

# THE ACEPHALOUS SOCIETY AND THE INDIRECT RULE SYSTEM IN AFRICA

## BRITISH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY IN RETROSPECT

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Students of African anthropology have identified two types of societies in indigenous Africa: those that have centralised forms of authority (states); and those that have no centralised forms of authority (stateless or acephalous peoples or societies). For instance, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard said:

It will be noted that the political systems described in this book fall into two main categories. One group which we refer to as Group A, consists of those societies which have centralised authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions - in short, government - and in which cleavages of wealth, privilege and status correspond to the distribution of power and authority. This group comprises the Zulu, the Nkwato, the Mamba, the Banyankole and the Kede. The other group, which we refer to as Group B consists of those societies which lack centralised authority, administrative machinery and constituted judicial institutions - in short, which lack government and in which there are no sharp divisions of rank, status or wealth. This group comprises the Logoli, the Tallensi, and the Nuer. (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: 5.)

During the colonial period, indirect rule, the system of native administration practised by the British, covered states and stateless societies alike.

The aim of this article is to examine in retrospect how indirect rule as a system of administration affected the two different types of societies in Africa. Did it affect both in the same way? If not, what was the difference between the two, and which of the two was worse off?

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By the system of indirect rule the native peoples were ruled not directly by European colonial officers but indirectly through their own native rulers who were invariably chiefs. Four years of research (1987-1991) in northern Ghana among the Chakali, an acephalous society, and the neighbouring Wala, a state society, focused on how the two types of societies responded to British colonial government based on indirect rule. It is the view of the writer that the stateless of acephalous societies were the worse off under indirect rule in that for them the system meant service to two new masters, the native master and the European.

### The pre-colonial political system in Chakali

Before the advent of British colonial rule in 1901, Chakali was made up of thirteen independent *Taos* (villages): Bulenga, Chagu, Tuasa, Motigu, Bisikan, Kandia, Ducie, Gilan, Dupari, Balea, Sogla, Tisa and Katua. Each village was governed by a council of *Nihese* (elders), headed by the *Taotina* (owner of the village). He held his post by dint of being the descendant of the first settler. Other officials of the village included the *Vugotina* of the *Tao* (priest of the village *vugo*, or cult), the *Koro* or *Bong-Na* (war-chief: suffix *na* = chief), and the *Vorgo* or *Vudi* (diviner).

Although it is possible for us to talk of some kind of government in the pre-colonial *Tao*, in so far as the entire pre-colonial Chakali society of *Taos* was concerned there was no government in the sense of a group able to exercise effective control over both the people and their territory. Each village was independent in its own right. Intervillage disputes were settled through one of three relationships, that employed in each case being agreed between the parties. (a) If the parties belonged to the same matrilineal descent group, or *Hian*, it was possible for them to settle their differences at the home village of the *Hian-Nihie* (Head of the *Hian*). (b) If the parties to an inter-village dispute belonged to the same *Bia*, i.e. patrilineal descent group, there was the possibility that the dispute could be settled by the *Taotinas* of both villages, the venue of the settlement being in that case the home village of the genealogically senior *Taotina*. (c) Where the parties belonged to the same *Vugo*, there was the possibility that the dispute between them could be settled at the home village of the *Vugotina* Supreme of the *Vugo* (Daannaa 1992: 158). *Vugos* like those of Sonyor Kipo, Safeo Kala, and Koali commanded very large clienteles in Chakali. Indeed there were members of each of these cults in almost every village. Let us say that there was a dispute between two parties, one from Bulenga and the other from Ducie. If both parties were clients of the Safeo Kala their differences in that case would be settled by the elderly members of the *Vugo*. In short, common matrilineal blood ties, common patrilineal blood ties, and common membership

of a *Vugo* between inter-village disputants were the means by which peaceful settlement of disputes was achieved in Chakali at the intervillage level (Daannaa 1992: 158-164).

The different villages of Chakali cooperated amongst themselves in times of war. This was so during the wars fought against the Sambarima and Babatu, and the Soffa (Safa) under Samori during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Fighting men from all thirteen villages would assemble in the event of an attack by the enemy. In the drive to present an even stronger front against Babatu and Samori, the *ChakaliWalea* (Chakali army) entered into the Konbonghi Alliance with the Wala. Thus in 1886 when the Wala Army was routed by the Sambarima at Yeru-Nasa and Tilo-Pie, the Chakali took their share of the calamity (Daannaa 1992: 91; Holden 1965: 76; Wilks 1989: 107; Levzion 1968: 155). On the other hand the Chakali benefited from the Kanbonghi Alliance in that they were at least able to beat off three of the six attacks mounted by Babatu against the Chakali villages of Katua, Ducie and Tisa. In a nutshell, pre-colonial Chakali was an acephalous group society or a society of acephalous villages which cooperated through common kinship ties or some other kind of relationship linking up the villages, and in some cases the neighbouring Wala kingdom.

### The colonial political system in Chakali: the British colonial administration in Chakali politics

With the establishment of the British colonial system three developments began the transformation of the political system in Chakali. (a) The *Bulenga-Na* or *Bong-Na* of Bulenga gained chiefly authority over the *Bong-Nas* in the other *Taos*. (b) Chakali as a whole became annexed to Busa, a division of the so-called Wala Native State which was created during the colonial period. (c) The *Bong-Na* took the place of the *Taotina* as the political authority in the village.

This new-found position of the *Bulenga-Na*, however, was not to last for long. As will be seen below, as a result of the irresponsible conduct of the *Bulenga-Na* Anjamani, the position of the *Bulenga-Naship* as a chiefship ceased to be recognised by the colonial administration. The chiefly medallion which was normally presented to the incumbent of the *Bulenga-Naship* by the colonial administration was taken back from Anjamani by the District Commissioner. Rather than being chiefs entitled to some degree of regard, the subsequent *Bulenga-Nas* were ordinary headmen. It is not clear why the bad conduct of one chief alone should have been used as a reason to demote permanently the office of *Bulenga-Nan*. Perhaps we can find the reason in the explanation given by David Lan of British colonial attitudes towards native chiefs:

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In the early years of the century the Government attitude to chiefs was that they were simply a tool to be used to enforce government policies. If a chief refused to cooperate he should be got rid of and, to prevent future disobedience, perhaps the chieftaincy itself should be disbanded at the same time (Lan 1985: 185).

