Harnesing Ghana's Multi-Party Democracy through Traditional Governance

Dominic Alimbey Dery (PhD)

Department of Languages and Liberal Studies, Faculty of Applied Art, Tamale Technical University, Ghana

Abstract: - **This paper explores the relationship between aspects of indigenous African political culture and the search for appropriate principles and practices for Africa and Ghana's political future.The main thesis is that some political values of traditional Dagbon, Gonja and Bulsa societies are relevant to our contemporary lives and should, therefore, be adapted and integrated into strategies for better governance in the modern Ghanaian setting. I make this claim based on the premise that some features of traditional culture can play an important role in the search for enduring and workable solutions to Africa's socio-political and economic problems. The study uses an ethnographic approach. A total number of thirty participants made up the study population, out of which fifteen were chiefs and the other fifteen were key informants /opinion leaders. Information was elicited from the former using semi-structured interviews while in the case of the latter, focus group approach was relied on. Despite some of the weaknesses of traditional governance, it has the characteristics that can serve as foundations in building culturally-relevant institutions of democratic governance in contemporary Africa and Ghana.**

Key Words: **Harnessing, multi-party democracy, traditional governance**

I. INTRODUCTION

This study has become necessary because the current practice of multi-party democracy, has left Ghanaians deeply divided on party lines and has created lots of acrimony and insecurity. Elections years are normally as though the country is at war with itself. Insults become the order of the day, impunity on the part of party supporters and above all violence become the order of the day. This has led several well-meaning Ghanaians to propose a departure from the current multi-party democratic system.

The issue of governance is not a new phenomenon to African societies. Long before the introduction of the colonial project, African societies had on their own established a variety of political systems with corresponding politico-socio-economic institutions which catered for the allocation of resources, law-making, and social and political control. The then predominant principle of social relations that existed in pre-colonial African society was presumed to be one of family and kinship associated with communalism. Every member of an African society was believed to have his or her position defined in terms of maternal relatives or paternal relatives (Kargbo 2007). Land, a major factor of production was owned by groups such as the family or the clan (Rodney 1978). As a result of this principle of social organization, consensus,

rather than conflict over the distribution of economic resources, was often the way in the discourse about governance. That is not to say that conflicts did not occur, since we know from historical, oral and anecdotal accounts that over time, some families, through wars of conquest, subjugated other families, thereby widening their territorial bases and eventually becoming the ruling aristocracies.

Kargbo (2007), further argues that as a result of the generally exploitative relationship that characterized the colonial project, a relationship where ''racial justice'' dominated the discourse on governance, it became a fad for most of these post-colonial African states to sway towards the socialist principle of development in the 1960s and the 1970s. However, by the 1980s, as a result of the abysmal failure of the socialist experiment, these African states gradually went back to the neo-liberal development paradigm with its wholesale embrace of the market reforms popularly known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). It is however, important to state that despite the embrace of the Washington-Consensus by African leaders for over two decades now, African countries continue to be faced with various and numerous problems of governance, a situation which has undoubtedly led to doubts about the legitimacy by these post-colonial African states (ibid 2007).

This situation, added to the failure of the state structures inherited from the colonial state to govern in line with the socio-economic aspirations of Africa's people's, and the time tested and proven resilience of traditional institutions as a result of their effective institutionalization, has led to a renewed interest in indigenous knowledge and indigenous institutions (for example, Ake, 1990; Ayittey, 1991; Davidson, 1992; Wunch & Olowu 1990). This renewal of interest in traditional institutions has by and large been manifested in the growing interest in decentralization in Africa at large and Ghana in particular. Some scholars have however suggested that the fact that traditional governance is popular among mainly rural residents as opposed to the vast majority of urban dwellers who are in support of modern governance structures has deepened the crisis of governance in Africa (Mengisteab 2006).

It is against this background of the crisis associated with growing dissatisfaction with the Washington Consensus that my thesis supports the idea of integrating traditional governance structures into modern structures of governance to ensure efficient and effective governance in Africa at large

and Ghana in particular must be understood. Skinner (2007), observes that similar measures like the adoption of Washington Consensus in the 1960s by the new African elite essentially led to an outright neglect of traditional leadership structures in some countries or a drastic reduction in their powers and influence in the affairs of state. He further asserts that these African nationalists ignored their own ''counter - racist'' philosophies such as ''negritude'' and the ''African personality'' by ignoring traditional political cultures, while firmly rejecting compromise with African traditional politicians. For example, Ghana's own Kwame Nkrumah did not only relegate chiefs to the background when it came to governance, he also disagreed with the view that the new African states used agriculture to build their economies and employed ethnic - based coalitions (Lewis 1967).

II. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Contrary to several claims through Eurocentric histories which infantilized Africans and threw doubts on their innovative abilities, there is now a general consensus that state formation in Africa is not a post-colonial development (Diop 1974). There is enough evidence for instance, that functional states like the Ashanti kingdom, the Zulu kingdom and the great Zimbwabwe existed in pre-colonial Africa. Archaeological findings in recent times in sites such as Mapungubwe and Thulamela in South Africa demonstrate that pre-colonial Africans were innovative and had well organized political institutions of power (Kargbo 2007).

Consistent with the communalist nature of traditional society, at the basis of traditional governance during this period was the institution of the family and kinship which defined the social and economic positions, especially access to land of members of society. The heads of these dynastic families often used their control of resources like land, cattle and the bride price through strategic political marriage alliances, to establish themselves as a privileged economic and social stratum. Moreover religious beliefs and practices, which at this time were family based in the form of ancestral worship, were used by the family to mobilize and instil discipline in members in the process of state formation. In spite of the resilience of traditional governance structures and the fact that they vary greatly from highly centralized to de-centralized systems, there is still no consensus on the desirability of integrating them into modern democratic governance structures.

Since multi-party democracy forms the main subject matter of this thesis, it is necessary to consider the various scholars' opinions of what constitutes multi-party democracy. This will then help to concretize the proposition, the Ghanaian-African concept of democracy by consensus, a panacea to our search for a permanent system of governance.

According to Salih (2007), multi-party system is characterized by competition between more than two parties, thus reducing the chances of single party government and increasing the likelihood of coalitions. He is however quick to admit that it is difficult to define multi-party systems in terms in terms of the number of parties being explained by reference to the class nature of party support (party conflict being seen, ultimately, as a reflection of the class struggle), or as a consequence of party democratization and the influence of ideologically committed grass-roots activists.

That notwithstanding, Bevir Mark and others base their definition of multi-party democracy founded on the theory developed and given prominence by Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), in his book 'Bergsonism'.

Deleuze (1995:853) cited in Muwowo (2015), defined multiplicity in the context of democracy and equated it to the concept of the western political theory which he spoke of as an embracing theorem. He further broadened his concept to the kind of political system which provides for equal participation of people in the governance of a country, regardless of race, class, gender, language, state, society, person and party. In the opinion of Muwuwo (2015), Deleuze's definition of multiplicity or in simple terms multi-partism in politics is aimed at rendering political thinking more nuanced and generous towards difference as a basis for participation of citizens in a democratic dispensation. Deleuze uses the term multiplicity as part of his broader project to overturn 'Platonism' (Bevir, 2010:911).

From Deleuze's theory of multiplicity, Bevir Mark and others define multi-party democracy as a political system that is characterized by both democratic decision making institutions and by the presence of two or more political parties who represent sectors of people from sections of life (Bevir, 2010:911; Encyclopaedia of Democracy 1995:853) in Muwuwo (2015).

J. C. Piano on his part departs from the traditional perspective and defines multi-party system as ''an electoral system, usually based on proportional representation that requires a coalition of several parties to form a majority to run the government'' (Piano 1973:243). Frank Bealey on his part supports Piano's definition though the former states that the ''term can be misleading because it is not used to mean a situation where there are several political parties, the normality in any democracy''. He then adds that ''it refers the proposition where there are more than two parties in the legislature and none of them has enough representation to form a single party government'' (Bealey 1999:217-218).

Borgdanor, Vernon on his part define multi-party democracy ''as a kind of mixed government'' where both the opposition and the ruling government are given a mandate to execute the duties of the state. He then explains his theory of a mixed government operates on two main assumptions that ''every section of the community is likely to abuse its position if the government was left solely in its hands'' (ibid) and ''Secondly that the only effective check on the exercise of power by one section was the exercise of a countervailing power by other sections.'' Having looked at the modern concept of democracy, it is necessary to prove that traditional political

systems of the Dagomba, Gonja and Bulsa meet the requirement and definition of the concept of democracy.

A Critique of Democracy

Democracy like all values has its strengths and weaknesses, contrary to what its proponents would normally want to portray, a flawless system whose values override all other values.

Strengths of Modern Democracy

When discussions take place about democracy, two things come to mind, these are the Athenian democracy and the liberal representative democracy. The Athenian model of democracy or what is also called participatory democracy. Athenian democracy places emphasis on the direct and active participation of all citizens and on their political equality. The sovereign body which took all major decisions was the assembly of citizens in which all citizens could participate. The emphasis of the Athenian model was on politics. The institutional arrangement were designed to maximize active citizenship and laid stress on the notion of civic virtue. On the part of liberal democracy which model emerged at the end of eighteen century put the emphasis on political contestation, on rational discussion, and on avoiding tyranny. It was sometimes known as the republicanism, which is sometimes contrasted with democracy, was the necessary condition for perpetual peace.

