

Africans
The history of a continent

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Independent Africa

Three interrelated forces dominated African history during the second half of the twentieth century. One was unprecedented population growth, from something over 200 million in 1950 to 600 million in 1990, owing to medical progress supplemented by increased fertility. The second, drawing upon this, was a liberating momentum that destroyed European rule, resisted authoritarian African successors, and fostered individual mobility and opportunity. The third was a quest for political harmony, economic progress, and sheer survival amidst the resulting turmoil. By the 1990s, as population growth rates at last passed their peak, Africans could draw some encouragement from the knowledge that Chinese, Indians, and Latin Americans had all surmounted similar, if less acute, crises of demographic expansion during the previous generation and had emerged strengthened from them.

Rapid population growth

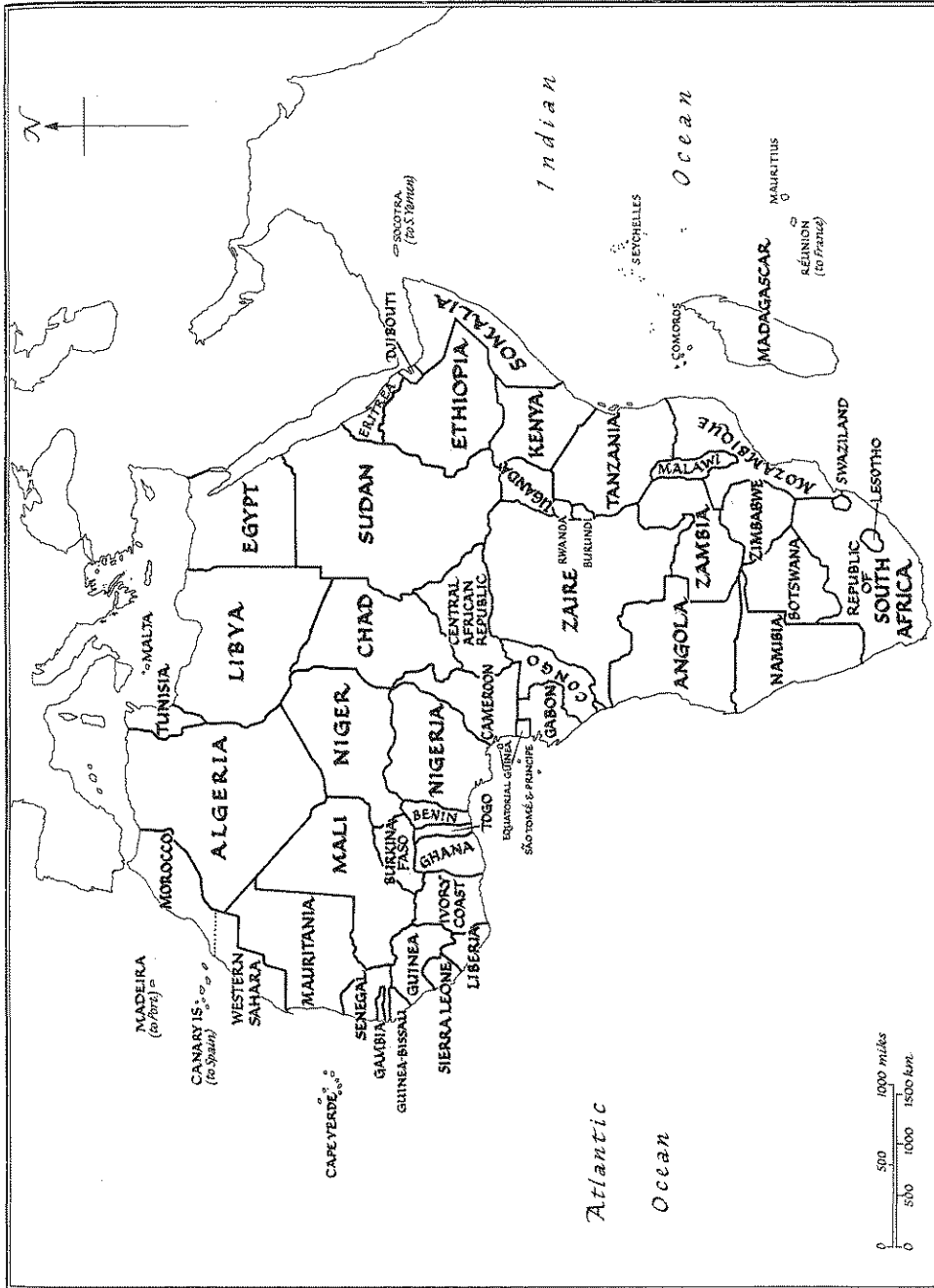
Around 1950 population growth accelerated swiftly. In the Belgian Congo, for example, the annual growth rate increased between the earlier 1940s and the late 1950s from about 1 to nearly 2.5 per cent. By the 1960s it was slightly over 3 per cent,¹ which became the average for sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s. The chief reason for acceleration was a further fall in deathrates. Between 1950 and 1990 life expectancy at birth in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 39 to 52 years.² Its deathrate fell between 1965 and 1990 from 23 to 16 per thousand.³ The decline was due chiefly to lower infant and child mortality. In the 1950s there were many African countries where 30 to 40 per cent of children died before age 5, but few where less than 22 per cent died by that age. By the mid-1970s, however, few African countries lost more than 27 per cent of children by age 5, while many lost fewer than 22 per cent, although more than half of all deaths were still during the first five years, and mortality rates were markedly higher in western Africa than elsewhere.

One reason for lower deathrates after 1950 was that crisis mortality, already much reduced between the wars, declined still further. Even the famines beginning in 1968 apparently had little lasting impact on population totals, while mass vaccination reduced several epidemic diseases and eradicated

smallpox in 1977. More important was the discovery of cheap synthetic drugs and their widespread use after the Second World War. Their most spectacular successes were against severe complaints such as tuberculosis, syphilis, and leprosy, for which a cure was at last found during the 1980s. But their chief demographic impact was on endemic childhood complaints like pneumonia and malaria, which could at last be attacked – along with measles, polio, diarrhoea, and malnutrition – through the extension of health services to children and mothers. In 1960 tropical Africa had one qualified doctor for every 50,000 people; in 1980, one for every 20,000. Population per ‘nursing person’ may have halved between 1960 and the late 1980s. Use of modern remedies depended crucially on the education of mothers. The Ghanaian census of 1960 was typical of tropical Africa in showing that mothers with no education lost almost twice as many children as those with elementary schooling and over four times as many as those with secondary education.⁴

In contrast to the interwar period, however, Africa’s population growth after 1950 was also generally fuelled by rising birthrates, hitherto confined to the north. The most rapid growth in fertility in sub-Saharan Africa seems to have occurred during the 1950s. The Belgian Congo’s birthrate rose between 1948 and 1956–75 from 43 to 48 per thousand, although its deathrate fell more dramatically from 28 to 19 per thousand. In Kenya, at its peak in the late 1970s, each woman bore on average eight children during her life.⁵ One reason for rising birthrates was that antibiotic drugs reduced the proportion of infertile women, so that by the 1960s even Gabon had a rising population, giving an upward demographic trajectory to the entire continent for possibly the first time in its history. Despite much local variation, women were probably not generally marrying earlier, but birth intervals were growing shorter, especially in eastern Africa where women perhaps had less control over their fertility than in the west. The chief means of birth-spacing was breastfeeding, which often continued for eighteen to twenty-four months in the tropical countryside but was abbreviated in urban and intermediate environments, especially where women had education and wage employment. Sexual abstinence beyond weaning continued in parts of West Africa but probably became uncommon elsewhere; often, indeed, renewed pregnancy became the signal for weaning. Since birth-spacing was designed to maximise the survival of mothers and children, declining infant mortality may itself have encouraged parents to shorten birth intervals, but there is no direct evidence for this and parents may have seen matters differently. Certainly the desire for large families survived. Not only did they demonstrate virility and success, but most children soon became economic assets, they increased the chance that one of them might be spectacularly successful, and they gave parents some guarantee of support in old age. As poor Nairobi women said of their children, ‘Those are my fields.’ Large families were rational for individuals, if not for society. Modern family planning was little used before the 1980s. Until then, the inherited attitudes of an underpopulated continent

Independent Africa



13 Independent African states
Source: Adapted from Roland Oliver, *The African experience*
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), p. 232.

joined with modern medicine to produce the most sudden and rapid population growth the world is ever likely to see.

