

African Nationalism and the Struggle for Freedom

INTRODUCTION

African nationalism is a subjective feeling of kinship or affinity shared by people of African descent. It is a feeling based on shared cultural norms, traditional institutions, racial heritage, and a common historical experience. One enduring historical experience shared by nearly all Africans was colonial oppression, discussed in the previous chapter. Along with this sense of shared identity is a collective desire to maintain one's own cultural, social, and political values independent of outside control.

It is worth stressing that African nationalism, like nationalism elsewhere in the world, is not new; it is as old as ancient times. In fact, in Africa, contrary to a common view in Western scholarship of Africa, African nationalism predates colonialism. In the annals of African history, one finds coherent organized African communities with a very strong sense of identity, prepared to defend their territorial and cultural integrity against those who would want to destroy or undermine them. For instance, when the great African king, Mansa Musa of Mali, was on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324–1325, the Wolof people—who had been forcibly brought under the Mali kingdom—seized the opportunity to rebel against the Mali kingdom. The Wolof people were expressing a nationalism, a separate national identity and a desire to

govern themselves in their own land. We also know that Africans did not passively accept European rule, which was alien and destructive of the African social order. The effective resistances put up against European colonization by the Ashanti people of Ghana, the Hehe of Tanzania, or the Zulus of South Africa suggest a very strong sense of national identity that was already in place—and a fierce determination not to succumb to any other authority but their own. The king of the Yao people in Tanzania had this to say to a German commander who had been sent to him to affirm the German colonial claim to his country in 1890:

I have listened to your words but can find no reason why I should obey you—I would rather die first. . . . If it should be friendship that you desire, then I am ready for it, today and always; but to be your subject, that I cannot be. . . . If it should be war you desire, then I am ready, but never to be your subject. . . . I do not fall at your feet, for you are God's creature just as I am . . . I am Sultan here in my land. You are Sultan there in yours. Yet listen, I do not say to you that you should obey me; for I know that you are a free man. . . . As for me, I will not come to you, and if you are strong enough, then come and fetch me.¹

A Ghanaian king, Prempeh I of Asante, in the same tone, declined the British offer of protection—a euphemism for colonial control. He said that his kingdom wished to remain on friendly terms with all white people, and to do business with them, but he saw no reason why the Asante kingdom should ever commit itself to such a policy with the British government. The British took over the country anyway, the king was exiled for several years to an Indian Ocean island for non-co-operation, and violent tensions between the Ashanti people and the British continued for ninety years, well into the beginning of the twentieth century. The king of the Mossi people of Burkina Faso told a French captain: "I know the whites wish to kill me in order to take my country, and yet you claim that they will help me to organize my country. But I find my country good just as it is. I have no need of them. I know what is necessary for me and what I want. I have my own merchants. . . . Also consider yourself fortunate that I do not order your head to be cut off. Go away now, and above all, never come back."² The French never went away and the Mossi lost their country. A leader of the Nama people in modern Namibia told the Germans: "The Lord has established various kingdoms in the world. Therefore I know and believe that it is no sin or crime that I should wish to remain the independent chief of my land and people."³ The Germans were not impressed either. Westerners, for their own reasons, chose to call these

groups “tribes,” despite the fact that many of them were extremely large with well-structured social and political institutions. Ample evidence shows that these groups were nations occupying specific territories that they were willing to defend, if threatened or attacked. The sentiments expressed by the kings and leaders demonstrate nothing but nationalism by a people who wanted either such relations with foreigners as exist between equals or to be left alone.

Group sentiments that emerged in Eastern Europe following the collapse of communism are clearly manifestations of nationalism, not unlike what one would have seen in Africa on the eve of the European scramble for the continent. When the Soviet Union collapsed, its former republics split off, some of them facing internal conflicts as various groups sought to retreat into their linguistic or cultural enclaves. Yugoslavia disintegrated, throwing its people into a nasty civil war. Czechoslovakia ended in 1992 with agreement to split into two countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia. What binds all these groups is a common heritage, based on religion, language, and historical experience. The historical experience of living under foreign hegemony or being governed by political parties thought to be manipulated by an outside power has been a potent driving force behind national secessionist attempts in Eastern Europe as well as in modern Africa.

MODERN AFRICAN NATIONALISM

After colonial rule had been firmly established, Africans continued to exhibit many forms of disaffection and resistance. Because Africa had been sliced into different colonies, as the resistance coalesced, organizations formed to protest various elements of colonial rule were often based on the territory under one colonial power (such as France, Britain, or Germany). Since it was virtually impossible for Africans to organize on a country-wide basis, regional or ethnic organizations became the most practical option. Because the colonizer was European and the colonized was African, such organizations came to be seen, particularly by outsiders, almost entirely in racial terms. It served the colonial powers' interests for them not only to play ethnic groups against one another, but also to characterize the more militant or outspoken ones as being anti-white.

The Mau Mau uprising against British rule in Kenya is a perfect example of a movement that was presented in the Western media as an aimless, fanatically violent rebellion bent on killing and maiming any white person for the fun of it. Such a racial interpretation was simplistic and wrong. The goal of such an interpretation was to divorce the struggle from the legitimate grievances that undergirded it. As I have already pointed out, European colonizers had some racial motives for

seizing African territories, but the Africans simply wanted their territories back and the freedom to live their lives as they saw fit. This surge in African nationalism was fueled by several catalytic factors besides the oppressive colonial experience itself: missionary churches, World Wars I and II, the ideology of Pan-Africanism, and the League of Nations/United Nations. Each of these factors will now be discussed.

Colonial Oppression

As was pointed out in the last chapter, colonization was mostly a negative, exploitative, and oppressive experience. Africans have bad memories of that experience, even though some may appear to have benefited materially. They were humiliated, their culture denigrated and distorted, and their land confiscated. European immigrants, who were encouraged to come to Africa as pioneer farmers and given large tracts of land to farm, forced Africans to provide cheap labor, which resulted in severe consequences for African communities. Large plantations were established for growing cash crops. How could anyone not expect Africans to resent this after a while? In fact, at the very beginning of colonial occupation, the African resistance took the form of armed revolt. The Temne and the Mende of Sierra Leone revolted against the hut tax. The Nama and the Herero people in Namibia revolted against German forced labor. Evidence of severed human limbs and ears in King Leopold's Congo proves that many Africans there resisted forced labor. These kinds of revolts were typical of "primary resistance," spontaneous and local uprisings. They were not militarily successful—for obvious reasons including the lack of a country-wide organizational base—and were brutally suppressed. Later, people adopted strategies that were more moderate and employed conventional means. Associations were formed for the purpose of addressing specific grievances: low wages, poor educational and health facilities, inadequate prices for cash crops grown by African farmers, lack of business opportunities, and absence of representation in local political councils. When these reforms were thwarted by colonial settlers who were loathe to spend any money on "natives," or to share any of their power with the Africans, or when the colonial officers in the metropole decided Africans were not yet ready for reforms, then the Africans ultimately began to think about self-rule as their answer.

It has been suggested that the concept of political freedom was alien to the African people, that Africans were traditional and had no sense of democracy. African societies, to be sure, were collective societies in which the needs and rights of the communities as a whole preceded those of the individual. But collective ethos should not

be equated to a lack of appreciation for personal freedom. As explained in Chapter 2, some African communities exercised a great deal of consultation in an atmosphere of unfettered debate and discussion. Leaders were chosen and held accountable for their actions. Those who resisted the wishes and demands of their people were often overthrown or replaced. In some societies, hereditary rule was permitted only so long as leaders performed according to standards accepted and sanctioned by their communities. When a leader was incompetent or betrayed the people's trust by being unfair or cruel, he was voted out and another leader chosen from a different house or family.

