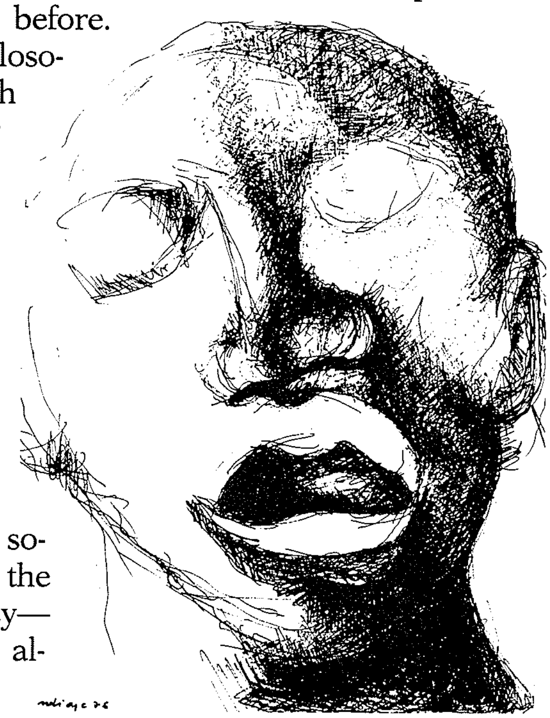
Africa Agonistes

Africa has endured an economic catastrophe that dwarfs the Great Depression. Starting from stark poverty, it descended during the past decade into unbelievable deprivation. Famine, war, and civil strife became commonplace, and even AIDs was visited upon the Africans. By 1990, Africans in most of the 46 black-ruled nations below the Sahara were poorer than they had been 30 years before.



Yet all is not misery. As philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah writes here, Africans in their disillusionment have cast aside the shallow nationalism of the early postcolonial years. They are holding their societies together with old bonds of family and tribe, and, increasingly, with new bonds, spun by churches, sports clubs, and other groups. These humble grassroots institutions of "civil society," he believes, are paving the way for stability and democracy—democracy which has come already to a surprising number of countries. Even more—some two dozen—have adopted free-market economic policies. Having discovered that socialism does not work, says economist Robert Klitgaard, Africans are now finding that capitalism has limitations, too. Markets cannot function without enforceable laws and accountable governments. But many countries are slowly putting these and other pieces of a free society into place.

ALTERED STATES

by Kwame Anthony Appiah

Aban bɛ gu a, ɛfiri yam.
If the state is going to fall, it is from the belly.
—*Ashanti Proverb*

My first memories are of a place called "Mbrom," a small neighborhood in Kumasi, capital of Ashanti, at a time when that kingdom went from being part of the British Gold Coast colony to becoming a region of the Republic of Ghana. There were only about a million of us Ashanti and there would soon be 10 million Ghanaians, but we knew that Kumasi (built like Rome, my father said, on seven hills) had a longer and nobler history than the national capital, Accra. I grew up during the late 1950s and early '60s knowing that I lived in Ashanti and that the Asantehene was our king and, at the same time, singing enthusiastically the Ghanaian national anthem—"Lift high the flag of Ghana"—and knowing that Kwame Nkrumah was our prime minister and then our president. It did not occur to me as a child that the "we," of which this "our" was the adjective, was fluid, ambiguous, obscure.

I knew my father cared that he was an Ashanti man, and I knew he cared that he was a Ghanaian nationalist. He was proud of his role in the struggle for our independence from Britain, but he was also committed to our learning English, not as the tongue of the colonizer but as the unifying language of our new and polyglot nation. It did not then occur to me—it never occurred to him—that these identities might be in conflict. It did, however, occur to others (many of them journalists from Europe and North America) when he joined the opposition to his old friend Nkrumah, and it occurred to many in Ashanti, a coup and a couple of constitutions later, when I was in my teens, when he did not join the Ashanti-based Progress Party, as it in turn came to power in 1969. I grew up knowing that we were Ghanaian nationalists and that we were Ashanti.

I grew up also believing in constitutional democracy or, more precisely, believing that what these words stood for was important. When my father and his friends were locked up by Nkrumah in the early 1960s, I was too young to think of it as anything more than a family tragedy. But by the time he came out I knew that the abolition of the legal opposition in 1960 had been a blow against democracy, that it had led naturally to imprisoning those who disagreed with our president, that all this evil began when multiparty electoral democracy ended. Of course, I also knew that we owed respect to the chiefs of Ashanti (indeed, to the chiefs of other regions of Ghana, too), that their role in controlling the allocation of land and in the settlement of family disputes was an essential part of life. I grew up knowing we were democrats and that we respected chieftaincy.