Liberation

Nationalist leaders and metropolitan statesmen had only dim perceptions of the social forces underlying Africa's liberation during the generation after 1950. Both had more immediate concerns. Nationalists wanted to seize central power in each colony and use it to entrench their own authority and create modern nation states. Colonialists had diverse aims in the early 1950s. Britain planned gradual devolution to friendly successor states. France and Portugal planned ever closer integration between colonies and metropolises. Belgium scarcely thought about the matter. In responding to nationalist challenges, however, all were alert to Cold War calculations. 'Had it not been for Russia', Kwame Nkrumah reflected, 'the African liberation movement would have suffered the most brutal persecution.'⁶ Colonial powers also had to count the cost of repressing nationalism and modernising colonialism, which escalated with population growth. The benefits of retaining power became doubtful once Europe recovered economically in the early 1950s. French technocrats began to think colonies merely a burden on the most progressive sectors of industry. British officials concluded in 1957 that it mattered little economically whether the colonies were kept or lost. Many businessmen agreed: their priority was good relations with whoever held power. By the late 1950s, therefore, it was unprofitable to resist nationalism. 'We could not possibly have held by force to our territories in Africa', Colonial Secretary Macleod recalled. 'Of course there were risks in moving quickly. But the risks of moving slowly were far greater.'⁷ General de Gaulle made the same calculation after returning to power in 1958. The Belgians made it in 1959. All found it easier to transfer Africa's growing problems to African successors. Only the Portuguese and southern African settlers chose to fight, judging political power vital to their survival. Yet all these calculations were compelled by nationalist action. Although the fruits of Africa's liberation later disappointed many Africans and Europeans, the liberation itself was a major achievement of the human spirit.

The initial momentum was strongest in the north. The two former Italian colonies, Libya and Somalia, became independent in 1951 and 1960. In Sudan the British were secure so long as Egypt claimed the territory, for that compelled the Mahdi's political heirs to ally with Britain. When military officers took power in Egypt in 1952 and renounced claims on Sudan, the British had to accept its independence in 1956. In the Maghrib the French resisted nationalism until 1954, when defeat in Indochina led them to reduce commitments by granting self-government to Bourguiba's Neo-Destour in Tunisia and restoring the exiled King Muhammad in Morocco. Both countries became independent in 1956. In Algeria, young militants, mostly former soldiers, took advantage of French weakness in 1954 to launch urban terro-

rism and guerrilla war in the mountains, but French opinion rejected another retreat. 'Here, it is France', the Prime Minister insisted. During the next eight years some half million French troops largely defeated the Front de Libération Nationale within Algeria, but its survival across the borders in Tunisia and Morocco made continued occupation unbearably costly to France. In 1962 the FLN obliged de Gaulle to accept complete Algerian independence. Some 85 per cent of European settlers left immediately, often destroying what they could not carry.

West Africa saw no violence on the Algerian scale. The breakthrough here was the Convention People's Party's sweeping victory in the Gold Coast's first election in 1951, presenting the British with a type of nationalism to which they had never expected to transfer power. 'We have only one dog in our kennel', the governor reflected. 'All we can do is to build it up and feed it vitamins and cod liver oil.'⁸ The CPP leader, Kwame Nkrumah, left prison to become Leader of Government Business. During the following six years of joint rule, he skilfully used the risk of disorder to ease the British out, but the delay gave time for his party's centralising ambitions and willingness to tax cocoa-farmers in the name of development to alienate the Asante kingdom and the Muslim north. Consequently the CPP won only 71 of 104 seats in 1956 and Ghana gained independence a year later as an unhappily divided country. Competition to succeed the British also emphasised Nigeria's divisions. The election of 1951 entrenched a dominant party in each of the three regions. Fearing the ambitions of educated southerners, northern leaders delayed independence until their region received a majority of seats in the federal legislature, an arrangement certain to provoke conflict after independence in 1960. In Sierra Leone and the Gambia, parties representing hinterland peoples won decisive majorities over coastal elites, securing independence in 1961 and 1965 respectively.

Nationalism initially took a different course in the two French federations of West and Equatorial Africa. In the west the federal Rassemblement Démocratique Africain became the dominant party in most colonies, but not in Senegal where Senghor's Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais represented the majority inland peoples. As the electorate expanded, however, local forces strengthened in each colony, especially in wealthy Côte d'Ivoire, which feared the burden of financing poor inland territories, and in its equatorial counterpart, Gabon. Their interests coincided with de Gaulle's, for he wished to exclude African representatives from the French Assembly while tying individual colonies into close dependence upon France. Forced to choose in 1958, only Guinea's radical RDA branch preferred total autonomy to continued association with France, but that arrangement proved ephemeral and each colony became independent in 1960. Serious violence occurred only in Cameroun, where the local RDA branch had radical roots in communist trade unions and among land-hungry peasants, a conjunction which led other political elites to form a moderate coalition, with French support, whose electoral victory in 1956 precipitated a rebellion suppressed only after

independence. A more successful liberation war began three years later in Portuguese Guinea and contributed largely to the coup d'état which destroyed the Portuguese empire in 1974. The truly disastrous decolonisation took place in the Belgian Congo, whose paternalistic regime provided no representative institutions or governmental training before major riots shook Leopoldville in January 1959. Conscious that empires were collapsing around them and that domestic public opinion would not tolerate armed repression, the Belgians hastily arranged elections, intending to transfer political authority to Africans in 1960 while retaining administrative and military control. In this huge and sparsely populated colony with no previous political organisation, over a hundred parties contested the elections, some promising to return all taxes and even resurrect the dead. The most successful, led by Patrice Lumumba, and its allies won only 41 of 137 seats. Its centralising aims alienated larger ethnic groups in outlying provinces.

The early provision of elections ensured that West African nationalism took a predominantly constitutional form. In East Africa, by contrast, violence was crucial. Although the British defeated Kenya's Mau Mau insurrection in 1956, the revolt enabled the colonial government to compel Kenya's European settlers to accept African political advancement, leading in 1963 to the transfer of power to nationalists, led by Jomo Kenyatta, who were prepared to safeguard property rights, contain militants, and reduce unrest by distributing land bought from departing settlers. The threat of violence, but not its reality, was also vital in Tanganyika, where the Tanganyika African National Union of 1954 won exceptionally widespread support, thanks to its base in the earlier African Association, its use of the widely spoken Swahili language, and the absence of strong tribal politics – conditions largely inherited from Tanganyika's nineteenth-century experience. TANU's total victory in the country's first election in 1958–9 led to rapid independence in 1961. Three years later Tanganyika united with Zanzibar as Tanzania when the Arab-led Zanzibar Nationalist Party was overthrown by an African insurrection. Uganda's politics, by contrast, were deeply divided, for there was no substantial white enemy to unify the powerful indigenous kingdoms, especially after Britain revitalised Ganda patriotism in 1953 by deporting the Kabaka. Two coalitions of non-Ganda notables contested power and one, the Uganda People's Congress, secured it in 1962 by an opportunistic alliance with Ganda leaders.

The liberation of Central Africa was even more violent, moving far from the elections and constitutionalism of West Africa. In the British territories, two nationalist parties, the Malawi Congress Party (in Nyasaland) and the United National Independence Party (in Northern Rhodesia), mobilised almost universal African opposition to the settler-dominated Central African Federation. Their civil disobedience in Nyasaland in 1959 and Northern Rhodesia in 1961 convinced Britain that repression would be intolerably costly. The federation disintegrated in 1963, leaving Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia under African governments (as Malawi and Zambia) but provoking Southern

Rhodesia's white settlers to declare 'independence' in 1965. African nationalists there launched guerrilla warfare, but with little success until 1975 when Mozambique's independence enabled young guerrillas to infiltrate Rhodesia's African reserves. Escalating violence and military stalemate led both sides to accept an election in 1980 which both hoped to win. The victor was the largely Shona liberation movement led by Robert Mugabe, who became independent Zimbabwe's first Prime Minister. The events in Portuguese colonies making this victory possibly had begun with African revolts in Angola in 1961 and Mozambique in 1964, provoked by Portuguese settlement, absence of political rights, and the example of African independence elsewhere. Angola's liberation movement was divided into three factions based in the colony's three main population concentrations in the north, centre, and centre-south. Each achieved little more than survival. In Mozambique, by contrast, the largely united Frelimo movement liberated much of the north and was winning the centre when Portugal's war-weary army seized power in Lisbon in 1974. The settlers fled both colonies. Frelimo took control of Mozambique, but Angola's factions fought for supremacy. Yet Angola's independence provided a base which enabled guerrillas in neighbouring South-West Africa (Namibia) to win independence from South Africa in 1990.

Subsequent failings should not obscure the genuine hope and idealism which nationalism kindled. 'National freedom . . . was an uncomplicated principle,' Julius Nyerere of Tanganyika recalled, 'and it needed no justification to the audiences of the first few TANU speakers. All that was required was an explanation of its relevance to their lives, and some reasonable assurance that it could be obtained through the methods proposed by TANU.'⁹ Yet because most Africans were poor people with local concerns, such explanation did not easily convince them. TANU, an exceptionally effective party, plausibly claimed some 300,000 members before its electoral victory in 1958 and 1,000,000 after it, among a total population of 10,000,000, half of them children – ample support to scare away a weak colonial government, but potentially ephemeral and far greater than most parties achieved. Even the CPP won the votes of only one of every six or seven Gold Coast adults before independence. Nationalism only partially aroused many of Africa's deepest political forces. Responses to it depended on local circumstances. This was where the social forces shaped by population growth contributed to liberation.

