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Norman Miller
Giesel School of Medicine, social@normanmillerarchive.com

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The Political Survival of Traditional Leadership

by NORMAN N. MILLER*

VIEWED from the higher echelons of government in the new nations, the rural leader is an insignificant individual who goes about managing his local affairs and carrying out—with varying degrees of success—the policies and hopes of the government. Viewed from below, from the inner recesses of the village, the leader is a man of authority; a man who has used wealth, heredity, or personal magnetism to gain a position of influence. As seen by nation builders and development experts, the rural leader is tacitly pointed to as the key to success. It is he who can mobilise the people. It is through him that more energy will be expended, more muscles used, and more attitudes changed. Conversely, it is the leader's lack of initiative that will entrench the *status quo* and doom the modernisation schemes before they begin.

An important group of these rural leaders comprises the former traditional authorities—chiefs, sub-chiefs, and headmen—who occupied bureaucratic positions within the indirect rule systems of colonial régimes. Although legally deposed by many independent African governments, such leaders continue to exercise substantial influence, particularly in the building of local institutions in the rural areas. Some have been able to move into party or administrative positions; others have been so strong that the local authorities have been forced to deal with them directly as spokesmen for their area. Other traditional rulers have no formal leadership position but, through manipulation of their past legitimacy, have continued to dictate local policies and shape major decisions. Whatever the basis, the political survival of traditional leaders is significant because they provide the vital linkage between the government and the people. They influence the success of specific modernisation schemes by serving as translators, interpreters, and mediators of government goals. This form of leadership is basically syncretistic, a leadership pattern among chiefs and headmen which is a synthesis and

reconciliation of the opposing forces of traditionalism and modernism.[1] The result is a form of leadership which is neither modern nor traditional but an incorporation of both. The process is one of accommodation and compromise. It is a reconciliation of demands from (*a*) the traditional, custom-bound elements of rural society, and (*b*) the modernising bureaucratic groups made up of local administrators and political party leaders.

A key characteristic of syncretistic political behaviour is constant change. The political system is one in which values and guidelines for action come from two competing subsystems—a fluid situation, which allows a great deal of personal jousting and bargaining on the part of the traditional leaders. The individual leader can respond to a peasant in one way on a given topic and answer a bureaucratic administrator on the same topic in another manner. This phenomenon promotes the speaking to two worlds in different tongues, a duality of response. For the villager, the situation is often in flux. New syncretistic guidelines, principles, and practices are mixed and are not fully understood. The leader himself is unpredictable; he will often vacillate between extremes of what is traditional and what is modern. Specific examples of syncretistic behaviour include speeches which mix the names of national leaders and tribal heroes; the use of amulets, charms, and protective medicines to ensure victory in a difficult political test; the use of diviners, practitioners, and religious technicians to aid the leader in solving modern problems; the constant mixing of slogans that refer to heroic tribal myths alongside national modernising propaganda; and the employment of vernacular proverbs to gain support for bureaucratic demands.

From the administration's point of view, such syncretistic leaders cause difficulty and delay. Each new project or procedure usually needs a new bureaucratic overture. Most syncretistic leaders view each innovation as something that must be reconciled with both traditional and modern values; there are no precedents and no procedures that can be easily repeated. The leader must weigh his position in the new situation and mark his course carefully to gain the needed synthesis. A project can take on extreme political overtones for the entire rural area, and be negotiated *ad infinitum*. The delay often continues until the leader can find his footing among other rural influentials. Like politicians in any

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[1] The term 'syncretistic' is occasionally applied to prophets' movements and separatist church movements in the sense that they derive a part of their doctrines and ritual from traditional religion. It can also have broader meaning, as Hodgkin points out, in the search for some form of synthesis between European culture and traditional values. See Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London, 1956), pp. 99 and 171.

society, his continuing goal is to maximise his future bargaining potential and to safeguard his current leadership position.

Modern syncretistic leadership is based on the very real need of both peasants and government to have a rural intermediary. The fundamental issue at stake is *the application of coercive force*. Alien bureaucratic leaders, administrators, and even party officials have the ability and the authority to use coercive force in the rural areas. What they do not have is the necessary degree of consensus to obtain the needed co-operation on bureaucratic projects. Conversely, the traditional leaders still hold some authority and are accepted as legitimate in the eyes of the peasant. This is in spite of the fact that they lack the legal ability to use coercive force. The result is that each system of leaders needs the support of the other. The marriage between the two systems tends to produce forms of syncretistic leadership behaviour, which may be distinguished as either *alliance* or *coercion*. A third distinction is made when syncretistic leadership breaks down and disappears, and a situation of *mutual hostility* exists.