The liberal representative model however put much emphasis on institutions than the Athenian model. Tyranny was to be avoided by control of the executive, assured through the separation of powers and through emphasis on individual rights. Rational discussion was to be achieved through the election of skilled representatives who would debate the important issues of the day on behalf of the citizens. The twentieth century democracy, however, has brought about a sometimes contradictory fusion of the institutions of liberal democracy with the politics of participatory democracy, and in this sense it is the product of the two overlapping historical revolutions which established 'modern' politics.

The first of these was the bourgeois revolution beginning in the eighteenth century which gave birth to the liberal or limited state with individuated citizens, government through competitively elected representatives, and between the public and the private spheres. The resulting political institutions were at least much liberal as they were democratic. There are of course synergies between the liberal ideal of limited government under the rule of law and the democratic ideal of governments accountable to their citizens via free and fair elections.

Popular Sovereignty

The first ideal of democracy is the rule of the people. Popular sovereignty implies that all minimally competent adults come together as one body to make decisions about the laws and policies that are to regulate their lives together. Each citizen has a vote in the processes by which the decisions are made and each has the opportunity to participate in the deliberations over what courses of action are to be followed.

Political Equality

Political equality implies equality among citizens in the process of decision-making... Each citizen has the right to an opportunity to express his or her opinions and supporting reasons to every other citizen has the right as well as the duty to participate in open and fair discussions. These are the ideals of democracy.

These ideals are partly realized in features like one-person, one-vote is observed in the process of electing representatives to the legislative assembly; anyone may run for election to public office; in elections, a number of political parties compete for political power by advocating alternative visions of the society; the political campaigns of candidates and parties consist in large part in discussion and argument over the worth of these opposing views, and everyone is permitted to have a say in this process; and the society tolerates and often encourages vigorous debate on all issues of public interest. It is worth noting that today's definition of democracy takes into consideration Robert Dahl's polyarchy definition of democracy, which insist that there must be a possibility to change the government, through democratic procedures.

Weaknesses in Democracy

One of the fundamental weaknesses of democracy is ethical legitimacy. What democrats are saying is that no value may override democracy. In terms of regime preference, they are saying, for instance, that a democracy which tortures, is preferable to a dictatorship which does not. Now all states claim political legitimacy – that their laws should be obeyed, that their judges are entitled to judge, that they may raise taxes. However, the claims of democrats imply ethical legitimacy, a claim to moral authority. It is more like the infallibility claim made by the Catholic Church, which asserts that certain declarations by the Pope are the absolute moral truth (Christian, 1996). The weakness of this democratic ethic argument lies in the fact that the only remedy for any defect of democracy is democracy itself. Put differently, no method or process is accepted as a legitimate response to the democratic process, and certainly not the use of force.

Inequality and Democracy

Democracy has woefully failed in its bid to eliminate social inequality, and this seems a permanent and structural failure. It is undeniable that all democratic societies have social inequalities – substantial differences in income, in wealth, and in social status. These differences have persisted: there is no indication that inequality will ever disappear in democracies. In stable western democracies, inequality is apparently increasing. The pattern established in the United States is, that the lowest incomes do not grow: all the benefits

of economic growth go to the higher income groups. The example below attests to this fact:

Average household incomes before taxes grew in real terms by nearly one-third between 1979 and 1997, but that growth was shared unevenly across the income distribution. The average income for household in the top fifth of the distribution rose by more than half. In contrast, average income for the middle quintile climbed 10 percent and that for the lowest fifth dropped slightly. Furthermore, income growth at the very top of the distribution was greater yet: averaged income in 1997 dollars for the top 1 percent of households more than doubled, rising from $420, 000 in 1979 to more than $1 million in 1997 (Congressional Budget Office, 2001).

Another fact of democratic inequality lies in the fact that in a theoretical democracy of 100 voters, a party of 51 voters can confiscate the property of the other 49. They can divide it among themselves. However, if one voter is sick on Election Day, they lose their majority. A party of 52 has more chance to divide the property of the minority, but now the minority is 48 and there is slightly less to divide. A party of 99 will have guaranteed success against a minority of one, but the shares after division will be small. In practice, a coalition of two-thirds, or three-quarters, can successfully disadvantage a minority (one-third, one quarter). For instance, the majority might exclude the minority from the main labour market, and then force this excluded underclass into workfare. The emergence of an underclass is usually seen as a structural change within a society, but it might be simply a side-effect of democracy. Every democracy is a temptation (to the majority) to disadvantage minorities. In practice, every existing liberal democracy is a dual society, with some politically marginalized minority (typically the urban class).

The Myth of Moral Superiority

Democratic states claim no morally superior origin. Their own mythology places their origins in the political movements of 'the people' (starting with the older western democracies). Let me sum up the past two hundred years of democratic history. The intertwined histories of democratic legitimations, social movement activism and institutional changes generated, in some of the world's states, a significant democratization of the institutions of government.