Almost all nationalist parties found their first and greatest support in towns, swollen during the 1950s by young immigrants from rural primary schools attracted by artificially high wage levels set by trade unions and reforming colonial governments. The CPP won nearly 95 per cent of urban votes in the Gold Coast election of 1951, while Dar es Salaam took more than half of TANU's first 40,000 membership cards. Young immigrants, market women, and junior civil servants were prominent in nationalist crowds, whose volatility was a major political asset, as the pivotal riots in Accra in 1948 and Leopoldville in 1959 demonstrated. Only the RDA branches in Guinea

and Cameroun were rooted chiefly in trade unions, but many parties found important support among organised labour, although its taste for political strikes waned as independence approached and workers saw the danger of subjection by authoritarian parties. Many party leaders themselves held white-collar urban jobs. All but four members of Zaire's first cabinet were former clerks. From the towns nationalism penetrated the countryside chiefly through commercial networks. The bourgeoisie of Fes financed the Istiqlal, one-quarter of Nigeria's nationalist leaders were businessmen, and the trader-politician was a crucial figure at branch level throughout Africa. Cash-crop farmers, with urban contacts, local organisations, and a concern with government marketing policies, were often vital to rural support. Their associations fathered nationalist parties in Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda, although commercial farmers could also spearhead opposition to movements which threatened their interests, as in the resistance of Asante's cocoa-growers to the CPP. Yet support could also come from less prosperous rural areas. In many colonies of white settlement, population growth on scarce African land created discontents which fuelled nationalism. Southern Rhodesia's African population multiplied seven times between 1900 and 1970. The Mau Mau rebellion was a response to population growth on a fixed area of land and to the burdensome soil conservation schemes by which governments throughout eastern and southern Africa tried to ameliorate population pressure, often managing only to activate nationalist support. One leader described Southern Rhodesia's hated Land Husbandry Act of 1951 as 'the best recruiter Congress ever had'.

As predominantly local people, most Africans saw nationalism in part as a new idiom for ancient political contests, much as they had previously used colonial rule. Yorubaland was a classic example. There the Action Group, claiming to represent Yoruba against the Igbo-led NCNC, was dominated by Christian professionals and businessmen, notably its leader, Obafemi Awolowo, a man from Ijebu. As commercial competitors, Ijebu were unpopular in Ibadan, as was Ibadan's own ruling Christian elite. While this elite joined the Action Group, therefore, most Ibadan people supported a populist party affiliated to the NCNC. Yet Ibadan was still resented for its nineteenth-century imperialism in eastern Yorubaland, especially in Ife, which backed the Action Group. In Ife's local rival, Ilesha, however, a majority supported the NCNC, while their opponents within the town joined the Action Group. This was not 'tribalism' but the factional conflict of a society where local issues seemed vastly more important than national party affiliations. It was indeed often because nationalism was absorbed into such local political rivalries that it gathered the support needed to destroy colonial rule. Only more rarely did that support come from social conflict. Some nationalist movements did win followings especially among dissident commoners or formerly stateless peoples hostile to what Nkrumah called 'the deep-rooted cancer of feudalism'. As the Gold Coast's governor reported, 'The C.P.P. is the Party of the young men, who in the past have been suppressed and denied any part in

the management of their State [i.e. chiefdom] affairs.¹⁰ In French West Africa, where officials used administrative chiefs against the RDA, victorious nationalists widely abolished chieftainship. More intense conflict occurred in Rwanda, where mission education enabled the Hutu agricultural majority to form their own party, win election in 1960, and overthrow the Tutsi monarchy and aristocracy, whose attempts to regain power were to provoke terrible reprisals in 1994. But in neighbouring Burundi the Tutsi were warned by this example, retained nationalist leadership at independence in 1962, and violently repressed the Hutu majority, who did not win electoral power until 1993. Other aristocracies who used nationalism to retain power included the Moors in Mauritania, emirate governments in Northern Nigeria, chiefly families in Botswana and Lesotho, and (briefly) Arabs in Zanzibar. In three situations, moreover, nationalists depended especially on conservative social forces. One was the 'green revolution' where a rural hinterland party overthrew urban political leadership, as in Senegal, the Gambia, and especially Sierra Leone, where in 1957 some 84 per cent of parliamentarians were kinsmen of chiefs and the ruling party adopted the symbol of the Poro society. A second situation was where a dominant nationalist movement expanded into outlying districts by attracting regional elites, best illustrated from Northern Rhodesia where the Buluzi kingdom's leaders temporarily affiliated with UNIP in 1962. The third alliance between nationalists and conservatives occurred when they combined to overthrow an unusually oppressive colonial regime. In Central Africa, especially, common hostility to the Central African Federation won the Malawi Congress Party strong support among the conservative chiefs and peasants of the least-developed Central Region, so that the ancient Nyau societies emerged from the bush on independence day to dance on the steps of mission churches. In Southern Rhodesia, similarly, the guerrillas of the 1970s allied with the spirit mediums of the old Munhumutapa state, who shared their goals of land and freedom.

Yet many nationalist movements did seek to harness the forces of change which colonial innovations and demographic growth had liberated during the 1950s. Nationalism often gave African women greater political opportunity, whether as party members, demonstrators, suppliers to liberation movements, or occasionally as guerrilla fighters. In Guinea women were the RDA's strongest supporters and the party reciprocated after independence by raising the minimum age of marriage, limiting bridewealth, outlawing polygyny, and banning repudiation of wives. Young men profited even more directly. Always a major source of change in Africa, they were doubly so thanks to demographic growth: in Kenya the proportion of African males over fifteen who were aged fifteen to twenty-four rose between 1948 and 1962 from 20 to 32 per cent. The party best embodying youth and change won every election held in Ghana for half a century after 1945. Organised as youth wings, as the 'verandah boys' of Accra, the young gave nationalism its indispensable menace. Some gained occupational mobility as party organisers or used party support to win power in local communities. Backed by Guinea's

radical and Islamic party leadership, they conducted in 1959–61 a ‘demystification campaign’ to destroy ritual objects and painful initiation rites by which elders had long dominated them. Above all, the young provided the guerrillas who ousted recalcitrant regimes. They were the *vakomana* (boys), as Southern Rhodesia’s guerrillas were known, often at first migrant labourers or their sons recruited outside the country, later secondary school students who crossed the borders for military training, and at all times the village youths who responded most eagerly to guerrilla propaganda. When the Rhodesian war ended in 1980, two-thirds of guerrillas entering assembly points for demobilisation were aged twenty-four or less.

Economic development

When most African countries became independent around 1960, everything conspired to raise expectations. Nationalism aimed to imitate the most modern nation states: not the minimal governments of agricultural societies but the development plans and bureaucratic controls of the industrial (especially socialist) world. Nationalists believed that colonialism had retarded their countries. They drew confidence from their astonishing political success. They exaggerated the power of government and law, having experienced it only as subjects. They knew that their frail regimes depended on rapid economic progress. Some, like Nkrumah, perceived a uniquely favourable opportunity to catch up with advanced countries and win the respect so long denied their race. All had experienced rapid economic growth in the 1950s, when high commodity prices had enabled colonial governments to implement development plans emphasising infrastructure. When Nkrumah gained power in 1951 he adopted the Gold Coast’s plan but ordered its implementation in half the time, using cocoa revenues accumulated in London. Besides those assets, most new states had relatively small public debts, ample land, and free peasants. They were poor states, but not the world’s poorest. Ghana’s annual national income per head in 1960 was £70, Egypt’s £56, and Nigeria’s £29, compared with India’s £25. To expect rapid economic transformation was naive, but to hope for significant growth was reasonable. And it happened, at first and in most countries. Between 1965 and 1980 sub-Saharan Africa’s Gross Domestic Product per head (at constant prices) grew at an average of 1.5 per cent per year, against 1.3 per cent in India. During the 1980s, by contrast, India’s annual growth rate rose to 3.1 per cent, while sub-Saharan Africa’s GDP per head declined by 1 per cent per year.¹¹ The turning-point for Africa came during the later 1970s.

Until that point economic growth had taken three main directions. One was a continuation of the postwar cash-crop boom. Peasant production expanded especially in the virgin forests of Côte d’Ivoire and in Kenya, where between 1959 and 1980 the lifting of colonial restrictions enabled smallholders to expand their plantings from 1,000 to 50,000 hectares of the best tea in the world, with parallel increases in coffee production. Older crops like Senegal’s

groundnuts and Ghana's cocoa were still expanding during the 1960s, while improved machinery and chemical inputs stimulated new plantation enterprises, notably Swaziland's sugar industry. The second growth area was mining, where Africa's chief potential lay. While copper and other established ventures flourished until the mid-1970s, new resources were exploited in the Sahara (uranium in Niger, iron in Mauritania, oil and gas in the north), in western Africa (bauxite in Guinea, iron in Liberia, phosphates in Togo, manganese and uranium in Gabon, oil in Congo, Gabon, Angola, Cameroun, and Nigeria), and in Botswana (where discoveries in the 1960s made the country the world's largest diamond exporter). Mining also helped to make sub-Saharan Africa's industrial sector a third growth area, expanding by 7.2 per cent per year between 1965 and 1980. Nigeria's manufacturing sector grew during those fifteen years at 14.6 per cent per year.

