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THE BIRTH OF NATIONS

The honeymoon of African independence was brief but memorable. African leaders, riding the crest of popularity, stepped forward with energy and enthusiasm to tackle the tasks of development and nation-building; ambitious plans were launched; bright young men went quickly to the top. Expectations were high; the sense of euphoria had been raised to ever greater heights by the lavish promises of nationalist politicians campaigning for power, pledging to provide education, medical care, employment and land for all. 'Seek ye first the political kingdom,' Nkrumah had told his followers, 'and all else shall be added unto you.' The march of African nationalism seemed invincible. Africa, so it was thought, once freed from colonial rule, was destined for an era of unprecedented progress. African leaders even spoke of building new societies that might offer the world at large an inspiration.

The circumstances seemed auspicious. Independence came in the midst of an economic boom. In the postwar era, world prices for African commodities – cash crops like cocoa and coffee and mineral products like copper – soared to new levels. Between 1945 and 1960 the economies of colonial Africa expanded by between 4 and 6 per cent per annum. West African groundnut production doubled between 1947 and 1957; cotton production trebled. Tea production in

southern Africa doubled. In Kenya, once government restrictions were lifted, peasant output between 1954 and 1964 rose on average by more than 7 per cent per annum. The terms of trade were favourable; oil at the time cost less than $2 a barrel. Public debt was low; foreign currency reserves in many cases were relatively high. Moreover, Western governments stood ready to provide substantial amounts of aid. In 1964 the level of aid to sub-Saharan Africa in the form of grants or cheap loans from Western Europe and North America alone reached more than $1 billion. Given the extent of the vast mineral resources that Africa was known to possess – oil, gas, uranium, bauxite, diamonds, gold – the potential for economic development seemed enormous. In his book *The Economics of African Development*, published in 1967, the World Bank economist Andrew Kamarck concluded: 'For most of Africa, the economic future before the end of the century can be bright.'

Even the rainfall pattern – a key factor in determining Africa's fortunes – was propitious. Good rains fell throughout the 1950s, boosting agricultural production. In 1961 Lake Chad and Lake Victoria reached their highest levels in the twentieth century.

The advent of independence also brought a cultural revival. African music, art and literature expanded into new forms; African novelists and dramatists made their debut. In 1966 President Senghor of Senegal hosted the first World Festival of African Arts and Culture in Dakar, bringing writers, musicians, sculptors, artisans and *griots* – traditional storytellers – from every corner of Africa for two weeks of performances, celebrations, lectures and debates.

The study of Africa – its history, archaeology, sociology and politics – became a serious discipline in universities around the world. What attracted particular interest was new evidence discovered in 1959 that Africa had been the cradle of mankind. After years of exploring the Olduvai Gorge, a hot, desolate, stony canyon in northern Tanganyika (Tanzania), a Cambridge archaeologist, Louis Leakey, and his wife, Mary, uncovered the skull of an australopithecine, a hominid ancestor whose remains have been found only in Africa. Officially known as *Zinjanthropus boisei*, but more affectionately referred to in the trade as Dear Boy, it was immediately acclaimed the

earliest known tool-making ancestor of mankind, about 1.8 million years old.

On the global stage, African states excited the attention of the world's rival power blocs. The position that each newly independent country adopted in its relations with the West or the East was viewed as a matter of crucial importance. Africa was considered to be too valuable a prize to lose. While the old colonial powers sought to strengthen the special relationship they had mostly formed with their former colonies, the Eastern bloc embarked on major campaigns to gain influence in the new states. There was often intense competition between the two sides at a time when the Cold War in other parts of the world was at one of its peaks. 'We see Africa as probably the greatest open field of manoeuvre in the worldwide competition between the [communist] bloc and the non-communist,' said President Kennedy in 1962, echoing Harold Macmillan's earlier view. The West tended to regard with suspicion and distrust any links between Africa and the socialist world. An even fiercer contest for influence was waged between the Russians and the Chinese.

With both the West and the Soviet bloc vying for their support, African politicians became adept at playing off one side against the other. The more idealistic leaders, such as Tanganyika's Julius Nyerere, preferred that Africa should stand aloof from the sterile quarrels of the Cold War. But others sought to gain maximum advantage from it.

A sign of Africa's growing international ambitions came in 1963 when representatives from thirty-one African governments established an Organisation of African Unity. The OAU was launched with many high ideals and a hotchpotch of aims, including the liberation of southern Africa from white minority rule, but also the hope that it would provide Africa with a powerful independent voice in world affairs.

As they set out to achieve their goals of economic development and social progress, African leaders settled on a variety of blueprints for the future. Most believed that development and modernisation depended on strong government control and direction of the economy, a strategy inherited from the colonial era and encouraged by an influential school of Western development economists. The private sector was

considered too weak to make much difference. 'Throughout most of Africa today, you can count the number of effective African businessmen on two hands,' wrote Barbara Ward, one of the most influential development economists in Africa, in 1962. Only state power and planning could produce the degree of rapid change required to deliver the promises that African leaders had made before independence. A 'big push' was needed to break the mould of poverty and to move Africa towards sustained growth. The imperative of development thus justified greater government control and intervention, an outcome that African leaders actively sought for their own purposes.

The route most favoured by African governments and development economists alike was industrialisation. Industrialisation, it was thought, would enable African states to break out of their colonial trading patterns, ending their dependence on a narrow range of commodity exports and manufactured imports. It would have a far more 'modernising' impact than agriculture, providing higher productivity and creating urban employment. Agriculture was considered incapable of providing the engine of economic growth. The recommended form of industrialisation was import-substituting industry; it would replace the need for imported goods by developing local manufacturing production for domestic markets, thereby improving the balance of payments position and saving foreign exchange. What was envisaged in essence was a shift from low-productivity agriculture to high-productivity manufacturing. 'The circle of poverty', declared Nkrumah, 'can only be broken by a massively planned industrial undertaking.'

In defining their ideological stance, most governments opted for the umbrella of African socialism, believing that it held the potential for fast growth after years of exploitation by Western capitalists. Drawing a comparison between socialism and colonial capitalism, Nkrumah remarked:

> Ghana inherited a colonial economy . . . We cannot rest until we have demolished this miserable structure and raised in its place an edifice of economic stability, thus creating for ourselves a veritable paradise of abundance and satisfaction . . . We must go forward with our preparations for planned economic growth to supplant the poverty, ignorance, disease and illiteracy left in the wake by discredited colonialism and decaying imperialism . . . Socialism is the only pattern that can within the shortest possible time bring the good life to the people.

What particularly influenced Nkrumah and other leaders impressed by the potential of socialism was both the experience of the Soviet Union which seemed to show that socialism produced rapid modernisation, and the record of socialist parties in Western Europe after the Second World War in establishing welfare states.

African societies, it was commonly claimed, traditionally included many indigenous aspects of socialism: the communal ownership of land; the egalitarian character of village life; collective decision-making; extensive networks of social obligation; all were cited as examples. 'We in Africa,' asserted Nyerere, a leading proponent of African socialism, 'have no more need of being "converted" to socialism than we have of being "taught" democracy. Both are rooted in our past, in the traditional society which produced us.'

In an essay on African socialism that he wrote in 1962, Nyerere gave an idyllic account of pre-colonial society. 'Everybody was a worker . . . Not only was the capitalist, or the landed exploiter unknown . . . [but] capitalist exploitation was impossible. Loitering was an unthinkable disgrace.' The advent of colonialism had changed all this. 'In the old days the African had never aspired to the possession of personal wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows. He had never had labourers or "factory hands" to do his work for him. But then came the foreign capitalists. They were wealthy. They were powerful. And the African naturally started wanting to be wealthy too.' There was nothing inherently wrong with that, said Nyerere, but it led to exploitation. There was now a need for Africans to 're-educate' themselves, to regain their former attitude of mind, their sense of community. 'In rejecting the capitalist attitude of mind which colonialism brought into Africa, we must reject also the capitalist methods which go with it.'

Yet despite all the time and energy spent on explaining it, African

socialism was little more than a potpourri of vague and romantic ideas lacking all coherence and subject to varying interpretations. For some governments it was merely a convenient label. Kenya entitled its key policy document as *African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya* while vigorously pursuing a capitalist strategy. Côte d'Ivoire was one of the few which admitted to a policy of 'state capitalism'. While Nyerere argued that socialist ideals would eventually produce socialist structures, Nkrumah aimed to build socialist structures in the first place. Modibo Keita of Mali described his vision of socialism as 'a system where there will be no unemployed, and there will be no multimillionaires . . . a system where there will be no beggars, and where each will eat if hungry'. Whatever formula they chose, most socialist-minded governments placed high value on the role of the private sector and on foreign investment. What they wanted essentially was to avoid both the evils of capitalism and the pitfalls of doctrinaire socialism. Almost all remained wary of the idea of nationalisation. Only Nasser in Egypt, Ben Bella in Algeria and, for a short time, Sékou Touré in Guinea, went in for wholesale nationalisation.

More radical views about Africa's future were often aired. Marxist economists and theoreticians argued that because colonial rule had made Africa so dependent on the international capitalist system – restricting its role to producing commodities, enabling foreign operators to export their profits and thereby limiting the possibilities for development – only a clean break with the past would release its full potential. They advocated that Africa should cut its ties to international capitalism altogether, opt out of world markets and become 'autonomous'.

Another school of thought believed that Africa required revolutionary violence to throw off the shackles of its colonial past in order to attain true socialism. The leading proponent was Frantz Fanon, a black psychotherapist, born in 1925 on the Caribbean island of Martinique, who had fought in the French army during the Second World War, earning the Croix de Guerre with bronze star for his actions against the Germans in northern France. After qualifying as a doctor in 1952, Fanon took a post as head of the psychiatric

department at a hospital at Blida in Algeria, but resigned in 1956 in protest against the brutality of the Algerian war and joined the FLN, becoming a prominent spokesman for its cause. He attended the All-African People's Congress in Accra in 1958 as an FLN representative and in 1960 became its permanent ambassador there, gaining glimpses of how the newly independent states of West Africa were being run. Diagnosed with leukaemia in 1960, he spent his dying days in 1961 based in Europe writing a ferocious tirade attacking not only colonialism but the bourgeois regimes that had inherited power in Africa. Published in 1961 as *Les Damnés de la Terre* – 'The wretched of the earth' – Fanon's polemic became a bible for revolutionary enthusiasts around the Third World.

Fanon argued that Africa had achieved only a 'false decolonisation', leaving real power in the hands of foreigners and their 'agents' among the ruling elites. What was needed was a violent overthrow of the entire system. Drawing on his experience of the Algerian war, he maintained that violence had 'positive and creative qualities'.

> Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organised and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge of the practice of action, there's nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of trumpets. There's nothing save a minimum of readaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag waving; and down there at the bottom an undivided mass, still living in the Middle Ages, endlessly marking time.

On a national level, violence helped nation-building; it unified people, providing 'a cement mixed with blood and anger'. It also benefited individuals. 'At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.'

Fanon believed fervently in the coming African revolution. He pinned his hopes principally on the peasantry. He regarded workers in towns as a 'labour aristocracy', too compromised by the colonial system, to be of use. But he envisaged that the spearhead of the

revolution would be formed by the dispossessed masses living in *bidonvilles* on the fringes of towns – the wretched of the earth, or the lumpen-proletariat, as he called them. 'This lumpen-proletariat is like a horde of rats; you may kick them and throw stones at them, but despite your efforts, they'll go on gnawing at the roots of the tree.'

A number of foreign players actively sought out revolutionary opportunities in independent Africa, notably China. Lacking the economic resources to compete with Russia on trade and aid, the Chinese hoped to gain more by spreading revolutionary ideology. They focused on dissident groups, such as the Sawaba movement in Niger, Tutsi exiles in Burundi and opposition factions in Kenya. After setting up embassy quarters in a Greek-owned hotel in Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, in 1964, they dabbled extensively in rebel activities in neighbouring Congo, lending support to Lumumbist leaders like Gaston Soumialot in Kivu and Maniema and Pierre Mulele, a former Lumumbist minister who, after fifteen months' training in Maoist teaching and guerrilla tactics in China in 1962–3, set up a revolutionary group in Kwilu province.

China's presence in Africa was small, insignificant when placed alongside the West's many contingents. Yet the reputation the Chinese gained throughout much of Africa at the time, in African eyes as much as in the Western view, was of a dangerous breed of men, capable of any feat of subversion. When China's premier, Zhou En-lai, made a tour of African states between December 1963 and February 1964, his very appearance was taken as an ominous sign. The Lagos *Daily Times* described him as 'one of the world's most dangerous men'. His parting speech in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, in February 1964, seemed to confirm the worst fears about China's intentions. Speaking of the 'earth-shaking changes' that had already occurred in Africa, Zhou En-lai went on to assert that 'revolutionary prospects are excellent throughout the African continent'. In the version more commonly used, his words were translated as 'Africa is ripe for revolution'.

Another foreign player keen to find a revolutionary role in Africa was Cuba. Encouraged by the Algerians, Fidel Castro decided in 1965

to despatch an expeditionary force to eastern Congo to assist rebel groups operating there. The expedition was intended to be part of what was called an 'International Proletarian Army', an alliance of revolutionary groups aimed at confronting 'imperialism' around the world, notably American imperialism.

A team of 120 Cuban fighters was recruited for the eastern Congo mission, all volunteers and virtually all black. Their leader was the legendary Argentinian revolutionary, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, who had become bored with life as a minister in Castro's government and was eager for a new adventure. During the preliminary stages of setting up the mission, Guevara travelled to Algiers to consult Ben Bella, to Beijing to consult Zhou En-lai and to Cairo to consult Nasser. 'I shall go to the Congo,' Guevara told Nasser, 'because it is the hottest spot in the world now . . . I think we can hurt the imperialists at the core of their interests in Katanga.' Nasser was sceptical about Guevara's intention to lead the mission himself. According to an account of their meeting given by the journalist Mohammed Heikal, Nasser's son-in-law, Nasser warned Guevara not to become 'another Tarzan, a white man among black men, leading them and protecting them'. He shook his head sadly: 'It can't be done.'

The group that Guevara chose to support operated in the mountains along the western shore of Lake Tanganyika. It was led by Laurent Kabila, a 26-year-old assembly member from north Katanga, a former student in Paris and Belgrade, who hoped to establish 'a provisional government for the liberated territories of the east'. Guevara's plan was to use this liberated zone as a training ground not only for Congolese rebels but for members of liberation movements from southern Africa. He recognised that the task might take up to five years.

In April 1965, at the age of thirty-four, Guevara arrived in Dar es Salaam, in secret and in disguise, as part of an advance party of Cuban fighters en route to the eastern Congo, a thousand miles away. Travelling in three Mercedes-Benz, they reached the lakeside town of Kigoma, then crossed Lake Tanganyika by boat to the Congo, landing there on 24 April.

The expedition was a fiasco. Guevara found Kabila's rebels to be

untrained, undisciplined, disorganised, riven by tribal rivalry and petty squabbles, and led by incompetent commanders who preferred the safety and comfort of bars and brothels in Kigoma on the other side of the lake to revolutionary action. 'The basic feature of the People's Liberation Army', Guevara subsequently recorded, 'was that it was a parasite army; it did not work, did not train, did not fight, and demanded provisions and labour from the population, sometimes with extreme harshness.'