Missionary Churches

Christianity has been in Africa for a very long time, long before its proselytization brought European missionaries to Africa. The introduction of Christianity into Africa goes back to Roman times, when the Gospel writer Mark founded the Coptic Christian Church in Alexandria, as explained in Chapter 3. Islam became a far more widespread force from about the eighth century onwards, aided by *jihads* (holy wars) against those who would resist conversion. Lucrative trade and immigration contributed to the Christian retreat into Ethiopia's highlands, where the Coptic Church survives to the present day.

The Catholic Church was introduced into Africa by the Portuguese in the late 1400s in Benin and was soon extended to Congo and Angola. At that time, Christian proselytizing seems to have been simply helpful in facilitating the establishment of Portuguese presence in Africa for commercial purposes. The African chiefs or kings that were approached also saw the political potential of using Christianity to unify their empires and strengthen their own positions. Richard Hull captures the mutuality of interests evident between the proselytizers and the traditional rulers as follows:

Benin's Oba, or King, first encountered the Portuguese in 1486. European explorers were immediately impressed by the vastness of the empire, the strength of its rulers, and the possibility of transforming the state into a powerful Christian commercial [*sic*] ally. Benin, on the other hand, marvelled at the Portuguese items of trade such as modern weaponry and agricultural implements, fine cloth, and tales of a distant Portuguese empire. Both saw mutual advantages through the establishment of diplomatic relations. . . .⁴

These relations between the Africans and the Portuguese (as explained in Chapter 3) later soured as the Portuguese began to pursue a more

intrusive role in the internal political affairs of the kingdoms as when they attempted to alter African customs such as polygyny (which allowed the king to maintain his power and influence by forming alliances). In other African countries, Christian missionaries either preceded the colonial takeovers or came in immediately after a country had been declared a colony. Colonial authorities found that Christianity had a pacifying effect on the African people, with its emphasis on spiritual matters over earthly affairs. Our lives in this world are so short, the missionaries would say, that it really does not matter what the colonial rulers do to us. What matters is what we do in preparation for the hereafter, for eternal life.

The Christian church also served to patch up the disintegrating African communities hit hard by colonial policy, without attacking the root causes of the disintegration. One such example was the devastating defeat suffered by Tanzanian people in the so-called “Maji Maji Rebellion” of 1905–1907. Africans chose to resist oppressive German colonialism. The Germans put down the revolt. When it was all over, 120,000 Africans had lost their lives. The destruction was so thorough that the Africans lost faith in their ancestral spirits also. They had been assured by their leaders that they would be duly protected by their ancestors in battle. In utter dismay and despondency, following their devastating defeat, most of these people turned to Christianity. The same phenomenon, the loss of faith in traditional religious institutions, is demonstrated in Sembene Ousmane’s film *Emittai* in which Africans in Senegal during World War II were forced “to volunteer” for the French Army and surrender their livelihood (rice) to the French colonial authorities. While the women hid the rice and were captured by French authorities and held hostage until they agreed to release the rice, their men, in hiding, were huddling together and making sacrifices to their ancestors and their Gods, asking them to make sure that their livelihood would not be destroyed. Moreover, they believed that giving away the rice to the colonial authorities would be a serious violation of their social traditions. As the standoff continued, one by one the men began to falter in their faith. They began to wonder why, in this moment of critical need, their ancestral spirits would not come to their aid. Perhaps their Gods were not true Gods after all. Perhaps the doubts openly expressed by some of them may have incensed their Gods, causing them to refuse to come to the people’s rescue. The boycott collapsed. The men were held responsible for the rebellion and ultimately shot, despite having given in to French demands. Again here, as in the Tanzanian situation, Christianity offered solace in the face of a great national tragedy. The close symbiotic relationship between Christian missionaries and colonial authorities continued for the duration of colonial hegemony in Africa.

The catalytic role of the church in developing African nationalism arose from the education that the church schools provided in colonial Africa. In many African colonies, mission schools were the main educational institutions, and the expense of educating Africans was often borne entirely by the missions. In other colonies, the colonial government provided the funding, but the teaching staff and the curriculum were the responsibility of the missions.

Mission education had three modest goals: First, to provide the basic literacy that would enable Africans to absorb religious education and training and help in the spread of the Gospel; second, to impart the values of Western society, without which missionaries believed the Africans could not progress; and third, to raise the level of productivity of the African workers (both semiskilled and clerical) without necessarily empowering them sufficiently to challenge colonial rule. Mission education was, generally speaking, inadequate, especially in its emphasis on a religious education that Western society was already finding anachronistic. But, limited or flawed as it might have been, it was enough to whet the appetite of African people for more education and to pique their political consciousness. In central Kenya, for instance, the Kikuyu people were fascinated by the possibilities offered by a good education, but they were so dissatisfied with the missionary education provided by Anglican and Scottish missions that they began to found their own schools. African parents wanted the kind of education that would equip their children with more than just the ability to read the Bible and write in their own indigenous languages. They wanted their children to acquire the intellectual skills and language abilities necessary to fight for the land that had been taken away from their parents by European settlers and colonizers. Parents also wanted their children to succeed in the white man's world, the glimpse of which had been provided by colonial as well as missionary education. When colonial authorities restricted the number of African-run schools, some parents showed their defiance by keeping their children out of mission institutions.

Africans developed enormous respect for modern education. They believed, correctly, that colonial authorities were more likely to deal with an educated African spokesperson than one who was not. It helped a lot if an African emissary who was sent to plead the cause of his people happened also to be fluent in a relevant European language. In 1929, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya was chosen by his people to go to England to present their grievances to British authorities. His people hoped that he would make a strong impression on the British and convince them that educated Africans, like himself, were not only ready to handle political responsibilities seriously but perhaps also able to run a government. During the long stay in England, Kenyatta

studied at the University of London, producing *Facing Mt. Kenya*, a book in which he not only interpreted Gikuyu life and culture to the Western world but also documented the cultural devastation that had occurred among the Gikuyu people at the hands of the colonial administration. Moreover, he made an impassioned case for his people's desire and right to regain their land and to govern themselves. In addition, he traveled all over Britain speaking to sympathetic British people willing to hear about colonial injustices in Kenya. Clearly, he contributed to the crystallization of British groups such as the Fabian Society as anti-colonial organizations. These societies later not only lent their support to anti-colonial organizations in the British empire but also contributed to the shifting opinion in Britain against continued colonialism. Kenyatta's rise to prominence and eventually to the leadership of Kenya was greatly assisted by his mastery of the English language.

Another African whose mastery and command of a European language became a pivotal factor in his political career was Léopold Sédar Senghor, the late first president of Senegal. Senghor was educated in Catholic mission schools in Senegal and later studied at the Sorbonne at the University of Paris. He rose through the ranks to become an important political figure in the French colonial system and, despite the intellectual controversy that attended his articulation of ideas such as *negritude*, he was a significant interpreter of African culture to the French-speaking world. Throughout his life, he enjoyed widespread respect and admiration as a philosopher, poet, and writer among French intellectuals and in the French-speaking world in general. In 1984, Senghor became the first African to be awarded membership in the exclusive French Academy. This is "the highest honor France can bestow on its statesmen and men [*sic*] of letters."⁵

Missionary education then had dual consequences for the Africans: it gave them skills with which to articulate their demands and question the legitimacy of colonial authorities; it also turned out to be a powerful medium of African acculturation of Western Christian (and political) values, values that the African very cleverly and ingeniously, to the utter surprise of his colonial master, incorporated into political debate over their struggles for freedom. As Ali Mazrui puts it: "The destruction of the 'pagan' African culture was naturally accompanied by attempts to replace it with *some* aspects of the English way of life. Next to making the boys and girls upright Christians, this was an important aim of the Christian educators."⁶ He concludes that missionary education was perhaps far more successful at producing a new cultural African than a consistent Christian. The impact of the Christian church is evident all over the African continent.