Despite anti-democratic countertrends, the long run direction of change in some of the states was a democratization of state power (Markoff 1999). This mythology is sometimes linked to a belief in the superiority of a proto-liberal western civilization – 'from Plato to NATO'. But the reality of democratic expansion has more to do with NATO than Plato, or any other philosopher. The Iraq and Libyan wars have shown, once again, just how bloody 'democratization' can be.

The Conservatism of Democratic Culture

At best, democracy is no more than a system of government, but in western democracies it has acquired a sacred status, and it is taboo to question it. Yet there is no moral basis for this cult of democracy, for this sacralisation. This is what Bhikhu Parekh says of liberalism: Unless, we assume that liberalism represents the final truth about human beings, we cannot indiscriminately condemn societies that do not conform to it (Parekh, 1993). A democracy is different from other possible societies, cultures, and regimes: by definition it substitutes itself for them. This substitution is not inherently good: democracies have specific defects, in their culture and society.

Most prominent is the conservative bias: democracy and democratic culture structurally limit innovation. The uniformity and conformity of liberal democratic societies has been criticized, for almost as long as they exist – from the 19th century on. At first, these criticisms amounted to nostalgia for aristocratic individualism, and it is still a favourite tactic of democrats to label all criticisms of democracy as 'elitist'. It is important to mention that John Stuart Mill is typical of this type of aristocratic criticism, directed at the emerging mass society:

It does seem, however, that when the opinions of massive average men are everywhere become or becoming the dominant power, the counterpoise and corrective to that tendency would be, the more and more pronounced, individuality of those who stand on the higher eminences of thought. It is in these circumstances most especially, that exceptional individuals, instead of being deterred, should be encouraged in acting differently from the mass.

In other times there was no advantage in their doing so, unless they acted not only differently, but better. In this age, the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time (Mill, 1859.

However, not all anti-conformist criticism can be dismissed as aristocratic nostalgia. In the 100 years after Mill wrote, the aristocratic culture of noble eccentricity became culturally marginal. Instead, new forms of individualist 'eccentricity' emerged within mass culture, especially from the 1960's onwards.

III. METHODOLOGY

The approach to this study is qualitative. The study adopts an ethnographic approach. In this direction, three chieftains were used to assess the relevance of traditional governance in harnessing modern democracies like that of Ghana. The three chieftains are Dagbon, Gonja and Bulsa. These three were

settled on because each of them was unique in its own way and all were old and time tested systems.

The population for this research was made up five chiefs each, drawn from the three chieftains. I also included key informants/opinion leaders because these were the people who had institutional memories which had been accumulated over several years. These key informants were fifteen in all, five each from each of the three chieftains.

The population was purposively sampled because chieftaincy is a specialized area that requires people with specialized knowledge and expertise. Chiefs and key informants/opinion leaders have been involved in this business of governance for a very long time hence there was the need to tap into their expertise. I relied on a guide to help identify who were the influential chiefs and opinion leaders, besides the paramount chiefs who I already knew and had made preliminary contacts. Data was collected using mainly semi-structured interviews in the case of chiefs and focus group discussions in the case of these key informants/opinion leaders. Data was collected with the assistance of an interpreter who had good knowledge of the language and traditions of the people. Recordings were done during these interactions. The audio was later played to facilitate effective transcription. Each interview's transcript was first reviewed while listening to the audiotape. Sections of the transcripts were then marked, or "coded" in one of two ways: (a) as a basic theme, category or idea that was previously identified in the literature or as a theme, topic or idea that was not anticipated and emerged from the data itself. The coded data were then studied for similarities and peculiarity across paramountcies, and overtime.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To Describe the Nature and Features of Ghana's Indigenous Political Systems and their Relevance to the Current Multi-Party Democracy

In an attempt to get responses to the above objective, I fashioned out a question that inquired into the existing political processes and how they were conducted.

Inquiring into Existing Political Processes and How they are Conducted (Qualification to Chieftaincy and Selection of Chiefs)

Chieftaincy is known to the different ethnic groupings who make up Ghana's population. In the southern part of Ghana, who qualifies to be a chief and the way chiefs are differ sharply from what pertains in the north. Among the traditional areas that form my study area, princes contesting the position of chief are required to appear in person individually before a college of kingmakers to make a claim to the "skin" office of chief. Factors that are considered include among others, seniority, character, and popularity of the candidate (Galizzi and Abotsi, 2011). The study further confirmed that the Gonja and Dagomba practice the 'gate' system, thereby alternating

the selection of chiefs between competing gates or eligible families of royal lineage.

The issue of who qualifies to be a chief is a known fact by all who matter in the three paramountcies I visited and interviewed. My respondents were quick to point out the various royal families that could ascend to each chieftain. For instance, among the Dagomba, there were some gate skins that led to Yendi (Yani) or the ultimate position of Ya Na, and these are; Yo (Savelugu), Karaga and Mion. Awedoba also adds that during the colonial era, the eldest son of the late king (the king's gbonlana) if he was not already an occupant of any of these three gate skins could still contest for the title of Ya Na.