Kabila himself put in only one appearance, arriving with copious supplies of whisky, but left for Kigoma after only five days in the field, preferring to spend his time on international travel or at his base in Dar es Salaam. His brief visit left Guevara unimpressed. 'He let the days pass without concerning himself with anything other than political squabbles, and all the signs are that he is too addicted to drink and women,' Guevara noted in his field diary. He dismissed Kabila as a man lacking in 'revolutionary seriousness'.

Despite the efforts of the Cubans, guerrilla activity tended to end in disarray, with rebels fleeing in panic, abandoning their weapons and leaving their wounded to fend for themselves. 'Often it was the officers who took the lead in running away,' Guevara recorded. Harassed by the Congolese army and white mercenaries, the rebels suffered one reverse after another. After seven months of fruitless endeavour, weary and demoralised, Guevara organised the Cuban retreat, crossing the lake to Kigoma in November 1965. His scathing account of what had happened was written in a small upstairs room in the Cuban embassy in Dar es Salaam during December 1965 and January 1966, but it remained secret for thirty years. His opening words were candid. 'This is the history of a failure,' he wrote.

The difficulties that African states faced as they embarked on independence were daunting. Africa was the poorest, least developed region on earth. Its climate was often harsh and variable. Drought was a constant hazard, sometimes lasting several years; two droughts earlier in the twentieth century – in 1913–14 and 1930–3 – proved catastrophic. Rainfall in half of the continent was generally inadequate. African soils in many areas were thin, deficient in nutrients and low in

organic content, producing limited yields. Most of Africa's population – some 80 per cent – were engaged in subsistence agriculture, without access either to basic education or health services. Disease proliferated among humans, animals and plantlife. Although modern medicine had tamed epidemic diseases like smallpox and yellow fever, endemic diseases like malaria and sleeping sickness (trypanosomiasis) took a heavy toll; the tsetse fly, causing sleeping sickness among humans and cattle alike, prevented some 10 million square kilometres of potentially productive land from being utilised effectively for livestock and mixed agriculture. Locusts and red-billed quelea birds regularly devastated crops. River blindness (onchocerciasis) affected more than 1 million people living in the riverine areas of the interior of West Africa. Bilharzia (schistosomiasis), absent from a large part of the continent at the turn of the twentieth century, by 1960 had spread to almost every water area below a few thousand feet. Death rates for children in Africa in 1960 were the highest in the world; life expectancy, at thirty-nine years on average, was the lowest in the world.

There was an acute shortage of skilled manpower. Most African societies were predominantly illiterate and innumerate. Only 16 per cent of the adult population was literate. In black Africa in the late 1950s, just as the independence era was beginning, the entire region, containing a population of about 200 million, produced only 8,000 secondary school graduates, and nearly half of those came from two countries, Ghana and Nigeria. No more than 3 per cent of the student-age population obtained an education at secondary level. Few new states had more than 200 students in university training. In the former French colonies there were still no universities. Only about one-third of the student-age population at primary level went to school. More than three-quarters of high-level manpower in government and private business were foreigners.

The rate of population growth added new difficulties, stretching government services to the limit. As a result mainly of health measures, the growth rate rose from about 1 per cent in 1945 to nearly 3 per cent in 1960. Each woman in Africa contributed on average six children to the next generation. In Kenya in the 1970s the figure rose

to eight children. Between 1950 and 1980, Africa's population tripled. Nearly two-thirds of the increase occurred in rural areas, aggravating land shortages. Millions migrated to urban areas, notably to capital cities, some driven by landlessness and poverty, others attracted by the hope of a new life with regular wages, a share in the money economy, football and movies.

The urban population in Africa expanded faster than on any other continent. In thirty-five African capitals, the population increased annually at 8.5 per cent – a rate which meant that they doubled in size every ten years. In 1945 there were only forty-nine towns in the entire continent with a population exceeding 100,000. More than half were in North Africa: ten in Egypt; nine in Morocco; four in Algeria; one in Tunisia; and one in Libya. Eleven others were in South Africa. Between the Sahara and the Limpopo, only thirteen towns had reached a population on 100,000, four of them in Nigeria. In 1955, the population of Lagos numbered 312,000; of Léopoldville (Kinshasa), 300,000; of Addis Ababa, 510,000; of Abidjan, 128,000; of Accra, 165,000. By the early 1980s, Lagos and Kinshasa had populations of about 3 million each, while Addis Ababa, Abidjan and Accra had all passed 1 million. Most urban inhabitants lacked basic amenities like running water, sanitation, paved roads and electricity. Millions lived in slums and squatter settlements, in shacks made from sheets of plastic, packing crates, cardboard boxes and pieces of tin. For most there was no prospect of employment. On average less than 10 per cent of the African population at independence earned a wage.

The economic resources available to African governments to fulfil their dreams were limited. Africa's share of world trade was no more than 3 per cent. The assets of three US corporations – General Motors, Du Pont and the Bank of America – exceeded the gross domestic product of all Africa, including South Africa. Government revenues were subject to sharp fluctuations. In Ghana, over an eight-year period between 1955 and 1963, the average year-to-year fluctuation in revenue from export duties was plus or minus 28 per cent. Only a few islands of modern economic development existed, most of them confined to coastal areas or to mining enterprises in areas like Katanga and the

Zambian Copperbelt. Much of the interior remained undeveloped, remote, cut off from contact with the modern world. Fifteen African states were landlocked, relying on long and often tenuous links to the sea, hundreds, sometimes a thousand miles away.

The colonial legacy included an infrastructure of roads, railways, hydro-electric schemes and a revenue system based on commodity exports and imported goods. But much of the economies of African states had been developed in accordance with the needs of colonial powers, as Sylvanus Olympio, the first president of Togo, noted:

> The effect of the policy of the colonial powers [he wrote] has been the economic isolation of peoples who live side by side, in some instances within a few miles of each other, while directing the flow of resources to the metropolitan countries. For example, although I can call Paris from my office telephone here in Lomé, I cannot place a call to Lagos in Nigeria only 250 miles away. Again, while it takes a short time to send an air-mail letter to Paris, it takes several days for the same letter to reach Accra, a mere 132 miles away. Railways rarely connect at international boundaries. Roads have been constructed from the coast inland but very few join economic centres of trade. The productive central regions of Togo, Dahomey (Benin) and Ghana are as remote from each other as if they were on separate continents.

Africa's economies were largely owned or controlled by foreign corporations – almost all modern manufacturing, banking, import–export trade, shipping, mining, plantations and timber enterprises. They remained heavily dependent on foreign markets, supplies of capital and technology. But except for mining and trade, foreign investors found little to attract them: the risks were regarded as high; the markets of Africa were tiny. The manufacturing sector, on which so many hopes were pinned, was only a small fraction of gross domestic product, usually less than 5 per cent.

Political systems too were recent transplants. Africans had little experience of representative democracy – representative institutions were introduced by the British and the French too late to alter the

established character of the colonial state. The more durable imprint they left behind was of authoritarian regimes in which governors and their officials wielded enormous personal power. The sediment of colonial rule lay deep in African society. Traditions of autocratic governance, paternalism and dirigism were embedded in the institutions the new leaders inherited.

The most difficult task facing Africa's new leaders was to weld into nations a variety of different peoples, speaking different languages and at different stages of political and social development. The new states of Africa were not 'nations'. They possessed no ethnic, class or ideological cement to hold them together, no strong historical and social identities upon which to build. For a relatively brief period, the anti-colonial cause had provided a unity of purpose. Nationalist leaders had successfully exploited a variety of grievances among the urban and rural populations to galvanise support for the cause. But once the momentum that they had achieved in their drive for independence began to subside, so other loyalties and ambitions came thrusting to the fore. 'We have all inherited from our former masters not nations but states,' remarked Félix Houphouët-Boigny, 'states that have within them extremely fragile links between ethnic groups.' Indeed, as the result of a long historical process during the colonial era, the engine of ethnic consciousness – the tribal factor – was more potent than it had ever been before.

African societies of the pre-colonial era – a mosaic of lineage groups, clans, villages, chiefdoms, kingdoms and empires – were formed often with shifting and indeterminate frontiers and loose allegiances. Identities and languages shaded into one another. At the outset of colonial rule, administrators and ethnographers endeavoured to classify the peoples of Africa, sorting them out into what they called tribes, producing a whole new ethnic map to show the frontiers of each one. Colonial administrators wanted recognisable units they could control. 'Each tribe must be considered as a distinct unit,' a provincial commissioner in Tanganyika told his staff in 1926. 'Each tribe must be under a chief.' In many cases, tribal labels were imposed on hitherto undifferentiated groups. The chief of a little-known group

in Zambia once ventured to remark: 'My people were not Soli until 1937 when the Bwana D.C. [District Commissioner] told us we were.' When local government was established under colonial rule, it was frequently aligned with existing 'tribal areas'. Entirely new ethnic groups emerged, like the Abaluyia or Kalenjin of western Kenya, formed from two congeries of adjacent peoples. Some colonial rulers used tribal identities to divide their subjects, notably the British in southern Sudan and the French in Morocco. Chiefs, appointed by colonial authorities as their agents, became the symbol of ethnicity.

Missionary endeavour added to the trend. In the process of transcribing hitherto unwritten languages into written forms, missionaries reduced Africa's innumerable dialects to fewer written languages, each helping to define a tribe. The effect was to establish new frontiers of linguistic groups and to strengthen the sense of solidarity within them. Yoruba, Igbo, Ewe, Shona and many others were formed in this way.

Missionaries were also active in documenting local customs and traditions and in compiling 'tribal' histories, all of which were incorporated into the curricula of their mission schools, spreading the notion of ethnic identity. African teachers followed suit. In southern Nigeria, young men from Ilesha and Ijebu who attended school in Ibadan or Oyo were taught to write a standard form of the Yoruba language and to identify themselves as Yoruba – a term previously reserved for subjects of the Oyo empire. As mission stations were largely responsible for providing education, educational achievement tended to depend on their locality and thus to follow ethnic lines.

Migration from rural areas to towns reinforced the process. Migrants gravitated to districts where fellow tribesmen lived, hoping through tribal connections to find housing, employment or a niche in trading markets. A host of welfare associations sprang up – 'home-boy' groups, burial and lending societies, cultural associations, all tending to enhance tribal identity. Certain occupations – railwaymen, soldiers, petty traders – became identified with specific groups which tried to monopolise them.

It was in towns that ethnic consciousness and tribal rivalry grew apace. The notion of a single Igbo people was formed in Lagos among the local 'Descendants' Union'. The Yoruba, for their part, founded

the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* – a 'Society of Descendants of Oduduwa', the mythical ancestor of the Yoruba people; its aim was 'to unite the various clans and tribes in Yorubaland and generally create and actively foster the idea of a single nationalism throughout Yorubaland'. Ethnic groups became the basis of protest movements against colonial rule.

In the first elections in the postwar era in Africa, nationalist politicians started out proclaiming nationalist objectives, selecting party candidates regardless of ethnic origin. But as the number of elections grew, as the number of voters expanded, as the stakes grew higher with the approach of independence, the basis for campaigning changed. Ambitious politicians found they could win votes by appealing for ethnic support and by promising to improve government services and to organise development projects in their home area. The political arena became a contest for scarce resources. In a continent where class formation had hardly begun to alter loyalties, ethnicity provided the strongest political base. Politicians and voters alike came to rely on ethnic solidarity. For politicians it was the route to power. They became, in effect, ethnic entrepreneurs. For voters it was their main hope of getting a slice of government bounty. What they wanted was a local representative at the centre of power – an ethnic patron who could capture a share of the spoils and bring it back to their community. Primary loyalty remained rooted in tribal identity. Kinship, clan and ethnic considerations largely determined the way people voted. The main component of African politics became, in essence, kinship corporations.

The formation of one ethnic political party tended to cause the formation of others. In Nigeria the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, the first modern political organisation in West Africa launched in 1944, started out with the aim of establishing a broad-based national movement, but after tribal dissension it became an Eastern regional party, dominated by Igbo politicians. Yoruba politicians left to form the Action Group, building it around the nucleus of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. In Northern Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani, while disdaining the nationalist cause which Southerners espoused, nevertheless formed in 1949 the Northern People's Congress as a political offshoot of a predominantly Hausa cultural organisation, *Jam'yyar*

Mutanen Arewa – Association of the Peoples of the North. In a more extreme example, in the Belgian Congo rival tribal parties were launched by the score. In most countries, political leaders spent much time on 'ethnic arithmetic', working out alliances that would win them power and keep them there.

Few states escaped such divisions. In Tanganyika, Julius Nyerere was helped, as he himself acknowledged, by the fact that the population was divided among 120 tribal groupings, none of which was large enough or central enough to acquire a dominant position. He benefited too from the common use of the Swahili language, spread initially by Arab traders, then taken up by the Germans and the British as part of their education system. Other states had to contend with a variety of languages, sometimes numbering more than a hundred. In all, more than 2,000 languages were in use in Africa.

There was a widespread view at the time of independence that once the new states focused on nation-building and economic development, ethnic loyalties would wither away under the pressure of modernisation. 'I am confident,' declared Nigeria's first prime minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, during a 1959 debate over the motion to ask for independence, 'that when we have our own citizenship, our own national flag, our own national anthem, we shall find the flame of national unity will burn bright and strong.' Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea spoke in similar terms in 1959. 'In three or four years, no one will remember the tribal, ethnic or religious rivalries which, in the recent past, caused so much damage to our country and its population.' Yet African governments were dealing not with an anachronism from the past, but a new contemporary phenomenon capable of erupting with destructive force.

An example of the potentially explosive nature of ethnic rivalry occurred just before independence in the fertile green hills of Rwanda and Burundi, two ancient kingdoms in the heart of Africa, administered under Belgian rule as a joint colony called Ruanda-Urundi. The two kingdoms were both occupied by a Hutu majority and a Tutsi minority, speaking the same language, sharing the same customs and living intermingled on the same hillsides. In the pre-colonial era the royal elite, chiefs and aristocracy of the Tutsi, a cattle-owning people

numbering no more than 15 per cent of the population of both territories, had established themselves as a feudal ruling class over the Hutu who were predominantly agriculturalists. In Rwanda the Hutu were required to submit to bonded labour service – *uburetwa* – from which all Tutsi were exempt. Discrimination between Tutsi and Hutu was part of everyday life. By appearance, Tutsis tended to be taller and slimmer than their Hutu neighbours, with longer faces and narrower noses. But generations of intermarriage, migration and occupational change had blurred the distinction. Hutu and Tutsi alike moved from one group to the other. Some Hutu were wealthy in cattle; some Tutsi farmed. Though ethnic divisions were well entrenched, what mattered as much as ethnicity was status. Beneath the pinnacle of the royal elite, relationships were determined by a pyramid of immensely complex pecking orders. Central rule in Rwanda was based on a tripartite structure – Tutsi cattle chiefs, Hutu land chiefs and a separate category of army chiefs, all appointed by the king. Loyalty to the Tutsi kings was widely shared.

Under colonial rule, first by the Germans then by the Belgians, more rigid definitions were imposed. German officials in the early 1900s identified Hutu and Tutsi as distinct and separate ethnic groups. With few staff of their own on the ground, they relied on the Tutsi as the ruling aristocracy to enforce control, enabling them to extend their hegemony over the Hutu.

The Belgians went further. In the 1920s they introduced a system of identity cards specifying the tribe to which a holder belonged. In cases where appearance was indecisive or proof of ancestry was lacking, a simple formula was applied: those with ten cows or more were classified as Tutsi, those with fewer were Hutu. The identity cards made it virtually impossible for Hutus to become Tutsi.