This was precisely what happened at Bulenga: "the chieftaincy itself" was "disbanded", leaving in its place only the usual headmanship.

As a direct result of the abolition of the Bulenga chiefship the whole of Chakali was brought under the *Busa-Na*, a divisional chief of Wa, the central town of the Wala. Section 3 of the Native Authority Ordinance, 1932 (No. 2 of 1932, Northern Territories)<sup>1</sup> made such annexation lawful:

The Chief Commissioner may by order made with the approval of the Governor

- a* constitute any area and define the limits thereof;
- b* assign to that area any name and description he may think fit;
- c* appoint any chief or other native or any group of natives to be a native authority for any area for the purposes of this Ordinance;

and may by the same or any subsequent Order similarly made declare that the native authority for any area shall be subordinate to the native authority for any other area.

Even before the passage of this ordinance, Chakali had effectively been subjected to the authority of the Wala chiefs through whom orders were relayed from the District Commissioner to Chakali natives. The removal from office of *Bulenga-Na* Anjamani, who appeared to be the strong man of Chakali at the time, made the authority of the *Wa-Na* over Chakali more or less complete. The story of *Bulenga-Na* Anjamani, as narrated by the Bulenga people and corroborated by other sources, says that he was a powerful man who was much feared for the possession of harmful magic. It is said that he was even feared by the *Wa-Na*, the Paramount Chief. It would appear that Anjamani was on bad

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<sup>1</sup> Later reenacted as the Native Authority (Northern Territories) Ordinance, Cap. 84, *Laws of the Gold Coast*, 1936 Rev.

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terms with the Wala chiefs whom he was supposed to regard as his undisputed superiors by the terms of the newly-established colonial system.

It is not clear from the available information when, and during the reign of which *Wa-Na* the drama of Anjamani's dismissal from office took place. I was told at the Dagaaba village of Nadoli that Anjamani was *Na* of Bulenga at the time that Kanle was *Nadoli-Na*. Kanle became *Nadoli-Na* after the death of his father Dapenle, who was appointed to the *Nadoli-Naship* by Lieutenant-Colonel H.P. Northcott of the British expeditionary force who took the area for the British Crown in about 1898. In 1987 the then *Nadoli-Na*, Dasaa II, explained: "*Nadoli-Na* Kanle, *Boli-Na* Sunkono and *Bulenga-Na* Anjamani were the strong men who stood behind Mallam Isaka when he was helping the English to establish their administration over his area."<sup>2</sup> If the *Nadoli-Na* is correct, then there is little doubt that Anjamani was *Bulenga-Na* during the reigns of *Wa-Na* Tangili and *Wa-Na* Dangana. We know that Mallam Isaka, who was gazetted in 1910 as the "Mohammedan Chief" of Wala was during the first decade of the twentieth century actively involved in pacifying the acephalous peoples of the Wala countryside with a view to compelling them to accept English protection and jurisdiction (Wilkes 1989: 143).

According to the story of *Bulenga-Na* Anjamani which is still told today, as a result of reports received from the *Wa-Na* about the insubordination of the *Bulenga-Na*, it was decided that Anjamani be dismissed and a new *Bulenga-Na* be appointed in his place. A candidate was agreed upon, and the date for the event fixed. In the light of the reputation Anjamani had for the practice of evil magic, many in the village warned the *Bulenga-Na* elect that evil spells might be cast at him by the dismissed *Bulenga-Na*. These warnings did not change the course of events. On the morning of the day appointed for the ceremony, the *Bulenga-Na* elect suddenly collapsed and died while he was about to take his breakfast. Just as the corpse was being dressed for the funeral, the District Commissioner and the *Wa-Na* arrived at the scene where the dead man would have been proclaimed the new *Na* of the village and Chief in charge of all headmen in Chakali.

After having acquainted himself with the events of the morning, the District Commissioner gave orders for the arrest of Anjamani. The attempt to arrest Anjamani, however, was unsuccessful. He escaped from Bulenga and from Chakali altogether. The District Commissioner then ordered that Anjamani's house be searched. This was done and a magical charm consisting of the tail of an animal placed between two flat stones was found. This magical charm was

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2 Information received at the Nadoli *Nayiri* in July 1987.

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taken away by the District Commissioner, together with the chiefly medallion which had been presented to Anjamani by the colonial authorities. Rather than returning the medallion to Bulenga after a new *Bulenga-Na* was enskinned, the District Commissioner sent it to the Pasala village of Kundungu where it was presented to the *Kundungu-Na*. Thus, the *Bulenga-Na* became demoted in the eyes of the colonial administration from the position of chiefship to that of ordinary headmanship. The only native chiefship in Chakali which was recognised and respected by the colonial administration in this way began to diminish in status.<sup>3</sup>

The fearsome story of Na Anjamani, it would appear, painted an unfavourable picture of Bulenga, and perhaps the whole of Chakali to the colonial authorities. The magical charm found and taken away by the District Commissioner from Anjamani's house was precisely the kind of magic prohibited under the provisions of the Native Customs (Northern Territories) Ordinance (No. 5 of 1908). Section 2 of the ordinance, which came into force on September 2, 1908,<sup>4</sup> provided:

Whoever directly or indirectly promotes, encourages or facilitates the worship or invocation of any fetish which it is pretended or reputed has power to protect persons in the commission of, or guilty of, crime, or to injure persons giving information of the commission of crime, or which has been suppressed by order or regulation under section 3, shall be liable to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding fifty pounds.

By giving orders for the arrest of Anjamani under the prevailing circumstances the District Commissioner was not acting *ultra vires*, but was rather implementing the provision of the ordinance.

From about the end of the second decade of the twentieth century onwards, therefore, there was no Chakali native chiefship. All the native *Bong-Nas* were simply headmen. The result of this development was that when the Native Authority Ordinance, 1932 was brought into force strengthening the position and

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3 Information received at Bulenga, 1987. The account is corroborated by earlier information received from Jabuni Daguo, 1981 at Tuasa, from *Bulenga-Na* Awuore Seidu, 1973, and *Bulenga-Na* Saka, 1985.