Alliance. This form occurs when communication between the traditional leader and the modernising agent (administrator or party official) is established, and the traditional leader translates the desires of the modernising agent to the people. The main elements in the relationship are that (*a*) the traditional leader's authority has been bent to serve the ends of the modernising agent, probably by some type of persuasion, (*b*) articulation to the people has been favourable and activating, and (*c*) the task, programme, or campaign will be undertaken. The alliance situation closely resembles the relationship between chiefs and the colonial administration under indirect rule. Communications between the two groups tend to be good on specific issues, and co-operation is forthcoming. Consensus has been established on an *ad hoc* basis, and there is agreement on the bureaucratic norms to be used. The interest groups that exist in the rural areas tend to be sympathetic to co-operation between the two positions and support syncretistic behaviour. Group allegiance remains unchanged and common interests are articulated by the reconciling leader.

Coercion. This form occurs when overt bureaucratic coercion is applied to the traditional leader and partial co-operation is gained. The traditional leader, however, goes only as far as he is forced to go in activating the people. From the administrator's point of view, plans and projects are delayed, barriers are encountered, and obstructionism and inaction are commonplace. Communication between the two groups is distorted through the various selective processes. Consensus is tenuous and there is often disagreement on the bureaucratic norms to be applied. Tradi-

tional interest groups are somewhat hostile to the modernising pressures, and the syncretistic leader has difficulty holding support for the issues at stake. Group allegiance can shift rapidly, and there is no clear-cut common interest. Traditional leaders become increasingly wary of decrees and written words; they tend to demand the familiar face-to-face methods of doing business as a prerequisite to co-operation.

Mutual hostility. This situation occurs when the relationship between the two leadership groups has broken down and syncretistic leadership is non-existent. Traditional leaders withdraw and attempt to avoid contact with bureaucratic agents. Entrenchment takes place and the *status quo* is idealised. Projects, plans, and campaigns flounder; as a result, incriminations and reprisals are aimed at the 'unco-operative' traditional leaders. Communications are ruptured. Little or no consensus exists, and there is blatant disagreement on norms and bureaucratic rules. In this situation, interest groups lack cohesion and members may shift allegiances rapidly. Government attempts at gaining public participation meet with failure and there tends to be an entrenchment of the leaders in each camp. Structures that do exist become binding, in that the bureaucratic leaders are increasingly formalistic, petty, impersonal, and critical of the 'backward' traditional leadership. Both types of leaders are inclined to articulate their built-in biases. Attitudes and opinions bind the individual to the system of which he is a part. Modernisation attempts are usually abortive.

The alliance and coercion forms of syncretistic leadership promote one or more forms of neo-traditionalism. Because traditional leaders are constantly reconciling traditional values, it is understandable that many of these values may be brought forward in slightly altered form and embraced as significant and important. This may be termed revivalism, in that the people's current beliefs need 'to embody the moral prescriptions of the past and apply them to modern conditions'.[1] This is not necessarily a resurgence of historic interest in the past, as has occurred in Ghana and Buganda, but a revival of past guidelines for application to modern behaviour. Because most Africans are not very far from the land-based, practical problems of rural life, the solutions to contemporary problems could be expected to be land-based, and familiar in terms of past symbols and ritual. Syncretistic leadership exists because of this traditionalism and the ability of rural leaders to capitalise on traditional habits.

[1] David Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda* (Princeton, 1961), p. 27. Also see Apter's 'The Role of Traditionalism in the Political Modernization of Ghana and Uganda', in *World Politics* (Princeton), XIII, October 1960, pp. 45–68.

In summary, the fundamental argument is this: rural traditional authorities survive in modern times as local political leaders. They do so by serving as intermediaries between modernising bureaucratic authorities and the custom-bound populace. When they fail to serve as intermediaries, a condition of mutual hostility between themselves and modernising authorities develops, and there is a failure to reach bureaucratic goals. When some accord is reached, the situation is in essence syncretistic, that is, the traditional leader serves to balance the demands of the populace and the bureaucratic groups. Syncretism can take the form of alliance or coercion. Under either situation traditional leaders must capitalise on certain culture-bound factors that support traditionalism, and also specifically manipulate such things as local myth, ritual, symbol, and customary law. If this balance is maintained, a tendency toward neo-traditionalism can be expected. When neo-traditionalism persists, the modernising bureaucratic authorities will attempt to check such tendencies as threats to bureaucratic goals. Conflict may be expected because the syncretistic leader tends to rely on the more traditional basis of influence, and in essence to tip the balance in favour of the customary values. This, in turn, causes modernising agents to exert pressure on the syncretistic leader to re-align with bureaucratic goals. The result is either a re-balance under alliance or coercion conditions, or a rupture in relations causing mutual hostility. This over-all thesis may best be illustrated and expanded upon by focusing on a particular nation and a specific ethnic group.