This modest economic success turned into crisis during the later 1970s. Among the many reasons, some were beyond political control. The most fundamental was uniquely sudden and rapid population growth. The capital cost of colonising more marginal land and expanding existing services to provide millions of new children with food, housing, dispensaries, and primary schools absorbed the surplus available for investment before there could be any thought of development. In these circumstances, *any* per capita growth was noteworthy. Changes in the global environment were a second reason for crisis. When world oil prices multiplied sixfold during the 1970s, Africa's dependence on motor (rather than rail or water) transport left it especially vulnerable. Within a decade oil imports absorbed some 60 per cent of Tanzania's export earnings and its transport system began to disintegrate, as in several other countries. Africa's terms of trade deteriorated sharply from the mid-1970s. Copper prices fell by three-quarters during the next decade, devastating the economies of Zaire and Zambia, while many new mining ventures elsewhere collapsed. Agricultural export prices followed suit during the late 1970s and were still at all-time low levels in the early 1990s. As other continents produced competing commodities and the growth-point of international trade shifted to the exchange of manufactured goods between industrial countries, tropical Africa's share of world trade probably fell to its lowest point for a thousand years. One result was debt. A few countries borrowed recklessly during the 1960s, but general crisis began with the oil-price increase: between 1970 and 1976 Africa's public debt quadrupled. By 1991 Black Africa's external debt exceeded its annual Gross National Product, a proportion more than twice that of any other region. Only half the servicing payments due were actually paid, but the outflow still exceeded the inflow of foreign aid and investment.

Debt was the point at which the global economic environment gave way to African policy decisions as the chief reason for crisis. Independent African states had vastly different economic experiences. This was partly because they had different opportunities: Côte d'Ivoire, unlike Ghana, had virgin forest for cocoa, while Botswana had diamonds and the highest growth rate

in the world. But the differences were also because their leaders made different economic choices.

At independence around 1960 most economists believed that poor countries could best achieve development if their governments extracted resources from peasant agriculture and invested them in more modern sectors. This appealed to modernising nationalist leaders, especially if they were also socialists. As Nkrumah insisted, 'The vicious circle of poverty . . . can only be broken by a massively planned industrial undertaking.'¹² Yet in Ghana and elsewhere this strategy proved disastrous. It was viable only if new enterprises bore their recurrent costs, but many were infrastructural projects profitable only in the long term, while factories were generally too large and inefficient – in 1982 Ghana's operated at about 20 per cent of capacity. Meanwhile Ghana's public-sector employment increased between 1957 and 1979 by 150 per cent, taxation and corruption helped to reduce the real prices paid to cocoa growers by about 93 per cent between 1957 and 1983, and cocoa output declined from a peak of 572,000 tonnes in 1964–5 to a trough of 153,000 tonnes in 1983–4. Instead government borrowed abroad and multiplied the money supply one hundred times between 1965 and 1984. Ghana's economic decline was checked only in the 1980s.

By 1966, when Nkrumah fell to a military coup, perceptive leaders realised that his strategy was impracticable. An alternative socialist strategy was devised by Julius Nyerere in Tanzania and expressed in the Arusha Declaration of 1967. Arguing that foreign aid was inadequate to develop the economy, that cash-crop farming encouraged capitalist differentiation, and that services could not reach scattered homesteads, Nyerere advocated a rural-focused development strategy centred on *ujamaa* (socialist) villages with an element of communal farming. When peasants did not comply, Tanzania's powerful ruling party compulsorily 'villagised' about half the rural population between 1969 and 1976, sometimes at bayonet-point. This facilitated the provision of schools, dispensaries, and piped water, but communal fields were a disaster: in twenty villages studied in 1980 they occupied 8 per cent of land, took 20 per cent of labour (mainly by the poor), and produced less than 2 per cent of agricultural output. Meanwhile transport deteriorated, producer prices fell, agricultural output declined, inflation soared, established civil-service posts quadrupled between 1967 and 1980, the proportion of investment devoted to manufacturing trebled during the 1970s, and Tanzania's rural-focused strategy produced one of the highest urbanisation rates in the world (over 10 per cent per year). Forced villagisation was equally disastrous in Ethiopia and Mozambique.

Several countries adopting free market strategies did better than their socialist counterparts, but they too suffered crisis during the 1980s. Kenya was an example. Africans there took over all but the largest agricultural and commercial enterprises after independence. This strengthened pressure for fair agricultural prices – in 1976 Kenya's producer price for coffee was twice Tanzania's – and encouraged widespread adoption of valuable cash-crops in

highland areas, raising smallholder incomes at the expense of a growing landless class. Between 1965 and 1980 per capita GDP grew at 3 per cent per year, but during the 1980s the rate fell to 0.4 per cent, debt service increased to absorb one-third of export earnings, and the country entered acute economic and political crisis. Côte d'Ivoire's experience was similar. Virgin forest enabled cocoa production to increase between 1950 and 1990 from 61,690 to 815,000 tonnes and coffee production from 54,190 to over 250,000 tonnes. A liberal investment code attracted foreign capital, so that the volume of industrial output grew by some 15 per cent per year between 1960 and 1975. Ivoirian entrepreneurs diversified from agriculture into urban services and manufacturing. But lower export prices threw the economy into crisis during the late 1970s. Budget receipts collapsed. Foreign enterprises exported profits. Government borrowed until it had to suspend debt payments. An average annual per capita GDP growthrate of 2.6 per cent before 1980 turned into an annual decline of 3.2 per cent during the next decade. The Ivoirian miracle became a mirage.

The economic dilemma was most vivid in Nigeria. It was a very poor country at independence, but oil production began in 1958, each region had a valuable cash crop, there were strong commercial classes, and government fostered local capitalism. Growth was rapid until 1973, when oil-price increases provided unimagined wealth. Between 1968 and 1977 government revenue multiplied thirty-four times.¹³ Yet, in a bitter irony, growth of per capita GDP then slowed to 1.7 per cent a year during the 1970s and a decline of 1.1 per cent a year during the 1980s.¹⁴ Oil was an enclave with only financial linkages to the rest of the economy. Its earnings overvalued Nigeria's currency, so that cash-crop exports collapsed while cheap manufactured imports undercut local industry. Then the international depression of 1979–83 and a decline in oil prices in 1983 almost halved public revenue, created a foreign exchange crisis, boosted public borrowing and inflation, reduced industrial capacity utilisation below 40 per cent, and threw the economy into disorder which still reigned a decade later.

These difficulties were paralleled in North Africa, but economic growth there was faster and more consistent. Even overpopulated Egypt saw substantial economic development, in contrast to deepening poverty before 1950. The military coup in 1952 led to a land reform which limited individual holdings to twenty hectares, redistributed land to smallholders, and raised agricultural wages. Between 1952 and 1970 Colonel Nasser's regime partially freed Egypt from colonial economic patterns. Agricultural yields and the share of industry in GDP rose by about 50 per cent. The proportion of export revenue drawn from cotton almost halved. Instead Egypt supplied manufactured goods and labour to the oil-rich Middle East, where some three million Egyptians were working in 1985. The price for growth was debt, an inflated public-sector payroll, stifling controls, urban overcrowding, and dependence on imported grain. Yet at 4.1 per cent a year between 1965 and 1990, the growthrate of Egypt's GNP per capita was far above world averages.¹⁵ And

the demographic expansion which had dominated the country's history since Muhammad Ali was at last slowing.

North Africa's most ambitious development policy was in Algeria, where the victorious FLN regime possessed the resources (from oil and natural gas) and the political will to undertake the single-minded investment in state-owned heavy industry which left-wing economists saw as the route to industrialisation. During the 1970s Algeria's investment rate exceeded 35 per cent of national income and manufacturing output grew at 7.6 per cent per year.¹⁶ By the late 1970s, however, the economy was burdened with unfinished projects. A liberalising reaction became a stampede as oil prices fell and debt charges rose. During the 1980s economic growth barely kept pace with population. Meanwhile land scarcity had bred agricultural stagnation, reliance on imported grain, and rapid urbanisation.

Amidst the widespread crises of the 1980s, the structural adjustment strategy imposed on indebted countries by the International Monetary Fund was designed to reduce state controls and public employment, maximise exports, and free prices and exchange rates – 'less state and better state', as President Diouf of Senegal described it. A radical military regime under Flight-Lieutenant Rawlings successfully imposed this policy on Ghana during the 1980s, restoring positive growth rates, reducing inflation, and doubling cocoa output and industrial capacity utilisation. Whether Rawlings could maintain the policy after his election as civilian president in 1992 remained uncertain. Other governments found the strategy politically destructive, 'like telling the people to rise against us', as President Stevens of Sierra Leone protested. For the development strategies pursued since independence had been largely political rather than economic in design. To shore up frail states and regimes, they had strengthened governmental controls, multiplied patronage, fostered accumulation by the ruling elite, extracted surplus by indirect means, favoured volatile townsmen against less threatening peasants, and supplied constituents with the services – roads and schools and dispensaries – which they saw as virtually the state's only useful function. To international bureaucrats, minimal government might promise greater economic prosperity, but to African rulers it promised less political security. They knew, as the experience of Zaire or Uganda demonstrated, that the greatest danger of all to African economies was civil war. From that perspective, their strategies had been neither irrational nor merely greedy.

