno Latour are of central importance. The undifferentiated order of the pre-colonial Asante kingdom, in which the chiefly and priestly functions of the rulers were not separated, comprises the initial focus. Sacrifices and marriage exchanges, both of which were directed at establishing and perpetuating relations between the living and the spirits of the dead ancestors, are posited as the most important responsibilities of the chief. Also explored are perceptions that the founding of the kingdom and its authority structure are the results of sacrifices offered to various gods by the Asante king and his chiefs.

The second part examines the dissolution of the traditional order since the onset of British colonial occupation. The secularization process was initiated by the aspirations of colonial administrators and missionary bodies who aimed to maintain Christian converts under the 'political' authority of their non-Christian chiefs, who were still important ritual leaders. Consequently, it was necessary to start dividing society along 'political' and

'religious' lines so that only the former was a mandatory concern for all. The kernel of modern citizenship was planted at the same time as the 'religious' conscience of individuals started to influence their rights and duties towards their 'political' rulers. Furthermore, theories about Asante as a state based on contract and representation were proposed and developed. In the post-colonial era chiefship has been put into the service of the independent nation state – both as an instrument of administration and a nationalistic symbol, while, most recently, chiefs have been depicted as leaders in civil society, even receiving support from global developmental organizations. Yet traditional chieftaincy is strongly criticized by certain Christian groups belonging to the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, which still see it as integrally linked to traditional cosmologies.

The third part of the book takes the discussion beyond the separation of the categories of religion and politics. Secularization has also has also entailed the dematerialization of religion, establishing it as something that ought to be understood primarily as mental or spiritual; in a secular society 'things' like deities, witchcraft, or sacrifices should not be recognized as proper agents and actions at the level of immanent relations. In Ghana such views are effectively contradicted by religious groups which see spiritual forces as the most powerful agents in social relations. The cases discussed deal with attempted state control of anti-witchcraft activities, the efficiency of protective magic during political upheavals, and Pentecostal notions of demonic influences in secular politics. The Conclusions section brings the themes of the book together by discussing the large-scale effects of the secular project in contemporary Ghanaian society.

Research is based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in Ghana in 2000–2001 and 2005–2006, data drawn from several archival sources located in Ghana and the United Kingdom, and the anthropological and historical literature on Ghana and the Asante.

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