Awedoba (2009), makes some very critical revelations that there are different grading of chiefs which can be aspired to, both by royals and non-royals. He also states that some chieftaincy positions were reserved solely for daughters of the Ya Na. This was confirmed when I visited Yendi. The following titles were the preserve of the daughters of Ya Naa. In order of importance/seniority they were as follows; Gundogu Naa (occupied by the senior most daughter of the Ya Naa), Kpatua Naa, Kuglogu Naa and Fia Naa.

Awedoba (2009), also contended that to be able to ascend to the high office of Ya Naa, one must go through a hierarchy of chieftaincy titles. These titles are normally associated with villages and so a prince must begin his title search from a lower position and then gradually seek promotion to the highest title possible. This method according to Awedoba (2009), had a double effect of reducing succession disputes and also training chiefs for the ultimate title of Ya Naa.

In the case of the Gonja, the original gates to the paramountcy were Bole, Kong, Kusawgu, Tuluwe and Kpembe. I was also informed that the eligibility of Kusawgu, Tuluwe and Kpembe chiefdoms have never been in doubt. Later, Kong lost its right to ascend to the throne, when its chief was alleged to have assisted or joined forces with the marauding slave raiders of Samori to fight the Gonja in the Bole area. Thus, till date the only skin gates in Gonja land that qualify to ascend to the position of 'Yagbonwura' are; Kpembe, Bole, Kusawgu and Tuluwe. The Gonja, like the Dagomba and Builsa, practice a rotational system of choosing the paramount chief. When the paramountcy is vacant, the gate whose turn it is to provide the next Yagbonwura then brings forward a number of interested contestants to the vacant position for the kingmakers to decide on the most appropriate candidate. According to Affuli, the current linguist of the Yagbonwura, who has served several Yagbonwuras, they are some key factors that the kingmakers would look for in the search for a Yagbonwura, these factors are, seniority, character and above all the popularity of the candidate.

Among the Bulsa, the chieftaincy title has always rotated between the Ayietas and Afokos. These were brothers and so depending on which family's turn it was, the family would then put up interested candidates to be voted for. The election

of a chief can be a routine with fixed rules and a time honoured procedure. By the early 1900s, Bulsa elected their chiefs through one of the most transparent voting processes, i.e. standing behind the candidate of one's choice. This method of electing/choosing chiefs has remained a practice among the Bulsa to date. According to my study, when the Sandema paramountcy became vacant, the next Sandema Naab came from 'apootiba bisa' (lineage of the sandema royals). Interested candidates registered with the Sandema traditional council. Then between the traditional council and the 'apootiba' (royal) family the ground rules guiding the election of a chief were agreed on. Each candidate provided agents to monitor the voting process.

Before voting is carried out, a screening of the Electoral College is carried out through a roll call to ensure that all those to vote are present and no impersonators tolerated. The Electoral College is made of the head/landlord of every Builsa (natives only) house in Sandema (Yerinyona). From every house, one person votes and the sub-divisional chiefs also exercise their franchise. Before the voting begins, a screening of the candidates is also carried out. This screening process is normally in the form of an introduction of the contestant. It is one of the agreed rules that sons are not allowed to contest their fathers. It is brothers who can contest each other or one another.

To signify the beginning of the voting process, candidates stand by trees, the essence of standing by a tree is that each tree represents the symbol of that candidate. The supporters then come and form queues behind candidates of their choice. The various candidates' agents join the traditional council to count the voters and so the one who emerges with the highest number is declared winner. It is noteworthy that, my respondents informed me that negotiations are done for merges to take place before voting. It was also revealed that a group does not necessarily move together with their candidate to merge with another group/candidate. Members are allowed to move and join any candidate of their choice in the event of a tie. Winning is by a simple majority thus symbolically the adage that the leader is the one who has a following is exemplified among the Bulsa voting process.

I was also informed that all contestants must have their heads shaved before the elections. And that the traditional council together with the kingmakers dig a hole into which all candidates contribute a certain amount of money. Perhaps, this could also symbolically be a kind of filling fee. Each candidate is then interviewed before he puts his money into the hole. The interview is to give each candidate the opportunity to say why he wants to be the next 'Sandema Naab'. The one who emerges with a simple majority is then carried home to rest and begin a process of spiritual fortification and other ceremonies preceding the outdooring. Mention must be made that because the chieftaincy institution is a human institution, it would be completely impossible to do away with subtle influences or biases towards a particular candidate but my interaction with respondents from all three

paramountcies could attest to the fact that the selection of a chief was normally as genuine as possible. This was for fear of repercussions from the spirit world who the chiefs were directly answerable to. Additionally, the involvement of the chief who was custodian of traditions and customs of the people was to ensure that the right thing was done.