And by the time I was old enough to be for democracy, I knew we were also for development and modernization; that this

The Dream of Two Worlds: *Nearly one third of Africans now live in towns or cities.*

meant roads and hospitals and schools (as opposed to paths through the bush and *juju* and ignorance); cities (as opposed to the idiocy of rural life); money and wages (as opposed to barter and domestic production). Modernization, however, did not rule out the proper pouring of libation to the ancestors or the complex practices of the Ashanti funeral. You did not have to give up the *ntoma*, the toga-like cloth which my father wore almost always, except when he was on his way to court, dressed in his dark European suits and carrying—even after independence—the white wig of the British barrister. To reduce my outlook to a slogan: I grew up believing in development *and* in preserving the best of our cultural heritage.

I doubt that these experiences were unusual for a young person growing up in the household of professional people at the time of independence in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet someone from Europe or North America might have seen my beliefs and commitments as inconsistent. Perhaps it is possible to combine ethno-regional and national allegiances (for example, African-American and southern in the United States, Welsh or northern in Britain, and, more controversially, Québécois in Canada). But few in the industrialized West, I think, proceeded as blithely as we did in ignoring the tensions involved here.

Of course, Ghana and I have grown uneasy with all of these childhood faiths. Yet, looking back now, I can discern a pattern to these paired adherences, yoked so uneasily together—Ghana, Ashanti; development, heritage; democracy, chieftaincy—and it is a pattern that makes a sort of sense. In each case, the first member of the pair was something we took to belong to the sphere of the state, the business of the government in the capital, Accra, while the second belonged to a sphere that we could call society.

But this way of thinking leaves too much obscure. In Western political theory, the state is understood in terms that go back to Max Weber: Where there is a state, the government claims supreme authority and the right to back up that authority with force. Taxes and conscription are not voluntary; the criminal law is not an optional code. Imprisonment, the lash, the gallows stand behind state power. By contrast, the sphere of society, though equally demanding, is bound together by ethical conviction, ties of affection, shared worlds of meaning. Along with this dichotomy between state and society come still other distinctions: between law and custom, between public and private life, between the obligations of citizenship and the more elective world of communal reciprocity. In a state, theoretically only the government regularly coerces—and only in matters of public concern. In theory, too, personal affection and region and ethnicity play no role in the assignment and execution of state offices, and careers are open to talent.

But state and society are never as separate as theory would have them. One common currency joins them—the economy. Just as in the most intimate domestic relationships money has its uses, in the sphere of the state, social relations—family, ethnicity, regional allegiances, clubs, societies, and associations—provide the materials of alliances. Enough is economically at stake in the modern state for the call of society—the web of social and ethnic relationships—to enter into the operations of its government.

In the United States (as in Europe) this is an all-too-familiar fact: Economic interests, ethnic affiliations, and regional alliances compete to shape the operations of the state.

In Europe and North America (with important exceptions such as Ireland, the Basque country, "Soviet" Lithuania, and Puerto Rico), there is an overwhelming consensus that the state has a legitimate monopoly on coercion. Even when a specific injunction does not have an ethical consensus behind it, this fact does not threaten the state's other authority. Recall that in many American cities and states, one of the largest industries is the illicit drug trade. Like the so-called parallel economies of Africa, the drug industry involves state functionaries (including police officers), entails bribery and corruption of officials, mobilizes ethnic and family loyalties, and depends on the existence of subcultures at odds with the law and with the pronouncements of officials. Still, the majority of Americans who use and trade drugs, and thus question a central norm of the American government, do not question their allegiance to the United States.

But in Ghana (as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa), something else is going on. It is true that in Ghana, for a short period before and after independence in 1957, many literate, urban citizens (and some others) shared a similar allegiance to the Ghanaian state. In the high days of postindependence nationalism, we all shared a sense of the meaning of Ghana because it was clear what we were *against*—namely, British imperialism. We were enthusiastic for national independence, and, seizing upon that enthusiasm, Nkrumah created the first (and

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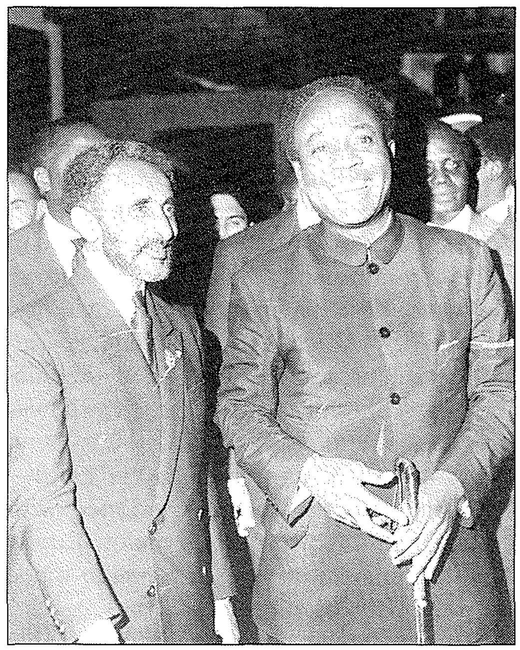
last) mass party in Ghana.