The majority of the first generation of African leaders, among them Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Léopold Senghor (Senegal), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria), and Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Malawi), were products of missionary education in their own countries. In South Africa, the Africans who organized the first nationwide political movement to address the needs of the Africans and to oppose the impending racist legislation being contemplated by the white minority government in 1912 were pastors. In Kenya, the independent schools that African religious leaders opened were quite political in terms of articulating the grievances of their people, as well as in combining local and Christian beliefs. Not surprisingly, the colonial government treated these schools as a very serious security risk.

Another sense in which the church influenced the growth of African nationalism was in the doctrine and content of its teachings. Christian doctrine stressed the spiritual kinship of people, the idea that all human beings, regardless of color and nationality, were God's children and equal in the eyes of God—therefore endowed with a right to treat each other, and to be regarded, with kindness and consideration. The church, however, failed to translate this doctrine into practice. It was contemptuous of Africans and their culture. It behaved as though it did not expect Africans to notice the contradiction between the benevolence of the doctrine and the virulence of the racism exhibited by some of the missionaries. In my thirteen years of missionary education in Africa, not once did I hear a priest or a monk utter a word of criticism of colonial rule. Indeed, student interest in political affairs and frequent discussion of political issues were frowned upon and often punished. The missionaries excluded the Africans from any meaningful role in running the churches. They maintained a discrete social distance from the Africans, interacting with them in a patronizing manner, and preaching the Gospel or teaching African school children simply as a job to do, not a sacred calling. Missionaries who had children, for instance, would send them abroad for education rather than to the same schools with African children. This may have been justified at the turn of the century when educational facilities in Africa were poor and primitive but not in the middle of the twentieth century. In eastern, central, and southern Africa, where European settlers had their own schools, the missionaries preferred to send their children to racially exclusive schools, never raising any moral objections to the existence of such segregated schools. Missionaries made few attempts to learn about and understand African traditions and values, although they wrote a great deal about Africans. They looked down upon African rituals,

customs, and languages and, in some cases, deliberately attempted to destroy African institutions. Herskovits says,

Other things being equal, Africans everywhere came to prefer schooling under secular auspices. One reason for this . . . was that in lay schools they were less subjected to the continuous denigration of their own culture. In the mission schools, many aspects of African ways of life that continued to be highly esteemed, or were important for the functioning of society, particularly customs associated with sexual behavior and with marriage, fell under missionary disapprobation, and were attacked in the classroom.⁷

There was no attempt in such schools to consider points often raised in defense of certain African customs and rituals. When Africans, in defense of polygyny, pointed to the early Biblical tradition of polygamy, the missionaries responded simply by quoting the Church's dogma on monogamy as God's only sanctioned practice. When some sought to continue the veneration of their ancestral spirits along with Christian rituals, the missionaries threatened them with expulsion or excommunication from the church. Even the use of traditional music and dance in worship was severely discouraged as barbaric and heathen.

Except for scattered and isolated acts of defiance or opposition by a few missionaries toward forced labor or physical abuse of Africans, the churches, by and large, wanted Africans to believe that colonization was undertaken for the good of the Africans. They enunciated the "colonial purpose," whatever it was. Moreover, some missionaries served as apologists for colonial governments. For example, the Rev. Robert Moffat, a missionary in central Africa, is reported to have advised King Lobengula of the Ndebele people to accept the Rudd Concession, even though he knew of Cecil Rhodes' ultimate imperial intentions to seize African lands north of the Limpopo River. Many Africans, of course, quietly endured this kind of treatment, believing that obedience, humility, and "turning the other cheek" were necessary for spiritual salvation. Others began to resent being treated like inferior human beings and decided that it was time to demand a voice in running religious institutions. They founded their own churches, separatist churches, where they could interpret the scriptures in ways that did not denigrate their cultures and their heritage and where the people could enjoy "religious self-expression." Such separatist churches included the Chilembwe church in Malawi, the Kimbangu and Kitawala churches in what is now called the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Tembu church in South Africa. Colonialists called these churches "cults."

Dramatic examples of separatist Christian churches established with a clear political agenda are those that were built in central Kenya, having broken away from the Scottish and English missions. In addition to differences over doctrine, the Kenyans were concerned about colonial education in general:

[Colonial education] was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their country. Instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society, and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state. . . .

This meant that colonial education induced attitudes of human inequality, and, in practice, underpinned the domination of the weak by the strong especially in the economic field.⁸

Indeed, it came as no surprise at all, during the African uprising against the British known as the Mau Mau, that those schools run by the independent churches were singled out for punitive measures. They were accused of subversion, aiding and abetting Mau Mau “terrorism” and were closed down.

The anti-clerical thread that runs through some African intellectual writing is attributable to this perception that Christian missions were anti-African and sympathetic to the colonial pillage of the African continent. Kofi Awoonor writes,

The propagation of the Christian faith has always connoted the consolidation of imperial power. The Roman Emperor Justinian encouraged the Christianization of all African chiefs who sought his good will. He even bestowed investitures with robes and honorific titles for chiefs who embraced the Church. Religious propaganda was an essential aspect of imperial expansion, and the colonial powers had long grasped the important truth that it was cheaper in the long run to use the Bible than military power to secure distant dominions.⁹

The Christian church became an unwitting catalyst in the development of African nationalism by equipping the African intellectually to fight for his freedom and by presenting disparities between doctrine and practice in such a way as to arouse the African who expected equal and fair treatment after he was acculturated.

World Wars I and II

An African poet, Taban Lo Liyong, once said that Africans have three white men to thank for their political freedom and independence: Nietzsche, Hitler, and Marx; Nietzsche for contriving the notion of the

superman, the master race; Hitler for trying to implement Nietzsche's idea in Germany with a view to extending it globally, thus setting off the most destructive war the world had ever witnessed; and Marx for raising the consciousness of the oppressed and colonized masses in Africa by universalizing the concept of economic exploitation of human beings.¹⁰ Although Lo Liyong does not explicitly make the connection between African freedom and the three men, there is no denying the fact that both world wars had a tremendous impact on African nationalism in several important ways.

First of all, Africans were drafted to serve in both wars—a million of them in World War I and 2 million in World War II. The British alone were able to enlist about 700,000 Africans to fight on their side in World War II. The irony of using “unfree” Africans to fight against German imperialism and to die for the freedom of the allied countries was not lost on the African soldiers who saw military action in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa itself. They learned modern military skills in battle and demonstrated leadership abilities. Many of them performed acts of bravery and endurance that should have banished once and for all any racist notions that Africans, given a chance, could not measure up to Europeans. Once the war ended, African veterans felt that they had earned at least the right to be treated with respect. Basil Davidson quotes a Nigerian soldier who wrote home from India during the war:

We all overseas soldiers are coming home with new ideas. We have been told what we fought for. That is ‘freedom.’ We want freedom, nothing but freedom.¹¹

African veterans resented very much the lack of gratitude shown by their colonial masters. Many British veterans were rewarded for their part in saving Britain and her empire with generous pensions and offers of nearly free land in the colonies. The African soldiers were given handshakes and train tickets for the journey back home. They could keep their khakhi uniforms and nothing else. These African soldiers, after returning home, were willing to use their new skills to assist nationalist movements fighting for freedom that were beginning to take shape in the colonies. Service in the colonial army made it possible for Africans from different regions of the same colony to meet and get to know one another, an important step in the breakdown of ethnic barriers and the development of shared identification with the country as a whole.