When it came to the issues of justice and the rule of law, regarding the latter, though these three paramount chiefs who form my study area did not have a police force to enforce laws of the kingdom, subjects were obliged to respect these laws because they were part of the formulation and drafting of these laws- there was therefore that sense of ownership. For instance, in page 26 of the Constitution of the Dagbon State of 21st to 29th November 1930 on the subject matter of how the Ya Naa administered Dagbon says "it was agreed that the State of Dagbon was administered by the Ya Naa, assisted by a **Judicial Council of Elders and a Council of State composed of Divisional Chiefs and Elders** (emphasis are mine).

Regarding the enforcement of justice, my interactions with respondents further affirmed the fact that chiefs adjudicated disputes within a community, including offences that were considered distasteful to ancestral spirits and other spiritual beings. Judicial functions were exercised in three jurisdictional tiers: the village chief was subject to a senior or divisional chief, who in turn was subject to a paramount chief. Hence, village courts had jurisdiction over petty civil and criminal offenses within their geographical locations. Divisional chiefs exercised appellate powers in disputes decided by the village or town courts within their jurisdiction. The paramount chief or king's court was at the apex of the traditional judicial system, with the greatest geographical jurisdiction and appellate powers.

Any complaint from an aggrieved person was always referred to the judicial council for its scrutiny. This judicial council then made the outcome of its investigations and decisions known to the chief who had a final say as to what judgment to mete out. This was yet again another classical example of separation of powers. In all the three paramountcies forming my study area I visited, the participants in my interviews unanimously agreed to the existence of such a mechanism for the application of justice. My participants were of the opinion that pre-colonial traditional societies, no less than modern society, engaged with issues of good governance, justice, accountability, security and economic prosperity. For them, their ancestors had fashioned appropriate institutions that implicitly recognized the people as the ultimate source of political legitimacy, and made respect for the popular will and promotion of the material well-being of the people an important condition of a chief's survival in office.

The above assertion is further buttressed by Vaughan (2003), African societies in the decentralized systems rarely had an executive branch of governance with police forces that penetrate communities to enforce laws and rules of society.

Rather, members of the community observed the laws, rules and norms of their own communities primarily because they were party to their making through consensual decision-making processes. The community at large also participates through various means in the enforcement of its rules and norms.

Thus, the system in such societies did not create a permanent separation between makers and enforcers of rules or government and society, at least at the local level. The separation of powers as was found in all three chieftaincies in line with the liberal representative model of democracy, also sometimes referred to as the republican system. In this model, emphasis is placed on institutions. Therefore, the system as it existed had a way of ensuring justice for its people and enforcement of the rule of law.

On the issue of the tenure of office of chiefs, they were enskinned for life, provided they kept to the tenets of good behaviour and remained the conscience of the people. In the opinion of Addo-Fening cited in Agyeman-Duah (2008), an elected chief did not acquire an indefeasible title to the stool/skin once he sat on it. According to Casely Hayford cited in Agyeman-Duah (2008) it is the right of those who placed him thereupon to put him off the stool/skin for any just cause... No other authority can rightly interfere with his position if his people are satisfied with him. I was also informed that a chief cannot sack another chief from office except for the one(s) he appointed. Since chiefs were supposed to live above reproach, any behaviour that was considered disgraceful (stealing, fighting in public or sleeping with peoples wives) could attract removal.

Additionally, if a village chief or sub-chief owed his position to a senior chief and failed to show respect to the appointing authority, such a chief risked removal, the case of the current 'Buipe Wura' Jinapor and the current Yagbon Wura, leading to the dismissal of the former. In the event of incapacitation, a chief did not necessarily lose his position because, he ruled in council. His council of elders and important divisional chiefs would come together to run the affairs of state until his death. In Dagbon for instance, there are two categories of chiefs who helped to rule Dagbon, these are; 'Ya-Naa-Bihi' (sons/grandsons/descendants of Ya Naa, who are chiefs in line of succession to Yendi) and the 'Ya-Na-Kpamba' (Ya Naa's Elders, chiefships are held by any one whom the Na cares to appoint but may also be held by Na Bihi in certain instances). The period between the death of a sitting Ya Na and the performance of his funeral, the void was occupied by the 'Kuga Na' who steps in a Dagbon history in a state of emergency till a new king is elected.

In the case of the Gonja, the 'Yagbon Wura' had the following cabinet ministers to assist in manning Gonja land. The cabinet members are; 'Sanyo Wura', 'Damongo Wura', 'Debre Wura', 'Mankpang Wura', 'Klor Wura', 'Kpanshiegu Wura', 'Busunu Wura', 'Wasipe Wura' and 'Kpembe Wura.' The 'Wasipe Wura' is also assisted by the 'Yazori Wura','

Kpembe Wura' by the 'Kanyasi Wura', 'Lepo', 'Singbon' and 'Kanaklo', 'Damongo Wura' is assisted by 'Bodama Wura.' There was therefore not point in time that the village, town or kingdom would be left unattended to. On occasions that the paramount chief had to travel out of his kingdom, there were divisional chiefs and elders who managed the affairs of state till he came back.