But the "we" here was, in fact, rather limited. Nkrumah's electoral support in the preindependence elections in Ghana was a 57 percent majority of half of the population registered to vote. That amounted to perhaps 18 percent of the adult population. Our vision of Nkrumah was in part one of those typical illusions of modernity: Osagyefo (the "Redeemer") Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the organizer of rallies, the charismatic public speaker, the international statesman—even Nkrumah the blind tyrant—was a creature of the modern media. We did not see the rural millions to whom he was almost as mysterious as the colonial governor who had preceded him. (I can still recall the retired watchman, who had long served colonial masters, visiting us each Christmas to request a calendar with photographs of the British queen. In his opinion, clearly independence had been a mistake.) By 1966, when the first of our many postindependence coups exiled Nkrumah, the real, if limited, enthusiasm there once had been had largely evaporated. When Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings came to power in a coup in 1981, his nationalist rhetoric and the resurrection of Nkrumahism generated enthusiasm mostly among students, who had not seen all of this before. For most Ghanaians cynicism about the state and its rhetoric was the order of the day. It is instructive to reflect on the stages of this disillusion.

But first we should recognize how surprising it is that there was a moment of "nationalism" at all. The new government that inherited Ghana from the British resembled its counterparts in most of the sub-Saharan states of postcolonial Africa. It had to unite and govern vastly different cultures and peoples speaking different languages within its borders (despite the fact that, at one time, much of modern Ghana was within the Ashanti empire). There was, for example, the relatively centralized, bureaucratic Ashanti state itself and the smaller Akan states which have a culture and a language similar to that of Ashanti. There were the much less centralized Ewe-speaking peoples of the southeast, whose dialects were not always easily mutually intelligible and who were artificially separated by a colonial boundary from



In search of the political kingdom. Kwame Nkrumah with Haile Selassie of Ethiopia (left) at an African summit conference in 1963.

their fellow Ewe-speakers in Togo. There were the urbanized Ga-Adangbe who dominated the region of the capital. And there were miscellaneous small chieftaincies and tiny tribal groups in what we in Kumasi referred to vaguely as "the North."

In a few cases in black Africa—Somalia, Lesotho, Swaziland—the new national states created in the 20th century corresponded to precolonial societies with a single language. In most places, however, the new states brought together peoples who spoke different languages and had radically different religious and political traditions.

Out of the almost endlessly diverse cultures, economies, and ecologies of the African continent, four European states—Britain, France, Portugal, and Belgium—constructed the artificial national geography of contemporary Africa. (Germany lost its African possessions after World War I; after World War II, Italy ceased to be a player.) In Ghana, as in most other states, the colonial language remained the official language after independence, since the government's choice of an indigenous language would have favored one linguistic group over all the others. (Even Somalia took a while to get around to using Somali.)

If the history of metropolitan Europe in the last century and a half has been a struggle to establish statehood for nationalities, Europe left Africa at independence with states looking for nations. Once the moment of cohesion against the British was over (a moment whose meaning was greatest for those of us—often in the cities—who had had the most experience with colonizers), any prospect of national unity had to come to terms with a nation made up principally of differences.

How was Nkrumah's nationalism able to overcome this? Partly, I think, because it was oddly unconnected with the actual Ghanaian state. Nkrumah's nationalist enthusiasms were, famously, pan-Africanist. Describing a speech he made in Liberia in 1952, Nkrumah writes: "'Africa for the Africans!' I cried . . . . 'A free and independent state in Africa. We want to be able to govern ourselves in this country of ours without outside interference . . . .'" It was natural for him to speak of "our" country anywhere in (black) Africa. At the level of generality at which Africans are opposed to Europeans, it was easy to persuade us that we have similarities: Most of "us" are black, most of "them" white; we are ex-subjects, they are ex-masters; we are or were "traditional," they are "modern;" we are "communitarian," they are "individualistic;" and so on. Even when these observations were not entirely true, it did not hinder their rhetorical effectiveness because of another difference: In the end, "they" are mostly quite rich and "we" are mostly very poor. Only in the richest of sub-Saharan black African countries has the average annual per-capita gross national product exceeded $1,000. (Gabon, with its small population, its oil, and its rich mineral reserves, heads the list at about $3,000 in 1988.) More characteristic are the few hundred dollars per-capita GNPs of Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia.

It was an important part of Nkrumah's appeal, therefore, that he helped to found the Organization of African Unity in 1963, that he represented Africa in the nonaligned movement and at the United Nations, and that he was publicly preoccupied with the complete liberation of Africa from colonial rule. Being proud to be Ghanaian, for many of us, was tied up with what Nkrumah was doing not for Ghana but for Africa. But as decolonization continued, Ghana—impoverished in part by Nkrumah's international adventures—became less of a figure on the African scene. In the post-Nkrumah state, simply being African was too general or vague to furnish the various Ghanaian peoples a national identity.

Like other inheritors of postcolonial African states, Nkrumah had extensive ambitions for his country, and they were shaped by Ghana's specific experience with colonialism. For the form of colonialism Ghana had known was not found everywhere.