A CASE FOR ANALYSIS: THE NYAMWEZI OF TANZANIA

The political organisation of an ethnic group such as the Nyamwezi includes, in the broadest sense, the traditional institutions by which law and order are maintained, the organisation of authority in sub-systems— the chiefdom, village, or family—and those institutions which safeguard the integrity of the political units.[1] As used here, the political organisation is the widest effective social group which creates and maintains order, forces compliance with the norms of that social order, and socialises and maintains support for the authority figures who are in positions of leadership.[2] In a study of a non-western, multi-centred, traditional society, leadership and authority are functionally diffuse. Leaders per-

[1] The writer is indebted to Mary Eaton Read Nicholson and Richard Simpson for helpful comment and criticism on this portion of the manuscript.

[2] See discussion of the political organisation of the related Sukuma people in J. Gus Liebenow, 'Responses to Planned Political Change in a Tanganyika Tribal Group', in *The American Political Science Review* (Menasha, Wisconsin), L, 2, 1956, pp. 442–61.

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form political activities from a position which may be attained through a combination of religious, economic, and familial legitimacy. Kin relations and ritual activities take the place of the more specific functions in western societies associated with political office and binding contracts.

The background: Nyamwezi political organisation[1]

Three key factors characterise the Nyamwezi traditional political system. First, there has never been a paramount chief who has unified all the Nyamwezi. Each chiefdom was autonomous and, except for a few periods of consolidation, chiefs were always wary of attempts at unification. Political cohesion among the Nyamwezi does not lie in an over-all centralised political authority, but is based on similarity in customs, laws, language, and political and economic structures. Second, the political organisation of each chiefdom has been a pyramidal hierarchy; below the chief are headmen with territorial jurisdiction, and below the headmen are subheadmen with village or neighbourhood jurisdiction. Third, in the person of the chief was found the main decision-making authority affecting the individual peasant.

Basically, political life in each chiefdom centred around the chief, whose sources of authority were his magical-religious functions, his administrative position, his role as the military commander, and his position as supreme judge. Specifically, he was believed by his people to be the earthly representative of the founder of the chiefdom. He was thought to be able to influence the fate of the land and was generally believed to be able to enlist ancestral spirits to aid the community. Most chiefs were thought able to call on the ancestors to control the elements —to bring rain or to stop floods.[2] When functioning as judges, chiefs traditionally had the power of life and death.[3]

The specific sources of chiefly power may be briefly summarised:

[1] The Nyamwezi number some 363,252 (1957 census) and are the second largest of Tanzania's 120 ethnic groups. They mainly inhabit Tabora, Nzega, and Kahama districts in the central plateau region. Tabora district is the focus of the present study. The most important background literature includes Rev. Fr. Boesch, *Les Banyamwezi, peuple de l'Afrique orientale* (Münster, 1930), and R. G. Abrahams, *The Political Organization of Unyamwezi* (Cambridge, 1967).

[2] Some of the ritualistic functions of the chief included magical preparation of seed, control of rain, village cleansing after twins were born, and control of epidemics and calamities such as famine, rinderpest, hail, or man-eating lions. The responsibility of each chief was to find the cause of the problem and to initiate measures against it, usually with the aid of a diviner.

[2] Within the memory of living elders, death sentences were given for treason, cattle theft by a stranger, adultery with a chief's wife, and occasionally for witchcraft. Murder, arson, and assault generally received less severe penalties. Execution in the Unyanyembe chiefdom, for example, was by mutilation and leaving the condemned to the hyena.

(a) the chief was the sole proprietor of land and controlled the allocation of such land to the cultivators; (b) in time of famine the chief controlled the dispensing of food from chiefdom granaries; and (c) his accumulated wealth from fees, fines, booty, tools, and unused property enabled him to purchase the loyalty of key subjects, including warriors.

Conversely, the traditional restrictions on a chief's power came from several sources: (a) subjects could demand a chief's removal if his supernatural powers were believed to have failed; (b) the delegation of chiefly authority for war, adjudication, religious ceremony, and ritual performance effectively reduced the over-all authority of a chief and often made him dependent on functionaries in the chiefdom; (c) the fear of ancestral vengeance in a vanquished area kept most chiefs from occupying conquered lands and expanding their territorial holdings; (d) the ability of families to 'hive off' from an abusive chief and to join another chiefdom restricted a chief for fear of losing manpower and tribute; and (e) collective action by peasants to remove an abusive chief was possible as a last resort, and meant complete loss of property, wives, and livestock for the chief.