Politics

Africa's underlying political realities were, first, its people's predominantly local concerns, leading them to perceive national issues in terms of local interests and to judge their representatives and the state by their services to local advancement. Second, independent regimes faced Africa's ancient obstacles to state-creation: huge underpopulated areas, poor communications, limited literacy, resistance to the extraction of surplus by poor people

jealous of their freedom, and codes of honour which encouraged the ostentatious show of power. To these, thirdly, were added new obstacles resulting from colonial change: arbitrary international boundaries, regional and social rivalries between rich and poor, growing populations pressing on resources, volatile capital cities, the overweening power of modern weapons, and the sheer novelty of tropical Africa's social order. Finally, these problems were compounded by the haste, sometimes the violence, and, paradoxically, the idealism of decolonisation: opportunistic coalitions, regional rivalries mobilised for political competition, constitutions tailored to short-term ends, expectations inflated by easy victories, and locally minded people exercising universal suffrage.

These tensions fused in June 1960, on the very morning of independence, in the collapse of the new Republic of the Congo (later Zaire), which demonstrated the anarchy threatening any regime whose skill and power faltered. When Belgium sought to transfer political responsibility to nationalist politicians while controlling the civil service and military, the soldiers mutinied, administration collapsed, and four regional armies came into being. Politicians were divided between unitarists from small ethnic groups and federalists from the large Kongo and Lunda sections. When central power collapsed, Lunda and allied leaders in Katanga (Shaba) declared independence, backed by Belgian mining interests. A United Nations force reintegrated Katanga in January 1963 but then withdrew, leaving regional rebellions, millenarian movements, and tribal wars with modern weapons to engulf more than half the country during 1964–5, until Joseph Mobutu's military regime gradually and brutally restored central control.

Africa's other prolonged civil wars (leaving aside Eritrea) fell into three patterns. Sudan and Chad straddled ancient boundaries between northern Muslims and the black peoples they had raided for slaves. In Sudan the British first isolated the southern 30 per cent of the population, then hastily reintegrated them before independence, provoking southern mutiny in 1955 and a rebellion which continued with intermissions into the early 1990s. In Chad, by contrast, southerners were almost half the population and had French backing, but their Christian leaders treated the north with a tactlessness which provoked revolt in 1965, followed by more than two decades of warfare in which northerners seized the remnants of central power and disputed them among themselves. A second pattern of civil war occurred in Angola and Mozambique, where Portuguese collapse in 1974 left former guerrillas struggling to impose control over societies where state power had vanished. In Angola the Marxist MPLA dominated the capital but not the northern and south-central provinces, where American aid helped regional opposition to survive for two decades. In Mozambique, by contrast, Frelimo had no rivals until its dogmatic socialism and ethnic bias drove many peasants to welcome the Mozambique Resistance Movement (Renamo), a destabilisation force created by Rhodesia and South Africa which effectively partitioned the countryside with Frelimo, each party preying upon the civilian

population like the *chikunda* of the past. Mozambique's suffering found parallels in Liberia and Somalia, the third type of civil war. Liberia's crisis followed partial integration of hinterland peoples into its Afro-American political system, especially in response to nationalism elsewhere during William Tubman's presidency (1944–71). In 1980 urban riots destabilised the Afro-American regime and enabled hinterland troops to seize power, but their brutality sparked civil war in which rootless teenagers took the same prominent part as in Mozambique and Zaire. They created even worse conditions in 1991–3 in Somalia, where the overthrow of Siad Barre's military regime unleashed clan warfare which coincided with drought to create one of independent Africa's most tragic situations.

Such disasters, together with the great responsibility resting upon the leaders of new states, made it easier to understand the jealousy and ruthlessness with which Africa's rulers exercised power. So did the sheer difficulty of political democracy in African circumstances, a point best illustrated by Nigeria's experience. The price paid for its independence in 1960 was that its northern region controlled the federal parliament while all three regions retained much autonomy. This encouraged the majority group in each region (Hausa in the north, Yoruba in the west, Igbo in the east) to dominate local minorities, who together formed one-third of the population. Combined with the localism of voters and the materialism of cultural traditions, this bred a blatantly ethnic, clientelist, and corrupt politics. When young Igbo officers overthrew the government in 1966, their coup was immediately, although too simply, seen as tribalist. Northerners retaliated against local Igbo, negotiations failed, Igbo declared secession as Biafra, and the rest of the federation fought to stop them, partly from patriotism, partly because Nigeria's oilfields were in Biafra, but mostly because minority peoples in each region, who would have lost most if Nigeria disintegrated, provided most of the army and its commander, General Gowon. The redivision of Nigeria into twelve states on the eve of war met minority interests and became a condition of peace when Biafra surrendered in January 1970 after thirty months of courageous resistance.¹⁷ Under military rule until 1979, Nigeria's political system was transformed by the multiplication of states and by the wealth that higher oil prices gave the federal government. Instead of three strong regions struggling for autonomy from the centre, thirty small states competed for influence at the centre, making Nigeria 'a unitary state with a strong decentralising component'.¹⁸ The consequences appeared in the civilian politics of the Second Republic (1979–83), when parties lost their regional monopolies, the National Party of Nigeria evolved towards the kind of predominance enjoyed by the Indian National Congress, the Middle Belt (swollen by immigration from all directions) emerged as a major political force, but politics at the state level became even more localised, clientelistic, and corrupt than before. In 1983 the army again seized power 'to save this nation from imminent collapse'. Ten years later it undertook to restore civilian rule but rejected the successful presidential candidate from the south, thereby reviving regional

antipathies and leaving Nigerians unsure whether democracy was possible in their country.

Faced with these pressures, most leaders of newly independent states relied first on bureaucracies inherited from colonial rule, generally giving their Africanisation highest priority. Inflated in size, hugely expensive, and as authoritarian as the officials of Pharaonic Egypt, these bureaucracies nevertheless provided frameworks without which many new states would have disintegrated, a point illustrated by the stability of former colonies of white settlement where nationalist leaders had inherited the administrations and police forces created to repress them. Yet these were seldom the rational bureaucracies of Weberian theory. Rather, as in nineteenth-century Egypt or Asante, they were to varying degrees patrimonial, in that office was conferred in return for personal loyalty and service to the ruler, in situations where social mobility precluded the organic solidarity of a hereditary ruling class. Such regimes were held together by personal relationships among a small elite, Cameroun's being reckoned in the later 1970s at fewer than a thousand people. Unlike the Sokoto Caliphate, these were governments of men and not of laws. 'System? What system? I am the system', President Bourguiba of Tunisia declared, while President Mobutu's public statements had the full force of law.¹⁹ Each elite member headed a personal clientage, usually on tribal or regional lines, which imposed burdensome obligations but linked him to a locality and supported his claim to be its spokesman and protector, so long as his performance satisfied constituents. Such patrons might be hereditary aristocrats, educated technocrats, or upstart party bosses. Their consolidation into a single ruling group was crucial to a regime's stability, as the turbulence of Benin (former Dahomey) or Sudan demonstrated. Solidarity might come from shared experience in a liberation struggle or a shared vision of national development. It might come from the ruler's patronage, common business interests, intermarriage, and a distinct lifestyle – 'platinum life', as it was known in Abidjan. It might be fostered by corruption, an ancient feature of African politics which acted, like the manipulation of cash-crop prices, as a means by which weak rulers exploited their subjects without risking direct assaults on their economic autonomy. 'Every day', the Prime Minister of the Central African Republic explained, 'I tell our growing elite not to be ashamed of becoming the bourgeoisie, and not to be afraid of getting rich.' Around 1980 the proportion of household income received by the richest 10 per cent of households was 45 per cent in Kenya and 23 per cent in the United Kingdom.

In their 'hegemonic project' to dominate society, ruling elites generally drew on three additional institutions. One was a single political party, either inherited from a unified nationalist movement (as in Tanzania), consolidated at independence when opposition leaders hastened to join the victors (as in Kenya), or created as an artificial support group for some usurper (as in Zaire). Some single parties were merely mechanisms to prevent real politics while providing harmless arenas for ambition, popularising state propaganda, organising political ceremony, channelling patronage, and enforcing

social control, especially in otherwise ungoverned towns. Other parties grew this way with time and power, notably the CPP in Ghana and FLN in Algeria. A few were serious attempts to institutionalise as much democracy as leaders believed possible in fissiparous societies. Nyerere in Tanzania articulated this view, which often seemed threadbare to those born after independence.