Samir Amin, a leading African political economist, has classified three types of colonial experiences in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries like Ghana belong to the "Africa of the colonial trade economy." The slave trade had been at the heart of its initial integration into the world economy, and, later, tropical food products—cocoa, palm oil, coffee—formed the basis of an export-oriented agricultural economy. Nigeria, with perhaps a quarter of the population of black Africa, is the most important such state. A second type of colony belongs to "Africa of the concession-owning companies." In Gabon, the Central African Republic, Congo, and Zaire, sparse populations and a difficult climate and ecology made the tropical agriculture of West Africa a dubious proposition. Companies dealing in timber, rubber, and ivory practiced a brutal form of exploitation, investing as little as possible and creating, as a result, no local surpluses and offering little in the way of Western education. (At independence in 1960 there were only three Africans among the top 4,700 civil servants in Zaire.)

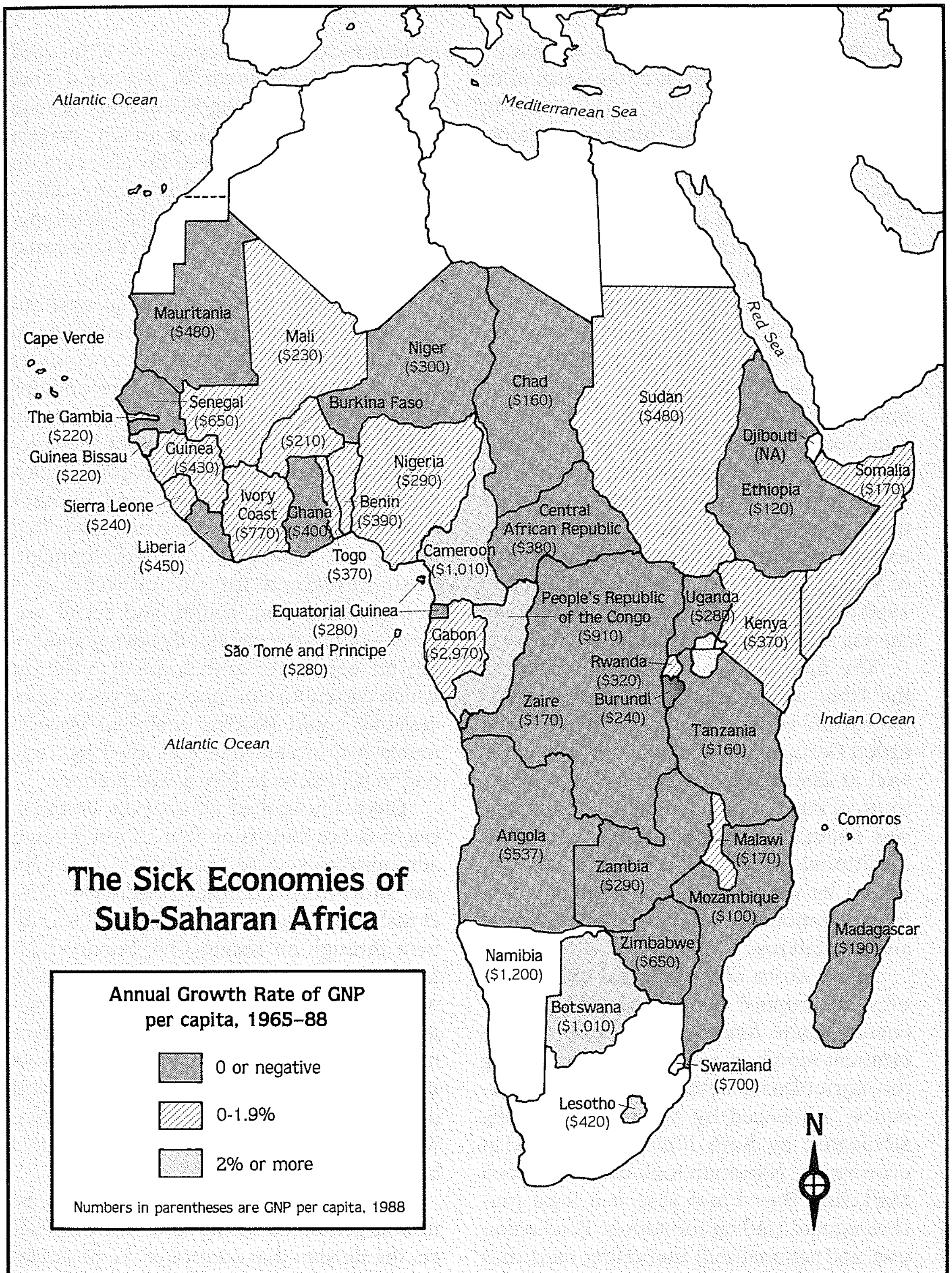
The final colonial sphere is "Africa of the labor reserves," including the settler plantation economies of Tanzania—then called German Tanganyika—and Kenya, as well as Zimbabwe and the whole of Africa south of Zaire, where the colonial economy was dominated by mining. In these areas traditional societies were radically disrupted by the massive and often involuntary migration of many people to the mines and plantations.