Belgian officials established a Tutsi bureaucracy and favoured Tutsi education. The Catholic Church was especially influential in promoting the Tutsi cause. Its resident bishop, Monsignor Léon Classe, who had arrived in Rwanda as a simple priest in 1907, was regarded as a leading expert and consulted regularly by the Belgian authorities. What Classe envisaged, as he made quite clear, was a medieval-style Rwanda, with a ruling Tutsi aristocracy and a Hutu peasantry,

working hand-in-hand with the colonial administration and with the Catholic Church guiding the whole enterprise. When the Catholic Church was given responsibility for the entire educational system in the early 1930s, government and church officials were in full agreement on what was required. 'You must choose the Batusi [Tutsi],' Monsignor Classe, told missionaries, 'because the government will probably refuse Hutu teachers . . . In the government the positions in every branch of the administration, even the unimportant ones, will be reserved henceforth for young Batusi.' The Hutu were not entirely disregarded, but a streaming system ensured that Tutsi were given the best opportunities in education. Primary schools were segregated. The only Hutu able to escape relegation to the labouring masses were those few permitted to study in seminaries. In the forced labour regime that the Belgians ran, developing it from the previous Tutsi system, Tutsi were employed as taskmasters over Hutu labourers. Tutsi chiefs were used to enforce order and discipline. By the late 1930s the Belgians had made ethnicity the defining feature of ordinary life in both Rwanda and Burundi. Whatever sense of collective identity had previously existed in the two kingdoms shrivelled and died.

The reaction in Rwanda came during the 1950s. A period of Hutu political agitation culminated in 1957 in the publication of a *BaHutu Manifesto*, written by a group of nine Hutu intellectuals, all former seminarists, which challenged the entire administrative and economic system in Rwanda. The central problem, said the authors, was 'the political monopoly of one race, the Tutsi race, which, given the present structural framework, becomes a social and economic monopoly'. They demanded measures to achieve 'the integral and collective promotion of the Hutu'. Church leaders, including Tutsi priests, were prominent in advocating reform. Belgian officials conceded that 'the Hutu-Tutsi question posed an undeniable problem' and proposed that official usage of the terms 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' – on identity cards, for example – should be abolished. The Hutu, however, rejected the proposal, wanting to retain their identifiable majority; abolition of identity cards would prevent 'the statistical law from establishing the reality of facts'. The idea gained ground that majority rule meant Hutu rule. Ethnic obsession took hold among the small stratum of the

educated elite. Political parties were formed on an ethnic basis. Hutu parties campaigned for the abolition of the Tutsi monarchy and the establishment of a republic.

The first violence erupted in November 1959, after a Hutu sub-chief, a prominent political activist, was beaten up by a band of Tutsi militants. In what became known as 'the wind of destruction', roving bands of Hutu went on the rampage, attacking Tutsi authorities, burning Tutsi homes and looting Tutsi property. Hundreds of Tutsi were killed; thousands fled into exile. The terminology used by Hutu extremists for the killing was 'work'.

At this critical juncture the Belgians decided to change sides. A Belgian army officer, Colonel Guy Logiest, appointed to take charge of Rwanda as Special Resident, believed it necessary to be 'partial against the Tutsis' in order to reconstruct the system. In a report to Brussels he declared: 'Because of the force of circumstances, we have to take sides. We cannot remain neutral and passive'. Recalling his mission in a book published in Brussels in 1988, Logiest spoke of his desire 'to put down the arrogance and expose the duplicity of a basically oppressive and unjust aristocracy'.

In early 1960 Logiest began dismissing Tutsi chiefs, appointing Hutus in their places. The new chiefs immediately organised the persecution of Tutsis in districts they controlled, precipitating a mass exodus in which some 130,000 Rwandan Tutsi sought refuge in the Congo, Burundi, Uganda and Tanganyika. In local government elections, held in June and July 1960 amid continuing violence, the all-Hutu *Parti du Mouvement de l'Émancipation Hutu* – Parmehutu – won 2,390 out of 3,125 council seats, gaining a dominant position in almost every commune. The Belgian authorities then colluded with Hutu leaders in organising what was subsequently described as a 'legal coup'. In January 1961 Rwanda's newly elected *bourgmestres* (mayors) and councillors were summoned to a meeting at Gitarama, the birthplace of the Hutu leader, Grégoire Kayibanda, where they declared the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic. Legislative elections in September confirmed Hutu supremacy. But a report by the United Nations Trusteeship Commission warned in 1961: 'The developments of these last eighteen months have brought

about the racial dictatorship of one party . . . An oppressive system has been replaced by another one . . . It is quite possible that some day we will witness violent reactions on the part of the Tutsi.'

On 1 July 1962 Rwanda became an independent state under a republican government led by Grégoire Kayibanda, a politician devoted to the cause of Hutu hegemony and determined to keep the Tutsi in a subordinate role. On the same day Burundi gained its independence with seemingly more stable prospects. Though there were similar tensions between Tutsi and Hutu, the Tutsi monarchy in Burundi survived. Yet Burundi and Rwanda alike were to endure a series of massive upheavals.

9

THE FIRST DANCE OF FREEDOM

As founding fathers, the first generation of nationalist leaders – Nkrumah, Nasser, Senghor, Houphouët-Boigny, Sékou Touré, Keita, Olympio, Kenyatta, Nyerere, Kaunda, Banda – all enjoyed great prestige and high honour. They were seen to personify the states they led and swiftly took advantage to consolidate their control. From the outset, most sought a monopoly of power; most established a system of personal rule and encouraged personality cults. 'The president personifies the Nation as did the Monarch of former times his peoples,' explained Senghor. 'The masses are not mistaken who speak of the "reign" of Modibo Keita, Sékou Touré and Houphouët-Boigny, in whom they see, above all, the elected of God through the people.'

Kwame Nkrumah's ambition soared above all others. Having successfully challenged the might of British rule in Africa and opened the way to independence for a score of other African countries, he saw himself as a messianic leader destined to play an even greater role. At home he wanted to transform Ghana into an industrial power, a centre of learning, a model socialist society which other states would want to emulate. He also dreamed of making Africa a giant, in economic, political and military terms, as united and as powerful as the United States or the Soviet Union, with himself as leader. Believing

himself to possess unique ability, capable of achieving for Africa what Marx and Lenin had done for Europe and Mao Tse-tung for China, he created an official ideology, calling it Nkrumahism, and built an ideological institute in his name costing millions of dollars. A staff of mostly left-wing expatriates worked there diligently, constructing elaborate political theories. But despite their efforts, 'Nkrumahism', though frequently quoted in public, was never clearly defined. When it was launched in 1960, 'Nkrumahism' was defined as a 'complex political and social philosophy' to which Nkrumah would add from time to time. A few years later it was said to be based on 'scientific socialism'. After four years of study, the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute announced:

> Nkrumahism is the ideology for the New Africa, independent and absolutely free from imperialism, organised on a continental scale, founded upon the conception of One and United Africa, drawing its strength from modern science and technology and from the traditional African belief that the free development of each is conditioned by the free development of all.

Gamal Abdel Nasser controlled Egypt through what was known as 'Nasserism'. Nasserism was neither a movement nor an ideology but a system of personal rule. The organisation of the state and its policy was determined by his will alone. All power was concentrated in his hands; every aspect of government came under his remit. He decreed the nationalisation of industry, transport, financial institutions, large hotels and department stores and introduced central planning of the economy, all enhancing his personal ability to control the state. 'He managed to abolish the difference between state and government, between those two and himself,' his biographer, Professor P. J. Vatikiotis, observed. 'Instead of separating the powers of government, he fused them.' His control extended to the media, trade unions, professional syndicates, youth organisations and religious institutions. Some Egyptians likened him to a modern Pharaoh.

Personal loyalty was what Nasser required from his officials. 'The Council of Ministers under his chairmanship became an audience,'

recalled Fathi Radwan, one of Nasser's ministers. 'Ministers listened dutifully and took down notes, received instructions. If one of them wished to comment or speak he had to ask his permission.' He tolerated no opposition, crushing communists and Muslim Brethren alike, relying on his secret police – the *mukhabarat* – to track down dissenters. 'Their main task – and source of livelihood – comprised in suggesting to their chief, Nasser, the existence of conspiracies against him, and that they were protecting him from them,' recalled another of Nasser's ministers, Dr Abdul Wahhab Al-Burullusi. Thousands of his opponents suffered detention in concentration camps at the hands of the *mukhabarat*. Many others lived in constant fear of them. Writing from prison in October 1965, Kamal El-Din Hussein, one of the original group of conspirators, remarked: 'I regret the revolution has been transformed into one of terror. No person is certain of his fate once he utters a free opinion.' The paradox was that despite running a police state, Nasser was still idolised by the masses.

In Guinea, Sékou Touré deified himself in a similar fashion. His main title was *Guide Suprème de le Révolution*, but he also liked to be known as 'The Great Son of Africa'; 'The Terror of International Imperialism, Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism'; and 'The Doctor of Revolutionary Sciences'. He was portrayed as an expert in every field, from agriculture to philosophy to soccer. More than twenty volumes of his speeches and reflections upon Guinea and African development were published and made compulsory reading. Students were required to memorise his long didactic poems to ensure success in their examinations. No major decision could be taken without his approval. He was the source of all authority, ruling by decree, intervening at his own discretion in legal cases and deciding the verdict when necessary in the name of the people. Guinea, wrote Lansiné Kaba, was 'a one-man show, in which Touré was the sole actor, while others danced, applauded or sang in his honour according to his whim'.

In Malawi, Hastings Banda's grip extended not just over the government and the economy of the country but even over the moral standards under which the population was required to live. Within weeks of independence in 1964, in a blaze of anger he dismissed ministers who dared to challenge his authority and went on to run

Malawi as his personal fiefdom, demanding not just obedience but servility. No other African leader imposed his personality with such vigour and force on the country he ruled. He insisted on directing even the smallest details of Malawi's affairs. 'Everything is my business. Everything,' he once said. 'The state of education, the state of our economy, the state of our agriculture, the state of our transport, everything is my business.' He was equally blunt about what power lay at his disposal. 'Anything I say is law. Literally law. It is a fact in this country.' He tolerated neither dissent nor criticism. No one was permitted to question his authority or his decisions. His quest for absolute control extended to interference with the courts. The strict puritan code which he so much admired became the nation's way of life. Men were forbidden to wear long hair; women were forbidden to wear short skirts or trousers. Films, foreign newspapers, magazines and books were strictly censored to prevent 'decadent' Western influences from harming the population. The position that Banda held in Malawi was sometimes likened to that of one of the old Maravi kings, complete with divine right and absolute authority.

In Côte d'Ivoire, Houphouët's 'reign' was more benign but similarly autocratic. An avid admirer of de Gaulle, he took control at independence in 1960 under a constitution which he himself had designed to ensure that one-man rule prevailed. He remained unapologetic about his style: 'Democracy is a system of government for virtuous people,' he said. 'In young countries such as our own, we need a chief who is all-powerful for a specified period of time.'

In one country after another, African leaders acted in contempt of constitutional rules and agreements they had sworn to uphold to enhance their own power. Constitutions were either amended or rewritten or simply ignored. Checks and balances were removed. Nkrumah's first amendment to the constitution – abolishing regional assemblies – was introduced only two years after independence.

In their quest for greater control, the device they commonly favoured was the one-party system. In some cases, one-party systems were achieved by popular verdict. In pre-independence elections in francophone Africa in 1959, Houphouët-Boigny's *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* won all seats in the Legislative Assembly; so too did

Senghor's *Union Progressiste Sénégalaise*, Keita's *Union Soudanaise* in Mali and Bourguiba's *Neo-Destour* in Tunisia. In East Africa, Nyerere's Tanganyika African National Union won all open seats in parliament in 1960; and in the 1964 elections, Banda's Malawi Congress Party also swept the board. In other cases, one-party systems were arranged by negotiation, whereby opposition parties accepted a merger with ruling parties. Sékou Touré's *Parti Démocratique de Guinée* won fifty-six seats in Legislative Assembly elections in 1957, and the following year he arranged for opposition politicians to join the PDG. In Kenya in 1964, Kenyatta persuaded opposition politicians from the Kenya African Democratic Union to cross the floor and take up prominent posts in the government. There were many other examples, however, of where one-party systems were imposed simply by suppressing opposition parties – as in Ghana, Niger, Dahomey, Togo, Mauritania, Central African Republic and Upper Volta (Burkina Faso).

Not all attempts to impose one-party rule were successful. When Abbé Fulbert Youlou announced plans to install a one-party system in Congo-Brazzaville in 1963, trade unions and youth groups took to the streets in anti-government demonstrations which lasted for three days. A former Catholic priest, Youlou ran a regime that was notoriously corrupt. Most ministers were heavily involved in their own business affairs, setting up ventures like bars and nightclubs in Brazzaville and running diamond-smuggling rackets. A television station was established for three hundred sets. Critics of his regime were dealt with vigorously. Once when the opposition tabled a motion of censure against his government in the National Assembly, Youlou pulled out a revolver from under his soutane and pointed it at the deputies responsible. When demonstrations against his plans for a one-party system erupted, Youlou telephoned de Gaulle pleading with him to order French troops stationed in Congo-Brazzaville to intervene, but de Gaulle refused. Congolese army officers went to Youlou to demand his resignation. He signed, then fell into a faint and, upon recovering, telephoned de Gaulle. '*J'ai signé, mon général*,' he announced tearfully. He later sought exile in France, but was turned away and settled in Madrid.

There were many arguments used to justify one-party systems.

New states facing so many challenges, it was said, needed strong governments which were best served by concentrating authority with a single, nation-wide party. Only a disciplined mass party, centrally directed, was an effective means to overcome tribal divisions, to inspire a sense of nationhood and to mobilise the population for economic development. Some proponents of one-party systems held an ideological conviction that an elite political party was the supreme instrument of society. Multi-party politics, it was argued, usually deteriorated into a competition between tribal blocs and alliances. Since opposition parties tended to rely on tribal groups for support, they undermined the cause of nation-building and weakened the efficiency of the state. They were thus a luxury which new states with limited resources could ill afford. Some African leaders argued that opposition parties were in fact alien to African practice and that a one-party system, if properly managed, provided a democratic outlet just as adequate as did a multi-party system.

Julius Nyerere was one of the most eloquent advocates of a one-party system. He maintained that the two-party system had evolved in the West as a result of competition between socio-economic classes. But since African society was essentially classless, there was no basis for two parties, and parliamentary systems of the kind bequeathed to Africa by Europe's departing colonial powers were misplaced.

> The British and American tradition of a two-party system is a reflection of the society from which it evolved. The existence of distinct classes and the struggle between them resulted in the growth of this system. In Africa, the Nationalist movements were fighting a battle for freedom from foreign domination, not from domination by any ruling class of our own. Once the foreign power – 'the other Party' – has been expelled, there is no ready-made division among the people. The Nationalist movements must inevitably form the first Governments of the new states. Once a free Government is formed, its supreme task lies ahead – the building up of the country's economy. This, no less than the struggle against colonialism, calls for the maximum united effort by the whole country if it is to succeed. There can be no room for difference or division.

Opposition parties, said Nyerere, were no more than a distraction, with dangerous potential. 'The only voices to be heard in "opposition" are those of a few irresponsible individuals who exploit the very privileges of democracy – freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom to criticise – in order to deflect the government from its responsibilities to the people by creating problems of law and order.'