Beyond the military and leadership skills acquired, and the sharpening of contradictions inherent in colonized Africans fighting in wars to save their colonial masters from the tyranny of a fellow white man (Hitler), the two world wars had a very important psychological

dimension. Because the conquest of Africa had been accomplished so thoroughly and so effectively, a myth of the white man's superiority and invincibility had developed. The white man, through his policy of racial segregation in the colonies and his harsh treatment of the "natives," had, in fact, nurtured this myth. He had behaved in Africa with impunity, as though there was nothing the African could do about it. The war experience changed all that, at least for the African soldiers who had fought side by side with the white man. The Africans noticed that, in war, the white man bled, cried, was scared, and, when shot, died just like anyone else. They also saw that he displayed a range of emotions and abilities that Africans knew they themselves had. It dawned on the African that beneath the skin, there was no difference between him and the European. In the words of the Zimbabwean nationalist, Ndabaningi Sithole, "This discovery, for indeed it was an eye-opening discovery, had a revolutionizing psychological impact on the African."¹² From that point on, it would be impossible to convince the African that the European was some kind of "superman." African soldiers also heard about the spectacular military successes of the Japanese against the Russians; these exploits, of a presumably inferior non-European people, served to break the myth as well. The wars indeed helped fuel African nationalism.

On a personal level, this myth of white superiority was so embedded in my psyche that I was not even aware of it till I came to the United States. In Kenya, I had attended a racially segregated school for Africans. The European schools always did the best in national examinations followed by Asian schools. The African schools brought up the rear. It seems as though I had accepted the idea that Europeans were just naturally smarter than the other racial groups. During my first year in college in the United States, I took a freshman physics course in which I was the only black student. My white laboratory mate was not good in physics. I spent many hours helping him with laboratory exercises. I mentioned to a group of African students one evening that I was surprised at how slow this white student was. The African students broke out laughing. "What did you expect?" one of them asked. "They are just like us. Some of them are extremely bright, some of them are quite dumb." That is how my coming to the United States demythologized the white race for me. I now understand how racial segregation was used both in Kenya and elsewhere (especially in South Africa) to protect and perpetuate the myth of the inherent superiority of the white race. White people were afraid that if everyone were given an equal chance to compete or strive together, the myth simply could not hold together for long.

Finally, economic conditions deteriorated considerably in the colonies during and between the two world wars: high unemployment,

accelerated rural-urban migration resulting in overcrowded cities, inadequate schools, and health facilities. All resources were diverted to the war effort, and Africans were coerced to produce more to feed Europe even as they were not producing enough to feed themselves. Africans were taxed more and forced labor became more widespread. European colonial powers were exhausted physically and economically after each world war. Thus, they were not willing or able to commit substantial resources to improving dire social and economic conditions in the African colonies. They were unwilling militarily to suppress nationalist movements that had been fuelled by the devastation of the war. After World War II, both Britain and France were looking for an honorable exit from Africa. Hitler, a man imbued with a racist ideology, determined to build a state of pure Aryans, precipitated World War II, and engaged his fellow Europeans to utter exhaustion in the most destructive and wasteful war the world had ever seen. It was certainly in this sense that poet Lo Liyong credited Hitler with helping to inspire the African struggle for independence.

Pan-Africanism

Three names often associated with Pan-Africanism are Henry Sylvester-Williams, W. E. B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey. George Padmore gives credit to Sylvester-Williams, a West Indian barrister for originating the idea of Pan-Africanism, an ideology consisting of two key elements: the common heritage of people of African descent all over the world and the incumbency of African people to work for the interests and the well-being of one another everywhere. Sylvester-Williams, alarmed by the frantic extension of colonial rule all over Africa then underway and the racist treatment of Africans then living in London, decided to summon Africans to a meeting in 1900 to protest these actions to the British government and also to appeal to decent British people to do all they could “to protect the Africans from the depredations of the empire builders.”¹³ That meeting gave birth to the word “Pan-Africanism” to dramatize the need for them to work together to ameliorate conditions facing them as people of color. Shortly after the meeting, Sylvester-Williams returned to the West Indies where he died within a year. The responsibility to continue the work begun by Sylvester-Williams then fell upon Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, an African American intellectual and political/social activist. It is ironic in a sense that a Pan-African movement, embodying the unity of all people of African descent, had its origins outside Africa, specifically in the United States and the Caribbean. DuBois felt that black people in the New World, in order to free themselves from racial discrimination and rampant racism, must reclaim their African roots and become proud of

their heritage. He believed that people neither proud of who they are nor aware of where they came from could not successfully combat negative stereotypes being heaped upon them by other racial groups.

DuBois was moved to revive the Pan-African movement by two factors. One was the information coming out of Africa that showed that Africans were being severely mistreated for resisting colonial exploitation, especially in the Belgian Congo, where reports indicated that Africans refusing to sign up for labor were being physically tortured and mutilated. DuBois felt that something had to be done to stop this brutalization of Africans. The second factor was the need to seek some recognition for the important contributions that African veterans had made in World War I. Only European veterans were rewarded generously for their efforts, while the Africans who had fought valiantly and helped liberate German colonies were not honored in any way. Specifically, DuBois wanted the European powers to adopt a Charter of Human Rights for Africans as a reward for the sacrifices they had made during the war fighting for Allied Powers. In 1919, a Pan-African conference, the first of five such conferences organized by DuBois, would not have been allowed to take place in Paris, had it not been for a prominent African, Blaise Diagne of Senegal. The first African to serve in the French parliament, Blaise Diagne used his influence with the French Prime Minister to secure permission for the conference to be held. The Allied Powers, assembled to sign the Treaty of Versailles, were not sympathetic at all to such a large meeting of black people. The United States was afraid that DuBois might use the international forum to publicize lynchings of black people in the United States. The Europeans did not want any negative publicity associated with the brutal and repressive actions of their governments in African colonies. And none of the Allied Powers wanted the sterling accomplishments of black soldiers highlighted by this gathering for fear of offending the white soldiers and the European public. This conference, and the next four that DuBois organized, influenced the growth of African nationalism in many significant ways.

DuBois was prophetic when he predicted in his 1903 book, *The Souls of the Black Folk*, that the major issue of the twentieth century was going to be one of race. Like most intellectuals, DuBois felt that prejudice and racism toward people of color was based on ignorance. So much negative and false theory had been written about Africans to justify colonization that most people in the Western world actually thought that Africans were worthless, had no past, and had made no contribution to human civilization. DuBois felt, therefore, that it was important for Westerners to be educated. He spent his life as a scholar-activist articulating issues that affected Africans globally.