The second supportive institution was the army, but it was a two-edged weapon. African rulers had long struggled to control the disproportionate power of those with guns. Emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, for example, had suffered several coups d'état. Colonial rule had concealed the problem, so that at independence only Houphouët-Boigny seems to have foreseen the political significance of armies generally recruited from backward regions. By the mid-1970s, however, many ostensibly civilian regimes relied heavily on military support, as in Morocco or Sierra Leone, while half of the continent's governments originated from coups d'état. Soldiers generally seized power for a complex of reasons: concern to eradicate the 'VIPs of waste', as Nigeria's first military rebels described civilian politicians; policy conflicts, expressed during Colonel Gaddafi's coup in Libya in the code-word, 'Palestine is ours'; specifically military grievances, such as the refusal to employ former colonial troops which precipitated tropical Africa's first major coup in 1963 in Togo; fear of victimisation, which stimulated Colonel Amin's take-over in Uganda; and sheer ethnic rivalry and personal ambition. A few military regimes were brutal tyrannies, but most operated much like their civilian predecessors.

A third and more reliable buttress for regimes was the international order. Until the Cold War ended in the late 1980s, foreign aid gave African rulers extensive patronage at very little cost in dependence. The United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity, founded in 1963, acted as 'Heads of State's trade unions', in Nyerere's phrase, and guaranteed the sanctity of colonial borders. Largely for this reason, Africa's independent states, unlike their regimes, enjoyed far greater stability than had their counterparts in Latin America or Asia. The price, possibly worth paying, was unresponsive regimes, xenophobia towards other African nationals, and the collapse of pan-African dreams.

In order to dominate society, newly independent regimes sought to destroy or incorporate potential concentrations of independent power. These might be great foreign companies like Union Minière, nationalised in 1967. They might be regional or ethnic units, for, apart from the prolonged civil wars already described, many states had at least one region hankering for autonomy but incapable of asserting it against the power of modern weapons. Pre-colonial kingdoms could survive only if they coincided with modern states like Morocco or Swaziland; elsewhere they were early victims of centralising regimes, as in Uganda in 1967. Pluralistic states such as Nigeria left 'traditional rulers' – in practice often modern elite members – much prestige but little institutional power. More totalitarian regimes held with Frelimo that 'for the sake of the nation, the tribe must die'. Probably few citizens agreed with them, seeing no necessary conflict between ethnic and

national identities.²⁰ Other social groups took the same view. 'We are all members of UNIP, but don't bring politics into Union matters', a Zambian miners' leader insisted in 1968. Yet his was one of the few trade unions strong enough to preserve its freedom of action. Peasant associations and cooperatives were even less successful. The more paranoid regimes also challenged religious institutions, but inability to replace their services generally made these attacks abortive.

While most newly independent regimes abandoned democracy, a few preserved greater political freedom. Botswana, with a successful economy and much ethnic homogeneity, held regular competitive elections. The Gambia, despite less economic success, did the same until 1994. Senegal drew much unity from Islam and the Wolof language and culture; after a period of restricted democracy, it restored relatively free political competition in the early 1980s. Demands for liberalisation became widespread at the end of that decade as largely urban groups, often born into independence and disillusioned by its fruits, attacked regimes weakened by economic crisis and their Western backers' unwillingness to support continued authoritarianism once the Cold War ended. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, only seven of forty-five sub-Saharan states were politically pluralistic; four years later, only a handful openly resisted pluralism. Benin, Congo, Zambia, and Mali were the first to change their regimes through elections, while several incumbent regimes won elections which were at least contested by multiple parties. Resistance continued longest in Togo, where Eyadema's northern-based military regime was in bitter conflict with the coastal Ewe, and in Zaire, where Mobutu's survival rested on his military power, skill in dividing the opposition, and conviction of his own indispensability. Yet many newly elected leaders were 'born-again politicians': established members of the political elite barely distinguishable from their predecessors. Several were soon in difficulty. The post-independence generation was probably more committed than its parents to the new African states, but otherwise democracy was no easier in Africa in the 1990s than in the 1960s. Nor was it any less necessary.

The collapse of initial independence regimes took a different course in North Africa owing to the growth of Islamic fundamentalism. This originated with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood of 1928 and gathered influence elsewhere in North Africa during the 1970s. Some fundamentalists were traditional moral reformers. Others envisaged an anti-imperialistic world revolution. The most influential, such as Abbasi Madani in Algeria and Hassan al-Turabi in Sudan, were sophisticated intellectuals aiming 'to Islamise modernity', by accepting the West's technology and administrative skills, while reforming its moral corruption in accordance with Islamic law and replacing its liberal democracy by elected and egalitarian but specifically Islamic institutions. In the early 1990s fundamentalists held powerful positions only in alliance with Sudan's military regime. Elsewhere they had support in universities and among Arabic-educated immigrants to swollen and neglected *bidonvilles* around Maghribian cities, where they organised mosques and social services.

They were persecuted in Morocco and Libya, whose regimes claimed their own Islamic legitimacy. In Tunisia they won considerable electoral support as independents in 1989 but were then repressed. Their chief success came in 1991 in Algeria, where riots, bred by the economic crisis resulting from forced industrialisation, led the much-decayed FLN to risk multi-party elections. The Islamic Salvation Front was winning these when the army intervened to exclude those seeking 'to use democracy to destroy democracy'. This enabled more extreme and violent fundamentalists to seize control of the movement. Fundamentalism in the north was potentially as important to Africa as liberation in the south. Both were indeed products of similar forces: youthful protest bred by rapid demographic growth and urbanisation, mass education, and economic stagnation:

We are at the fleeting historical moment when the relative weight of young adults in the age pyramid and the knowledge gap between them and their parents are culminating simultaneously . . . In the patriarchal fabric of Arab societies, this hyperacute generational conflict has found expression in Islam.²¹

One other upheaval matched these in historical significance: the Ethiopian Revolution, which began in 1974 and took a course distinctive to late twentieth-century Africa. Like the continent's two other genuine revolutions, in Rwanda and Zanzibar, Ethiopia's both overthrew and inherited the state structure of an *ancien régime* divided ethnically from most of its subjects – in Ethiopia from the outlying non-Amharic peoples conquered during Menelik's southward expansion. When Haile Selassie's army mutinied in January 1974 over military grievances, the old aristocracy had been too weakened by his autocracy to resist effectively, while attempts to create a liberal constitution failed because Ethiopia's undeveloped capitalism provided no bourgeoisie. Instead the initiative passed first to students and trade unionists in Addis Ababa and then, when Ethiopia's territorial integrity seemed threatened, to a unitarist military faction, headed by Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, which adopted Marxian language and relied on communist aid. Mengistu's regime failed to conquer or conciliate those seeking secession for Eritrea and greater autonomy for Tigray and other outlying regions. Legislation in 1975 destroyed landlordism and empowered peasant associations to redistribute land, but actual redistribution was uneven and the regime subsequently lost rural support by attempting to extract agricultural surplus by techniques that alienated peasants everywhere in Africa: state farms, official marketing, producer cooperatives, compulsory villagisation, and forced resettlement in outlying regions, all amidst recurrent famine. Weakened by the Soviet Union's collapse, Mengistu was overthrown in May 1991 by a coalition of regional guerrilla forces, led by former revolutionary students, which promised multi-party elections. Eritrea seceded in 1993. Ethiopia's continued integrity was uncertain. But the revolution had destroyed the obstacles to capitalism which had shaped its own character.

State contraction

One reason for 'people power' after 1980 was that states were contracting. Economic decline forced governments to abandon dreams of imitating the world's most modern states and to concentrate limited resources on limited goals: maintaining themselves in power, defending their borders, preserving order, and averting economic collapse. This did not necessarily weaken the state directly, for its coercive apparatus might survive. But some security forces decayed, enabling guerrillas (now with easier access to weapons like the AK 47) to defeat professional armies in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Liberia. Moreover, contraction weakened states indirectly by damaging their efficiency (where, for example, transport systems broke down), reducing their patronage, robbing them of legitimacy, and strengthening civilian groups performing former state functions. As the state declined, society, always the true strength of African civilisation, adapted to new conditions as it had in the past adapted to the slave trade or colonial rule.

Education best illustrates this process. Most nationalist leaders owed their positions to schooling and invested massively in it. Between 1960 and 1983 primary school enrolment in Black Africa roughly quadrupled, secondary school places multiplied sixfold, and the number of university students increased twenty-fold.²² It was one of the great successes of independence, with important political implications. Thereafter, however, state education faltered as the ever-expanding child population outran resources. During the 1980s primary school enrolment fell from 77 to 70 per cent of the age group.²³ Good education often became a privilege of the elite who could pay for it, but ordinary parents retained their faith in schooling and provided their own. In Christian areas churches often ran these schools. Zaire's government, for example, was unable to maintain the schools it had earlier expropriated from the Roman Catholic Church and returned them in 1976. Some Islamic regions organised similar private systems, even in Egypt. Ugandan villages employed teachers while the state conducted examinations. Kenya, characteristically, saw a proliferation of profit-making schools. But for teachers it was often a time of poverty and quiet devotion.