> There can only be one reason for the formation of such [opposition] parties in a country like ours – the desire to imitate the political structures of a totally dissimilar society. What is more, the desire to imitate where conditions are not suitable for imitation can easily lead us into trouble. To try and import the idea of a parliamentary opposition into Africa may very likely lead to violence – because the opposition parties will tend to be regarded as traitors by the majority of our people, or, at best, it will lead to the trivial manoeuvrings of "opposing" groups whose time is spent in the inflation of artificial difference into some semblance of reality "for the sake of preserving democracy". The latter alternative, I repeat, is an over-sophisticated pastime which we in Africa cannot afford to indulge in; our time is too short and there is too much serious work to be done.

Moreover, claimed Nyerere, a one-party system could offer an even better framework for democracy than a multi-party system which resulted in endless bouts of political warfare. 'Where there is one party – provided it is identified with the nation as a whole – the foundations of democracy can be firmer, and the people can have more opportunity to exercise a real choice, than when you have two or more parties.'

In practice, one-party systems were used by politicians in power mostly to suppress any sign of opposition to their regimes and to keep themselves in office. Mass parties, once founded upon popular support, simply withered away, leaving, as Frantz Fanon remarked, nothing but the shell, the name, the emblem and the motto; they served only as the stronghold of a privileged few.

Stage by stage, African leaders accumulated ever greater personal power, spreading the tentacles of their control into the further reaches of society. They preferred to rule not through constitutions or through state institutions like parliament but by exercising vast systems of patronage. Parliaments, where they survived, were packed with supporters, chosen for their known obedience. Government bureaucracies were staffed by party loyalists. Trade unions and farmers' organisations were subordinated to the interests of government. The press existed merely as an outlet for government propaganda. Political debate became a matter of platitudes and praise-songs, no longer taken seriously. 'System? What system?' retorted President Bourguiba, when asked about Tunisia's political system. 'I am the system!'

The opportunities for patronage available to African leaders provided them with the 'cement' they needed to consolidate their control. At their disposal were thousands of appointments not only to cabinets, parliaments and bureaucracies, but to new parastatal organisations set up to boost the development of industry and agriculture. In most countries, government was the largest employer, the chief dispenser of jobs and benefits. Many appointments were made not on the basis of merit but of party loyalty or tribal affiliation. The awarding of contracts and licences and the allocation of development projects – roads, schools and hospitals – were influenced by similar considerations. Decisions were often taken as a result of personal ties and obligations or for reasons of personal profit. Fanon likened the leaders of one-party states to 'chairmen of the board of a society of impatient profiteers'. The lines of patronage radiated out from presidencies to regions, districts and villages. At each level, 'big men' worked the system, providing followers and friends with jobs, contracts and favours in exchange for political support; in order to retain support, they had to ensure the distribution of rewards. Throughout Africa, the politics of patronage and patrimonial rule became a common political pattern.

A small elite – no more than about 3 per cent of the population – used their position to great personal advantage. Independence had given them control of land registration, credit, taxation, marketing boards, public investment, import requirements and negotiations with

private capital. Politicians lost no opportunity to accumulate wealth and privilege. Many were more preoccupied with their own business deals, with contracts, commissions and quick profits, than with government affairs. Indeed, political activity was seen by ambitious Africans as the most direct way of securing wealth and social standing.

In his study of one-party states in West Africa published in 1965, Arthur Lewis, a distinguished West Indian economist, observed:

> Much of what is going on in some of these countries is fully explained in terms of the normal lust of human beings for power and wealth. The stakes are high. Office carries power, prestige and money. The power is incredible. Most West African Ministers consider themselves to be above the law, and are treated as such by the police. Decision-making is arbitrary. Decisions which more advanced countries leave to civil servants and technicians are in those countries made by Ministers, often without consulting expert advice. The prestige is also incredible. Men who claim to be democrats in fact behave like emperors. Personifying the state, they dress themselves up in uniforms, build themselves palaces, bring all other traffic to a standstill when they drive, hold fancy parades and generally demand to be treated like Egyptian Pharaohs. And the money is also incredible. Successful politicians receive, even if only elected to Parliament, salaries two to four times more than they previously earned, plus per diem allowances, travelling expenses and other fringe benefits. There are also vast pickings in bribes, state contracts, diversion of public funds to private uses, and commissions of various sorts. To be a Minister is to have a lifetime's chance to make a fortune.

Civil servants filling the posts vacated by departing colonial officials insisted on the same high salaries and perks – pensions, housing allowances and cheap loans. Government budgets soon became burdened with the huge cost of salaries, allowances and presidential expenses. Writing in 1962, the respected French agronomist René Dumont noted that a deputy in Gabon was paid more than a British Member of Parliament and earned in six months as much as the average

peasant did in thirty-six years. He went on: 'As for the Gabonese presidency, parliament and ministers, with all their supposedly useful trips, it probably represents, in relation to the national income of the country, more than the cost to France of the court of Louis XVI in 1788.' Ministers in Nigeria were rewarded not only with princely salaries but rent-free, air-conditioned residences, replete with stewards, gardeners and drivers, generous car allowances, entertainment budgets, free telephone and free electricity. Senegal's budget for 1964 showed that 47 per cent of the total was allocated to civil service salaries. In the Central African Republic and in Côte d'Ivoire the figure was 58 per cent; in Congo-Brazzaville, 62 per cent; in Dahomey, 65 per cent. A report on Zambia noted: 'Expensive houses built for the emergent elite swallow up the bulk of urban housing investments. Thus the construction of 1,710 high- and medium-cost dwellings and 1,307 servants' quarters absorbed 77.2 per cent of the amount spent on urban housing in 1974. Another 13.4 per cent went into the building of 1,266 low-cost units, 4.7 per cent into 2,000 houses on serviced plots, and the remaining 4.7 per cent into 9,905 shanty houses.'

The wealth the new elite acquired was ostentatiously displayed in grand houses, luxury cars and lavish lifestyles – 'platinum life', it was called in Abidjan. In East Africa a new tribe appeared, cynically known as the WaBenzi, in description of rich politicians, officials and businessmen who drove about in expensive Mercedes-Benz cars. Though ministers in parliament and at public meetings still issued promises about social equality and referred sympathetically to the needs of the common man, the gap between the rich elite living in plush villas, elegant apartment buildings and town houses, and the masses surviving in slums and *bidonvilles* on the fringes of towns became ever more noticeable.

A study of trade figures of fourteen francophone states in 1964 showed that the amount spent on importing alcoholic drinks was six times higher than that spent on importing fertiliser. Half as much was spent on perfume and cosmetic imports as on machine tools. Almost as much went on importing petrol for privately owned cars as on the purchase of tractors; and five times as much on importing cars as on agricultural equipment.

Equally profligate was government spending on prestige projects such as presidential palaces, conference halls, airports, airlines, hotels, grand highways and embassies abroad. The most glaring examples of lavish spending occurred when governments competed for the privilege of holding the annual conference of the Organisation of African Unity, an event renowned for producing little else than bombast and rhetoric from assembled heads of state. Nkrumah set the precedent in 1965 by building a palace containing sixty luxury suites and a banqueting hall capable of seating 2,000 guests. Others followed suit. President Omar Bongo of Gabon, a man much given to gestures of personal grandeur, ordered the construction of several seafront hotels in Libreville especially for an OAU summit and a new palace for himself with sliding walls and doors, rotating rooms and a private nightclub, all costing well over $200 million. President Siaka Stevens spent two-thirds of Sierra Leone's national budget to host an OAU summit meeting. Togo spent $120 million – half of the national budget – on building a thirty-storey hotel and conference centre in Lomé, which included fifty-two presidential suites, in the hope of persuading the OAU to transfer its permanent headquarters from Addis Ababa to Lomé. But the OAU did not agree to the move.

The blight of corruption, meanwhile, spread ever further, most notably in West Africa at first, then to other areas. In many parts of West Africa there had been a long tradition of 'dash' – of gift-giving for services rendered. The bigger the man, the bigger the 'dash' for the favour received. The 'Big Man' became an accepted feature of West African life, a patron fostering his followers by his fame and fortune. Until independence, the opportunities for self-enrichment were limited; the principal beneficiaries of colonial rule were the white elite, officials and businessmen, enjoying a lifestyle which the black elite aspired to emulate but were largely prevented from reaching. Independence unlocked the floodgates. Politicians used their public office to extract 'commissions' at every available opportunity. The bigger the politician, the bigger the political or business manipulation. The common cut on government contracts in West Africa was 10 per cent. Foreign firms and local businessmen alike budgeted for the extra 10 per cent that had to be paid either to politicians or to the ruling

party to succeed. In numerous cases, prominent politicians simply looted the state treasury, transferring money to their private accounts; loans and debts to the state were routinely overlooked.

The practice of bribery and embezzlement spread from top to bottom, from politicians to tax collectors, customs officers, policemen, postal clerks and dispensary assistants. It affected everything from job applications to licences, scholarships, foreign exchange and the location of factories. Writing about West Africa in 1961, Frantz Fanon observed: 'Scandals are numerous, ministers grow rich, their wives doll themselves up, the members of parliament feather their nests and there is not a soul down to the simple policeman or the customs officer who does not join in the great procession of corruption.' In time, bribery and corruption became 'a way of life', accepted as a means of getting by, earning a living, obtaining a service or avoiding hassle.

In Ghana, Nkrumah's ministers were well known for pushing through contracts with foreign corporations for a 10 per cent fee. 'It was the order of the day,' one of Nkrumah's officials recalled, 'for every minister connected with a government contract to take a cut for himself.' Ministers flaunted their wealth openly. 'Socialism doesn't mean that if you've made a lot of money, you can't keep it,' remarked Krobo Edusei in 1961. Edusei gained particular notoriety when his wife ordered a £3,000 gold-plated bed from a London store. In the ensuing scandal, she was obliged to send it back. Edusei confessed in later years to owning fourteen houses, a luxurious beach house, a long lease on a London flat, several expensive cars and six different bank accounts.

Nkrumah himself was engaged in the business of collecting bribes, setting up a special company, the National Development Corporation, to facilitate the handling of bribes from foreign businessmen and others seeking government contracts. With control of companies like the National Development Corporation and by using government funds for his personal use when necessary, Nkrumah became a wealthy man. In one example, the price paid by the government for properties purchased from a Greek businessman was deliberately inflated so that £1 million could be turned back to Nkrumah for his own use.

In Nigeria the first years of independence became an orgy of power

being turned into profit. The advantages of political office were used at every opportunity by Nigeria's leaders to accumulate empires of wealth and patronage with which to improve both their personal and their party's fortunes. Using public resources, party and government bosses were able to reward their supporters and friends with jobs, contracts, loans, scholarships, public amenities; indeed any favour that came within their purview. Power itself in effect came to rest on the ability to bribe. Parties, once in power, moved quickly to amass a fortune from public funds large enough for them to be able to win the next election; a network of banks, businesses and financial structures were set up to support this objective. Parties which did not command state resources simply stood no chance of winning elections. Between 1958 and 1962, for example, the Action Group government in Nigeria's Western Region invested about £6.5 million in the National Investment and Properties Company, a business which had four party leaders as its directors. In the period between April 1959 and November 1961, one of the directors gave £3.7 million to the Action Group party in the form of 'special donations'. Northern politicians ran a similar spoils system. A study of thirty-nine investment and loan projects of the Northern Nigeria Development Corporation undertaken in 1966 showed that the biggest borrowers had been the big men of the Northern government.

The misuse of public funds in Nigeria had deep roots. During the colonial era, many Nigerians regarded government institutions as *olu oyibo* – whiteman's business, an alien system that could be plundered when necessary. 'Government's business is no man's business,' ran a popular Nigerian saying. Explaining the practice, Eghosa Osaghae, a Nigerian academic, commented: 'There was thus nothing seriously wrong with stealing state funds, especially if they were used to benefit not only the individual but also members of his community. Those who had the opportunity to be in government were expected to use the power and resources at their disposal to advance private and communal interests.' The same attitude prevailed with the coming of independence. The state was regarded as a foreign institution that could be used for personal and community gain without any sense of shame or need for accountability. Plunderers of the government

treasury were often excused on the grounds that they had only 'taken their share'. What added to the problem was the notion that the government was, in effect, a reservoir of 'free money'.

Every facet of Nigerian society was eventually permeated by corruption. A senior civil servant summarised: 'You bribe to get your child into school; you pay to secure your job and also continue to pay in some cases to retain it; you pay ten per cent of any contract obtained; you dash the tax officer to avoid paying taxes; you pay a hospital doctor or nurse to get proper attention; you pay the policeman to evade arrest. This catalogue of shame can continue without end.'

It was often said that, because of the internal tensions and rivalries afflicting most African states, only strong government could provide the stability they needed to develop and prosper. Yet in practice, strong governments of the kind employed in Africa – whether personal dictatorships or one-party systems – rarely ensured either political stability or effective administration. Once in power, African leaders became preoccupied with staying in power, employing whatever means were necessary. Much depended on their ability to operate patrimonial systems that kept key supporters loyal to them. Political activity was reduced to 'palace politics', an arena for ruling elites to manoeuvre for their own interests. Rival factions competed for ascendancy. Conspiracies and plots proliferated. The common aim was to gain political office and the power and patronage that went with it. Fanon observed: 'The men at the head of affairs spent two-thirds of their time in watching the approaches and trying to anticipate the dangers which threaten them, and the remaining one-third of their time in working for their country.' Ministers were regularly rotated and reshuffled to keep them off-balance and to prevent them from becoming a threat.

In dealing with political opponents, African leaders resorted readily to arbitrary measures – arrest, detention and other forms of harassment. Within a year of independence, Nkrumah introduced laws allowing the government to detain anyone without trial for up to five years. In theory, the Preventive Detention Act of 1958 and other similar measures that followed were to be employed only at times of

emergency; in practice, they were used to silence critics and opponents and even, in some cases, to pay off petty scores. In 1958 thirty-eight people were detained; in 1961, 311; in 1963, 586, in 1965, some 1,200. Among the victims was Dr Danquah, the doyen of the old-guard elite for whom Nkrumah had worked on his return from London. He died in prison in 1965, spending the last year of his life in solitary confinement, a sick and disheartened man, deprived of adequate medical treatment. In Malawi, Banda was characteristically blunt about his intentions: 'If, to maintain the political stability and efficient administration, I have to detain ten thousand or one hundred thousand, I will do it,' he said in 1965. Opposition parties across Africa were routinely banned on grounds of 'national security'; government opponents were routinely imprisoned. Leaders like Nkrumah and Banda relied on fear as an instrument of control.

When the first upheavals occurred, they appeared as random episodes. In 1958, after two years of political squabbling in Sudan, army generals took control, citing the need for 'stable and clean administration'. In 1963 Togo's president, Sylvanus Olympio, was shot dead in Lomé by a group of ex-servicemen led by a 25-year-old sergeant, Etienne Eyadéma, in revenge for refusing to employ them in the Togolese army. The following year, armed African gangs in Zanzibar incited an uprising against the Arab ruling elite, forcing the sultan to flee in his yacht. Some 5,000 Arabs were killed, thousands more interned, their houses, property and possessions seized at will. A revolutionary council, led by Abeid Karume, appealed for assistance from China, the Soviet Union and East Germany. Hundreds of communist technicians duly arrived, prompting Western fears that the island might become another 'Cuba'. On mainland Tanganyika, Nyerere, worried by the prospect of Zanzibar being drawn directly into the Cold War and anxious to exert a moderating influence, proposed a union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The union was subsequently named Tanzania.