4 Later reenacted as Cap. 105, *Laws of the Gold Coast*, 1951 Rev.

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power of chiefs, the native Chakali headmen or *Bong-Nas* found themselves within the grip of chiefs who were foreigners.

By means of the ordinance the whole of Chakali, together with neighbouring Fufula villages like Mangwe, were constituted into what became known as the Busa Division of the Wala State. The Busa Division was ruled over by the *Busa-Na* who was designated a Divisional chief. Section 4 of the ordinance provided:

It shall be the duty of every native authority to maintain order in the area for which he is appointed, and every native authority shall have and exercise the powers by this Ordinance conferred over all natives residing or being within such area.

This meant in practice that every man and woman in Chakali became subject to the power of the *Busa-Na* whose duty it was to maintain order in all the *Taos*, as they were not by law all within his jurisdiction. In section 5 the ordinance provided:

A native authority may employ any person to assist in carrying out the duties imposed upon him by this Ordinance or otherwise by law, and any person so employed may carry out and give effect to any lawful order given by a native authority.

Under this section the *Na Kanboali* (Native Police of the *Na*) was established by the *Wa-Na* as paramount chief. The importance of this section, in so far as the Chakali people were concerned, was that it enabled the Wala chiefs to appoint their own brothers, cousins and friends as native law enforcement officers. No Chakali man was ever to become a member of the *Na Kanboali*.

The Native Courts Ordinance, 1935 (No. 31 of 1935, Northern Territories)<sup>5</sup> added still more power to the Wala chief. In section 4 (1) it provided:

A Native Court shall consist of Head Chiefs, Sub-Divisional Chiefs or a Sub-Divisional Chief, or Chiefs or a Chief, or any other person or persons, or a combination of any such authorities and persons.

Thus for the Chakali people it was the Wala chief who was, by law, regarded as the Native Court. Section 8 of the ordinance provided:

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5 Later reenacted as the Native Courts (Northern Territories) Ordinance, Cap. 104, *Laws of the Gold Coast*, 1951 Rev.

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Subject to the provisions of this Ordinance a Native Court shall administer -

- a* the native law and custom prevailing in the area of the jurisdiction of such Court, so far as it is not repugnant to natural justice or morality or inconsistent with any provisions of any other ordinance: Provided always that in regard to criminal offences by virtue of native law and custom such Court shall take cognizance only of such offences as may from time to time be prescribed by order of the Governor....

It would appear that in spite of this section, the Wala chiefs allowed the Chakali people to continue with the administration of local native customs which were inconsistent with, and in fact "repugnant to natural justice or morality". For instance, people who were accused of breaking the laws of the *Tao* continued to suffer corporal punishment administered by the Siguma men of the *Tao*. Similarly the meting out of posthumous justice (*Vugo-piasi*) continued until around the very last days of colonial rule when the matter drew the attention of the central government. It would appear that the Wala chiefs, i.e. the *Wa-Na*, the *Busa-Na* and the *Wa-Nabihi* chiefs ruling in Chakali villages were concerned only to ensure that the people were loyal to them. Once they had the loyalty of the people they were apparently happy to let them go on with whatever practices of adjudication they liked, even if such practices contravened the principles of "natural justice or morality" mentioned in the ordinance.

The State Councils (Northern Territories) Ordinance, 1952 (No. 5 of 1952) greatly weakened the judicial power of the chief. Section 8 provided:

A State Council may, in respect of any matter of a constitutional nature, impose customary constitutional sanctions and may make any customary award of a civil nature, including an award of amends to an injured person, but nothing in this Ordinance shall be deemed to authorise a State Council to punish any person by imposing a fine or awarding a term of imprisonment, and, subject to the provisions of section 14 of this Ordinance, no customary award or sanction shall be made or imposed which would involve the delivery or disposal of property or the payment of money exceeding twenty-five pounds in value.



However, there were two provisions in that ordinance which apparently were intended to guarantee the chief some degree of power. Firstly it was provided in section 22 (2):

Every person who, being required by a State Council or a Chief to assist in carrying out the duties imposed upon such State Council or Chief by this or any other Ordinance or by any customary law, fails, without reasonable excuse, so to do shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding five pounds.

Secondly, section 23 (1) provided:

Any person who commits any act with intent to undermine the lawful power and authority of a Chief shall be guilty of an offence, and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year.

### The transformation of the indigenous Chakali political system

As said earlier, in the pre-colonial period the *Bong-Na* was a member of the *Tao* considered to be outstandingly strong and brave who acted as a leader in times of war. In those days whenever the news of an invading army was received by the *Taotina* of any *Tao*, he would quickly pass the news to the *Bong-Na* who would prepare to lead the fighting men of the *Tao* to join the main Kanbonghi army. During the colonial period warfare between the various native peoples was not merely discouraged, but strictly prohibited by law. During the period of about half a century (1901-1957) that the British ruled Chakali, there was no war. This development did not mean that the office of the *Bong-Na* during colonial rule became defunct. Rather paradoxically, it became more and more important in the affairs of the *Tao*.

It must first be explained that during the colonial period *Bong-Nas* were not to be found in all the Chakali villages. Indeed, around 1950 only four out of the thirteen villages which make up Chakali had *Bong-Nas*. All the other nine villages were ruled over by the *Wa-Nabihi* chiefs from the Busa Gate or section of Wa.

During colonial rule it was the *Bong-Na* or the *Na*, not the *Taotina* who was regarded as the ruler of the *Tao* by the colonial administration, i.e. the Wa District Commissioner and his Native Authority the *Wa-Na*. It was on him that

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the colonial administration relied for the carrying out of its orders. For instance, it was the duty of the *Bong-Na*, assigned to him by the colonial administration, to take charge of the exacting of forced labour. In the colonial period the chief was required by the colonial administration not only to keep the peace in his *Tao*, but also to mobilise the able-bodied men of the village for work on the roads and other public projects. In fact, section 15 of the Labour Ordinance, 1935 (No. 33 of 1935, Northern Territories)<sup>6</sup>, passed to regulate the exaction of forced labour in the protectorate, provided in section 15:

A Chief may within the limits sanctioned by native customary law and subject to any regulations made under subsection (1) of section 19 of this Ordinance exact from the natives of any town or village within his jurisdiction labour for any or all of the following purposes: -

- a* the maintenance of native buildings used for communal purposes, including markets, but excluding juju houses and places of worship;
- b* sanitation;
- c* the maintenance and clearing of local roads and paths;
- d* the repairing of town or village fences;
- e* the digging and construction of wells;
- f* the provision and maintenance of local cemeteries...