In the years of British colonial administration, 1915–61, the consolidation of many chiefdoms took place and chiefs were given local administrative and court responsibilities.[1] Politically, however, few chiefs gained influence outside their districts, and most were only involved with parochial events within their chiefdoms. Important administrative functions stayed primarily in the hands of the British district officer, and political participation and intra-district integration were not attained. In positive terms, however, some consensus was undoubtedly achieved, and a degree of inter-area co-operation reached. Certainly the underpinnings of the post-independence structure of local government were established—such as the district councils and village development committees—and some experience gained in governmental procedures and parliamentary rules.

In the final years of the British administration, when nationalistic forces began to gather strength (1945–61), the institution of chieftaincy came under the greatest stress. Throughout the country chiefs faced a classic dilemma: whether to support the demands of the Tanganyika African National Union (T.A.N.U.) that colonial rule be abolished, or to support the British administration in attempting to contain the nationalistic protest. Fear of losing their paid positions as government administrators kept most Nyamwezi chiefs from joining the party. In the

[1] Tabora had 12 chiefdoms in 1961. The other Nyamwezi districts of Nzega and Kahama had a total of 20 chiefdoms.

late 1950s, however, as independence became more probable, a few chiefs secretly joined the political movement and allowed their personal membership cards to be used to aid local recruitment.

Because the chiefs were generally apathetic in the nationalistic movement and because they represented the *status quo*, they were repeatedly accused by the party of being lackeys of the colonial government. This conflict between the traditional and party leaders is a significant legacy in Tanzania's attempt at economic and political modernisation. In hundreds of individual cases T.A.N.U. officials so harassed traditional leaders that a major impasse was created between the two groups. Differences arose between peasants who supported chiefs and headmen and those, generally younger individuals, who supported the party leadership.

Chieftainship has remained particularly strong in the remote hinterland where urban influences have not penetrated. It is in the same remote areas that the party is attempting to gain the support of the people and to provide the interpretation and guidance originally gained from traditional leaders. As could be expected, the old disputes between chiefs and party leaders often militate against the party overtures. Party statements are no longer nationalistic protests designed to end colonialism, but are attempts to mobilise the people for modernisation schemes. Often new goals are espoused by old T.A.N.U. personalities. For traditional leaders, this in itself is reason enough for non-co-operation. The upshot is often a destructive whispering campaign against any modernisation project backed by the party.

In essence, a major source of the chief's difficulties was the necessity of having government support and popular support at the same time. Simultaneously withstanding accusations from the party, maintaining popularity with the peasants, and being a government agent caused the institution of chieftaincy to rest on a tenuous balance.

The modern survival of traditional leaders

The long-established institution of chieftainship, around which so much of Tanzania's political history had evolved, was dramatically abolished by the independent African Government on 1 January 1963.[1]

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[1] By the African Chiefs Ordinance (Repeal) Act of 1963 (Act no. 13 of 1963, effective on 1 January 1963). The Act states that the African Chiefs Ordinance, Cap. 331 of the Revised Laws, is repealed (section 1) but that if any Chief is an ex-officio member of a Council or Board he may continue to be a member if the Minister concerned concurs (section 2). Earlier, in 1957, the powers of the chiefs had been curtailed by the African Chiefs (Special Powers) Ordinance, which laid down that any chief whose chiefdom was in a district where a District Council was being formed remained the authority for the chiefdom, but 'must not... encroach on the jurisdiction of the new district council in any way'.

Chiefs were legally dethroned, but their influence did not end. As the Government moved to fill the administrative void with civil servants, the chiefs and headmen moved to consolidate their remaining influence. Throughout the nation examples of chiefs retaining power in a local area and gaining some governmental recognition were common. In these cases the government reaction was to appoint the chief a local government official; and, where the situation demanded more administrative expertise, to appoint a deputy with the chief.

Traditional Leaders in Tabora District, 1963 and 1966[1]

	Chiefs	Headmen
Traditional leaders in power when chieftaincy was abolished, 1963	11	97
In governmental positions, 1966	2	88
Employed by political party or co-operative society, 1966	1	2
Detained by government for political activity, 1966	1	0
Under arrest for peculation, 1966	0	2
Deceased, 1966	1	2
Others: local councillor, retired farmer, other work, 1966	6	3

The village headmen who served under the chiefs in the colonial administration have also been able to remain in power as paid officials. These individuals are basically traditional leaders, in that they generally came from families who historically retained the headmanship. Many also had kinship links with the local chief. Others gained their position because they served some magical-religious functions or because they were acceptable to the people, to their chief, and to the British administration. In modern times headmen usually hold posts as village executive officers in the local government structure or serve as village representatives on district councils.