On the part of dispute resolution mechanisms, suffice it to be said that all three paramountcies had their own processes of resolving their disputes. In the case of Dagbon, when there was a succession the last resort was to turn to the 'Nayiri' of Mamprugu who was a cousin of the Dagomba. This practice begun in the era of Na Zangina. Before a matter can end up with the 'Nayiri', it presupposse that the elders have tried and failed, thus exhausting all the dispute resolution mechanisms in Dagbon. In recent times, chieftaincy related disputes are referred to the National and Regional House of Chiefs.

The Gonja also have an elaborate dispute resolution mechanism where aggrieved candidates/contestants to the chieftaincy title can use to seek redress. For instance, when it is the turn of a gate to produce a chief, if a rival claimant from that gate is dissatisfied, the family elders/kingmakers in the family try to resolve the potential dispute. Should that fail, the matter is referred to the next paramount chief who is the appointing authority to that skin, if the matter is not resolved at that point, it is referred to the overlord of the Gonja traditional area and then to the Gonja traditional council. Should this fail, the case then goes to the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs. If there the contention over the vacancy has to do with the choice of a Yagbon Wura, the matter has to be settled by chiefs who cannot aspire to that paramountcy i.e. the Kpanshagu Wura, Kula Wura, Debre Wura, Senyo Wura, Damongo Wura and the Chorowu Wura.

In sum, the opponents of traditional governance have often argued that the principle of popular sovereignty, as espoused in modern times, was dysfunctional in the practice of traditional governance. They make the case that the hereditary nature of chiefs denied ordinary citizens the right to choose and change rulers. That the over-centralization of executive, legislative and judicial powers all in the hands of one person (chief), did not keep with modern ideals of separation of powers.

That the inability to codify customary laws and the resultant reliance on oral records of court procedures, proceedings and decisions allowed for "adhocism" and capriciousness instead of certainty and consistency, especially in the determination of punishments and penalties. But let me say that these deficiencies notwithstanding, the practice of traditional governance my participants agreed revealed rudimentary or burgeoning principles of modern democratic governance. They were mostly agreed on the fact that the concept of authority derives from the people. It was the people, ordinary citizens, not rulers who were the basis of properly constituted authority. This principle was given credence in several ways:

- In the nomination and election process;
- In the public exchange of oaths of obligation and loyalty between chief-elect and his subjects;
- In the insistence on consultation with the Council of Elders before making decisions of grave consequences on novel situations;
- In the openness of the discussion that preceded promulgation of customary laws.

It is worthy of note that the current practice in Ghana where each president has a Council of State that plays an advisory role is one of the best practices from traditional governance which has been adopted to improve modern governance and it must be emphasized this is purely Ghanaian. Thus, there is no gainsaying that traditional African political practice can be said to have had features or elements of democracy, in theory and practice, elements at least some of which could be nurtured and refined for contemporary application (Gyekye cited in Agyeman-Duah, 2008).

My interaction with my study participants confirmed certain things that are worth highlighting; Indigenous Africans do not have a library with books and computers, rather we have our own way of producing, codifying, storing and retrieving knowledge and information (we have written forms and non-written forms).

- We produce knowledge through our learning experiences, by observing the three worlds and cosmic reality. We learn together with our ancestors and deities.
- We codify our knowledge in specific words, metaphors, expressions, but also in sacred objects, sacred places and rituals.
- Our information is also stored in stories, myths and histories. Remembering and repeating these stories is an important skill that ensures the proper storage and retrieval of this knowledge.
- Potential for revitalization and complementarity with outside knowledge holders is a strong aspect of our knowledge.
- The ethical, code of conduct, and conditions for external knowledge holders to interfere help to regulate exploitation of our knowledge.

Through our ancestors, we have been able to accumulate a wide range of knowledge that allows our people to live, survive and prosper, to become wise and die with accumulated experiences and wisdoms which they in turn make available to the living and the yet unborn; either during their life time or when they die.

This knowledge mostly comes handy when we have to relate to our ancestral spirits, to produce our food, to heal the sick and to govern our society. We have organized our knowledge in different fields: we have knowledge specialists such as bonesetters, traditional birth attendants, and snakebite healers, healers of mental health problems.

The same people also further argue that arrangements for ensuring transparency and accountability were often ill-defined and obscure. They argue that for example, there was no clear separation between the 'public purse' and 'private purse' of the chief.