It was unfortunate that in the United States, the Pan-African movement was marked by intense and bitter rivalry between DuBois and Marcus Garvey, despite agreement on the basic premise of their struggle (namely, that the lack of racial pride among black people was one key ingredient missing in the struggle for racial equality). Unlike DuBois, Garvey was a racial purist; he had deep disdain for blacks, like DuBois, who had a mixed racial heritage, and he felt that the best way to redress the tribulations of black people was to return to Africa. Unlike intellectuals who believed that all people were basically good and could be made to love others through education, Garvey was a doer. Using the slogan, "Africa for the Africans at home and abroad," Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica in 1914 and moved it to the United States in 1916. He hoped that the UNIA would become a powerful mass movement with the goal of returning to Africa (to establish an African kingdom in Ethiopia which would rival in grandeur any white civilization that had ever existed). He started a series of business ventures (including a merchant ship), adopted a flag for the black race (red, black, and green), introduced an African national anthem set to martial music (that spoke of Ethiopia as the land of our forefathers, which our armies were poised to rush to liberate), and founded a newspaper, *The Negro World* (published in English, French, and Spanish). Garvey had charisma and commanded a huge following among black people in the United States as well as in Africa. He pressed the Allied Powers to let him have the former German colonies in Africa so that he could show the world what black people were capable of doing. He was confident that the UNIA could develop the so-called mandated territories far better than the Europeans and South Africa (which had been granted a mandate for Namibia) ever could. If the Allies would not give him control over the mandated colonies, he insisted that he would have to oust them by force. Despite the obvious fact that Garvey did not have adequate military force to seize any part of Africa, his threats were enough to make sure that no imperial power ever permitted him to set foot on African soil. Under penalty of a huge fine and a long prison sentence, the *Negro World* was banned in much of Africa as a subversive document. His relationship with the U.S. black elite, who did not subscribe to his racial purism or political radicalism, continued to deteriorate. He was convicted of mail fraud in connection with his business activities and, after serving a short sentence, deported to his native Jamaica, where he was unable to reverse the rapidly declining fortunes of his organization. Despite his personal and legal difficulties in the United States and his eventual eclipse, Garvey is credited with psychologically rehabilitating the color "black," instilling in black people all over the world a keen awareness of their African roots and

creating “a real feeling of international solidarity among Africans and persons of African stock.”¹⁴

In the meantime, DuBois continued with his strategy of holding international conferences. The 1919 Pan-African conference concluded with a petition to the Allied Powers to place the former German colonies under international supervision in order to prepare them for self-rule. The League did in fact adopt the mandate system, a measure that conformed to the spirit and intention of this petition. A resolution was also adopted demanding that European powers protect Africans from abuses of all sorts and set up a bureau under the League to make sure that legitimate demands of African people were being met. The Pan-African conference also demanded that education be provided, that “slavery,” forced labor, and corporal punishment be outlawed, and that some form of political participation be permitted. These were moderate demands.

The 1921 Pan-African conference was conducted in three sessions held in London, Brussels, and Paris, respectively. The first session reiterated the same demands as the 1919 conference. However, this time, the demands were backed by an eloquent assertion concerning the inherent equality of human beings. This “Declaration to the World” delivered by the conference president, DuBois, is worth quoting at some length:

The absolute equality of races, physical, political, and social, is the founding stone of world and human advancement. No one denies great differences of gift, capacity, and attainment, among individuals of all races, but the voice of science, religion, and practical politics is one in denying the God-appointed existence of super-races or of races naturally and inevitably and eternally inferior. That in the vast range of time, one group should in its industrial technique, or social organization, or spiritual vision, lag a few hundred years behind another, or forge fitfully ahead, or come to differ decidedly in thought, deed, and ideal, is proof of the essential richness and variety of human nature, rather than proof of the co-existence of demi-gods and apes in human form. The doctrine of racial equality does not interfere with individual liberty; rather it fulfils it. And of all the various criteria of which masses of men have in the past been prejudiced and classified, that of color of skin and the texture of the hair is surely the most adventitious and idiotic. . . .¹⁵

The second session was moved to Brussels and immediately ran into controversy. The Belgian press alleged that the conference was communist inspired and that, if allowed to take place, it might incite the “ne’er-do-wells of the various tribes in the colony” (meaning, of

course, the Africans in the Belgian-ruled Congo). The session was finally allowed to meet, albeit briefly, only to endorse the resolutions and statements already passed at the London session. The third session then moved on to Paris, where it was chaired by Monsieur Blaise Diagne of Senegal, attracting a large number of Africans from the French colonies. Here, once again, the demands for reforms were affirmed, and in addition, DuBois was chosen to present yet another petition to the League of Nations asking the League to look into the treatment of people of African descent the world over and to set up a mechanism for ameliorating their appalling conditions. These sessions were held in the capitals of three European countries with colonies in Africa in order to sensitize them to the situations obtaining in their colonies.

The 1923 Pan-African conference was held at a time when DuBois' rivalry with Marcus Garvey's organization was at its height. Attendance was much smaller than at the previous Pan-African conferences although the session in London was addressed by prominent British socialists like Lord Olivier and Professor Harold Laski. In addition to reiterating previous calls for colonial reforms, this session also called for due process (including jury trials) for Africans accused of crimes in the colonies and for an end to lynchings in the United States. Because of studies and reports indicating that forced labor and virtual slavery existed in Portuguese African colonies, DuBois and his colleagues decided to hold the second session of the 1923 conference in Lisbon. The hope was that the session might be able to link up with, and provide some support to, the few Africans who were studying in Portugal.

The 1927 Pan-African conference was held in New York. Several events of some significance to the black community were occurring at the time. First, Marcus Garvey's UNIP was near collapse and an end to the bitter and divisive rivalry between DuBois and Garvey was imminent. Secondly, the supreme ruler of the Ashanti people of Ghana, King Prempeh I, who for years had been exiled to the Seychelles islands for refusing to co-operate with the British, had been allowed to return home. It lifted the morale of the conferees and added stature to the convention that the Ashanti king sent representatives to the New York meeting. Thirdly, the imminent economic depression in the United States saw financial contributions to DuBois' work dwindle to a trickle. He had relied for financial support on the small but loyal African American middle class, which was soon threatened with economic ruin. Before the world community could recover from the Depression of 1929–1937, it was plunged yet into another major war. DuBois' desire to hold the next Pan-African conference on African soil had to be put off indefinitely, as economic conditions in Africa were

even more grim than those in Europe or the United States. Also, when the French government got wind of DuBois' plan, it adamantly opposed any such gathering being held in any of its colonies. It was not until 1945 that the next Pan-African conference could be held.

Elaborate preparations went into the 1945 Pan-African conference, to be held in Manchester, England. More Africans were involved in it than ever before, London being the center for a very large number of African students studying in Britain at the time. The conference committee was chaired by Dr. Peter Milliard (British Guiana) and T. R. Makonnen (British Guiana) was treasurer; George Padmore (West Indies) and Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), political secretaries; Peter Abrahams (South Africa) was publicity secretary and Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya) was conference secretary. For the first time, African political parties, trade unions, youth leagues, and students' associations sent representatives. The roster of attendees included those representing the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the Labour Party of Grenada (West Indies), the West Indies People's National Party, the Nigerian Youth Movement, the Nyasaland African Congress (Malawi), the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, and the Gold Coast Farmers' Association. The list of individual participants read like *Who is Who of the Black World*, and included, besides the conference planners, Wallace Johnson (Sierra Leone), Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Nigeria), Chief H. O. Davies (Nigeria), J. E. Taylor (Ghana), Dr. Hastings Banda (Malawi), Mrs. Amy Ashwood Garvey (then representing Jamaica Women's Movement), and Jaja Wachukwu (Nigeria). Some of these people went on to lead their own countries to independence. In general, the gathering was the largest and the most representative Pan-African conference ever held. It was a crowning achievement for DuBois, then universally acknowledged as the "Father of Pan-Africanism," who flew in from New York to convene it.