Former French colonies seemed especially susceptible to disorder and civil strife. French army units stationed in Africa in accordance with defence cooperation agreements which France signed with almost all its former colonies were called upon time and again for help

in restoring public order or snuffing out anti-government plots. In 1962 French troops were used in Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon to break up fighting between each country's nationals after a disputed football match, while in Cameroon they were actively involved in suppressing the Bamileke rebellion which had erupted before independence. In Gabon in 1964 they were used by de Gaulle to reinstate President Léon M'Ba, who had been briefly deposed by an army coup d'état. A French spokesman explained that it was not possible 'for a few men carrying machine guns to be left free to seize a presidential palace at any time'.

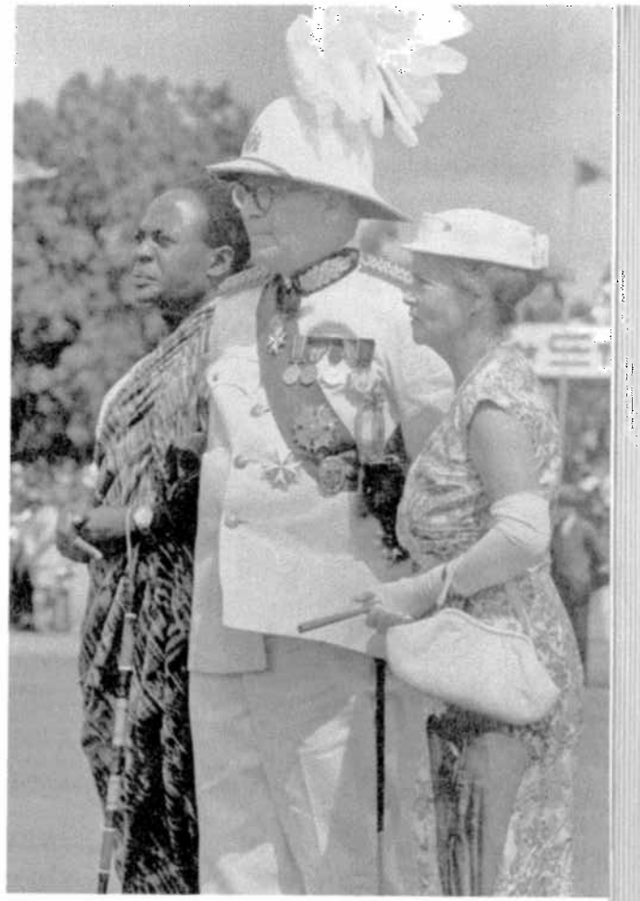
British troops in East Africa were called on in 1964 to suppress a series of army mutinies in Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya caused by grievances over pay, promotion and continued subordination to British officers. In the case of Tanganyika, soldiers in Dar es Salaam took control of the radio station, the airport, police stations and State House, Nyerere's residence and office, forcing him to go into hiding for two days.

From 1965, however, far from being random events, army interventions became increasingly frequent. In June Algeria's first leader, Ahmed Ben Bella, was deposed by Colonel Houari Boumédienne, his austere, secretive minister of defence, after a prolonged struggle for power. In November the Congo's army commander, General Mobutu, ousted President Kasa-Vubu and assumed the presidency for himself. A spate of coups followed in West Africa. In Dahomey (Benin) after a period of strikes, demonstrations and political deadlock, the army commander, Colonel Christophe Soglo, banned political activity altogether and set himself up in power. Ten days later, Colonel Jean-Bedel Bokassa seized power in the Central African Republic, citing the wholesale corruption prevalent amongst ministers and civil servants in David Dacko's one-party regime. Three days later on 2 January 1966, Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana stepped in to remove Upper Volta's president, Maurice Yaméogo, after crowds of demonstrators in Ouagadougou had implored the army to intervene. Like so many other African politicians of that era, Yaméogo had begun his regime popularly elected, determined to maintain an efficient administration and outspoken in his condemnation of

corruption. 'Government is not a gang of old pals having it good on nice food at the expense of the people,' he said. Yet the one-party regime he installed was notorious for corruption. While issuing ringing calls for sacrifice and austerity, Yaméogo lived in a luxuriously furnished presidential palace, ostentatiously married a 22-year-old beauty queen and indulged in other extravagances. He was subsequently convicted of embezzling more than £1 million.

None of the coups in Dahomey, the Central African Republic and Upper Volta attracted much attention. All were desperately poor countries, dependent on French subsidies for survival. Dahomey seemed to be encumbered with every imaginable difficulty: it was crowded, insolvent, beset by tribal divisions, huge debts, mass unemployment, frequent strikes and unending struggles for power among corrupt politicians. All three coup leaders were French army veterans who saw themselves in the tradition of de Gaulle and the Fifth French Republic, replacing ailing regimes with a salutary spell of military rule. 'We had been taught two things by the French army: discipline and how to save the state's finances,' said Lamizana after taking power. 'This lesson we have not forgotten.'

Yet the sequence of coups did not stop there. Like a contagion they spread across the continent, striking not only regimes that were inherently weak and unstable but bringing down even the giants of Africa – Ghana, Nigeria and even Ethiopia's Haile Selassie.



Farewell the Trumpets: Sir Charles Arden-Clarke standing with Kwame Nkrumah during Ghana's independence ceremonies in March 1957. Six years earlier, Nkrumah made the leap from convicted criminal to prime minister in the course of a day.

Dancing the Highlife: Kwame Nkrumah takes to the floor with Queen Elizabeth II at a ball at State House in 1961. At their first meeting at Buckingham Palace in 1957, Nkrumah was 'agog with excitement'.

13

THE COMING OF TYRANTS

In the first two decades of independence, there were some forty successful coups and countless attempted coups. In 1967 a 27-year-old Ghanaian army lieutenant, Sam Arthur, finding himself in temporary command of an armoured car unit, decided on an attempt to seize power because, he later confessed, he wanted to 'make history' by becoming the first lieutenant successfully to organise a coup. The coup attempt was given the name 'Operation Guitar Boy'. Arthur's armoured car unit drove into Accra but failed to gain control.

Many coups were accomplished without violence. Some countries even established a tradition of peaceful coups. In Dahomey – later renamed Benin – all six coups after independence were bloodless. In Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), where political activity was confined to such a small elite that incoming ministers tended to be related to those who had just been thrown out, politicians took pride in the fact that no one had ever been killed for political reasons. There was considerable disquiet, therefore, when, during the country's fourth coup in 1982, rival army factions clashed; shooting had never occurred before.

Whatever their real reasons for seizing power, coup leaders invariably stressed the strictly temporary nature of military rule. All they required, they said, was sufficient time to clear up the morass of

corruption, mismanagement, tribalism, nepotism and other assorted malpractices they claimed had prompted them to intervene and restore honest and efficient government and national integrity.

Some attempts were indeed made to return to civilian rule. The generals who overthrew Kwame Nkrumah stayed in power for only three years, taking no serious initiatives other than to increase the pay of soldiers, before handing back control to politicians. The next civilian government, however, encumbered by massive debts from the Nkrumah era, undermined by falling cocoa prices on the world market and pummelled by inflation and strikes, lasted for only three years before the army stepped in again. The next military ruler, General Ignatius Acheampong, ran a regime that was so corrupt that the army eventually removed him, installing another general. Just weeks before new elections were due to be held in 1979, a new phenomenon arose. A group of junior officers led by a 32-year-old air force officer, Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, seized power and embarked on what was described as a 'house-cleaning exercise'. Eight senior officers, including three former heads of state, were executed by firing squad; traders accused of profiteering were publicly flogged; the main market in Accra was razed to the ground; and impromptu People's Courts were set up to deal with scores of army officers and businessmen accused of corruption and malpractice. Rawlings then handed power over to the politicians. But only three years later he was back, staging a second coming in 1982. By then, after twenty-five years of mismanagement, plunder and corruption, Ghana had become a wasteland, a society that was crumbling in ruins at every level.

In Nigeria, after thirteen years of military government, General Olusegun Obasanjo presided over elections in 1979 reinstating civilian rule in what seemed to be propitious circumstances. Under a new constitution, Nigeria was divided into a federation of nineteen states, reducing the risk of polarisation between the country's three main ethnic groups and allowing some minority groups their own representation. The new federal structure consisted of four predominantly Hausa-Fulani states, four Yoruba, two Igbo and nine ethnic minority states. Furthermore, the constitution required political parties to demonstrate a broad national presence before they could qualify for

registration. Launching the new system, Obasanjo made clear he wanted no return to past practices. 'Political recruitment and subsequent political support which are based on tribal, religious and linguistic sentiments contributed largely to our past misfortune,' he said. 'They must not be allowed to spring up again. Those negative political attitudes like hatred, falsehood, intolerance and acrimony also contributed to our national tragedy in the past: they must not be continued.'

The election in 1979 was held in relatively calm conditions. It was won by the National Party of Nigeria, a northern-based party which drew support from Yoruba, Igbo and minority groups alike. Its leader, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, was a mild-mannered, unassuming and ascetic politician from a northern Fulani family, inclined to seek consensus. Though the election aroused the old ethnic tensions and rivalries that had wrecked the First Republic, they were more diffused than before. What seemed especially promising were Nigeria's economic prospects. By 1979 Nigeria had become the world's sixth largest oil producer, with revenues soaring to $24 billion a year.

Such riches, however, set off a vicious scramble for political office and the wealth that went with it. Access to the government spending process became the gateway to fortune. Patronage politics and corruption reached new heights. The press spoke of 'the politics of bickerings, mudslingings . . . lies, deceit, vindictiveness, strife and intolerance that are again creeping back into the country's political scene'. Addressing the annual conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association in 1981, Claude Ake observed:

> We are intoxicated with politics; the premium on political power is so high that we are prone to take the most extreme measures to win and to maintain political power . . .
>
> As things stand now, the Nigerian state appears to intervene everywhere and to own virtually everything including access to status and wealth. Inevitably a desperate struggle to win control of state power ensues since this control means for all practical purposes being all powerful and owning everything. Politics becomes warfare, a matter of life and death.

Foremost in the scramble were Shagari's associates. Renowned for venality, Shagari's administration was termed 'a government of contractors, for contractors and by contractors'. According to Larry Diamond, an American expert on Nigeria, 'the meetings of his cabinet and party councils became grand bazaars where the resources of the state were put up for auction'. The expected kickbacks on contracts rose to 50 per cent. An official enquiry in 1980 established that the cost of government contracts, inflated by kickbacks, was 200 per cent higher than in Kenya. Another enquiry found that the costs of construction in Nigeria were three times higher than in East Africa or North Africa and four times higher than in Asia.

When the oil boom came to an end, the economy plunged into recession, government projects were abandoned, unemployment soared. State governments became unable to pay teachers and civil servants or to purchase drugs for hospitals. But among the elite, the scramble went on. Visiting Nigeria on the eve of elections, Larry Diamond recorded: 'Everywhere one turned in 1983, the economy seemed on the edge of collapse. Still the politicians and contractors continued to bribe, steal, smuggle and speculate, accumulating vast illicit fortunes and displaying them lavishly in stunning disregard for public sensitivities.'

The elections in 1983 were conducted with such massive rigging and fraud that even hardened observers of Nigeria were astonished. Shagari, being the incumbent, won a second term, but as Nigeria descended into anarchy, the generals took control once more. 'Democracy had been in jeopardy for the past four years,' remarked a former army chief of staff. 'It died with the elections. The army only buried it.'

'The trouble with Nigeria,' wrote the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, in 1983, 'is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.'

★

There were a few military regimes that were noted for ruling effectively and for their efforts to root out corruption. In Togo, General Eyadéma, the former French army sergeant who had taken part in the assassination of President Olympio in 1963 and who seized power four years later, achieved a degree of stability rare in West Africa. In Niger, Colonel Seyni Kountché, after overthrowing Hamani Diori's corrupt regime in 1974, demanded efficiency and discipline and dealt swiftly with anyone who did not comply, caring little whether his regime was popular or not. But Africa's military rulers generally turned out to be no more competent, no more immune to the temptation of corruption, and no more willing to give up power than the regimes they had overthrown. And amid the hurly-burly of coups and revolutions that afflicted Africa came the tyrants.

In Zanzibar, Abeid Karume's regime, set up after the 1964 revolution against the ruling Arab elite, was bizarre and vindictive from the outset. A former merchant seaman, once proud to have served as an oarsman for the Sultan's ceremonial barge, Karume had little formal education but had gained popularity in the run-up to independence in 1963 as leader of the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), drawing support from African labourers, fishermen, farmhands and craftsmen occupying the lower rungs of Zanzibar society. In the last election before independence the ASP gained a majority of total votes cast, taking some 54 per cent, but won only a minority of seats. The result intensified deep-rooted racial animosity between Arab and African inhabitants, culminating in revolution and the emergence of Karume as head of a Revolutionary Council.

Once in power, Karume acted swiftly to crush the Arab community. The Revolutionary Council ordered arrests, imprisonment without trial, torture and execution as it saw fit and seized property and plantations at will. Thousands of Arabs were forcibly deported, packed into dhows, some old and unseaworthy, and sent to the Arabian Gulf. A British port official witnessed how the first three dhows were crammed with 450 Arab deportees given only 600 gallons of water for a journey expected to last anything from three to six weeks. A deserted, forlorn air settled over the narrow streets and

alleys of Stone Town, once filled with thriving shops and businesses. A correspondent wrote of the Arab community in 1965: 'They have lost the arrogance typical of their ruling days. Their shyness, their unobtrusive gait as they shuffle along the narrow lanes . . . gives the centre of the town the atmosphere of a ghetto.'

The prosperous Asian community, numbering 20,000, whom the sultan had encouraged to settle in Zanzibar, survived the revolution largely intact, but they too became the target of victimisation. Asian civil servants were abruptly sacked; their special schools were closed. Asians accused of minor offences were publicly flogged. When four young Persian girls refused to marry the elderly Karume, he ordered the arrest of ten of their male relatives for 'hindering the implementation of mixed marriages', and threatened to deport both the men and the hundred-odd members of the Persian Ithnasheri sect to which they belonged. President Nyerere prevailed on him to drop the charges, but a few months later, four other Persian girls were forced to marry elderly members of the Revolutionary Council; and eleven of their male relatives were ordered by a 'people's court' judge to be imprisoned and flogged. 'In colonial times the Arabs took African concubines without bothering to marry them,' said Karume. 'Now that we are in power, the shoe is on the other foot.'

The population at large was subjected to dictatorial control. Ruling by decree, Karume declared a one-party state and ordered all adult Zanzibaris to sign up as members of the ASP. A picture of Karume had to be displayed in every home. His security service, trained by East Germans, was given powers to arrest, torture and imprison without trial. Anyone who complained, even about food or consumer shortages, was liable to be denounced as an 'enemy of the revolution'. Karume also set up his own courts to deal with 'political' offences, appointing judges with powers to hand out death sentences from which the only right of appeal was to himself.

Distrustful of intellectuals and disliking experts, he soon fell out with Marxist members of the Revolutionary Council. Two former members accused of plotting against him were executed. Though given to making long rambling speeches, he never developed a coherent policy. More and more came to depend on his erratic and

capricious personality. He banned contraceptives; forced 'volunteers' to undertake farmwork; closed private clubs and abolished private business and trading enterprises. He expelled staff from the World Health Organisation and suspended malaria-control programmes on the grounds that Africans were 'malaria-proof', precipitating a huge surge in malaria.

His attitude towards government expenditure was equally bizarre. As a result of sharp increases in the price of cloves from 1965, Zanzibar gained substantial foreign reserves. But rather than spend the reserves on development projects or on much-needed imported goods like medicines, Karume preferred to hoard them. He insisted that Zanzibar should become self-sufficient. So while the exchequer bulged with funds, hospitals and clinics were chronically short of drugs, and basic supplies of rice, flour and sugar were rationed.