Health care followed a similar pattern. Between the 1960s and the mid-1980s the increase in medical personnel, together with cheap drugs, immunisation procedures, and general development, reduced infant mortality by nearly one-third and spared Africa any major epidemic. These medical interventions were so powerful that their impact continued, less dramatically, through the 1980s on a continental scale, but it was reversed in areas of violence, famine, and extreme economic decay. Ghana's real per capita public expenditure on health fell by 60 per cent between 1974 and 1984; eight years later the country had some 50,000 cases of yaws, a disease of poverty supposedly eradicated before independence, and its child mortality rate had risen.²⁴ Tuberculosis, cholera, and yellow fever became more prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, while each year an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 victims

contracted sleeping sickness. Roughly one African in six suffered a clinical case of malaria each year. Responses included buying modern drugs from proliferating retail outlets, consulting traditional practitioners, and adding modern drugs to local pharmacopeia in Africa's characteristically eclectic manner. Access to effective medicine depended increasingly on wealth, so that infant mortality rates varied more widely with income in cities like Abidjan than they had in nineteenth-century Europe.

This did not halt migration to towns, although it had slowed since the 1960s and now focused on provincial centres rather than capitals. During the 1980s sub-Saharan Africa's townsmen increased twice as fast as its population, forming 29 per cent of the total in 1991. The most rapid migration was by those fleeing rural dislocation, notably in Tanzania and Mozambique. Public housing provision lost all contact with need, so that the poor clustered either into single rooms at extortionate rents or into the self-built family shacks on city fringes known in Nouakchott as 'refuse dumps'. Whereas urban wages had far exceeded rural earnings during the 1960s, they fell over 30 per cent on average during the 1980s. In 1983 Tanzania's real minimum wage roughly equalled the government unskilled rate of 1939.²⁵ Yet employment was still a privilege, for the poor, hitherto mainly the incapacitated, now included the able-bodied unemployed. Statistics in the early 1980s generally showed them as 8 to 15 per cent of the potential urban labour force, but the proportion grew during the decade – Algeria's rate in 1989 exceeded 22 per cent – and such figures were misleading because the poor could seldom afford to be unemployed and instead undertook 'occupations' with minute earnings. The totally unemployed were mostly young people still relying on family support. Over half of Algerians in their early twenties were unemployed in the late 1980s as population growth and education outstripped jobs. Juvenile gangs like the *ninjas* of Lusaka flourished. In 1988 one of every five Nigerian prisoners was a teenager.

Survival in decaying cities depended heavily on informal occupations, which employed some 72 per cent of Nigeria's urban labour force in 1978, including its innumerable women traders and youthful apprentices. Self-employed earnings could be relatively high, but employees were severely exploited and many young men began their working careers in unpaid jobs. Informal occupations merged into the 'second economy' of black-marketeering, smuggling, corruption, and crime which expanded as state power contracted. In Uganda's extreme case, the second economy was thought to provide two-thirds of monetary GDP in 1981.²⁶ It was often an important field for entrepreneurship. Like other responses to economic decay and state contraction, these economic activities relied on solidary social groups. The need to organise schools or launch informal enterprises could strengthen family ties. Within the family, elite women generally enhanced their status after political independence, except in North Africa where fundamentalism reversed earlier gains. All adult women commonly gained the vote, but otherwise peasant and working-class women probably gained little from

independence. Their marital relations barely changed, apart from a slight trend to later marriage. Polygyny flourished where population growth made young brides available. Women suffered much poverty from economic decline and bore the burden of care for swollen families, although they often participated actively in the second economy and they still enjoyed greater nutritional and economic equality with men than in other poor continents. Economic decay and state contraction also strengthened ethnic loyalties, despite official disfavour. Private schools, informal enterprises, illicit trading diasporas, vigilante forces in place of non-existent police, and urban welfare associations in lieu of ineffective trade unions all mobilised ethnic solidarities, as did the continental passion for football.

Religion was a further nexus of social solidarity. Christianity and Islam expanded rapidly in independent Africa as those hitherto neglected – especially women and remote regions – claimed places in the modern world. ‘Everybody had joined,’ one woman explained, ‘and I was left behind like a fool.’ One estimate was that between 1950 and 1990 African Christians increased from 34 million towards 200 million.²⁷ The most rapid expansion was in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and in the Sudanic region running from Senegal to Ethiopia. Many southern Sudanese accepted Christianity during resistance to northern domination, while conflict between expanding Christian and Muslim fundamentalists bred grave conflict in central Nigeria. Church hierarchies were rapidly Africanised – in 1993 the Roman Catholic Church had sixteen African cardinals – and missionaries and money continued to flow into the continent, but Christian numbers nevertheless outran pastoral capacity, fostering a peasant Christianity in the Ethiopian manner with strong village congregations, sparsely trained evangelists, little superstructure or influence on family life, and much partly Africanised ritual. The expanding independent Churches – over 1,300 were founded in Zaire alone between 1960 and the early 1980s – had similar structures. They functioned effectively amid state contraction, for churches provided supportive communities, development projects, education systems, and medical or spiritual healing. Some churchmen, notably Archbishop Milingo of Lusaka, sought to counter literally interpreted witchcraft fears, which proliferated amidst insecurity and encouraged a revival of protection cults, witch-finding, and persecution. Both world religions spawned millenarian sects rejecting the post-colonial order. While Watchtower communities bravely endured political persecution, an Islamic teacher named Muhammadu Marwa created ‘a private republic’ of young rural migrants in Kano, ‘preaching that anyone wearing a watch, or riding a bicycle, or driving a car, or sending his child to the normal State Schools was an infidel’.²⁸ Its dispersal by the military in 1981 cost some 4,000 lives.

That was the most violent protest in a post-colonial city. Normally the urban poor, while resenting corruption and the gulf between ‘us’ and ‘them’, were too vulnerable, divided, dependent on patronage, committed to rural values, and aware of recent social mobility to challenge their rulers openly.

They might sing the radical words supplanting love lyrics in popular music, but political action generally required leadership from class-conscious workers in modern enterprises, religious zealots, or opposition politicians. The only issue that regularly brought poor townsmen into the streets was higher food prices. Such riots destroyed regimes in Liberia, Sudan, and Zambia and threatened many others during the 1980s. Yet the deepest alienation was seen in the armed youths who terrorised Liberia, Mozambique, and Somalia. Their counterparts had idolised Nkrumah, liberated Zimbabwe and Uganda, or struggled to transform Algeria and South Africa. Products of population growth, mass urbanisation, economic decay, and Africa's long history of generational conflict, they were available for change, whether creative or destructive.

Agrarian change

The gravest aspect of Africa's late twentieth-century crisis concerned food production. Estimates were notoriously unreliable, but most suggested that sub-Saharan Africa's per capita food output was still adequate in 1960 but declined by perhaps 1 per cent per year during the next twenty-five years before the decline slowed or halted in the mid-1980s.²⁹ These figures concealed great local variations. Ethiopia's agricultural decline may have begun in the 1940s, whereas Malawi, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe may have maintained production into the 1990s. Overall food availability, especially in North Africa, was maintained by imports, which cost some 20 per cent of Africa's export earnings during the mid-1980s.

One reason for declining agricultural output was state action which discouraged peasant farming. A West African study during the 1960s found that agriculture generally prospered in inverse proportion to government interference.³⁰ State marketing held down producer prices. Transport systems decayed. Manufactured goods became less available and more expensive. Between 1965 and 1980 the prices of urban as against rural goods in Zambia trebled. Even where food prices rose, urban growth drew labour out of agriculture. Women, who were responsible for much food production, suffered heavy dependency burdens as more children were born and survived.

Behind these relatively short-term factors were deeper structural problems. In 1990 Africa as a whole was neither overpopulated nor underpopulated, but its population was most unevenly distributed. Only about one-third of countries still had abundant land, but they included two of the largest, Sudan and Zaire. One estimate was that while Africa's population grew by 3 per cent per year during the 1970s and 1980s, its farmland increased annually by only 0.7 per cent, although the area devoted to grain expanded more quickly at the expense of cash crops. Land scarcity was worst in northern Ethiopia, where there were accounts of men suspended by ropes cultivating the steepest hillsides. Arable land was also scarce throughout North Africa, in West African population concentrations like Igboland, Burkina Faso, and the close-

settled zones of Hausaland, and in the high-rainfall areas of eastern and southern Africa. In these regions more intensive cultivation often succeeded in feeding larger populations, although sometimes with less nutritious foods. Lineage control of land in these areas (except Kenya) limited total landlessness, but often at the cost of fragmentation and a growing stratum of very poor cultivators, including many unprotected women, who worked for more prosperous neighbours and were especially vulnerable during scarcity. Where land was still available, civil servants and businessmen often took advantage of legal confusion to accumulate property, which increasingly replaced labour as the crucial scarce resource. Thanks to policies encouraging private appropriation of communal pasture, Botswana in 1981 had nineteen individual ranches with over 10,000 cattle each, while the proportion of rural households without cattle increased between 1974 and 1991 from about 50 per cent to 74 per cent. The elite also acquired many former European estates. Most commonly, however, African villages from Egypt to Zambia were dominated by modern counterparts of Hekanakht of Thebes: rich peasants with relatively large landholdings who owned most of the cattle, ploughs, and other agricultural capital, had family members in off-farm employment, enjoyed favoured access to agricultural staff and inputs, perhaps controlled irrigation or cooperative societies, held most village and local party offices, and distributed credit and employment to poorer neighbours.