The deliberations of the conference were wide ranging in scope. Reports were presented on conditions of black people in Africa, the United States, the West Indies, and Britain. Some resolutions reaffirmed demands made by previous conferences but not yet implemented by the colonial powers; others expressed the solidarity of the people of African descent with other oppressed and colonized people, particularly the Vietnamese, Indonesians, and Indians who were, at the time, actively involved in their own freedom struggles. This Pan-African conference was important in several ways: As already noted, it was the best attended by Africans from the continent. Many of those who attended went on to lead their countries to independence, becoming presidents, prime ministers, or cabinet ministers. It marked the transformation of the Pan-African movement from a protest movement—seeking moderate reforms including the right to form a

trade union, to be paid a decent wage, to vote for representatives in local councils, to obtain health care and housing, etc.—to a “tool” of African nationalist movements fighting for self-rule. The idea of independence was echoed throughout all the discussions at the conference. Information was provided about other struggles elsewhere in the world that were being waged against the same colonial powers that Africans were facing, and the participants were able to draw some lessons that might be applied to the African struggles. The conference allowed Africans in attendance to develop ties and relationships among themselves that helped them later in organizing their people when they returned home. The African activists who attended the conference said that they were inspired by the resolutions passed and encouraged by the moral support they received from each other.

When one looks at the first forty-five years of this century, one can identify three important objectives of Pan-Africanism, each one coinciding with a specific time period. Pan-Africanism began as a protest movement against the racism endured by black people in the New World, slowly evolved into an instrument for waging an anti-colonial struggle dedicated to bringing about African rule in Africa, and ended up as a dream or inspiration for African leaders and intellectuals who hoped that perhaps in the future, African states might be federated as the United States of Africa. Indeed, Pan-Africanism was the inspiration behind the efforts of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, when, soon after becoming prime minister of the newly independent state of Ghana in 1957, he immediately set about to convene in 1958 in Accra what might be called the sixth Pan-African conference. He called it the All-Africa People's Conference. It attracted new and more militant leaders like Patrice Lumumba of Congo and Tom Mboya of Kenya. The feeling at this meeting was buoyant. The question then was not whether all of Africa was going to be free, but how soon. In 1963, Nkrumah, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt were instrumental in founding the Organization of African Unity (OAU), a meeting forum for all newly independent African nations. Many ideological obstacles had to be overcome. There were conservatives and radicals among independent African leaders; there were those who wanted a very strong organization that would be a foundation for a continental government and those who were interested only in a much weaker association of sovereign states. Major compromises had to be made and the OAU ended up being not quite the strong continental organization that some wanted, but certainly an important symbolic step toward the dream of a Pan-African unity.

Much has happened in the last forty years to dull the optimism about eventual unification of the African continent. The OAU remained a weak organization until it was replaced in 2001 by the

African Union (AU). However, the dream of Pan-African unity lives on, at least in the rhetoric of African politicians and diplomats. In the end, the contribution of Pan-Africanism to the successful development of African nationalism and to the consciousness of people of African descent all over the world in helping them to secure a sense of connectedness with their African roots is quite significant.

The League of Nations and the United Nations

Following World War I, the world community was so shaken by the immense destruction wrought by that war that they decided to establish a new world organization to try to prevent the outbreak of another world war. The United States played a leadership role in founding the League of Nations although it never joined, a fact often mentioned as having contributed to the League's ineffectiveness and eventual demise. The League set up a mandate system under which colonies in Africa and elsewhere that had been governed by the losing World War I combatants, Germany and Italy, could be transferred as mandates to victorious Allied Powers. Such transfers were based on two conditions: That these mandated territories be administered with a view to their ultimately being granted independence, and that the European powers in charge of these mandated territories submit annual progress reports to the League as to what they were doing to prepare the territories for eventual self-rule. At that point, it was already being envisaged that German colonies such as Tanganyika, Togo, Cameroon, Namibia, Rwanda, and Burundi might be granted self-rule. Tanganyika, the western half of Togo, and the southwestern portion of Cameroon were mandated to Britain, however, while the eastern half of Togo and the eastern portion of Cameroon went to France. Rwanda and Burundi were mandated to Belgium, while South West Africa (whose name was later changed to Namibia) was mandated to South Africa. It was, therefore, only a matter of time before this idea of self-determination would be extended to the other colonies as well. In actual practice, the mandated territories were not governed much differently from other colonies, and there was no way for the League of Nations to force the mandate powers to pursue progressive policies.

That a major world war broke out within twenty years of the League's formation attests to the weakness of the League. The League's aims and principles were not articulated clearly enough and the League did not have the institutional mechanisms for resolving global conflicts (these shortcomings were later rectified in the United Nations Charter). The young Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was prophetic in his declaration at an emergency meeting of the League of Nations, following the unprovoked invasion of his country by Italy in

1936, when he said that a world body that seemed paralyzed to act in the face of such blatant aggression had failed miserably to justify its existence and was doomed to extinction. Three years after that statement, the war broke out in Europe as Germany undertook to conquer Europe and expand the Third Reich. In 1941, the United States was forced to join the war when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Four years after the United States entered the war, nearly 36 million people (soldiers and civilians included) had lost their lives, while Europe and the rest of the world had sustained untold physical destruction and economic ruin.

Just as it had happened after World War I, the world community was once again faced with the challenge of establishing a new world order that would try to prevent yet another conflagration on an even larger scale. Forty-six countries, including the United States, met in San Francisco and produced the founding charter of the United Nations Organization. The League's mandates system was transformed into the United Nations' trusteeship system, overseen by a Trusteeship Council. Italy subsequently lost her entire African empire, as Eritrea was given to Ethiopia, which annexed it. Italian Somaliland became a U.N. Trust Territory, and Libya was made "a self-governing kingdom" under the auspices of Great Britain.

The United Nations charter, in Article 62, directed its Economic and Social Council to "make recommendations for the purpose of promoting respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all."¹⁶ In 1948, the United Nations approved a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which spelled out an array of rights that all human beings are entitled to, regardless of their nationality or race. In Article 73, with respect to non-self-governing territories, the U.N. charter charged the relevant members of the world organization "to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions, according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement."¹⁷ Despite the cynicism shown by some scholars toward the United Nations' emphasis on human rights, and the bitter controversy as to whether the United Nations had the right to demand from colonial powers periodic reports on the colonies, Articles 62 and 73 nevertheless represented an unequivocal moral and political statement to the effect that colonialism was, then as now, unacceptable in the international community and that all European colonies in Africa and Asia had the fundamental right to govern themselves.

The United Nations found itself being used increasingly by the emerging leadership of the independence movements in African colonies as a forum to press for their people's right to be free. Various

U.N. agencies collected information on conditions in non-self-governing territories. The spokespersons of these countries used the forum provided by the United Nations to disseminate appropriate data and to ask for support. Socialist states like the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, ideologically opposed to colonialism and imperialism, and newly independent countries like India were more than willing to extend moral and material assistance to the African nationalist movements.

Even though the sentiment of national freedom was noble, the colonial powers were not entirely receptive to the notion. Portugal, for one, without any fear of disapprobation from her European allies, moved immediately to declare that her African colonies (Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Sao Tome and Principe) were not colonies but rather overseas provinces and, therefore, outside the purview of United Nations supervision. Nevertheless, through the United Nations, the international community went on record as condemning colonialism and offering support to those struggling for freedom. The United Nations has continued to be a catalyst in promoting independence, human rights, and literacy. It has provided hope to millions of working people by encouraging the adoption of progressive international labor legislation and by protecting the right of workers to form unions to improve their working conditions. The record of the United Nations in consistently opposing apartheid in South Africa and in helping newly independent African states to get on their feet is well known.

INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS

Much has been made of the fact that African nationalism was not quite like that of Europe because there were no states like those in Europe when colonization occurred. There are, however, many African groups with strong historical and social identities comparable to the ethnic and national groups of Europe. When colonial authorities drew boundaries, they did not pay any regard to the actual distributions of the various national peoples and ethnic communities; thus, the geographical entities that had been drawn to the convenience of the Europeans contained diversities of peoples. Ethnically homogeneous colonies were rare. What is important for our discussion, however, is that diverse African groups being governed by one colonial authority were able, through their leaders, to forge a sense of belonging to that geographical entity.

In political terms, African nationalism began to assert itself primarily after World War II. Organizations through which nationalism was channeled were varied and heterogeneous. William Tordoff

identifies seven social/economic groups, each with its own factional interests to protect, yet willing to support initiatives directed toward securing greater political rights and even independence for the country.¹⁸ These seven groups were:

1. Professional groups, consisting of lawyers and doctors, who tended to be allied with wealthy merchants and contractors
2. Teachers, clerks, and small merchants—or, in Marxian terms, the petty bourgeoisie—who were impatient with the status quo and eager to have the system transformed so that they could better themselves and perhaps help others as well
3. The colonial bureaucracy, including Westernized Africans who were the immediate beneficiaries of the “Africanization” of top government positions when independence came
4. The urban workers, interested in improving their wages and working conditions through trade unions (some of which were affiliated with emerging political parties, while others were not)
5. Small shopkeepers, petty traders, and hawkers who made up the “informal sector” of colonial economies
6. Cash crop farmers, some of whom were wealthy, and all of whom constituted a powerful and important segment of Africans
7. Peasant farmers, who toiled on their small farms in the country side and grew most of the food eaten in the country. Peasant concerns had to do with agriculture; they protested policies that controlled the market prices of their produce in urban markets, restricted ownership of cattle, or charged exorbitant fees for cattle dips.

“African nationalism was, therefore, composed of a number of different elements, representing sometimes interlocking, but often divergent, economic interests, which united temporarily in an anti-colonial ‘struggle.’”¹⁹

The nationalist struggle was waged, in part, by religious associations, trade unions, and welfare organizations, as well as by political parties. In the case of religious associations, mission churches in Africa were closely identified with colonial rule from the very beginning. Many African churchgoers broke away in order to be able to practice their customs: funeral rites, marriage celebrations, modes of dress, etc. Early secession of churches occurred in Nigeria and South Africa as early as the 1890s. There were also Zionist churches that were founded by charismatic individuals who claimed to have received a divine calling to lead their people to spiritual and political salvation. They are analogous to present-day fundamentalist groups and were characterized by spontaneity and emotionalism. Examples of such churches were the

Kimbangu and Kitawala churches in the Congo. In Kenya, there was the *Dini ya Musambwa* (Religion of the Spirits) founded by Elijah Masinde, which preached against colonial rule and attacked foreign religions as a deviation from the Africans' old and revered cultural ways. It campaigned for cultural authenticity and was strongly sympathetic to the Mau Mau uprising. Ironically, even after independence came, Masinde did not relent in his attacks against the government, believing that Kenyatta's government was just as un-African as its colonial predecessor. Masinde spent a great deal of his life in detention until he died a few years ago.²⁰ As one can expect, leaders of radical religious movements were found to be equally threatening and jailed or executed.

Trade unions and welfare associations were formed as towns began to grow, particularly after World War II, and Africans in urban areas began to form associations to assist new arrivals from the rural areas with accommodations, jobs, spending money, and a supportive network of individuals from "home." In British colonies, these kinds of "tribal" associations, with parochial interests and regional bases, were encouraged because they met the needs that colonial authorities did not have the resources or the inclination to address. Trade unions also began to organize on a sectoral basis since they were not permitted to go "national" or to become political. Trade union leaders realized that without the strength of the numbers from a national base they would not be strong enough to improve the working conditions of their members. Moreover, the leaders of these organizations became a pool from which political organizations could draw. In some cases, the trade unions themselves became indistinguishable from nationalist movements. For instance, Tom Mboya of Kenya began his career as the head of the Local Government Workers' Union in Nairobi while also serving as an official of the Kenya African Union (KAU). KAU was banned during the Mau Mau uprising against the British. When Mboya was elected General Secretary of the Kenya Federation of Labor (KFL) in 1953, he attacked draconian colonial measures that included mass removals of African families from their homes, the practice of "collective punishment," and the introduction of the "kipande" (the pass book) for controlling the movement of Africans in the country. Tom Mboya's rise to the position of General-Secretary of the Kenya African National Union, the party that led Kenya to independence in 1963, was a natural consequence of his extraordinary experience as a labor organizer and activist.

Sekou Toure of Guinea also began his political career as a trade unionist. As General-Secretary of CGT-Guinee, he used African trade unions for political education and mass mobilization. During a long strike in 1953, he stressed that workers' unity was essential to any

success and preached against “tribalism.” Toure and his colleagues argued that “the trade union movement . . . must integrate itself as the nationalist revolutionary and not as a reformist force within the context of other progressive forces. Its role in every instant is political.”²¹ Skills acquired in union organizing became critically important in Toure’s rise to the top leadership of the PDG (*Parti Democratique de Guinee*). In Nigeria, Morocco, Cameroon, and Zambia, trade unions wanted to maintain their autonomy and to concentrate on economic issues rather than to align themselves with political parties.

Many of these political parties began as interest groups composed of educated African civil servants, lawyers, doctors, and pastors often living in urban areas. They were originally moderate, reasonable, and interested only in limited reforms; they were not mass movements and did not try to supplant the colonial government. One of the earliest such groups was the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society founded in 1897, in Ghana, to ensure that the African people did not lose their rights to land. The National Congress of British West Africa, composed of educated Africans from the West African British colonies of Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Gambia, wanted the right to vote extended to educated Africans. Its leader, a respected lawyer by the name of Casely Hayford, once said that “Our interests as a people are identical with those of the Empire.”

Some political parties began as youth movements. A prime example would be the Nigerian Youth Movement, which began as the Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) in 1934, formed hastily by young people to protest the establishment of an African college in Lagos, which was to require the same amount of time in training, but would only issue diplomas instead of college degrees. It did not have a traditional affiliation with a British university, which meant that its education and diplomas would be considered inferior to those of other Nigerian schools. The LYM became the Nigerian Youth Movement, attracting support from all parts of Nigeria except the north and expanded its agenda to include protesting discriminatory legislation and pressing for the Africanization of the civil service. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe headed the Nigerian Youth Movement at one time, but political squabbles within the organization forced him to leave, taking with him some of the leaders to establish the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons in 1944. Another faction of the movement joined forces with Yoruba cultural groups to form an opposing party, the Action Group under the leadership of Obafemi Awolowo. Examples of other political parties that arose out of young people’s clubs were the *Rassemblement Democratique Africain* (RDA) founded in 1946 in French West Africa, the United Gold Coast Convention founded in 1947 in Ghana, and the Northern Rhodesia African Congress formed in 1948.

The French believed that, with assimilation, African peoples would ultimately remain within the larger French community of nations, under France's leadership. So they sponsored political parties in the colonies as chapters of the French national parties. For instance, the French Gaullist party, MRP (*Movement Republicain Populaire*) sponsored the *Parti Republicain du Dahomey* (in Benin in 1951), long after the French Socialist Party had established a chapter in Senegal (1936). It was through the auspices of French Socialists that Léopold Senghor worked his way through the political ranks to be a French deputy.