The position held by the chief in the *Tao* during colonial rule clearly superseded that which was held by the *Taotina*. For instance, the chief had the legal backing to enjoy the right of being served personally. In section 6 of the Labour Ordinance, 1935 it was provided: 'A chief... may, subject to the provisions of any regulations made under subsection (1) of section 19 of this Ordinance, have the enjoyment of such personal services as are reserved to him by native law and custom...'. Although in truth there was no existing native Chakali custom or tradition which established such personal services for chiefs, nonetheless, the chiefs seized the opportunity and made themselves masters over the people in Chakali. Every year during the famine season all the young men of the village were required to provide labour on the farm of the chief.

Because the chief was the man in the *Tao* charged by the colonial administration with the responsibility of keeping the peace he was in effect the judge of the village. It was he who was answerable to the colonial administration for any trouble or disorder that occurred in the village. Whenever there was a dispute in

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6 Later reenacted as Cap. 74, *Laws of the Gold Coast*, 1936 Rev.

the village it was the chief whose opinion represented the verdict. Courts fees charged to litigants as well as fines imposed on criminal offenders formed a substantial part of his remuneration. For instance The chiefs adopted that practice of requiring any person in the village wanting to sue another in the chief's court to pay a deposit of a sum of money (*a-san*). The higher the sum the more weight the case was expected to carry with the chief. Once a complainant had paid his deposit to the chief's court, it became the duty of the chief to summon the respondent, who was bound to pay an equal sum. The case was then heard and according to the rules, whichever party lost the case lost also the deposit to the court as its fees. Power had effectively passed from the bands of the *Taotina* into the hands of the chief. Any hunter in the village who killed a large game animal had to present a hind leg to the chief, and no longer the *Taotina*, as part of his remuneration. The *Taotina* had to be content with a present of a shoulder of the animal. In fact the *Bong-Na* came to be referred to as *Na* (chief) or *Koro* (chief) of the village. The *Bong-Na* of Chagu was thus called *Chagu-Na* or *Chagu-Koro*.

Whereas in the pre-colonial period the *Bong-Na* was both appointed and dismissed by the *Taotina*, in the colonial era this role was taken over by the colonial authorities. At Bulenga I was told that Anjamani, who had been the *Bong-Na* for the village, was dismissed from his office by the District Commissioner.<sup>7</sup> At Tuasa it was said that one *Na* of the *Tao*, Sakyi, was dismissed by the District Commissioner and a new one by the name of Banamina was appointed. The former *Taotina* of the village, Jabuni Daguo, said:

One day the District Commissioner paid a visit to Chakali. He was received at every *Tao* by the *Na* of the village. However, when he arrived at Tuasa he found that the *Tuasa-Na*, Sakyi, was absent from the village. When he asked about his whereabouts, he was told that the *Na* was away from his farm. The District Commissioner thereupon told the people of the village who were present that the *Na* was dismissed with immediate effect. Banamina, one of the men who was present at the gathering, and from whom the white man had made his enquiries, was presented to the people as their new headman. From that day onwards, Banamina became known in the village as *Halimai* (headman) or *Tuasa-Na*.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Information received at Bulenga Nayiri, July 1987.

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Although in the beginning the office of *Bong-Na* was one of merit to be held by the brave and the strong, by the end of the colonial period it had developed into an hereditary post. Only the man whose father, grandfather or forefather had in the past been a *Bong-Na* could in fact claim the right to succession to it. Those who were descended from ancestors who had been *Bong-Nas* constituted in effect the *Bong-Nabihi* or *Koro-Bisi* (princes) of the *Tao*. For all matters of politics and administration, it was the *Bong-Nabihi* headed by the *Bong-Na* who were to be consulted. Although the *Taotina* continued to survive as a public figure of some importance in the village, his place as ruler was taken over by the *Bong-Na*. By the end of the colonial period the rule of the *Taotina* had become restricted to spiritual matters. The performance of sacrificial rites and offerings to the *Tavoga* (earth-shrines) of the village, and ensuring that the *Vugo* of the village was well administered by the *Vugotina* of the *Tao* remained primarily his official functions.

### *Chiefs in colonial Chakali: native and non-native*

In colonial Chakali there were native Chakali chiefs (*Bong-Nas*) and non-native Wala chiefs (*Wa-Nabihi*). It will be recalled that one distinctive feature of the pre-colonial Chakali society was that there was no centralised form of authority responsible for coordinating or reconciling the different and divergent interests of the autonomous villages or *Taos*. The system that was practised by the Chakali *Taos* was one in which concerted effort was made by all the *Taos* to ensure that no one *Tao* became dominant in the affairs of all Chakali. No matter how strong or large a village was, it was nonetheless expected to treat the other *Taos* with equal respect. It was very important for the Chakali that each *Tao* retained its independence from the other *Taos*. This was the local Chakali concept of society.

The establishment in 1914 of the *Wa-Na* as the Paramount Chief of the entire North-West Province of the Protectorate by the colonial administration brought about a dramatic change in Chakali society. The system of segmentary acephalousness which the Chakali practised did not suit British colonial policy. Not only were the small communities of Chakali brought together under the authority of the *Busa-Na* and his superior the *Wa-Na*, but they were also restratified into a form of centralised or pyramidal system of local authority. The *Bulenga-Na* became the chief of all Chakali *Bong-Nas* or Headmen as they were referred to by the colonial authorities. Bulenga itself became the capital of Chakali. A rest house was built there to provide accommodation for the District Commissioner any time he was on a visit to Chakali. Thus for the first time one *Tao* had become the undisputed superior of all the other *Taos*.