Specific evidence of the contemporary political survival of traditional chiefs and headmen may be seen in data concerning the Nyamwezi leaders of Tabora District (table above). The chiefs who gained some official position were those who had enjoyed widespread popular support in their chiefdoms and had also had strong ties with party and administrative leaders. The chiefs who survived politically were those who had attained the highest education and, significantly, the shortest tenure of office. Chiefs who were reduced to the status of local councillors or

[1] Source: author's research. A survey of other Tanzania districts, including Nzega, Mpanda, and Rungwe, indicates that 25–35 per cent of the chiefs were able to remain in governmental positions of power.

retired farmers had been in office the longest and were the more closely identified with colonial rule. Most had smaller chiefdoms and a more localised base of support, and thus faced a greater possibility that local antagonisms weighed against them. Chiefs with longer tenure were also more conservative and more out of touch with changes in the nationalistic period. Undoubtedly they had few contacts with African party and government leaders; a fact that limited their opportunities when the new governing élite abolished chieftaincy in 1963.

Traditional headmen had an even greater political survival rate than did the chiefs, largely due to the headmen's appointment as village executive officers in the local government system. It is in this situation that an impasse for the administration has occurred. The headman deals directly with the people; it is through him that effective administration, adjudication, and modernisation must come. He has continued to hold village administrative posts, although often uneducated and uninterested in the efficient administration which the government desires. To replace him with an 'enlightened' headman is to remove the most acceptable leader and to incur the distrust and objection of the people. To leave him in his crucial position is to jeopardise the modernisation goals of the central government. Although most central government officials recognise this problem, chiefs and headmen have not been eased out of power. The fundamental reason is that a number of complex attitudinal and environmental factors favour their retention.

Attitudinal factors in traditional survival

Modern support for the institution of chieftaincy is so ingrained in the behaviour of most rural cultivators that, in spite of legal changes, a chief's influence continues. Habit, fear of rapid change, and the non-acceptance of local government administrators who have replaced traditional authorities underlie local attitudes. Other reasons persist. The peasants' widespread insecurity about the future promotes the survival of traditional leaders; for example, a former chief may hold power because his followers are sure neither of what the future will bring nor that the old chief will not be reinstated. Administrative changes are rapid enough to keep most peasants confused. The knowledge that other chiefs are still in authoritative governmental positions promotes the idea that the old chiefs may eventually regain influence. Caution and the desire not to burn bridges allow an atmosphere of tolerance toward traditional leaders to exist.

If a chief's tenure reaches back through two generations, his position as a respected leader may be confused with his position as a former chief

and a general aura of authority accorded him. For many conservative peasants the deposed traditional chief is the closest and most trusted leader. For others, the fear of an ex-chief on the basis of his magical-religious power is enough to sustain his authority. Moreover, since the Government has legally withdrawn support from the chief, he can now define his relationship with peasants on a more intimate basis than before and join vehemently with them in criticism of the Government. Criticisms of the administration on the basis that it does not do enough for the people is a common bond among cultivators. Since the new African Government cost the chief his livelihood and official position, there is every reason for him to join the people in the criticism of Government.

Basic Nyamwezi attitudes toward authority are also important. First, there is no tradition of questioning an authority figure unless he has flagrantly abused his powers. A chief's or headman's early authority would carry over to the present because he was originally in power. Such an individual would be far more acceptable than the imposed authority who is alien to the village.

Secondly, attitudes towards generosity are important. Authority figures have always been expected to be generous and to look after the needy. Europeans seldom recognised this custom, often with the result that the peasant was confused and annoyed and the administration's goals frustrated. This was basically a failure to realise that, as authorities, Europeans were expected to be generous with their food, drink, transport, medicine, and the like. Modern African local government officials share the European attitudes and seldom fulfil the peasants' expectations of generous leaders. Consequently it is more natural for a peasant to support the familiar leader who at least pays lip service to the old custom. A similar belief that the chief will look after the people in time of calamity is not transferred to the local government authority. Such authority is too far removed from the individual, there usually cannot be a face-to-face request for help, and there is little assurance that the administration would help an individual even if it could.

Considering over-all village behaviour, support for traditional leaders comes mainly from five village groups whose members rely on the chiefs and headmen as councillors, ritualists, confessors, or interpreters of modern events. These groups are: (a) the generally conservative elders over 50, (b) men between 15 and 50 who are uneducated, untravelled, and generally apolitical, (c) nearly all uneducated women over 30, (d) children under 15, and (e) the practising group of diviners, healers, medicine men, and soothsayers. Groups that tend not to support the

traditional leaders are: (*a*) educated or semi-educated men between 15 and 50, (*b*) village dissidents, agitators, rebels, (*c*) enterprising or innovating local-level educators, administrators, politicians, and (*d*) the few semi-educated women between 15 and 30.

