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# ANTHROPOLOGY AND GOVERNMENT IN GHANA

A. F. ROBERTSON

AS A CENTURY OF publication may attest, Ghana is one of social anthropology's principal domains. Opportunities for anthropological engagement in Ghanaian government have been extensive and in Dr Busia's brief conjunction of the roles of premier and professional anthropologist, may indeed have been sublime. More accessible evidence suggests, however, that this engagement has settled down over the years into a dialogue for which Dr Busia has himself provided a name: 'The Position of the Chief', a dialogue from which neither anthropology nor Ghana has appeared to learn much of lasting value. On the other hand, if a fairly liberal view is taken of the scope of social anthropology, the *political* engagement of anthropology in the government of the Gold Coast and Ghana has been quite interesting and even, on occasions, constructive. The involvement of such a discipline as anthropology in the processes of government is necessarily political, and the nature and extent of this involvement has therefore depended in large measure on whether political interest at any time is considered academically respectable. One may interpret the situation in Ghana by saying that to a large extent anthropology actually grew out of a political involvement with the processes of colonial government, and that as it became a respectable academic subject in its own right this involvement became distasteful to its practitioners. Recently, however, it has become apparent that *Ghanaian* anthropologists have shown an inclination to involve themselves professionally in matters of government, so much so that several are at risk of being taken into custody.

In discussing the relationship of anthropology and government I have tried to put aside the folklore to which fieldworkers in Ghana, and those associated with what has fairly or unfairly been called the Cambridge hegemony, are exposed. This article is therefore based on textual references, an excursion through the prefaces and footnotes of a number of well-known works. It takes an historical frame, relating developing anthropology to developing government, and dwells on the anthropologists' contribution to the dichotomization of 'tradition' and 'modernization'—a distinction which has penetrated administrative thinking in unhelpful ways.

The author carried out research in Ghana in 1968–69 while a research fellow of the African Studies Centre, Cambridge. Research was financed by the Social Sciences Research Council and a William Wise grant from Trinity College, Cambridge. A report based on this study of local politics, entitled *Local government in Ahafo, Ghana*, was submitted to the Ghanaian government in 1970. A book entitled *Dependence and opportunity: political change in Ahafo* was published by Cambridge University Press in 1973, with John Dunn as co-author. Dr Robertson is presently director of the African Studies Centre at Cambridge.

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