For the Chakali people this newly established system of chiefly authority was unacceptable. First of all, the *Na* in the *Tao* was much disliked and resented by the inhabitants of the village, who saw him as the agent of a foreign authority, i.e. the colonial administration. After all, it was he who took charge of the much hated *Hanlari* (forced labour). Secondly, the various Chakali villages considered the overlordship of the *Bulenga-Na*, and the position of Bulenga itself as the capital of Chakali, to be breaches of the fundamental principles upon which inter-*Tao* cooperation had been based in the past.

In the period before colonial rule, as already seen, parties to any inter-village dispute could settle their differences amicably through the *hian*, *tao* or *bia*, or *vugo*. With the establishment of the colonial system the settlement of disputes between parties from different *Taos* became the reserved duty of the *Bulenga-Na*. The parties to any inter-village dispute would normally come to the *Bulenga-Na* at Bulenga where the case would be heard, and then judgment given. If this new state of affairs was to be asserted, then the fundamental principle that all Chakali *Taos* were autonomous and equal in right would completely cease to exist.

For the Chakali people the Wa-Nabihi chiefs who were appointed as chiefs over some of the Chakali villages by the colonial Native Administration were also a problem. In the pre-colonial period we have said the defence of the Chakali village was the responsibility not only of its residents, but also of the people resident in other *Taos* or other societies who had blood relations with it. In other words, the people of every *Tao*, if attacked, would expect very eager support from any man living anywhere, provided that he was the son of a woman from the village. The man whose matrilineal home was a *Tao*, had rights in the *Tao* that was equal with the man whose patrilineal home was the same *Tao*. The emergence of Bulenga as the capital of all Chakali during the colonial period, was a factor which constituted a threat to the independence and security of the various *Taos*. My Tuasa informant said:

On the Bulenga market day the Bulenga young men would pick quarrels with the young men from Tuasa, Tisa, etc. Sometimes fighting would break out between the parties, and in the end the matter would be brought before the *Bulenga-Na*. Because the *Bulenga-Na* was himself a Bulenga man, he was normally quick to decide in favour of the disputing party from Bulenga village.<sup>9</sup>

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9 Information received from the late Jabuni Daguo of Tuasa, 1981. He narrated to me a case involving Bananmina of Tuasa and some Bulenga men in

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In an attempt to check the power of the *Bulenga-Na* which appeared to be misused, some of the *Taos* appealed to their relatives who were *Wa-Nabihi* to come and take up their offices of *Nan*. In this way a Wala prince from the Dzonyohi Gate, whose mother was a Tisa woman, came to Tisa and was made the *Tisa-Na*. Ide of Dzeri who was the first Wala prince to become *Na* at Katua, was also the son of a woman from that *Tao*. The Wala prince who was related matrilineally to a Chakali village, and who was invited to come and take over the *Nan* of that village, would first make sure that he had the approval and blessing of the *Wa-Na*. As time went on, Chakali became divided. While some of the *Taos* were ruled by *Wa-Nabihi* chiefs, others continued to be ruled by *Bong-Nabihi* chiefs. By the end of the colonial period more than half of all Chakali villages were under the *Wa-Nabihi* chiefs. Only the villages of Bulenga, Chagu, Dupari and Motigu retained their indigenous Chakali *Bong-Nabihi* chiefs.

If the reason for the establishment of the *Wa-Nabihi* chiefship in some of the *Taos* was to check the growing power of the *Bulenga-Na*, there is no doubt that the measure was successful. The *Bulenga-Na* was aware of the fact that the Wala princes ruling some of the *Taos* in Chakali were none other than cousins, brothers, sons or grandsons of the *Busa-Na* who was in charge of the Division, or possibly of the *Wa-Na* who was head of the whole Province. He knew that any confrontation between himself and the other *Bong-Nas* on the one hand, and the Wala princes ruling in some of the *Taos* on the other, for dominance in Chakali affairs, might lead to a confrontation and a head-on clash with the *Busa-Na* or even the *Wa-Na*. Thus, in all his dealings with the *Wa-Nabihi* ruling in Chakali, the *Bulenga-Na* was normally not only polite, but obedient.

Although in the beginning it was the Wala princes who protected the smaller Chakali *Taos* from domination by Bulenga, in the end it was they themselves who became the oppressors. The first Wala princes to become chiefs in Chakali, as explained above, were related matrilineally to the *Taos* of which they became *Nas*. Because the people of the village were his own kin, the first *Na* of each village was conscientious and sympathetic to local feeling. However, after the deaths of the first *Wa-Nabihi* chiefs in Chakali villages, the princes who were appointed by the *Busa-Na* and approved by the *Wa-Na* to succeed to the *Nan* were mostly not related in any way to the people of the Chakali villages. They came to occupy the posts not because they were invited by the *Taotina* of the respective *Tao* on the grounds of matrilineal kinship, but merely on the grounds of their being authorised to do so by the Wala chiefs. All objections raised by the *Taotinas* of the villages concerned to this new approach of the Wala princes

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which Bananmina was beaten at the Bulenga *Nayiri* upon the orders of the *Bulenga-Na* himself.

and chiefs were normally waved aside. So far as the *Wa-Nabihi* were concerned it was axiomatic that chiefship awarded to one member of a Gate was awarded to all members of that Gate. In their view therefore, a village which awarded its *Nan* to a Wala prince from the Dzeri Gate on the grounds of common kinship ties, implicitly awarded it to all the members of the Dzeri Gate. On the other hand, the Chakali villages concerned, took the view that the chiefship awarded to a person by reason of matrilineal descent could not be the inheritance of another strong man without either patrilineal or matrilineal kinship ties with the *Tao*.