In the Africa of the colonial trade economy, the tropical cash crops—in our case cocoa—made financing the costs of government simply a matter of appropriating the agricultural surplus. After independence, influenced by notions of planning advocated by both liberal and socialist economists, Nkrumah took over the Cocoa Marketing Board and gave it a legal purchasing and trading monopoly. Production was not nationalized; marketing (and thus access to the foreign-exchange value of the commodity) was. In theory, the surplus generated by this monopoly was to be used to finance development; in practice it went to the Cocoa Marketing Board and the state that "owned" it—which is to say, certain politicians and bureaucrats became rich. In other systems of political economy, different methods of financing the state suggested themselves, often much to the same effect.

The colonial powers had bequeathed to the new state little on which a nation could be built. Before independence, all colonies were supposed to be self-financing, and this included the costs of their own administrations. As a result, roughly half of the colonial government revenues had gone to paying expatriate bureaucrats, and another sixth had been spent on servicing loans that usually had little to do with development. Little remained for the cultivation—through education, health, and social services—of human capital. Besides maintaining an economic and political order in which agriculture or labor reserves or concessions could develop, colonial governments had limited interests. By 1960 only one in six adults in Africa was literate.

Given the limited aims of the colonialists, it is not surprising that so few foreign administrators were required to maintain the short-lived colonial hegemony. The British had "ruled" the Indian sub-continent through an Indian Civil Service with fewer than 1,000 British members. Likewise, the British and French and Portuguese colonial civil services in Africa were massively outnumbered by the populations supposedly in their charge. The armies and police forces that kept the colonial peace were officiated by Europeans but manned by African subjects.

The apparent ease of colonial administration generated in the new African leaders the illusion that control of the postcolonial state would allow them to pursue as easily their much more ambitious objec-



Source: World Bank. *Note: Some data are from years different from those cited. No growth-rate data available for Namibia and Djibouti.*

tives. "Seek ye first the political kingdom," Nkrumah famously urged. But colonial governments were designed for limited ends. Once they were turned to the task of massive development—to the building of roads and dams, schools and government offices—and to universal primary education and the enormous expansion of health and agricultural extension services, they proved unequal to the task. When the postcolonial rulers inherited the reins of power, few noticed, at first, that they were not attached to a bit.

To understand power in the postcolonial state, we must return to the ethno-regional loyalties with which I began. And the most surprising fact about these loyalties is that often they are not especially old, being the product of, or response to, colonial and postcolonial experiences.

In the 1930s and '40s, when people speaking similar languages arrived in the colonial towns and cities, when they listened to radio programs broadcast in dialects related to their own, when they realized that in other parts of their countries people had different practices, then an old and vague body of shared cultural practice was often transformed into a new politicized ethnicity. Only after independence in Ghana did the speakers of Ashanti and related Akan dialects come gradually to feel they shared a single identity. Likewise in Nigeria, the three major ethnic groups—Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo—are only a product of the rough-and-tumble of the transition from colonial to postcolonial status. In many places, these new ethno-regional identities have become extremely powerful. Here, however, is another point where variations in colonial experience mattered. For British and French colonial administrations were guided by very different theories of empire, and these different theories have affected not so much the importance of ethnicity—it is crucial everywhere—as the role it plays in the postcolonial state.

The British maintained "native administrations," attempting to regulate their colonies by using the structures of the precolonial states. They attempted, with the aid of official colonial anthropologists, to understand what came to be called "customary law" and to allow traditional elites to enforce those customs—in marriage and land rights, for example—whenever they were approximately consistent with British mores. The kingdom of Buganda (at the heart of modern Uganda), the northern Muslim states of Nigeria, and the Ashanti all fit the monarchical vision of the British officers who invented their country's colonial policy in Africa. (Where there were no traditional rulers to support, as in eastern Nigeria among the Ibo-speaking peoples, the colonial authorities sought to invent a form of "chieftaincy.")

The result of this policy was that, in places like Ashanti in Ghana and in Islamic northern Nigeria, the local leaders were not at all happy to defer to the centralizing impulses of the newly independent states. This led to, for example, the Nigerian civil war of the late 1960s. What began in 1967 with a pogrom against Ibo traders in northern Nigeria provoked first Ibo secession and then a civil war in which Yoruba people aligned with the North to "save the union."

In Ghana, too, whenever we have had civilian elections, parties usually have come with "tribal" labels—labels whose force has little to do with the announced intentions of their leaders. Certainly, the Ashanti kingdom in which I grew up was a source of resistance to Nkrumah. Because of this opposition to Nkrumah, Dr. Kofi Busia's Progress Party in the 1969 elections was seen as Ashanti or Akan. (One of Nkrumah's political advantages had been his origins in an ethnic group so tiny—the Nzima—that he was not identified with any of the principal Ghanaian groups.) In Akan areas of Ghana, in the 1980s, one heard the present government of Jerry Rawlings, whose mother was Ewe, discussed as an instrument of Ewe domination (an accusation that seems only marginally more reasonable than the allegation that he represents the domination of Scotland, through his father).

