

B O O K R E V I E W

KWAME ARHIN: TRADITIONAL RULE IN GHANA:
PAST AND PRESENT

PP. 163 WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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Kwame Arhin's book, 'Traditional Rule in Ghana: Past and Present' is an important contribution to the understanding of contemporary Ghanaian social structure, and has far-reaching implications for policy makers in the areas of decentralisation, local government administration and chieftaincy institutional reforms.

The author discusses traditional rule in Ghana with specific examples from Tallensi, Dagomba and Ashanti, and makes reference to other traditional social systems. His central theme is that though traditional rule in Ghana has been affected by the forces of social change, the institution has stood the test of time. These forces of change are Christian beliefs, formal education, the growth of trade and commerce, and the demonstration effects of factors in the colonial and post-colonial situations.

The book is organised into seven chapters. In the first chapter, three conceptual models are posited for understanding traditional rule in Ghana. These are (i) societies without obvious power-holders beyond the level of family groupings (ii) societies

with power-holders operating at rising levels so that they are said to have centralised political authority systems and (iii) societies that have the characteristics of both (i) and (ii).

Chapter 2 deals with succession to political office and Chapter 3 with the financing of traditional rule. In Chapter 4, there is a discussion of sanctions against abuse of power, which are the safe-guards and mechanisms developed by traditional societies to institutionalize, maintain and support traditional rule.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss traditional rule under colonialism and after independence respectively. Under colonialism, a new social order emerged in which there was an attempt to define a new position for the chief as a result of the forces of social change. As Arhin puts it 'Western education, the new distribution of wealth, Christianity, and the emerging new ideas of the times helped to strengthen the leaders of the destoolment movement'. These leaders of the destoolment movement became more dynamic and vocal in local politics during the post colonial situation.

In Chapter 7, Kwame Arhin discusses the future of traditional rule, and advances arguments, on the basis of the data so far analysed, for and against the abolition of traditional rule. He concludes by stating that "Traditional rulers could ensure the future of their office by getting themselves freed from their legal dependence on the central government, by taking steps to ensure their financial independence and by democratising their councils" (see p. 141).

The book is well written and contains many useful ideas which can be debated by scholars and the general reading public. From a methodological point of view, traditional rule is operationalised not in specific details but the author dwells mainly on chiefs as the central figures in traditional rule.

Kwame Arhin refers to the works of earlier scholars who have made contributions in this field, notably Mensah Sarbah, J. Casely-Hayford, R. S. Rattray, M. Fortes, P. I. Sarpong and Nii Amaa Ollenu. Kwame Arhin's book is an important addition to this body of available literature, and it should be particularly helpful to University students in the Faculty of Social Studies, as well as to the general reader who is interested in examining the foundations of traditional rule in Ghana.

There are a few typographical errors such as 'Roles of Succession' which should read 'Rules of Succession' (see Table of Contents). Also Mr. E. N. Omaboe should have been given his full traditional title under his picture. Apart from these minor points, the book deserves commendation.

P. K. Twumasi,
Dept. of Sociology,
University of Ghana,
Legon.