Many young people in land-scarce regions migrated to towns, but some continued to colonise outlying regions. Entrepreneurs are said to have cleared two-thirds of Côte d'Ivoire's 12 million hectares of tropical forest between 1958 and 1980. Land lost to tsetse fly in the early colonial period was also reclaimed, so that Malawi was almost clear of tsetse by the 1970s and colonists penetrated Nigeria's Middle Belt from all directions. But much colonisation was now driven, by necessity, into marginal lands. Newly emancipated slaves and serfs of the Tuareg in Mali and Niger cultivated northwards into the arid Sahel at the expense of their former masters, until by 1977 agriculture was 100 kilometres north of the limit set two decades earlier. Ethiopian and Kenyan highlanders spread out into surrounding lowveld, braving malaria, breaking up pasture, growing poor crops even in good years, and multiplying the number of potential famine victims during drought. Africa allegedly lost nearly six million hectares of pasture between 1973 and 1988.

For the first two decades of independence, African governments neglected or exploited peasant farming, concentrating on large-scale agricultural enterprises, whether socialist villages, state farms, irrigation schemes, or private estates. Socialist villages and state farms were uniformly disastrous. Large irrigation projects could be profitable, as in the Gezira or the Swazi lowveld, but the huge sums invested to exploit West Africa's unpredictable rivers would probably never pay. There was more success with out-grower schemes where peasant producers used central processing plants, as in Kenya's tea industry, and with mechanised dry grain farming by individual entre-

preneurs, as was widely practised in savanna regions. More modest innovations – ox-ploughing, animal transport, small-scale irrigation – spread in several areas, encouraging a re-emphasis on peasant farming during the 1980s. But the low productivity of peasant agriculture in Africa's hostile environment remained a crucial weakness. Grain yields were generally less than half those in Asia or Latin America. Nor were they susceptible to transformation by Green Revolution techniques so successful elsewhere, for those were designed for standardised agricultural systems mastering environments like India's floodplains, whereas African peasant farming was a skilled craft producing numerous crops adapted to small variations of soil and climate. Even the one widely grown improved variety, the hybrid maize of Central and East Africa, had major disadvantages for peasants. Although cultivators in Rwanda or Hausaland had long intensified their practices to support dense populations, they had perfected their skills over centuries in fertile environments. The problem in the late twentieth century was the suddenness and speed of demographic growth, demanding from cultivators accustomed to extensive techniques a more rapid intensification on worse soils than any previous peasantry had achieved.

The demand came, moreover, at an unpropitious moment. Increasing rainfall in the tropical savanna from the 1920s peaked around independence. In 1961 Lakes Chad and Victoria reached their highest levels of the century. Thereafter rainfall collapsed during the late 1960s into widespread drought still recurring at intervals in the early 1990s. There was no proof of lasting climatic change. Nor was there conclusive evidence that desert conditions were expanding more than temporarily, although massive deforestation was taking place and environmental degradation was acute in overpopulated regions like northern Ethiopia or Lesotho. Rather, sporadic droughts caused terrible crop failures in the tropical savanna, the worst being in Ethiopia and the Sahel during 1973, northern Uganda in 1980, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia in 1984–5, Mozambique, Angola, and southern Sudan at several points during the 1980s, and Somalia in 1992. Yet equally serious drought caused crop failure in Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Kenya without leading to famine, because their relief systems prevented it. Mass starvation occurred where the famine-prevention mechanisms established during the later colonial period collapsed, except in Ethiopia where they had never existed. All major famines except those of 1973 and the Sudanese crisis of 1984–5 were partly due to warfare. Government failures contributed, especially in Ethiopia, where the transport system was also unable to supply outlying regions. Remote peoples, often in pastoral or newly colonised areas, suffered especially, as did the growing numbers of landless labourers, for population growth was making African famines more like those of Asia. Yet one twentieth-century innovation survived almost everywhere. Although up to a million people may have died in the Ethiopian famine of 1984–5 and an even larger proportion of Somalia's population in 1992, nowhere was famine accompanied by a catastrophic epidemic. Only later census reports would

show the true impact, but initial indications were that famine scarcely affected Africa's demography.

Fertility decline

By the early 1990s, the rate of population growth had probably just passed its peak. In Egypt and Tunisia it had begun to fall during the 1960s, in Algeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and possibly Botswana during the 1980s.³¹ Birthrates fell slightly earlier, but deathrates also were still declining. The youngest generation of Egyptian women were already reducing their fertility during the 1940s, South African women possibly during the 1960s, Algerians and Zimbabweans during the 1970s. Sub-Saharan Africa's total fertility rate turned downwards in about 1983. By 1990 birthrates had fallen from their peak by 15 to 25 per cent in Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Kenya and by 10 per cent or more in parts of southern Nigeria.³² In North Africa lower fertility was mainly due to later marriage – between 1966 and 1986 the median age of Algerian women at first marriage rose from 18 to 23 years – and to the use of contraceptives (chiefly the pill) to end childbearing after a third or subsequent child.³³ Fertility decline in tropical Africa appears to have been due chiefly to contraception, whose importance was accepted by most African governments during the 1980s and formally proclaimed in the Dakar Declaration of 1992. Between 1981–2 and 1987–8 official family planning delivery points in Kenya increased from under 100 to 465, while condom sales in Zaire increased between 1987 and 1991 from 20,000 to 18,300,000. According to the World Bank's (possibly inflated) figures, the percentage of married women of child-bearing age or their husbands using contraceptives in the late 1980s was 50 in Tunisia, 43 in Zimbabwe, 38 in Egypt, 36 in Algeria, 33 in Botswana, and 27 in Kenya, but many tropical countries reported 10 per cent usage or less.³⁴ Adoption of modern contraception correlated closely with female education, which gave women career reasons to plan families and the status to make their wishes respected, and with relatively low infant mortality rates, which possibly neutralised fears of family extinction.³⁵ A Kenyan survey in 1989 showed that men as well as women wished to limit families, two motives being the expense of fee-based schooling and anxiety not to subdivide scarce land among sons. Kenyans had come to put wealth in property before wealth in people. In southern Nigeria, by contrast, it was chiefly women who favoured contraception, either to delay pregnancy and marriage for career reasons or as an alternative to breastfeeding and sexual abstinence as a means of spacing births within marriage. These women quoted official encouragement of family planning and obtained contraceptives chiefly from the proliferating pharmacies and medical stores.³⁶ Whether and how fast this second stage of demographic transition would spread through tropical Africa was uncertain, as was the average size of family at which stabilisation would occur. But Africa had survived its peak population growth rate.

Instead it faced a different demographic threat. The HIV virus probably

existed in Africa by 1959,³⁷ but it was probably then rare and did not attract widespread attention until 1986. By the early 1990s perhaps 2 per cent of all sub-Saharan Africa's adults were infected with HIV and the region had nearly two-thirds of the world's cases, although controversy still surrounded the tests on which statistics rested. North Africa had little infection. The worst-affected country was Uganda, with perhaps 1,300,000 HIV sufferers, or 8 per cent of its entire population.³⁸ Neighbouring countries to the west and south were also severely infected. The prevalence was highest in towns – including perhaps 25 to 30 per cent of Kampala's population – and along major transport routes, for AIDS was characteristically a disease of modernity, apparently unaffected by the natural milieu but responsive to the man-made environment of the twentieth century. This was because it was mainly transmitted sexually, often in association with venereal diseases, and therefore correlated with towns, transport routes, and labour migration networks where sexual partners changed rapidly. Women were especially vulnerable there: nearly 60 per cent of Ugandans infected with HIV were female, although the proportion was lower elsewhere. The chance of infected mothers transmitting the disease to their babies was probably 30 to 40 per cent. Such babies normally died before their third birthday. By destroying immunity, AIDS revitalised diseases believed controlled. In the early 1990s some 2,400,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa were thought to be infected with both HIV and tuberculosis.³⁹ With no immediate likelihood of a remedy, and with palliatives prohibitively expensive, initial projections of the demographic effects of AIDS suggested that in the worst-affected areas annual population growth rates of 3 per cent might give way to absolute population decline 'over timescales of a few to many decades', but some later estimates were less pessimistic, chiefly because Africa's birth and death rates were already so high that the epidemic would have a proportionately less severe demographic effect there than in Asia.⁴⁰ A social system designed to populate and master the African environment had, at its moment of triumph, become a means both of transmitting disease and of limiting its effects. Yet the epidemic's most striking feature was the compassion with which ordinary people treated its victims.⁴¹

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