It would appear that the Wala princes who succeeded to the chiefships of Chakali were on the whole hard on the villagers under their rule because they were not Chakali blood relatives. The inhabitants of Katua and Ducie are said to have rebelled twice against the rule of the Wala princes, and, in each case when it was realised that the rebellion would not succeed, to have fled from Chakali land into neighbouring Gonja territory. All my Chakali informants agree that these events actually took place during the colonial period. I was told by Manbo of Katua, who for a long time was the spokesman of the *Katua-Na*:

At the time the chiefs were maltreating the people. In Katua and Ducie, the chiefs were going after the wives of the men in the villages. The Ducie people came to an agreement and fled the village. Some people from Katua went along with them, but others stayed behind.<sup>10</sup>

At Ducie the name of Jeyenge (Jangare) is mentioned as the *Na* who, more than any other, maltreated people of the *Tao*. It is said that during the time of *Na* Jeyenge, all the people of Ducie fled the village except one man, Chapari, who stayed with his family. My Ducie informant explained that at the time the son of the chief and the chief himself were able to act as they wished towards any Ducie man, with the exception of this particular individual, who was well-known and feared for possessing powerful magic.<sup>11</sup>

#### *The Busa Gate and Chakali*

By the time *Busa-Na* Sumaila became *Wa-Na* in 1943, the whole of Chakali had come under the effective control of the Busa or Yijihi Gate of the Wa royal

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10 Information received from Sanpuo Manbo of Katua in December 1975. Manbo's account of the event was later corroborated by narrations of the story to me by J.C. Dougah in 1980.

11 Information received from the *Taotina* of Ducie, Bodai Wisa in 1980.

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house. This meant that all Chakali villages without distinction had accepted that they were subjects of the *Busa-Na*, through whom instructions from the District Commissioner were to be passed by the *Wa-Na* to them. The *Bulenga-Na*, who was the chief *Bong-Na* of Chakali, was in a sense a liaison between the *Busa-Na* on the one hand, and all the other village *Nas* of Chakali. Of course, although he was chief *Bong-Na* of Chakali, the *Bulenga-Na*, as we have said, could not and did not exercise any authority or power over those Chakali *Nas* who were *Wa-Nabihi*. Thus, although the *Bulenga-Na* was in theory the head chief of the Chakali area, his authority was in practice felt only by those Chakali *Nas* who were Chakali natives.

We have said that the chiefship of Tisa was founded by a prince from the Dzonyohi Gate, and that the chiefship of Katua was founded by a Dzeri prince. We will now find out how and why these two villages were transferred from the Donyohi and Dzeri Gates to the Yijihi Gate. All the people I have spoken to in Chakali hold that the chiefships were initially not in the hands of the *Busa-Na*. They also agree to the fact that Yijihi princes entered the politics of these two villages much later. However, no one in Chakali, at least among those I have spoken to, seems to know exactly why and how jurisdiction over Tisa and Katua was transferred to Busa. Some people take the view that the Gates originally holding jurisdiction gradually lost interest in the affairs of these villages in view of the fact that they were very far away. Others are of the view that Tisa and Katua were simply taken by force by the *Busa-Na* from the Gates holding them. Further investigations, however, have revealed that neither of these views represents the truth of the matter. In the case of Tisa the chiefship of the village came into the hands of the Busa princes only for reasons of administrative convenience. In the case of Katua the chiefship of the *Tao* was literally sold to Busa.

About the Tisa case, the *Wa-Na*, Momori Bondiri II, who is himself a member of the Dzonyohi Gate, said:

Tisa belonged to us in the past. However, at the time when the native tribunals were being set up it was realised that almost all the Chakali villages were under the jurisdiction of the Busa Tribunal. Tisa was an odd one out among the lot. It was therefore decided by the colonial administration that Tisa be put under Busa.<sup>12</sup>

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12 Information received at the *Wa-Nayiri* in July 1987.



With regard to Katua it appears that the chiefship of the village was sold by Hamid Bomi of Dzeri to *Wa-Na* Pelpuo III. Writing about the patterns of succession to *Nan* among the Wala, Ferguson and Wilks said:

In or about 1922 *Wa-Na* Pelpuo III decided to put Katua in charge of a Wala prince, and he offered the skin to Hamid of the Perisi segment. Hamid, however, decided that he wished to make a bid for the Perisi Skin itself, and accordingly sold Katua back to the *Wa-Na* for three pounds and the promise of support in his candidature... In the meantime Pelpuo III offered Katua to another prince, exchanging it for a yam farm but at the same time agreeing, in view of the unattractive nature of the office, that whoever held it should be entitled to consideration for promotion to Busa. (Ferguson and Wilks 1970: 360-61).<sup>13</sup>

This version of events contradicts an account narrated to me by Al-Haj-Asani of Dzedzereyiri who is matrilineally related to Katua, and consequently has followed developments in Katua affairs over the years. He told me:

The Dzeri prince, Ide, became the first Wala *Na* of Katua because his mother was from that village. He went and settled there in Katua. Then later, Ide's Babihi [patrilineal cousins] took over the *Katua-Nan*, with the end result that it was sold to *Wa-Na* Pelpuo of Yijihi for three pounds. Since then the *Nan* of Katua has been in the possession of the Busa princes.<sup>14</sup>

After looking at the two accounts carefully, one cannot help but conclude that the simple truth of the matter is what has been explained by Al-Haj-Asani. It is likely that the *Katua-Nan* had been occupied before 1920 by a Wala prince. This most probably was Ide of the Dzeri Gate. Thus the move made by *Wa-Na* Pelpuo III in 1922 was an attempt to bring Katua from the jurisdiction of the Dzeri Gate to that of Busa, and not to bring it under a Wala prince as suggested by Wilks. Besides, it is hard to understand why *Na* Pelpuo should have had to

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13 According to Wilks, Katua came into the hands of the Wala as a result of the Wala-Gonja wars during the second half of the 19th century. He did not, however, ascertain who ruled Katua or how it was ruled during the period between the wars and 1922, when *Na* Pelpuo appointed a Wala prince to rule it.

14 Notes taken from a conversation with Al-Haj-Dari Asani at Wa, April 1990.

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pay money to Hamid Homi for Katua, if Katua was in fact only then being given to Hamid. A senior chief does not have to pay money to a junior chief for a post which he has offered, but which has been rejected, and which is being taken by the offeror. Rather, what is reasonable and understandable is that *Na Pelpuo* had to pay three pounds to Bomi for Katua because the title to the *Nan* of that village was vested in one way or another in Momi, who "then transferred it". Clearly, it cannot be that Pelpuo "offered the skin to Hamid of the Perisi segment", and, when Hamid "decided that he wished to make a bid for the Perisi Skin itself", he had to buy back the Katua Skin for three pounds, as well as promise to support Hamid "in his candidature". This writer concludes that *Wa-Na Pelpuo III* was able to take over Katua from the Dzeri Gate as a result of collaboration between Hamid Bomi and himself, a collaboration which was perhaps not obvious to the colonial administration.