Karume's end came in 1972 when an army officer bearing a personal grudge shot him dead as he was relaxing with friends on the ground floor of party headquarters, drinking coffee and playing *bao*, a Swahili game akin to draughts. Large crowds turned out for his funeral, but they were noticeably subdued.

Jean-Bedel Bokassa's career as dictator of the Central African Republic combined not only extreme greed and personal violence but delusions of grandeur unsurpassed by any other African leader. His excesses included seventeen wives, a score of mistresses and an official brood of fifty-five children. He was prone to towering rages as well as outbursts of sentimentality; and he also gained a reputation for cannibalism.

From an early age, Bokassa's life was affected by violence. When he was six years old, his father, a petty chief in the village of Boubangui, was beaten to death at the local French prefect's office for protesting against forced labour. His distraught mother killed herself a week later, leaving a family of twelve children as orphans. Raised by a grandfather and educated at mission schools, he was constantly taunted by other children about the fate of his unfortunate parents. After completing secondary education, he enlisted in the French army, receiving twelve citations for bravery in combat during the Second World War and in Indo-China, including the Légion d'Honneur and

the Croix de Guerre. French officers, while recognising his courage under fire, also knew him to be a vain and capricious personality. But in the rush to independence, Bokassa gained rapid promotion. After serving as a sergeant for seventeen years, he left the French army in 1961 with the rank of captain and was given the task of helping to set up a national army. Three years later, at the age of forty-two, he was appointed chief of staff of the CAR's 500-man army.

Bokassa seized power on 31 December 1965, after learning that President David Dacko, a cousin, intended to replace him. Initially Bokassa's regime was not especially brutal. A former minister was beaten to death because he was deemed not to have shown enough respect to the army in the past. A former head of internal security was executed with extreme cruelty. Dacko was held in solitary confinement for three years. Political prisoners and inmates in Ngaragba prison in Bangui were routinely tortured or beaten on Bokassa's orders, their cries clearly audible to nearby residents. But otherwise Bokassa's preoccupation was to enjoy the pomp and power of office and to amass a fortune for himself.

He liked to describe himself as an 'absolute monarch' and forbade mention of the words democracy and elections. He promoted himself first to the rank of general and then to marshal, for 'supreme services to the State'. For public appearances he insisted on wearing so many medals and awards that special uniforms had to be designed for him to accommodate them. He delighted in naming after himself a host of schools, hospitals, clinics, roads and development projects as well as Bangui's new university. The front page of every school exercise book in the entire country was adorned with his picture. He adored the ceremony of state visits and toured the world a number of times, taking with him large retinues of assistants and distributing gifts of diamonds to his hosts.

His every whim became government policy. He himself held twelve ministerial portfolios and interfered in all the others. He controlled all decision-making, every promotion or demotion, every reward or punishment. Ministers were shuffled with monotonous regularity, as often as six times a year, to ensure that they did not become a threat. As the telephone system in Bangui hardly functioned, all

government offices were required to keep their radios switched on in order to hear intermittent instructions sent directly from the presidential office. Development projects were sometimes started with sudden enthusiasm, then abandoned when Bokassa's interest dwindled and the money was needed for another new idea. In a fit of pique about Bangui's poor airline connections, he decided that a national airline should be established: Air Centrafrique was duly set up, then promptly collapsed after a few flights.

Using government funds at will and fortunes he made from diamond and ivory deals, Bokassa acquired a whole string of valuable properties in Europe, including four chateaux in France, a fifty-room mansion in Paris, houses in Nice and Toulouse and a villa in Berne. He built a huge 'ancestral home' at Berengo, fifty miles from Bangui, and ordered a motorway to be built to it. The presidential estate there included private houses and apartments for foreign visitors furnished with reproduction antique furniture and gilt mirrors.

He permitted government ministers to make their own fortunes, occasionally chiding them for excessive greed, but willing to overlook corruption when it suited him. He also pampered the army with large salaries and sophisticated equipment and allowed officers to engage in commercial activities, recognising that his hold on power depended on the army's loyalty. Defence expenditure doubled between 1967 and 1969, and remained the second largest item in the budget. He packed the Presidential Guard with members of his own Mbaka tribe, mainly from his own village, providing them with the best uniforms and equipment. The government's finances were accordingly chaotic. No proper records were kept; budgets were ignored in favour of ad-hoc spending. Civil service salaries were often three or four months in arrears.

His sexual proclivities were voracious. He installed wives and mistresses in separate residences, leaving his palace several times each day to pay them visits, holding up traffic on the way. His principal wife, Catherine, a strikingly attractive woman whom he first spotted at the age of thirteen, lived in the Villa Nasser and owned a fashionable boutique in the city centre. Another favourite, La Roumaine, a blonde cabaret dancer whom he met on a visit to a nightclub in Bucharest,

lived in the Villa Kolongo, a palatial residence on the banks of the Oubangui river, surrounded by tropical gardens with courtyards, pools and fountains. Most of his wives tended to be known by their nationality; they included the German, the Swede, the Cameroonian, the Chinese, the Gabonese, the Tunisienne, and the Ivorienne. He was proud of his conquests. 'I did it like everyone,' he said in an interview in 1984. 'In Formosa, for example, I hustled the most beautiful woman in the country whom I later married. In Bucharest, the most beautiful woman in Romania; in Libreville, the most beautiful woman in Gabon . . . and so on. My criterion was beauty.'

He spent considerable effort tracking down a daughter named Martine born to a Vietnamese wife he married in Saigon in 1953. The first Martine to arrive in Bangui turned out to be an impostor. Nevertheless, to show his magnanimity, Bokassa adopted her. Then the real Martine was found working in a cement factory in Vietnam. Bokassa offered both of them in marriage via a kind of public auction. The eventual winners were a doctor and an army officer. Bokassa joyfully presided over a double wedding held in the cathedral, attended by several African heads of state. For the fake Martine, the marriage was to end in disaster. Her husband was involved in an assassination attempt on Bokassa and executed. A few hours after his death, she gave birth to a baby boy. The infant was taken away and murdered.

The French, keen to ensure that the Central African Republic remained within the French orbit, continued to underwrite Bokassa's regime with financial and military support. In wayward moods, Bokassa frequently picked quarrels with them, occasionally threatening to leave the French fold. In 1969 he announced a 'Move to the East' and proclaimed scientific socialism as the government's goal, expecting rewards to flow from the Eastern bloc, but when they failed to materialise, he reversed course. He abruptly converted to Islam, taking the name Salah Addin Ahmed Bokassa, hoping for Arab funds, but disappointed by the result soon reverted to the Catholic Church.

Despite the quarrels, Bokassa's attachment to France remained profound. He worshipped de Gaulle, addressing him as 'Papa' even after he had become president. The greatest moment of his life, he once said, was when he was decorated by de Gaulle in person. During de

Gaulle's funeral, he was inconsolable. '*Mon père, mon papa*,' he sobbed in front of de Gaulle's widow. 'I lost my natural father when I was a child. Now I have lost my adoptive father as well. I am an orphan again.' Bokassa also struck up a warm friendship with President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing – 'a dear cousin' – putting a wildlife reserve at his disposal for him to hunt every year and plying him with generous gifts of diamonds. Bokassa estimated that Giscard personally killed some fifty elephants and countless other animals during the 1970s.

It was during Giscard's presidency that the French indulged Bokassa's greatest *folie de grandeur*. In an attempt to emulate Napoleon, whom he described as his 'guide and inspiration', Bokassa declared the Central African Republic an empire and himself emperor of its 2 million subjects and made elaborate arrangements for his own coronation, using as a model the ceremony in which Napoleon had crowned himself emperor of France in 1804. From France he ordered all the trappings of a monarchy: a crown of diamonds; an imperial throne, shaped like a golden eagle; an antique coach; thoroughbred horses; coronation robes; brass helmets and breastplates for the Imperial Guard; tons of food, wine, fireworks and flowers for the festivities and sixty Mercedes-Benz cars for the guests.

The coronation took place on 4 December 1977 at the Palais des Sports Jean-Bedel Bokassa, on Bokassa Avenue, next to the Université Jean-Bedel Bokassa. To the strains of Mozart and Beethoven, wearing a twenty-foot-long red-velvet cloak trimmed with ermine, Bokassa crowned himself and then received as a symbol of office a six-foot diamond-encrusted sceptre.

The spectacle of Bokassa's lavish coronation, costing $22 million, in a country with few government services, huge infant mortality, widespread illiteracy, only 260 miles of paved roads and in serious economic difficulty, aroused universal criticism. But the French, who picked up most of the bill, curtly dismissed all such criticism. 'Personally,' said the French Cooperation Minister, Robert Galley, who represented Giscard at the coronation, 'I find it quite extraordinary to criticise what is to take place in Bangui while finding the Queen of England's Jubilee ceremony all right. It smacks of racism.' At the end of a state banquet, Bokassa turned to Galley and whispered,

'You never noticed, but you ate human flesh', a remark that prompted his reputation for cannibalism.

Reminiscing in later years about the coronation, Bokassa told the Italian journalist Riccardo Orizio, 'It was the least the French could do to repay me for my services as a soldier fighting for their country, and for all the personal favours their politicians received when I became president.'

The ultimate irony was that less than two years after the coronation, as a result of Bokassa's violent conduct, the French themselves felt obliged to step in and remove him from power. Bokassa's propensity for violence became increasingly evident during the 1970s. In 1972, in a campaign against theft, he published a decree prescribing mutilation for thieves. As part of the campaign, he personally led a bevy of ministers to Ngaragba prison where he ordered guards to beat convicted thieves with wooden staves. As the convicts screamed in agony, Bokassa turned to a foreign newspaper reporter to observe: 'It's tough, but that's life.' Three men died and several others seemed barely alive. The next day, forty-two thieves who had survived the beating, together with the corpses of the three others, were put on display under a blazing sun on a stand in Bangui's main square. When the United Nations Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, protested at the atrocity, Bokassa called him 'a pimp', 'a colonialist' and 'dumb as a corpse'. His other exploits included assaulting a British journalist with an ivory-tipped walking stick and attempting to strike a personal representative of Giscard d'Estaing.

The list of Bokassa's victims at Ngaragba grew ever longer. 'From 1976 to 1979,' the prison director subsequently testified, 'I executed dozens of officers, soldiers, diverse personages, thieves, students – under instructions from Bokassa.' Some were beaten to death with hammers and chains. Bokassa was also said to hold kangaroo courts in the gardens of the Villa Kolongo, sentencing men to be killed by lions or crocodiles he kept there.

The events that led to Bokassa's downfall started with student demonstrations in Bangui on 19 January 1979, in protest at an imperial edict that all pupils buy and wear new school uniforms. The uniforms were manufactured by a textile company owned by

members of the Bokassa family and sold exclusively in their retail stores. The demonstrations were joined by crowds of unemployed youths and quickly turned into riots; one of Bokassa's stores was ransacked. The riots were brutally suppressed by the Imperial Guard but strikes by teachers, students and civil servants continued.

In April, after further protests, scores of students were rounded up and taken to Ngaragba. One group of thirty students was stuffed into a small cell designed to hold one person; another group of twenty suffered the same fate. By the time the cell doors were opened the next morning, many were dead. Several witnesses claimed that Bokassa himself turned up at the prison and joined in beating and killing other students in detention. An independent judicial inquiry subsequently concluded: 'In the month of April 1979, the massacre of about 100 children was carried out under the orders of Emperor Bokassa and almost certainly with his personal participation.' In France, the media dubbed Bokassa the 'Butcher of Bangui'.

No longer able to stand the embarrassment of propping up Bokassa's regime, the French, after considerable prevarication, decided to remove him. On 20 September while Bokassa was on a visit to Libya, French troops stationed in Gabon and Chad, flew into Bangui, took control and installed David Dacko as president. Among the items they discovered at his residences were several chests full of diamonds, more than 200 cameras and accessories and a collection of pornography. At the Villa Kolongo they also found two mutilated bodies in a refrigerator. One body, with its head, arms and one leg missing, was identified as that of a mathematics teacher. When French troops drained the pond at Villa Kolongo, they came across bone fragments said to have come from some thirty victims eaten by crocodiles. The soldiers were told that other victims had been fed to lions kept in a nearby cage. When pressed by reporters about Bokassa's eating habits, President Dacko readily conceded that human flesh had been a regular item on his menu and had been served on occasion to foreign dignitaries. Bokassa, for his part, always denied charges of cannibalism.

Bokassa sought asylum in France, but was turned away. He found refuge instead in Côte d'Ivoire. At a trial that took place in Bangui in his absence in 1980, he was accused of murder, embezzlement and

cannibalism and sentenced to death. After four years in Côte d'Ivoire, he was allowed to settle in his chateau at Hardricourt, west of Paris. In 1986, feeling homesick, he decided to return to the Central African Republic. He was put on trial, found guilty of murder, though not cannibalism, and sentenced to death. The sentence was subsequently commuted, first to life imprisonment, then to twenty years' forced labour. In prison he turned to religion, constantly read the Bible and considered himself an apostle of Christ. After seven years' imprisonment he was released and spent his last years in Bangui in the Villa Nasser, surviving on a French army pension. He died in 1996, at the age of seventy-five, and was buried in an unmarked grave in Berengo.

At the time of Uganda's independence in 1962, Idi Amin was a newly commissioned officer, promoted from the ranks, with a military record that had already given British officials cause for concern. Virtually illiterate, with no schooling and limited intelligence, he had been recruited in 1946 to serve as a trainee cook in the King's African Rifles. A man of huge physique, he had gained attention by excelling at sport and marksmanship and by displaying qualities of stamina and loyalty which British officers admired. For nine years he held the national title of heavyweight boxing champion. Posted to Kenya during the Mau Mau campaign with the rank of corporal, he was nearly cashiered for carrying out interrogations of suspects with undue brutality. British officers nevertheless considered him worthy of promotion as a non-commissioned officer; he duly rose to the rank of sergeant-major, the highest position then open to African soldiers under British rule. But he was never regarded as 'officer material'. In the press of events leading to independence, however, as Britain searched for potential African army officers, Amin was considered an obvious possibility for promotion. Though failing to make much progress on special education courses to which he was sent, he nevertheless was given a commission in 1961 at the age of about thirty-six, one of only two Ugandan officers at the time.

Six months before independence, Amin's proclivity for violent conduct became a matter of controversy. While participating in a military operation in Kenya's Northern Frontier District, Amin was

accused of murdering three Turkana tribesmen. British officials in Nairobi dealing with the case wanted criminal charges brought against Lieutenant Amin, but the Governor of Uganda, Sir Walter Coutts, argued that to put on trial for murder one of only two African officers in Uganda shortly before independence would be politically disastrous. He asked instead that Amin should be returned to Uganda to face a court martial or other proceedings.

The decision on Amin's future was left to Uganda's new prime minister, Milton Obote. Obote recommended that Amin should merely be reprimanded. Thus reprieved, Amin continued his climb to the top. In 1964 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, given command of his own battalion and appointed deputy commander of the army. He soon became a familiar figure in the capital, Kampala, introduced into Obote's inner circle, invited frequently to State House, provided with a Mercedes car and other perquisites and clearly trusted by Obote as a bluff, loyal and simple soldier who would do his bidding without too much scruple.