The French, unlike the British, attempted to create a black elite, one that would be simultaneously African and French. Schools did not teach in "native" languages, and the French did not simply use revamped pre-colonial administrations. One might suppose, therefore, that this project of creating a class of black *evolués*, a "civilized" black elite, had laid firmer foundations for the postcolonial state. And it is certainly true that some of the states carved out of the old French African Empire—in particular Senegal and Ivory Coast in the west and Cameroon and Gabon further east—have been relatively stable. But this has not, in my view, been the result of the eradication of ethnicity. The majority of French colonies have chosen to stay connected to France, and all but Guinea (which has hardly had a record of stable progress) have accepted varying degrees of "neocolonial" supervision by the *metropole*, as the lingering authority of France is called. No military coups have been possible in Ivory Coast, for example, because there are French troops stationed there. In Gabon, the French actually removed soldiers who had the temerity to install themselves through a coup in 1964. And while Dahomey (later renamed Benin) had an average of about one coup per year in its first decade of independence, they involved the circulation of power among a small group, usually with the tacit consent of the Quai d'Orsay. (The French have recently withdrawn this commitment to support the government in power or, in the case of Benin, the officially recognized elites.) The CFA franc, used throughout almost all the former French colonies in Central Africa, is tied to the French franc and its rate of conversion guaranteed, which rules out the massive inflation caused by the printing of money that we witnessed in Ghana in the mid-1970s. The CFA franc limits the autonomy of the states, even while it helps maintain their political stability.

Yet despite these differences between British and French colonies, leaders such as Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the president of Ivory Coast since its independence in 1960, have had to play a complex ethno-regional balancing game to keep themselves in power. Merely removing old ethnic political institutions—chieftaincy is now largely ceremonial in Ivory Coast—has not wiped out the power of ethnic identifications. Houphouët-Boigny, to build support in regions other than his own, practices a careful policy of including representatives of all the country's ethnic regions in his party—the Parti Democratique de la Côte d'Ivoire—and within his cabinet.

Balanced so precariously between different ethnicities and regions, how have the new African nations managed the task which Thomas Hobbes defined as the very reason for the state: the preserving of order and the life of its citizens? In the mid-1970s, as the Ghanaian state began its sharp decline, I was teaching in Ghana. One of my tasks at the university was to teach political philosophy, and, in particular, Hobbes's *Leviathan*. For a Hobbesian, I suppose, the withdrawal of the Ghanaian state, incapable of raising the income to carry out its tasks, should have led to disaster. Yet Ghanaian life did not become a brutish war of all against all. Life went on. People did not "get away with murder"—even though the police usually would have been in no position to do anything about such a crime. People made deals, bought and sold goods, owned houses, married, raised families.

As for state officials (including those in the army and the police), their intervention was as likely to get in the way of these arrangements as to aid them, as likely to be feared and resented as welcomed. For many Ghanaians and especially rural farming people—living in a world whose mother tongue was not the English of our colonizers or of the postcolonial government—what mattered was how things had always been done. Disputes in urban as well as in rural areas were likely to end up in arbitration between the heads of families or in the courts of "traditional" chiefs and queen-mothers, in procedures that people felt they could understand and manage. Once the lawyers and the magistrates and the judges of the colonial (and now, with little change, the postcolonial) legal system came into play, most people feared that what happened would be beyond their comprehension and control.

In such circumstances, an argument that the state provided security would have been laughable. And rightly so. Only in a few extreme situations in Africa—among them Uganda since Idi Amin—have things reached a point of Hobbesian crisis. Even in Nigeria, where urban armed robbery and banditry on the highways have become accepted inconveniences, citizens are unlikely to see the state as a solution, since (rightly or wrongly) they suspect that the robbers have allies and protectors among the rulers.

Yet despite all of their limitations, African states endure. In Ghana, as in a number of other places, the decline has been halted. I am not in a position to judge how much of this can be credited to the "structural adjustment" imposed in African states

Thousands of Mauritanians fled Senegal in 1989 after a border dispute over grazing rights erupted into bloodshed—one of many barely reported conflicts that tear at Africa.

by the World Bank during the 1980s, although I suspect that the economic effects have been a good deal less positive than the Bank has sometimes claimed. But in trying to make sense of the return of the state in Ghana, I think it useful to underscore how the government has become a facilitator, rather than a director, mobilizing social allegiances that are largely autonomous. And it is important to be clear that I am speaking not only of the mobilization of ethno-regional (or "tribal") allegiances.

To explain what I mean it will help to return to Kumasi.

One of the most important organizations in my grandfather's life was the Ashanti Kotoko society, a modern Ashanti organization that engaged in various, often charitable activities. Equally important, I suspect, was the Masonic lodge of which he was master (the picture of him that hangs in my parents' home shows him in his Masonic outfit). All over Africa during the colonial period, new social organizations developed, drawing sometimes on European models, sometimes on traditional secret societies, guilds, and cults. When people moved to towns, they often formed hometown societies (*associations des originaires*). Many other organizations centered on Christian churches and Islamic mosques.