The use of specific techniques

In analysing how traditional leaders remain in power, however, a distinction should be made between the more general attitudes operating in Nyamwezi society and the specific customary practices which provide traditional leaders with a basis for political action. A further distinction may then be made concerning how leaders manipulate myth, ritual, symbols, customary law, and the like, for their own ends. First, the following customary practices persist and lend credence to the traditional system:

(*a*) *Use of political assassination.* The ultimate control of a Nyamwezi chief has been assassination by the royal family or headmen, usually by suffocation or poison. Occasional reports of headmen being assassinated occur today, and the deaths of two chiefs in the last ten years have led to trials and imprisonment under accusations of poisoning.

(*b*) *Use of traditional medical practices.* Various types of practitioners exist today to promote cures, dispense herbs and medicines, and in some areas to act as diviners and soothsayers. Some practitioners aid traditional leaders in ritualistic activity and help them gain success in specific undertakings. A traditional leader's dispensing of amulets, protective devices, and special medicines to ensure success in political undertakings is commonplace.

(*c*) *Continuance of dance groups.* Societies composed of specific groups (old men, young men, women, etc.) carry on the traditional dances, often for modern occasions such as celebrations marking independence day or the founding of the party. Vestiges of the past that tend to support traditional leaders are seen at such times when dancers clad in modern dress shout the names of honoured warriors of Nyamwezi history and refer to the heroic deeds of past chiefs.

(*d*) *Continuance of tribute.* Although the filling of chiefs' private granaries ceased officially in 1927, some chiefdom granaries continued to be kept as an administrative guard against famine; and small homages and gifts are still presented to traditional leaders in return for their favour.

(*e*) *Use of honorific greetings.* Honorific titles and the clapped-hand greeting to honour a chief are widely used.

(*f*) *Use of traditional elders' councils.* The newly constituted village development committees for most Nyamwezi villages are composed

largely of elders who have previously served on the village councils. More progressive individuals such as the local teacher or dispenser are occasionally on the committees, but former chiefs and headmen often dominate such meetings.

(g) *Use of traditional boundaries.* The boundaries of traditional chiefdoms are used today in delineating local government, court, and village development committee jurisdictions. Tax rolls are kept on the basis of chiefdom boundaries, and traditional headquarters are often used for modern offices. The result is a tendency for farmers to think of the new administrative units in terms of the old chiefdom, and to think of the new administrators in terms of chiefs and headmen.

A major reason why the above practices persist—and thus allow an environment which promotes traditional leadership—is that the chiefdom itself has remained the broadest political unit with which a rural African is directly concerned. The individual is first and foremost a member of a chiefdom whose geographical borders are known, whose leaders are dealt with on a personal basis, and whose authority system the farmer still understands most completely. Within the context of the chiefdom the traditional leader can use specific techniques to promote his own survival. Such techniques include the manipulation of ritual, the use of symbols, the reliance on a semi-judicial position in customary law, and the use of a position in a secret society.

Most ritualistic ceremonies carried out by chiefs and headmen in modern times are either those connected with the agricultural cycle or those employed to prevent disease and natural calamity. The ceremonies take the form of appeasing ancestral spirits, visiting the graves of former chiefs, protecting against witchcraft, controlling rainfall, ensuring fertility, and the like. For the more conservative elements of Nyamwezi rural society, these practices are important. The more educated chiefs and headmen who carry out limited ceremonies usually do so to appease their followers. Other chiefs use the ritual function for self-aggrandisement and as a basis of authority.

The importance of symbols and regalia lies in their actual possession. The physical holding of the regalia meant the holding of office. A modern transposition of these symbols has occurred; the possession now of the symbols of an administrative chief, such as records, files, books, pencils, and the like, has come to be equated with a position of authority. Most deposed chiefs and working headmen have these trappings of office and rely on them to give an official air. Other symbols of chieftaincy are still maintained by retainers and guardians of the chief's quarters. When worn by the chiefs and headmen, such regalia remind the peasants of the

customary power of the office and, in fact, give modern authority to the traditional leader.

With reference to customary law, the traditional leader had a dual judicial role in the colonial period. He was the most important informal interpreter of customary law, and he had the full legal and administrative powers of a court magistrate. When chieftaincy was abolished in 1963, it became illegal for chiefs to hold court. In fact, however, many chiefs continued to act as unofficial judges in such matters as bride-wealth, marriage, divorce, guardianship, land tenure, and rights regarding property, claims, and wills. Headmen, moreover, continued to have the legal right to hear local disputes and are, in fact, semi-judicial. Under Nyamwezi customary law the headman is particularly prominent in the allocation of land and the settlement of land disputes. Other conflicts, such as those over cattle, bridewealth, or inheritance, usually reach the headman when a family or families find themselves deadlocked. If the headman fails to reconcile the problem, the village development committee is the next step.