In British Africa, African organizations were allowed only if they were social/welfare committees or regional organizations. The British policy of "indirect rule" impeded the ability of Africans in the colonies to establish nationwide organizations or to be able to work with others outside their regions. When the NCNC began in 1944, it was as a federation of ethnic associations and social and literary clubs. In 1951, it was able to transform itself into a political party by admitting individual members. The NCNC was not able to make much impact in the northern or western regions of Nigeria, but instead became strongly identified with the Ibo people of Eastern Nigeria (under the leadership of Nnamdi Azikiwe). In western Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo combined parts of the Nigerian Youth Movement and a Yoruba cultural organization called *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* into a new political party called the Action Group (AG), which came to be identified almost entirely with the Yoruba people. In the northern part of Nigeria, a staunchly Muslim and conservative area, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa salvaged what was left of the Northern Elements Progressive Association and turned it into a Hausa cultural organization called the Northern People's Congress (NPC). When political support was secured from the powerful but conservative Muslim emirs such as the Sardauna of Sokoto, the NPC transformed itself into a political party. The colonial politics of Nigeria, from the early 1950s to the achievement of independence from Britain in 1960, was to be influenced by the existence of these three major political parties: the NCNC, the Action Group, and the NPC, each representing one of the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria.

In Tanzania, the Tanganyika African Association (TAA) was formed in 1929 as a discussion group, consisting of teachers and lower level civil servants, who met often and shared their experiences and ideas. They were not permitted any political activity and did not get involved in politics until after World War II. In 1954, a young university graduate by the name of Julius Nyerere decided to transform the TAA into the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), a mass political party prepared to address the rising demands of the African

people and to press for independence. A couple of smaller parties were formed prior to Tanganyika becoming independent of Britain in 1961, but they were overwhelmed by TANU at the polls. Nyerere became a persuasive and articulate political thinker; some of his ideas will be discussed in the next chapter.

In Kenya, in keeping with British practice of discouraging national organizations, a number of small regional tribal organizations were formed early in the century to protest specific colonial policies, but they found themselves targets of colonial repression. The Kavirondo Taxpayers' Welfare Association (KTWA) was formed in the 1920s by Africans from the western part of the country around Lake Victoria (comprising the Luo and Luhya) to protest unfair tax and land regulations, but they were banned by the colonial government because they chose to discuss their grievances publicly rather than simply go through official channels. There were also schisms within the organization due to ethnic and religious differences. The KTWA had a very short political life. Harry Thuku formed the Young Kikuyu Association in 1922 to protest the expropriation of Gikuyu land, before the authorities moved against him. He lost his job with the city of Nairobi and was subsequently detained and banished to a remote wilderness in the northern part of Kenya. The Young Kikuyu Association was soon succeeded by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), which later became the Kenya African Union, intended to be a territory-wide organization both in its program and its strident rhetoric of Kenyan nationalism; ultimately, due to effective colonial repression, the KAU never established a firm base outside the central region of the country. As the pace of political changes accelerated, especially following the emergence and suppression of the Mau Mau uprising, Tom Mboya, using his base as a trade unionist, established the People's Convention Party (PCP). The Kenya African National Union (KANU), which has dominated Kenya politics to this day was formed in March 1960. Its support came mainly from the Kikuyu people in central province and from the Luo people in the western section of the country, around Lake Victoria. In June 1960, a number of smaller ethnic groups, fearing domination by the two largest groups (i.e., Kikuyus and Luos) and with material support from the small but economically influential white settler community, formed the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). The smaller ethnic groups were represented by the Kalenjin National Alliance, the Masai United Front, the Coast African People's Union, and the Kenya African People's Party. A far-reaching consequence of British colonial policy can be seen in the patchwork of political groups representing different ethnic groups coming together, toward the end of colonial rule, with very limited experience of having worked together at a national level.

Even though this was not articulated, it seems that the British had no intention of letting Africans eventually govern themselves in those colonies populated by significant numbers of British settlers. In South Africa, following a history of hostilities between the British government and the white settlers, power was ultimately transferred to the whites with no attempt to ensure constitutionally that the rights of the other racial groups in the country would be protected. In Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, the white settlers were given internal self-government in 1923, meaning that the colony was responsible for everything except defense and foreign affairs, which remained in the hands of the British government. In 1953, the British government assisted in the setting up of a federation of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi under the control of the white minority colonizers. Five years later, the federation collapsed but the whites managed to retain their control of Zimbabwe and unilaterally to declare their independence from Britain in 1965. It took fifteen years of guerrilla warfare and thousands of lives for the Zimbabweans to pry their country from Rhodesia's white minority. In Kenya, the British settlers not only thoroughly dominated the country's politics but also heavily influenced British colonial policy toward Kenya.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the vast majority of African states achieved independence peacefully through negotiation, it nevertheless makes a lot of sense to refer to the process of transition from colonialism to independence as a struggle. Africans were never simply asked: When do you wish to become independent? They had to demand independence, they had to agitate for it. Many "agitators" went to jail; some of them were banished from their own countries for long periods of time. It used to be said that the surest path to becoming prime minister of an English-speaking African country was through jail. Indeed, Kenyatta (Kenya), Nkrumah (Ghana), Banda (Malawi), and many others served time in colonial jails before they became leaders of their own countries.

In the case of the Portuguese colonies, Portugal dealt with African demands for independence simply by annexing the colonies and declaring them "overseas" provinces of Portugal. The total refusal on the part of Portugal to entertain the thought that Africans were not Portuguese and might actually want to rule their own countries led the nationalists to launch protracted armed struggles.

Many factors mediated the struggle for independence: colonial education, the churches, ideas and expressions of support from individuals of African ancestry through the Pan-African movement, the

exposure to the world through world wars, and, of course, the forum provided briefly by the League of Nations and later by the United Nations. It is interesting that the Christian church and colonial education, pivotal tools in the Europeans' "civilizing missions" in Africa, also inadvertently became the tools that the African would use in fighting for freedom. Despite the atomizing impact of the divide-and-rule policies employed by colonial authorities, which we described, it is remarkable indeed that African people were able to wage fairly unified movements. The struggle mirrored all the contradictions of African societies that existed before colonialism and which have persisted since independence.

In any event, more than forty years of independence show that winning freedom from European colonial powers was but the beginning of a long tortuous process of liberation, nation-and institution-building, consolidation, and economic development, a process which began with one-party systems and socialist economies and now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, faces economic globalization and multiparty political systems. The next chapter takes a look at the first thirty years of African countries' experience as independent states.

NOTES

1. A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 23–24.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Richard W. Hull, *Modern Africa: Continuity and Change* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980), pp. 120–121.
5. Janet G. Vaillant, *Black, French, and African: A Life of Léopold Sédar Senghor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 1.
6. Ali A. Mazrui, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 27.
7. Melville J. Herskovits, *The Human Factor in Changing Africa* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 247.
8. Julius K. Nyerere, "Education for Self-Reliance," in Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 44–45.
9. Kofi Awoonor, *The Breast of the Earth* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1975), p. 21.
10. Author's conversations with Taban Lo Liyong at the University of Nairobi, summer, 1972.
11. Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa*, 2nd Edition (New York: Longman, 1989), p. 66.
12. Ndabaningi Sithole, *African Nationalism*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 47.
13. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1972), p. 96.
14. P. Olisanwuche Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and the Movement, 1776–1963* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1982), p. 78.
15. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, p. 108.

16. Harold K. Jacobson, *Networks of Interdependence: International Organization and the Global Political System*, 2nd Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 439.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 441.
18. William Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 51–52.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
20. Vincent G. Simiyu, *Elijah Masinde: A Biography* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers, 1997), pp. 14–35.
21. Ioan Davies, *African Trade Unions* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 88.