The early years of Uganda's independence were a time of considerable optimism. Between 1960 and 1965, Uganda, with booming exports of coffee, cotton and tea, achieved the highest per capita growth in East Africa. A carefully constructed federal constitution had enabled the ancient kingdom of Buganda to retain a measure of internal autonomy, with its own parliament, the Lukiiko, and monarchic traditions, while allowing the central government in Kampala to maintain effective control nationally. As prime minister of a coalition government, Obote set out to accommodate the disparate ethnic groups on which Uganda was built. The broad division occurred between the Bantu groups to the south, such as the Baganda, and the Nilotic and Sudanic groups of the north, such as the Acholi and Langi, to which Obote belonged; but as much rivalry was to be found among southerners or among northerners as between the north and the south. In the spirit of cooperation that prevailed after independence, Obote supported the appointment of the Baganda king, the Kabaka, Sir Edward Mutesa, as head of state in 1963.

Obote's ambitions, however, were soon to tear Uganda apart. In common with many other African leaders, he set his sights on

establishing a one-party state, arguing that tribal and factional groupings tended to threaten the stability of the country and that a one-party state was needed to forge a sense of national unity. His style of government became increasingly secretive and autocratic. Facing dissent within the cabinet, Obote arranged for armed police to burst into the cabinet room and haul five leading ministers off to prison. In what was tantamount to a coup, he then announced he was assuming all powers, abrogated the constitution, suspended the National Assembly, dismissed the Kabaka as president and appointed Amin as the new army commander. Two months later, in April 1966, he published a new constitution installing himself as executive president of a united state endowed with immense powers.

When the Baganda parliament, the Lukiiko, tried to oppose him and rallied supporters, Obote ordered Amin to attack the Kabaka's palace on Mengo Hill, three miles from Kampala's centre. The palace was shelled and ransacked and several hundred Baganda died. The Kabaka managed to escape after climbing a high perimeter wall and hailing a passing taxi. He spent the rest of his life in exile in London, dependent on the dole and the generosity of friends, and died there of alcoholic poisoning in 1969. His palace, meanwhile, was turned over for use by Amin's troops; the Lukiiko was taken over by the defence ministry; martial law was declared in Buganda; hundreds of Baganda were detained without trial; and Baganda political parties were outlawed. In 1967 Obote completed the rout by abolishing the kingdom of Buganda altogether, carving it up into four administrative districts.

Obote's position seemed impregnable. Yet his regime had come to depend for survival largely on coercion enforced by the army and the police. Intending to reinforce his control of the security apparatus, he developed a secret police organisation known as the General Service Department, recruiting members largely from his own Langi tribe and giving it a free hand to arrest and imprison suspected opponents. He also cultivated a personal following among senior army officers and built up support among the large contingents of Langi and Acholi troops in the army.

Amin, invariably shrewd and cunning when it came to his own safety, matched Obote's manoeuvres by enlisting loyal groups of

Kakwa, Madi and Lugbara tribesmen from his home district in the West Nile region; he also recruited heavily from Nubian communities scattered in towns around Uganda, descendants of southern Sudanese mercenaries used by the British authorities to pacify areas of Uganda, who were related directly to Amin's tribal group.

Their suspicions of each other intensified. Amin was implicated in the murder of the army's deputy commander, an Acholi officer who supported Obote. Amin also faced accusations of embezzlement of army funds. Taking advantage of Obote's departure from Uganda for a Commonwealth conference, Amin struck first.

Amin's coup in January 1971 was carried out with remarkably little resistance from within the army and greeted in many parts of Uganda with relief and enthusiasm. Throughout Buganda, the news of Obote's downfall brought rejoicing and popular demonstrations. Enjoying the role of national hero, Amin began by adopting conciliatory measures. He released political prisoners, lifted emergency regulations and made arrangements for the body of the Kabaka to be brought back from England for a traditional burial. He appointed a cabinet consisting mainly of highly qualified civilians drawn from the ranks of the civil service, the legal profession and Makerere University. After the first cabinet meeting, Amin's new ministers came away impressed, so they remarked, by his good nature and common sense. 'He was a model of decorum and generosity,' wrote Henry Kyemba, the cabinet secretary. Amin's early pronouncements encouraged a sense of optimism. He stressed the temporary nature of military rule, disbanded the secret police and promised free elections. He spent much time travelling by helicopter and by car from one district to another, listening to elders and addressing meetings.

Yet Amin never felt secure. Fearing a counter-attack by Obote supporters, he organised death squads to hunt down and kill scores of army and police officers he suspected of opposing him. Within a few months, mass killing of Langi and Acholi began. 'It was impossible to dispose of the bodies in graves,' wrote Kyemba.

> Instead, truckloads of corpses were taken and dumped in the Nile. Three sites were used – one just above Owen Falls Dam at Jinja, another at Bujagali Falls near the army shooting range, and a third at Karuma Falls near Murchison Falls. The intention was for the bodies to be eaten by crocodiles. This was an inefficient method of disposal. Bodies were frequently swept to the bank, where they were seen by passersby and fishermen. At Owen Falls many bodies must have been carried through the dam over which the Kampala–Jinja road ran, but many floated into the still waters to one side, near the power station.

In place of the old officer corps, Amin promoted men from his own West Nile district and Nubians, some of them from the ranks of the army, some who were raw civilians, giving them control of special units he set up to snuff out dissent. They owed no loyalty other than to Amin; they were given unlimited powers; and they came to be regarded with utter dread.

Amin's popularity soon dwindled. He had no interest in the business of government, nor indeed any understanding of it. 'His English was poor,' recalled Kyemba. 'He read very badly and clearly had a hard time just signing prepared documents. As his first Principal Private Secretary, I never ever received a handwritten note from him. Amin had no idea how governments were run.' Unfamiliar and impatient with the intricacies of administration, he ruled by whim, broadcasting his orders over the radio and plundering at will what he needed from the treasury. A huge proportion of funds was diverted to military expenditure. When budgets ran out, Amin routinely ordered the central bank to print more currency to 'solve' the problem. Ministers quickly learnt that to argue against him was both unprofitable and dangerous. Explaining his defection in 1975, Andrew Wakhweya, a finance minister, remarked: 'The government is a one-man show. Impossible decisions are taken by General Amin which ministers are expected to implement. The decisions bear no relationship to the country's available resources.' As prices soared and consumer goods became unobtainable, disillusionment with Amin's regime steadily spread.

Hoping to revive his popularity, Amin turned vindictively on Uganda's Asian community. A wealthy, aloof, immigrant minority,

controlling much of the country's trade and industry, the Asians were profoundly disliked. In August 1972, in a move that was applauded not only by the African population of Uganda but in other African countries with unpopular Asian communities, Amin ordered Asians with British nationality to leave the country within three months. Their expulsion, however, benefited not the expectant African populace, but Amin's army. The shops, the businesses, the property that the Asians were forced to leave behind, even their personal possessions, were seized as spoils by Amin's cronies. Within a few months, the huge amounts of Asian wealth had vanished. Shops were stripped then left bare; factories broke down; trade was severely disrupted; entire sectors of enterprise collapsed. In the general exodus of the Asian community that occurred – some 50,000 left in all – Uganda lost a large proportion of doctors, dentists, veterinarians, professors and technicians. At a stroke, government's revenues were cut by nearly 40 per cent. The overall impact on government services was disastrous.

Far worse was to come. After an abortive invasion that Obote supporters launched from Tanzania in 1972, Amin took revenge on civilians suspected of opposing him. Thousands died at the hands of his special squads. No one was immune. The chief justice was dragged away from the High Court, never to be seen again. The university's vice-chancellor disappeared. The bullet-riddled body of the Anglican archbishop, still in ecclesiastical robes, was dumped at the mortuary of a Kampala hospital shortly after he had issued a memorandum speaking out about the 'suspicion, fear and hidden hatred' that the civilian population felt towards Amin's forces.

One of Amin's former wives was found with her limbs dismembered in the boot of a car. When Henry Kyemba reported the matter, Amin expressed no surprise and ordered him to have the dismembered parts sewn back on to the torso and then arrange for Amin to view the body together with their children. According to Kyemba, Amin was widely believed to perform blood rituals over the dead bodies of his victims. 'On several occasions when I was Minister of Health, Amin insisted on being left alone with his victims' bodies,' he wrote from exile. 'There is of course no evidence for what he does in private, but it is universally believed in Uganda that he engages in blood rituals.' On other occasions, Kyemba witnessed Amin boasting that he had eaten human flesh.

As, one by one, civilian ministers were dismissed or fled into exile, bearing tales of atrocity and torture, Amin replaced them with military colleagues, mostly untrained and in some cases barely literate. All notion of orderly government ceased to exist.

Constantly needing to demonstrate his power and importance, Amin promoted himself to the rank of field marshal, declared himself president for life, and awarded himself military medals and titles like Conqueror of the British Empire; he also claimed he was 'the true heir to the throne of Scotland'. He took sadistic pleasure in humiliating officials, usually men with wide education and experience, for whom he held an instinctive distrust. His treatment of expatriates living in Uganda, especially the British, was sometimes similarly demeaning. A group of British residents, inducted as army reservists, were required to kneel in Amin's presence when they took the oath of loyalty, as a sign of his power over his former colonial masters. To impress African diplomats at a grand Kampala reception, Amin staged his entrance on a wooden litter borne by British carriers.

He enjoyed too playing a role on the world stage, firing off bizarre cables to foreign leaders. He wished President Nixon 'a speedy recovery from Watergate'; offered Britain's music-loving prime minister, Edward Heath, a post as bandmaster after his election defeat; advised Israel's Golda Meir 'to tuck up her knickers' and run to Washington; suggested to Mao Tse-tung that he should mediate in the Sino-Soviet dispute; and proposed himself as head of the Commonwealth. In a telegram to the United Nations secretary-general, he praised the action of Palestinian guerrillas who had murdered Israeli participants at the Olympic Games, and he went on to extol Hitler's extermination of the Jews. 'Hitler and all German people knew that the Israelis are not people who are working in the interests of people of the world and that is why they burnt over six million Jews alive with gas on the soil of Germany.' By threatening to execute a British lecturer who had written a manuscript describing Amin as a 'village tyrant', he became the centre of world attention. Pleas for clemency arrived

from the Queen, the British prime minister, the Pope and some fifty heads of state.

However cruel, capricious and brutal many of Amin's actions may have seemed in the West, in much of Africa he was regarded as something of a hero. By expelling the Asian community and attacking Western imperialism, he was seen to be fearlessly asserting African interests. At meetings of the Organisation of African Unity, of which he was chairman for one year in 1975, Amin's appearances, weighed down with his own medals and gold braid, inspired enthusiastic applause. He was also able to trade on his Muslim credentials, gaining valuable support and generous loans from the Arab world, notably from Saudi Arabia and Libya, in return for agreeing to promote the Islamic cause in Uganda.

The end of Amin's tyranny came in 1979. Faced with internal dissension, squabbling and rivalry within his army, Amin desperately sought a diversion and ordered the invasion of the Kagera Salient in northern Tanzania, allowing his troops to loot and plunder at will in an orgy of destruction. In retaliation, Tanzania launched a force of 45,000 men across the border and then decided to oust Amin altogether. After initial resistance, Amin's army broke and ran. Amin himself abandoned Kampala without a fight, fleeing northwards to his home in the West Nile district, eventually finding refuge in Saudi Arabia.

Amin's rule had left Uganda ravaged, lawless and bankrupt, with a death toll put at 250,000 people. When exiles were reunited with old friends on the streets of Kampala, they greeted each other in their delight with the phrase, 'You still exist!' But there was to be no respite. In 1980 Obote regained power in disputed elections, plunging Uganda into an anarchic civil war. Obote's repression was as bad as Amin's had been; his 'northern' army was accused by human rights groups of being responsible for 300,000 civilian deaths. By the time Obote was overthrown in 1985, Uganda was ranked among the poorest countries in the world.

Equatorial Guinea enjoyed only 145 days of independence before it was pitched into a nightmare of brutality and coercion that lasted for

eleven years. A former Spanish colony, comprising the mainland province of Rio Muni and the main island of Fernando Po (Bioko), it achieved independence in October 1968 under a shaky coalition government led by Francisco Macías Nguema. A politician of limited education and low mental ability, Nguema had made his way up the ladder as a result of the support of Spanish administrators who believed he could be turned into a trustworthy collaborator relied upon to do their bidding. On three occasions he had failed to pass examinations qualifying him for a civil service career and *emancipado* status, succeeding the fourth time only because of overt Spanish favouritism. In 1960, under Spanish auspices, he had been appointed *alcade* – mayor – of Mongomo district in the east of Rio Muni and given a seat in the small national assembly on Fernando Po. But while being groomed for office by the Spanish, Nguema harboured intense resentments against them and an abiding hatred of foreign culture and 'intellectuals' in general. Once in power, he lashed out.

The incident that triggered his rage occurred in February 1969 when on a visit to Bata he discovered Spanish flags still flying there. His inflammatory speeches against the Spanish sent youth activists into the streets searching for Spanish victims. Fearing for their safety, thousands of Spaniards fled the country. When the foreign minister, Ndongo Miyone, sought to defuse the crisis, Nguema refused to listen. A few days later Ndongo was summoned to a meeting at the presidential palace, beaten with rifle butts, hauled off to prison with broken legs, and brutally murdered. Scores of other politicians and officials whom Nguema wanted out of the way were killed. A former ambassador died after being repeatedly immersed in a barrel filled with water for more than a week. By the end of March most of the Spanish population of 7,000, including civil administrators, teachers, technicians, professionals and shopkeepers had fled, abandoning their businesses, property and prosperous cocoa and coffee plantations.

Equatorial Guinea steadily sank into a morass of murder and mayhem. Ten of the twelve ministers in the first government were executed. In their place Nguema installed members of his own family and fellow tribesmen from the small Esangui clan from the Mongomo region. His nephew, Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbosogo,

became commander of the National Guard, military commander of Fernando Po, secretary-general of the ministry of defence and head of prisons. Other nephews were appointed to senior security posts; one simultaneously held the portfolios of finance, trade, information, security and state enterprises; a cousin ran foreign affairs. Officers in the security forces were all linked to Nguema by ties of kinship.

Given unlimited powers to arrest, torture, rape and murder, Nguema's security forces wreaked vengeance on the country's educated classes and took savage reprisals against any hint of opposition. Thousands were incarcerated in prison and murdered there; two-thirds of national assembly deputies and most senior civil servants were killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile. Many were executed on a whim. When the director of statistics published a demographic estimate that Nguema considered too low, he was dismembered to 'help him learn to count'. In two documented cases he ordered the execution of all former lovers of his current mistresses. He also ordered the murder of husbands of women he coveted. Before each state visit that Nguema made abroad, political prisoners were routinely killed to dissuade other opponents from conspiring against him. Death sentences were invariably carried out with extreme brutality. Guineans were liable to be punished merely for failing to attend manifestations of praise and joy or for being '*discontento*'. In 1976 the last remaining senior civil servants, handpicked by Nguema to replace those he had previously murdered, sent him a mass petition asking for a relaxation of the country's total isolationism, hoping there would be safety in numbers. Every one of the 114 petitioners was arrested and tortured, many never to be seen again.

No proper administration survived. The only people to be paid regularly were the president, the army, the police and the militia. Most ministries – including those dealing with education, agriculture, construction and natural resources – had no budgets at all and their offices in Malabo were shut. The central bank too was closed after the director was publicly executed in 1976. All foreign exchange was delivered instead to Nguema who hoarded it along with large amounts of local currency in his various palaces on Fernando Po and Rio Muni. When Nguema was short of money, he resorted to

ransoming foreigners: $57,600 for a German woman; $40,000 for a Spanish professor; $6,000 for a deceased Soviet citizen.