It became clear during the 1970s, and increasingly during the '80s, that organizations in Kumasi such as the Methodist Church (to which my father belonged) and smaller churches (such as my mother's) were becoming more and more central in organizing the financing, building, staffing, and equipping of schools. Likewise, they supported the city hospital, and they worked with the leaders of the Muslim community and the Catholic archbishop to maintain orphanages and homes for the mentally ill and for old people without families to care for them. (Indeed, when he stopped working within state politics in the mid-1980s, it was to his church and its politics that my father turned his attention.)

It was not that churches and mosques had not done these things earlier: Much of the best secondary schooling in Ghana has been in church schools since my father was a boy, and mission hospitals are a familiar feature of the African landscape. Muslims are obliged as a matter of religious duty to support the poor. What was significant about the changes in the last decade-and-a half was that they involved explicit recognition that these organizations (and other groups, such as the Rotary Club) were taking over functions formerly reserved for government, and that state officials were only too keen to have their aid.

During the 1980s, chiefs and elders organized the maintenance of "public" roads. Business organizations provided food for "state" schools. Citizen groups bought and imported medical equipment for "government" hospitals. The institutions of chieftaincy, in Ashanti and elsewhere, began to carry out what were formerly state functions, mediating, for example, between labor and management in industrial disputes. *And, by and large, the state has acquiesced in all of this.*

The significance of the withdrawal of the state goes beyond official announcements in the capital. Local bureaucrats in towns and villages increasingly rely on private associations to carry out their functions. The management of "government" old-people's homes and orphanages in Kumasi depends crucially on private support, on the cooperation of chiefs, business people, and community leaders.

To the extent that the government provides some technical assistance and serves a coordinating function, we can speak of it now not as *directing* but as *facilitating* certain functions. This shift is surely to be wel-

GOING DEMOCRATIC?

Thirty years after its liberation from colonial rule, writes journalist Colin Legum, black Africa stands on the verge of "a second period of liberation from unpopular, unsuccessful governments." One of the latest countries to edge toward democracy is Ivory Coast, where longtime president Félix Houphouët-Boigny faced an opponent in a November election—and won. A month before, Gabon's newly legalized opposition won half the seats in the National Assembly.

While elections are becoming more common, sustained multiparty democracy remains rare. By one reckoning, only five of the 46 sub-Saharan countries have achieved it: Botswana, The Gambia, Djibouti, Mauritius, and Senegal. Nigeria is to make its third try at democratic government in 1992. There have also been recent reverses, notably in Zimbabwe, which became a one-party state when Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo merged their tribe-based parties to avoid bloodshed.

Such deviations are not universally condemned. Some Africans say that divisive multiparty systems are "un-African." The London *Economist* (Nov. 10, 1990) adds that they may be too much to hope for in such poor countries. And if foreign-aid donors punish all autocrats, some of the continent's boldest economic reformers may suffer. Yet there is no reason to prop up the likes of Zaire's notorious "kleptocrat," Mobutu Sese Seko. What the West should push for, the *Economist* says, is a free press and an independent judiciary, since "these make politicians accountable."

Still, regular elections are the best way known to enforce accountability. Africa may be headed in that direction, albeit slowly and without the euphoria that accompanied liberation. That sobriety may be the most hopeful sign that this promise of freedom will not prove false.

comed whenever it increases the control of citizens over their own lives. It has always been true that in large parts of Africa "tribalism"—what, in Ivory Coast, is half-humorously called "geopolitics"—far from being an obstacle to governance, is what makes possible any government at all. And we can see the government's new role as facilitator—acknowledging the associations of society rather than trying to dominate, to ignore, or to eradicate them—as an extension of an old established pattern.

The proliferation of private organizations is, if anything, a universal phenomenon in postcolonial Africa. And the ethno-regional and religious associations on which I have focused are only the first among many groups that maintain civil society. These include sports clubs, market-women's groups, professional organizations, trade unions, and farm cooperatives. In many of these organizations—be it a sports club or a choir or an *association des originaires* or the Ashanti Kotoko Society—there is a remarkable degree of formality, including elections and rules of procedure (sometimes even according to *Robert's Rules of Order*). A concern with constitutions and procedure is a key feature of churches in Ghana and elsewhere. Various women's "auxiliaries" allow women, who have been much worse-treated than men (and a good deal less represented) in the postcolonial state, to experience something like democratic participation. This is not an exclusively urban phenomenon, either. Clubs, associations, and cooperatives abound in the villages, the countryside, and among farmers.

These democratic organizations are, I believe, tremendously important for the development of public life in Africa. They give people an experience of democracy. It will become increasingly difficult for weak states to maintain their legitimacy without offering democratic participation. In 1989 and 1990 there were riots in Ivory Coast and in Kenya (historically, two of the most stable and prosperous African states), riots directed in both cases at presidents and leaders who were perceived as unresponsive to the concerns of their people. We have seen in Eastern Europe how the removal of army control opened the way to resistance to apparently well-established authoritarian rulers. Many African states don't even have the elaborate security apparatus that kept those regimes in power in the first place. (The "quiet revolution" in Benin, fueled by popular resistance, is apparently easing President Mathieu Kerekou out of power. It could set an example for other countries in Africa.)