### *The ordinary Chakali inhabitants and the British colonial system*

Whether one talks about the takeover of power by the chiefs from the *Taotinas*, or the appointment of the *Wa-Nabihi* as chiefs in Chakali villages, or the annexation of Chakali to the Busa Division of the Wa Paramountcy, makes no difference for an assessment of the effects on the ordinary inhabitants of colonial Chakali. For them and their traditional leaders, the *Taotinas*, the crucial issue was just one, namely, the domination of the Chakali people by the Wala. Even in the villages ruled over by *Bong-Nabihi*, people thought that it was the question of Wala chiefly superiority which constituted their key problem during the colonial period. Below are four passages. The first two are extracts from interviews held with inhabitants of villages ruled by *Bong-Nas* during the colonial days. The remaining two passages are extracted from interviews held with inhabitants of *Taos* ruled by *Wa-Nabihi* at the same time. The four passages read together give an insight into the feelings and reactions of the Chakali people to the changes that took place in their leadership structure during the colonial period.

#### *1. Bulenga*

Why the white man made us, the Chakali people, to serve the Wala, none of us can answer. We have never been conquered by Wa. We and the Wala were friends who helped one another against foreign invaders. Many of our people, for instance, died at Tugilor-pie whilst fighting for Wa against Babatu. Since the time Chakali was brought under the administration of the Wala chiefs, our people have been oppressed. Be you a *Taotina*, a chief or whatever, as long as

you are a Chakali native, you are nothing. The worst part of it is that since that time they, the *Wa-Nabihi*, have always been the judges in all cases. Imagine a Chakali native bringing a case before the *Busa-Na* or the *Wa-Na* against a Wala. Anyone can guess the result. The introduction of chieftaincy from Wa to Chakali right from the very outset made us people without rights. We only rely on sympathy.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. *Motigu*

Today educated people like you can easily speak your mind about things that happen. In the colonial days educated people like us could not do that. The simple fact was that since orders were given by an authority, they were to be obeyed by all means. Everyone had to obey his chief. It was a must. At that time, when the *Busa-Na* gave an order no Chakali person could complain, argue or refuse to comply. If you did, you ran the risk of being brought before the District Commissioner for indiscipline. It was in your own interest, in any case, to agree and not to disagree with your chief, for if you did you could not bring your complaint to the District Commissioner yourself. You could only do so with the knowledge of the chief himself. This procedure was avoided because it was regarded by many to be suicidal. For as long as the chief was aware of your complaint it was within his power to frustrate your efforts and, furthermore, to seek revenge. In the colonial days, if a chief did something bad against you, it was better to be quiet about it than to speak out and fight against him. Ask the people of Katua and Ducie and let them tell you about what happened to them when they quarrelled against their chiefs. They were warned but they did not pay heed. Accordingly, severe punitive measures were taken against them. Similarly, no matter which village in Chakali you came from, if you, a Chakali man, had a grievance against a Wala person, you had to be mindful of the fact that those who would pass judgment in any hearing were Wala and not Chakali people.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Account narrated by Mwengu from Sangpuo Yenge section of Yogile in Bulenga, 1987.

16 Account narrated by Mr J.C. Dougah in 1984. He is also the author of a book on the history of the Wa area (Dougah 1966).

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### 3. *Tisa*

I remember when I was a boy staying with my grandfather Sabaluu, who was the *Tisa Taotina*. I used to see him quarrel every day with the *Tisa-Na*. There was not a single day that the two men did not have a conflict. Many times my grandfather was taken to Busa and fined. I did not know why they were always quarrelling. Sometimes they would even insult each other openly in public. I remember for instance that one day the *Tisa-Na* insulted my grandfather: 'You big head'. and my grandfather retorted: 'You small eyes'.<sup>17</sup>

### 4. *Ducie*

We the people in Ducie are very thankful to the white man. If it were not for the white man, the Sambarima would still be attacking us today. It was the white man that drove them away permanently. Since that time there has been peace. What is bad about the white man however is that he believed in force. Whenever the District Commissioner wanted something to be done, we were told about it and we were to do it. We were told to do it whether we liked it or not. When chiefs were sent from Wa to rule us we did not like it but could do nothing because that was what the District Commissioner ordered. We had to accept the Wala princes. We were told that we could not see the District Commissioner save through the chiefs. Whatever the white man said was relayed to us by the chiefs. It was therefore difficult for us to differentiate between orders that were issued by the chiefs themselves and those that were issued by the District Commissioner. Some of the chiefs were wicked people who did a lot of bad things here in Ducie. What could the Ducie people do? They could do nothing. If the *Taotina* talked about the matter he would be reported by the chief to Wa as a rebellious elder and treated as such by the Wa-Na and the District Commissioner. Twice people in Ducie fled from the jurisdiction of Wa because of too much trouble from the chiefs.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Account narrated by Kuri, a literate native of Tisa, 1987.

18 Account narrated by Bodai Wisa, the *Taotina* of Ducie. Bodai Wisa, whom I interviewed in 1981, provided me with a lot of historical information on Ducie village in particular.

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It would appear that during the colonial period, of the thirteen villages in Chakali, the three most remote were those which suffered the most oppression from the *Wa-Nabihi*. These three villages were: Katua (41 miles from Wa), Ducie (40 miles) and Balea (45 miles). This view is evidenced by the fact that people in each of the three villages at some point in time ran away from their homes in attempts to evade Wala chiefly jurisdiction.

### Indirect rule in retrospect

During the colonial period the British administration used indigenous African traditions and traditional institutions in its attempt to achieve the colonial purpose. For instance, in Wa it used the indigenous traditional institution of *Nan* (chieftaincy) as a power base for controlling the natives of the North-Western Province of the Northern Territories Protectorate (Daannaa 1992: Part 4). However, a problem arose from the fact that not all the societies within the North-Western Province knew *Nan* as a traditional institution of authority. Although there were in existence working relationships between some of those societies not practising *Nan* (acephalous peoples) and the Wala kingdom, the former were not in fact subjects of the Wa chiefship. Acephalous societies like the Chakali were if anything its allies (Daannaa 1992: Parts 2, 3). Under these circumstances the colonial administration sought to trim and tailor the Wa chiefship for the acephalous peoples. The requirements of indirect rule drove the colonial administration to overstretch the tradition of *Nan*.