For both chiefs and headmen, the adjudication of customary law has remained an important function, and a continuing basis of authority. The removal of a case to the primary court, with an alien magistrate who is not from the local area and who probably is not a Nyamwezi, represents either a serious breach in the processes by which internal conflicts are resolved in the community, or a case between individuals who fall under different headmen or chiefs. In terms of political survival, any traditional leader who holds a position as a judge and mediator is in a strong position to continue his authority.

Secret societies are also used to give a former chief a claim to authority. Those that exist today are basically voluntary, and operate for such reasons as the curing of sickness, divining, spirit possession, ancestor worship, totemism, rain-making and the hunting of specific animals. Although these societies have diminished in popularity and have not in recent years been overtly political, they do exist in most places. The significant point is that chiefs and headmen occupy the higher ranks of the organisations. Because the societies cut across village and chiefdom boundaries, the officers have a potentially wide scope for political activity. Contemporary evidence suggests that traditional leaders use their positions in secret societies to reach influential elderly audiences, or as one of several claims to legitimacy.

Syncretism and neo-traditionalism

Syncretistic, reconciling behaviour depends in part on the persistence of some form of neo-traditionalism—a revival of past values. Traditional leaders must selectively use the past to ensure their position in the decisions of the future. Periodically, old values must be re-embraced and new conditions must be interpreted in light of earlier values. A movement of this nature occurs within an ethnic group and is in response to the encroachment of unacceptable modernistic values.

Such a neo-traditional movement occurred among the Nyamwezi between 1958 and 1964. The leaders of the movement, who were mainly chiefs, religious leaders, and trade-union officials, preached the long-term support of chiefly rule, the use of Swahili as the official language, and a re-emphasis on African dress and culture. Prior to independence in 1961 the movement was anti-administration, anti-European, and against the multi-racial local government ideas then under consideration. Following independence, the neo-traditional leaders continued to be against the African administration and against limiting chiefly powers. Criticism was also levelled at African government leaders because they were allegedly pro-Christian and discriminated against Muslims. The Government's reaction has been to negate the movements by emphasising the modernising, nation-building values that citizens should embrace and, in specific Nyamwezi areas, by forcing a few powerful chiefs to recant publicly.

Moderate neo-traditionalism, however, continues because the Government is not yet in a position to withdraw totally the powers of headmen and a few chiefs. The syncretistic leader is still the intermediary. Four main reasons exist for the persistence of these neo-traditionalists. First, to obtain literate, competent, and acceptable leadership at the village level requires higher pay and more rewards than the local government can afford. Secondly, to recruit competent village leaders entails persuading the individual that he should live in a remote village far from the more interesting urban areas. This constitutes a hardship that most educated leaders find difficult to accept.

Thirdly, potential rural leaders often do not come forward from within the local area because they fail to understand what the new positions entail, or because they fear responsibility. Such reluctance is based on not wishing to incur the jealousy of neighbours, not wanting to appear prosperous or grasping, and not wishing to supersede a more traditionally qualified person. Fourthly, the ostracism of unpopular local officials is common enough to be a major restraint on over-

ambitious individuals. The social position of anyone who is ostracised is, in Nyamwezi terminology (*bubiti*), equated with a hyena-like condition—all that is anti-social, dirty, nocturnal, and scavenging. In summary, neo-traditionalism is condoned and inadvertently promoted by the Government simply because only traditional leaders can be found to fill the rural leadership vacuum.

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Syncretism in political leadership is promoted by the persistence of traditional values and attitudes, and the counter-demands of the modernising bureaucratic state. The necessary environment for syncretism is perpetuated by the specific culture-bound revival of customary values, and the manipulation by leaders of symbols, ritual, customary laws, and the like. The syncretistic phenomena will continue as long as traditional value systems are in conflict with intruding modernising systems. Predictably, the traditional system will be changed by the implanting of new rural institutions, such as cells, co-operatives, parties, and administrative structures, which demand mass participation, which require new behaviour patterns, and which establish new goals for rural peoples. The success of the rural institutions will depend on the extent to which rural people manipulate these structures merely to create new forms of old organisations. In some places this will happen; gradualism will hold sway, traditional leaders will refuse to be influenced by administrators, and the organisational goals will not be reached. In other areas, innovative local leaders will accommodate the new rural institutions and the government's goals will be attained.

In general, there is a paradoxical co-existence of action and inaction in the rural areas. The situation is one of constant stimulation, reaction, and reformation. It is an ongoing process of change set upon a seemingly static society. The irony is that the human and the bureaucratic systems are experiencing constant upheaval, and yet the ebb and flow of rural life seems to be that of a dull monotony, unaltered and unchanging.