In long, rambling and incoherent speeches, Nguema fulminated against his pet bugbears – education, intellectuals and foreign culture. He closed all libraries in the country, prohibited newspapers and printing presses and even banned the use of the word 'intellectual'. All formal education came to an end in 1974 when Catholic mission schools were told to close. Children from then on were taught only political slogans.

In his drive to control organised religion, he ordered church sermons to include references to him as 'The Only Miracle' and decreed that his portrait be displayed in all churches. Under threat of immediate arrest, priests were forced to reiterate slogans such as, 'There is no God other than Macías', and 'God created Equatorial Guinea thanks to Papa Macías. Without Macías, Equatorial Guinea would not exist.' Even this, though, did not satisfy him. In a series of edicts in 1974 and 1975, he banned all religious meetings, funerals and sermons and forbade the use of Christian names. Christian worship became a crime. Virtually all churches were subsequently locked up or converted into warehouses. The cathedral in Malabo was incorporated into the presidential compound and used to store weapons. Foreign priests were expelled. The last Claretine missionary was held as a hostage at the age of eighty-five and released only after a ransom had been paid.

The urban economy collapsed. On a visit to Malabo in 1977, a foreign researcher, Robert af Klinteberg, described it as a ghost town, like 'a place hit by war or plague'. Nearly all shops, market stalls and the post office, along with government ministries, were closed down; consumer goods were unobtainable; electricity supplies were erratic. Trade and commerce were replaced by barter. Goods arriving on the few ships still calling at Malabo mostly went to Nguema's clique; the rest rapidly sold out at exorbitant prices. In rural areas, cocoa and coffee production plummeted. Nigerian plantation workers on contract were treated like slave labour and left in droves. To replace them, Nguema ordered the forced recruitment of 2,500 males from each of the country's ten districts, causing an exodus of tens of thousands to neighbouring Gabon and Cameroon.

In his report on Equatorial Guinea, Klinteberg summed it up as a land of fear and devastation no better than a concentration camp – the 'cottage industry Dachau of Africa'. Out of a population of 300,000, at least 50,000 had been killed and 125,000 had fled into exile. Hardly a single intellectual remained in the country; fewer than a dozen technical school graduates survived.

Presiding over this slaughterhouse, Nguema exhibited many signs of overt madness. His conversation and ideas were increasingly disjointed; his moods swung suddenly from periods of calm to uncontrollable violence. He sometimes carried out lengthy monologues with former colleagues whom he had executed. His movements were often jerky and uncoordinated; he became progressively deaf, shouting loudly in order to hear himself, refusing the use of hearing aids; he consumed large quantities of drugs, local stimulants like bhang and iboga, that visibly affected the pupils of his eyes. He received treatment in Spain for illnesses that were never disclosed.

Ill at ease in Fernando Po, he retreated to the mainland, first to Bata, where a new presidential palace was built for him, then to live in his remote native village in Mongomo where three of his four wives lived. He took with him most of the national treasury, storing huge wads of bills in bags and suitcases in a bamboo hut next to his house. Some of the money rotted in the ground. He also kept the country's pharmaceutical store there. Surrounded by relatives and village elders, he spent hours around a campfire discussing 'state policy' and reminiscing about the good old days before white rule.

Many Guineans believed he was endowed with supernatural powers. His father, a Fang of the Esangui clan, was said to be a much feared sorcerer, and Nguema constantly used his knowledge of traditional witchcraft both to prop up his legitimacy and to keep the local population in terrified submission. At his home in Mongomo he built up a huge collection of human skulls to demonstrate his power. He invented plots, then uncovered them, in order to prove his invincibility. He used clan leaders and elders and itinerant praise singers to spread the dreaded message of his magical powers. 'You may be against Macías as long as the sun shines, but in the night you have to be for him,' one of Klinteberg's informants told him.

Nguema's demise came in 1979 as the result of a clash with his ambitious nephew Colonel Obiang Nguema and other members of his family, who feared that unless he was removed they might be dragged down with him. They were spurred on by an incident in June 1979 when six officers of the National Guard who travelled to Mongomo to ask Macías to release funds for the payment of salaries several months in arrears were summarily shot. On 3 August Obiang led a coup against his uncle. After setting fire to most of the country's fiscal reserves, Macías escaped with two suitcases of foreign currency but was captured two weeks later.

After debating whether to put him on trial or commit him to a psychiatric ward, the family decided on a trial. The trial was held in September 1979 in the Marfil cinema in Malabo. The charges included genocide, paralysis of the economy and embezzlement of public funds. Out of a total of 80,000 murders listed in the original indictment, Nguema was found guilty on 500 counts. He rejected all murder charges, suggesting that his nephew, Obiang, was responsible. 'I was head of state, not the director of prisons.' Along with five of his most brutal aides, he was sentenced to death.

Fearful of his supernatural powers, no local soldier was willing to participate in a firing squad. So the task was given to a group of Moroccan soldiers. Long after his death, Nguema's ghost was believed to be a potent force in Equatorial Guinea. But his successor, Colonel Obiang, settled in comfortably enough.

Major Mengistu Haile Mariam first gained prominence when he harangued the Derg into ordering the execution of some sixty high officials from Haile Selassie's regime. Ambitious, ruthless and cunning, he was impatient from the start for revolutionary action. Coming from a poor background, a private soldier who had worked his way up the ranks to officer training school, his career and character seemed to symbolise the driving force behind the revolution. His mother was the illegitimate daughter of an Ethiopian nobleman, his father a guard at the nobleman's house. With little formal education, he was placed with the army as a 'boy' at the age of fifteen. A dour, secretive figure, whose dark complexion and facial features linked him to one of the

empire's conquered peoples of the south, he despised the rich and well-born elite that surrounded Haile Selassie's court. Stationed with the Third Division in Harar province, he acquired a record for insubordination and was constantly in trouble. One reason why he was sent as a representative to the Derg when it was first formed in Addis Ababa in June 1974 was said to be that his divisional commander simply wanted to get rid of him.

As a member of the Derg, Mengistu made common cause with the ordinary soldiers and non-commissioned officers who made up a large part of its membership and who became his power base. He also struck up close links with radical students and Marxist activists, many of whom had returned to Ethiopia from exile in 1974 demanding revolutionary change.

The changes initiated by the Derg came in swift succession. In December 1974 it proclaimed the advent of Ethiopian socialism. In January 1975 it nationalised banks and insurance companies, followed in February by all large industrial and commercial companies. In March it nationalised all rural land, abolishing private ownership and the whole system of land tenancy, thus destroying at a stroke the economic power of the old regime. To spread its message to rural areas, where 90 per cent of the population lived, it despatched the entire body of 50,000 secondary school students, university undergraduates and teachers into the countryside. 'Christ exhorted his apostles to go and teach,' a Derg official told students. 'Today Ethiopia is sending you to the countryside to enlighten the people.' In July the Derg nationalised all urban land and rentable houses and apartments. The monarchy, too, was formally abolished. The climax came in April 1976 when Mengistu appeared on radio and television to proclaim Marxism-Leninism as Ethiopia's official ideology.

As the revolution gathered momentum, Ethiopia was engulfed in strife and turmoil. Landlords and land-owners organised armed resistance; royalists and the nobility raised the banner of revolt; in one province after another, rebellions against the central government over long-held grievances flared up. In the north-western province of Begemdir a conservative opposition party, the Ethiopian Democratic Union, led by aristocrats, raised an army, succeeded in capturing

towns close to the Sudan border and advanced towards the provincial capital, Gondar. In the north-east Afar tribesmen formed the Afar Liberation Front and mounted guerrilla attacks on traffic using the main road to the port of Assab on the Red Sea coast, where the country's only oil refinery was located. In Tigray province a large guerrilla force was established by the Tigray People's Liberation Front with the help of the Eritreans. In the south the Oromo Liberation Front was launched with support from Somalia. The Somalis also revived the Western Somali Liberation Front, which had lain dormant for five years, and began to infiltrate arms and equipment into the Ogaden, preparing for a new initiative to recapture their 'lost' lands.

The fiercest struggle occurred in Eritrea. When the Derg decided in November 1974 to prosecute the war in Eritrea rather than seek a negotiated settlement, Eritrean guerrillas launched a massive onslaught. By mid-1976 the guerrillas had gained control of most of the countryside and were laying siege to small army garrisons. In a desperate attempt to shore up the army's hold on Eritrea, the Derg recruited a huge peasant army from other provinces, hoping that sheer numbers would overwhelm the guerrillas. Poorly trained and armed only with ancient rifles, scythes and clubs, the peasant army was routed on the Eritrean border even before it had been deployed.

In Addis Ababa the Derg met growing opposition from radical political groups which wanted civilian control of the revolution. In September 1976 the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), drawing support from labour unions, teachers and students, all vehemently opposed to military rule, embarked on a campaign of urban terrorism against the Derg and its civilian ally, the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement, usually known by its Amharic acronym, Meison. An assassination attempt was made on Mengistu in the centre of Addis Ababa in September, the first of nine such attempts. Scores of officials and supporters of the Derg were murdered. The Derg in turn sent out its own murder squads.

The Derg itself was split between rival factions. Mengistu demanded uncompromising action against the Derg's opponents; other officers favoured a more conciliatory approach. At a meeting of the Derg at the Grand Palace on 3 February 1977, Mengistu and his

supporters suddenly left the room, leaving behind seven members he considered his enemies. Mengistu's bodyguards stormed into the room with machine guns and forced them down to the basement. Mengistu joined them there and joined in the executions. He was now in undisputed control.

Mengistu next turned ruthlessly against his civilian opponents, embarking on what he referred to as a campaign of 'red terror', licensing civilian groups – the lumpen-proletariat of the slums – to act on his behalf. 'It is an historical obligation to clean up vigilantly using the revolutionary sword,' he told his supporters. 'Your struggle should be demonstrated by spreading red terror in the camp of the reactionaries.' At a rally in Addis Ababa in April, he smashed three bottles filled with a red substance he said represented the blood of the revolution's enemies, inciting followers to avenge themselves on the EPRP. He ordered arms to be distributed to 'defence squads' formed by urban neighbourhood associations, or *kebeles*, as they were called. Months of urban warfare, assassination and indiscriminate killing followed as supporters of the EPRP, Meison and the Derg struggled for control. From the *kebeles* of the shantytowns, armed gangs hunted down students, teachers and intellectuals deemed to be 'counter-revolutionaries'. Bodies of murdered victims were left lying where they fell with signs attached to their clothing naming them as 'oppositionists' or were dumped in heaps on the outskirts of the capital. Thousands died in the red terror, thousands more were imprisoned, many of them tortured and beaten. By mid-1977 the EPRP was effectively destroyed. In the final phase of the red terror, to establish his own supremacy, Mengistu turned on his Meison allies, destroying them too. The young generation of intellectual activists who had so avidly supported the revolution were all but wiped out.

Mengistu's hold over other parts of Ethiopia was nevertheless precarious. By mid-1977 the Ethiopian army in Eritrea had lost most major towns and controlled little more than Asmara and the ports of Massawa and Assab. In July 1977 Somalia, deciding the time was ripe to take advantage of the Derg's preoccupation with Eritrea and other revolts, launched a full-scale invasion of the Ogaden. By August the Somalis controlled most of the Ogaden. In September they captured

Jijiga, an Ethiopian tank base, and pressed on towards the town of Harar and the rail and industrial centre of Dire Dawa, the third largest city in Ethiopia.

What rescued Mengistu from military defeat was massive intervention by Soviet and Cuban forces, determined to prop up his Marxist regime. In November 1977 the Soviets mounted a huge airlift and sealift, ferrying tanks, fighter aircraft, artillery, armoured personnel carriers and hundreds of military advisers to Ethiopia. A Cuban combat force numbering 17,000 joined them. Led by Cuban armour, the Ethiopians launched their counter-offensive in the Ogaden in February 1978, inflicting a crushing defeat on the Somalis. The full force of the Ethiopian army, supported by the Soviet Union, was then turned on Eritrea.

At the fourth anniversary celebrations marking the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1978, Mengistu sat alone in a gilded armchair covered with red velvet on a platform in Revolution Square in Addis Ababa watching a procession of army units and civilian groups pass before him. Then he returned to his headquarters at the Grand Palace. Having succeeded in holding the old empire together, he liked to portray himself as following a tradition of strong Ethiopian rulers. Indeed, Mengistu came to be compared with the Emperor Tewodros, a nineteenth-century ruler who started his career as a minor local chieftain, fought his way up to take the Crown and then strove to reunite the empire after a period of disintegration. At official functions at the Grand Palace, while members of the Derg stood respectfully to one side, Mengistu chose to preside from the same ornate chair that Haile Selassie had once favoured.

One of his ministers, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, once a fervent supporter of the revolution, recalled his growing sense of disillusionment.

> At the beginning of the Revolution all of us had utterly rejected anything having to do with the past. We would no longer drive cars, or wear suits; neckties were considered criminal. Anything that made you look well-off or bourgeois, anything that smacked of affluence or sophistication, was scorned as part of the old order. Then, around 1978, all that began to change. Gradually materialism

became accepted, then required. Designer clothes from the best European tailors were the uniform of all senior government officials and members of the Military Council. We had the best of everything: the best homes, the best cars, the best whisky, champagne, food. It was a compete reversal of the ideals of the Revolution.

He recalled, too, how Mengistu changed once he had gained complete control.

He grew more abrasive and arrogant. The real Mengistu emerged: vengeful, cruel and authoritarian. His conduct was not limited by any moral considerations. He began to openly mock God and religion. There was a frightening aura about him. Many of us who used to talk to him with our hands in our pockets, as if he were one of us, found ourselves standing stiffly at attention, cautiously respectful in his presence. In addressing him we had always used the familiar form of 'you', *ante*; now we found ourselves switching to the more formal 'you', *ersiwo*. He moved into a bigger, more lavish office in the Palace of Menelik. He got new, highly trained bodyguards – men who watched you nervously, ready to shoot at any time. We now were frisked whenever we entered his office. He began to use the Emperor's cars and had new ones imported from abroad – bigger, fancier cars with special security provisions. Wherever he went he was escorted by these cars packed with guards, with more riding alongside on motorcycles.

He concluded: 'We were supposed to have a revolution of equality; now he had become the new Emperor.'

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IN SEARCH OF *UJAMAA*

As the dreams and expectations of independence faded, Julius Nyerere's socialist experiment in Tanzania stood out as a beacon of hope that Africa might yet find a route to the kind of new society that nationalist leaders once imagined. Nyerere was widely regarded as a leader of outstanding ability whose personal integrity and modest lifestyle was in sharp contrast to the extravagance and corruption for which other African presidents had generally become renowned. He possessed both a genuine concern for egalitarianism and an intense dislike for all forms of elitism. A slight, wiry man with a high forehead and a toothbrush moustache, he was known throughout Tanzania affectionately as *Mwalimu*, a KiSwahili word meaning teacher. He dressed simply, took no interest in the spoils of leadership or possessions and pursued his objectives with missionary zeal. Indeed, his speeches often sounded more like sermons than political addresses. He himself once admitted: 'I should have been a preacher in a pulpit instead of the president of a republic.' His intellectual energy was formidable. Articulating his socialist ideals with great clarity, he became the most influential thinker and writer in Africa of his time. On the world stage, he acted as a spokesman for the 'poorest of the poor', demanding a new international economic order that would give them a greater share in the world's wealth. He even found time to translate