Another thing that kept chiefs in check was the fact that chiefs did owe their rise to higher positions to the general recommendation of their subjects while paramount chiefs knew their continuous stay in office depended on their readiness to listen and seek the wise counsel of their *council of elders*.

V. CONCLUSION

The above deficiencies notwithstanding, traditional governance has the characteristics that can serve as foundations in building culturally-relevant institutions of democratic governance in contemporary Africa and Ghana. The decentralization and devolution of power and the values of respect of individual rights, the conscious efforts to always consult a broad spectrum of their subjects through the various recognized groupings, the formation of judicial councils to advice on matters of justice and even engaging their subjects in promulgation of traditional laws are but a few critical components of traditional African institutions of governance which are essential for developing and improving on modern democratic institutions and good governance in contemporary Africa and Ghana.

There is unanimity among all participants that there are traditional political processes in existence and these participants were able to demonstrate how these political processes are conducted. Whether their views are acceptable, actually depend on where one stands (orientation). These participants on their part were very passionate about their beliefs.

Chieftaincy has evolved into one such aspect of the people's indigenous cultural knowledges. It has become one such delicate value system that people are prepared to either die for or kill to defend. The chieftaincy institution is the most celebrated traditional institution in northern Ghana. The chief is the traditional political leader of his or her community. The chieftaincy institution is a predominantly male dominated institution. The few female chiefs may either be the chief for the community in some cases or in other cases, co-exist with a male chief. Examples of female chiefs are the "Sigbun Wuriche" and "Lepo Wuriche" both in Kpembe traditional area in the Northern Region. In Tanchara in the Nandom traditional area, there is also a female chief (Poge Naa) co-existing with the chief. The 'Magazia' is also another important women's leader in northern Ghana, particularly among the predominant Muslim communities. Mention must be made that the 'magazia' may derive her powers from the chief.

Chiefs exercise authority basically derived through "ascription" but the community must sanction inheritance and

enthronement of the skin. Though the selection of a chief was exclusive to a single, designated lineage, the elaborateness of the system of consultations and horse-trading ensured that succession to chiefly office was not an act of unmitigated imposition. This was an age old tradition that had been passed on from one generation to the other hence it was guarded zealously. The chief exercised powers of chief executive, chief law maker, chief judge, chief landlord, commander-in-chief of the army, or in taking decisions on matters of great moment, a ruler was expected to act in consultation with his Council of Elders, composed of the various identifiable groupings as was in the case of Dagomba, Gonja and Bulsa chieftaincy.

For example the current Kuga Naa of Yendi had this to say in affirmation of the point above "*every decision the Yaa Naa takes must be in consultation with me the Kuga Naa and his other elders so that he does not err on the side of tradition."* The Chief Linguist of the Yagbun Wura by name Afuli had this to say: *the Yagbon Wura can be likened to a president with his cabinet ministers and other appointees to help him in the day to day administration of his kingdom. The following are his cabinet ministers; Buipe Wura, Sanyo Wura, Damongo Wura, Debre Wura, Wasipe Wura, Kpembe Wura, Busunu Wura, Bole Wura and Kandeu Wura* (This arrangement is not by order of seniority or importance).

The emphasis on consultation by these traditional governance found expression in the practice of making public announcements or issuing orders in the joint name of the chief (Naa/Naab) and the Council of Elders. Traditional rulers, who persistently ignored the advice of his council, violated time-honoured and cherished customs of his people and risked either removal from office or a calamity. Again, the comment of the Kuga Naa, to the effect that a Yaa Naa who fails to consult his elders stands the risk of erring against time tested traditions.

Majority of the participants agreed that rulers elected at the village, town or state levels, exercised their hereditary right which was vested in a designated patri-clan known as the royal clan (*Na bihe – in Dagani and Naab bik in Buili*). It must be mentioned that in my discussions, all my participants agreed to one thing, that individual members of royalty, did not enjoy automatic right to the occupancy of a skin. He or she was selected (Dagbon and Gonja) or elected as was the case among the Bulsa from a field of multiple contestants hailing from the royal family. A ruler emerged only after a very elaborate system of formal and informal consultations that involved among others, the king makers, designated skin elders, and sooth- sayers.

But in the case of the Bulsa, by direct elections from a well constituted electorate college which has come to be known and accepted by the Bulsa. It was also generally agreed that an elected/selected chief did not acquire an indefeasible title to the skin. In the Words of Casely Hayford cited in Addo-Fening cited in (Agyeman-Duah, 2008) it is the right of those who placed him thereupon to put him off the stool for any just cause …. No other authority can rightly interfere with his position if his people are satisfied with him.

Let me state here that in my study area, the basic political unit of the northern political structure was the village or town, which comprised of a number of clans sub-divided into lineages. A lineage comprised of many individual supposedly descended from a common ancestry. These component towns and villages came to form a chiefdom or kingdom, with considerable autonomy and took decisions in matters of direct concern and interest to their everyday existence.

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