THE 'PARADOX' OF RURAL LEADERSHIP: A COMMENT

by ELLIOTT P. SKINNER*

This admirable analysis of the role of traditional leaders among the Nyamwezi in Tanzania throws light on some of the most intriguing problems of government in contemporary Africa. Recent reports from African societies confirm Dr Miller's finding that the traditional rulers are not withering away, but on the contrary have survived and are helping their people to adapt to the modern state. This would not be surprising had not many of the revolutionary and non-revolutionary leaders of the modern African states shown such hostility to the traditional leaders. Many politicians felt that the chiefs were reactionary and should be eliminated so that the African states could modernise and develop. Other modern leaders favoured retaining the chiefs while encouraging or coercing them to help modernise their societies. A few modern leaders felt that the chiefs should be honoured as custodians of the cherished values of their respective societies. But even here the hope was that the chief would help in a dialectical process of change by providing a secure base from which the society could take off.

What happened in fact, however, was that the chiefs did not disappear and even when they were legally dethroned their influence remained. Moreover, village headmen had a higher survival rate than chiefs, and were better able to resist the loss of power. They, like many chiefs, were able to retain their power because of the 'habit' of the local people, their 'fear of rapid change', and their refusal to accept local government administrators who replaced traditional authorities.

Dr Miller concludes his useful study of the Nyamwezi of Tanzania with a reference to the 'paradoxical co-existence of action and inaction in the rural areas'. It is unfortunate that he leaves us with a 'paradox' and does not try to put the 'irony' within a more understandable context. This is especially unfortunate since he had the answers at his finger-tips. The survival of the traditional leadership in African societies is not paradoxical, given the financial and technical inability of the modern African states to 'implant new rural institutions', etc. Moreover, it is doubtful whether any new political leaders could successfully supplant older ones without the economic power and institutional apparatus with which to do so.

* The United States Ambassador to Upper Volta, who acted as discussant on Dr Miller's paper when it was originally presented at the 1967 annual meeting of the (American) African Studies Association in New York.

The manner in which the Mossi chiefs in Upper Volta held on to their power throughout the rigours of the colonial régime, but lost—and regained—it afterwards is a case in point. These men became in many instances the tools of the French administration and were made to recruit forced labour for the coastal plantations, recruit soldiers for the army, and pay all types of levies. The people did not like these exactions, but were powerless to curb the power of the chiefs, now backed by French arms, and could not escape the new forms of taxation which the chiefs adapted from the French patterns. But what really saved the chiefs was the fact that the French ruled from the capital and did not impose a parallel political organisation in the rural areas. As far as the Mossi chiefs were concerned, the French were like locusts—they came periodically, drained the districts, but then left government to them. The Mossi chiefs only began to lose power over their subjects when the French abolished forced labour and other grievous forms of taxation, and began an 'enlightened' rule. Now, instead of having one administrator for 60,000 people, they created many subdivisions and administrative posts in the rural areas and brought their administrators into direct contact with the people. The French introduced institutions to rule the people directly and gradually began to curb the power of the chiefs. However, here, as in many parts of Africa, the coming of independence was to stop this process and give rise to another.

The rulers of most of the newly independent African states attempted to Africanise their bureaucracies or to set up new ones, and to build new political institutions. Africans received ministerial posts, became district commissioners and *commandants de cercle*, and new party organisations were created to *encadrer* the rural populations. However, almost all the African leaders soon found out that they did not have the money, the technical skill, or the personnel to staff their bureaucracies, or to create new institutions. In almost every country, Europeans were retained or imported to do the technical work in the ministries, and very few party organisations in the new states got off the ground. The rural areas suffered more in comparison with the cities because in most cases there was no money and no staff for the new but now moribund institutions. Indeed, in Tanzania Julius Nyerere felt it necessary for a time to give up his position as Prime Minister to work at party organisation in the rural areas.

It was as much the inability of the new states to provide and employ modern institutions as it was the syncretising ability of the local chief that was responsible for the survival of the traditional leaders. As soon as the rural bureaucracy or party apparatus ceased to be effective, the

chiefs resumed their traditional roles, or modified these to suit the times. In Mossi country the rural chiefs who in 1955–7 were apprehensive of the new political leaders of Upper Volta, took swift advantage of the decline of the single-party organisation, and by 1964 had effectively resumed control over their people, especially the older ones. The result was not unlike that which Dr Miller found among the Nyamwezi.

However, I do not consider the events in Upper Volta or in Tanzania either ironical or paradoxical. They were the direct result of uneven development or, if one wishes, of a transitional development stage in which there is a lack of congruence between the political ideology of the state and the existing political organisation in the rural areas. There is no doubt in my mind that conditions in the rural areas of modern Africa will change. Chiefs may continue to provide leadership for rural Africans but only until the modern bureaucratic nation-state can afford to create and effectively use its own local institutions.