Admittedly, for a long time the colonial administration did not understand that acephalousness or statelessness was a system of society in its own right. The first detailed literature about acephalousness as a system of society in Africa was published by Meyer Fortes in 1940 after his research among the Tallensi in the north-eastern corner of the Northern Territories Protectorate (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). His findings were supported by David Tait in 1958 (Tait 1958).

Thus there is no doubt that the British in their colonial experiment in Africa tampered with indigenous African traditions. One may wonder whether the British "invented" tradition as has been argued by Terence Ranger (Ranger 1983). Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the negative effects of colonial intervention in its adjustment, trimming and alteration of African traditions to meet the needs of the indirect rule system. This system laid all emphasis on centralised rule, or paramount chiefship, an institution which the acephalous society lacked, was unfamiliar with and did not want. In contrast, the state society had a centralised form of authority, was familiar with it and at the least did not hate it. People who were unfamiliar with centralised authority had to adapt to it, when it was imposed, at two different levels: that of the native

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authority, and that of the British colonial administration itself. As we have seen the Chakali people in the colonial days had to accept rule both by Wala native chiefs and by the colonial administration.

During the colonial era cooperation between acephalous Chakali on the one hand, and centralised Wa on the other broke down. It would appear that this breakdown was due to the fact that those who were in control of Wala affairs, the *Wa-Nabihi*, no longer needed to resort to the assistance of the Chakali *Bong-Nas*. There were no longer slave raiders or other enemy forces, threats of whom might have urged the *Wa-Na* to seek allies in the acephalous countryside. Furthermore, the *Wa-Na* had found a new ally, the colonial administration, which was alone stronger than all the native acephalous groups put together.

The indirect rule system of administration adopted by the British colonial government placed acephalous Chakali under the authority of centralised Wa without any mechanism to check Wala abuse of power. Consequently throughout the colonial period the *Wa-Nabihi*, and in particular those of the Busa Gate, endeavoured to retain as well as strengthen Wala control over Chakali. There is no harm in placing small social units under the care and authority of larger ones if such an arrangement is administratively more convenient. However, it is important that some kind of provision be made so that those large social units entrusted with authority and power over their smaller neighbours do not abuse such authority and power. As Sumner wrote as long ago as 1906:

In every societal system or order there must be a ruling class or classes; in other words, a class gets control of any society and determines its political form or system. The ruling class, therefore, has the power. Will it not use the power to divert social effort to its own service and gain? It must be expected to do so, unless it is checked by institutions which call into action opposing interests and forces. There is no class which can be trusted to rule society with due justice to all, not abusing its power for its own interest. (Sumner 1959: 169)

In my view, a useful mechanism in the colonial system would have been a Chakali Council of *Taotinas* established by the District Commissioner, who would have met with it from time to time to hear directly any Chakali complaints against the Wala chiefs. This would have been useful firstly because the Wala chiefs, once they were aware of the fact that they would be reported to the District Commissioner if they abused their powers, would have acted better and more fairly in Chakali. Secondly, the colonial administration would have gained more information and knowledge about the Chakali and its society. Precisely because no such mechanism was ever created, it was easy for the Wala

chiefs who became the Native Authority for the Chakali area to concern themselves more with strengthening and legitimising their rule over the Chakali than with implementing the principles in which the colonial administration itself believed.

That the acephalous society was worse off under indirect rule does not mean that the system worked well for, or was liked by state societies. Between the native ruler of the state society and the District Commissioner, relations might be strained. The account given by Goody and Braimah of Kpembewura Timu, a senior chief within the Gonja Native State, under indirect rule shows this:

The Kpembewura was addressed by the British Officer as 'my good friend' but the treatment he got from him was worse than that of a slave. Practically every week carriers were demanded to take loads to Kumasi, Tamale and Kintampo. Imoru was then Leppowura, the right hand man of the chief, and he and Chuawura Sulemanu were often on horseback for 24 hours a day, going from village to village to conscript carriers... The Constabulary also went round seizing men to make up the quotas demanded. Whips were constantly at men's backs and there was no-one to complain to. When carriers were required, the Kpembewura was made to sit in the sun until the number of men was made up, even though he was a sick man and could ill stand it. (Goody and Braimah 1987: 62)

The colonial administration reacted harshly to any chief who failed to comply with orders. For instance, in July 1933 the Acting Commissioner, Dixon, sent a message to the *Na* requiring him to come and see him. The *Na* failed to honour this request because he was ill. Dixon thereupon sent again to the *Na* with the message that

he had not arranged a meeting with me nor had he fixed a date for a meeting with the chiefs and pointed out that he could not make the excuse of being sick all the time and that if he was fit for *damba* festivals then he was fit to see me.<sup>19</sup>

All things considered, indirect rule as practised in West Africa appears to have been no different from that in East Africa about which Morris and Read write:

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19 RAT/240, Informal Diary (Wa District), entry for 4 July 1933.

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"[I]n the search for justice in East Africa, the goal proved elusive" (Morris and Read 1972).

That the acephalous society was worse off under indirect rule means only that, whilst the British colonial administration lorded it over the native paramount chief and the state society, they, for their part lorded it over the acephalous communities under their power.

## Conclusion

We have tried in this article to understand the effect of the indirect rule system of colonial administration practised by the British during the colonial period, on the two different types of society in indigenous Africa. We have found that the system of indirect rule affected the acephalous society on the one hand, and the state society on the other, in different ways and to varying degrees. Unlike the state society, which was ruled by the colonial administration through chieftaincy, the acephalous society had to grapple with a new and complex centralised form of authority. This study suggests that whenever we talk about the history of British colonial administration in Africa, the type of society should be taken into consideration. Not to do so risks overlooking the actual historical circumstances of some of the acephalous societies which were subsumed under the so-called Native States.

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