Democracy is not simply a matter of parliaments and elections—though these would be welcomed by some in every state in Africa—but the development of mechanisms by which the rulers can be restrained by the ruled. Otherwise, citizens in Africa have few reasons to acquiesce to the injunctions (or the whims) of those who claim to rule. Paradoxically, it is the state that needs democracy, not the citizen.

But while it is easy to remark on the inadequacy of the classical nation-state model for Africa, it may be too soon to pronounce on its outcome. Clearly, if the state is ever to reverse recent history and expand the role it plays in the lives of its citizens, it will have to learn something about the surprising persistence of these "premodern" affiliations, the cultural and political fretwork of relations through which our very identity is conferred.

Allow me to revert once more to the personal. When I was about eight years old, I fell very ill. After I had been in the local hospital for what seemed like months, the English queen paid her first postindependence visit to Ghana. She and her husband and the president of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, duly arrived in Kumasi and made their way through the hospital, passing as they did so by my bed. The queen, whose mastery of small talk is proverbial, asked me how I was, and I, in a literal fever of excitement at meeting my mother's queen and my father's president all on the same day, mumbled that I was quite well. The president, who had only recently locked up my father, stared at the ceiling, tapping his foot (making, as it turned out, a mental note to return my doctor to what was then still Rhodesia). After they had passed through, I went, against the orders of my doctor and to the consternation of the nurses, to the window and looked out in time to see an extraordinary sight. The Duke of Edinburgh and the president of Ghana were trying, halfheartedly, to pull an ancient Ashanti sword out of the ground in which it was embedded. The sword, tradition had it, was put there by Okomfo Anokye, the great priest of Ashanti, and the first great king, Osei Tutu, who had founded the kingdom two-and-a-half centuries earlier. The great priest had supposedly declared that if the sword were ever to be pulled out of the ground, the Ashanti nation would fall apart.

It seemed to me, from way up above the crowd of dignitaries, that Nkrumah's tug on the sword was even more halfhearted than the Duke's. No Ghanaian ruler could even jestingly simulate an assault on Ashanti unity here in the heartland. Today, long after Nkrumah has gone to his ancestors, Ashanti remains—refashioned perhaps, but strangely obdurate. The sword, they tell me, has disappeared.

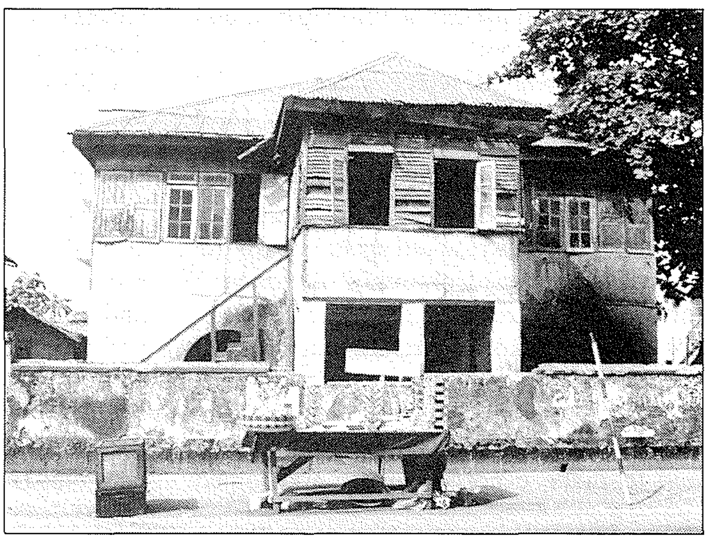
ADJUSTING TO AFRICAN REALITIES

by Robert Klitgaard

I got the news during a brief visit to the United States in September 1988. Don Bonifacio, the finance minister of Equatorial Guinea and my closest colleague, had been fired. I figured that it must have had something to do with the recent coup attempt. The plotters were partly motivated by fears of the free-market reforms Don Bonifacio and President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo had been pushing to shore up the country's crumbling economy, reforms that threatened the backdoor enterprises of many high government officials. The changes weren't popular among the people, either. Despite them, the economy continued in its downward spiral. I wondered if a fearful President Obiang had sacrificed Don Bonifacio to prevent further unrest.

I had been working in Equatorial Guinea for two years as the head of a World Bank-funded economic rehabilitation project. The country was a kind of laboratory of underdevelopment, five tiny islands off the western coast of the continent and a mainland slot the size of Maryland nestled between Cameroon and Gabon. In 1985, the 300,000 or 400,000 citizens—no one knows for sure how many people live there—had an average income of a little more than $100, according to one international agency, or about $300 according to another. The average Equatoguinean can't expect to live past 45, and every year about 90 percent of the population contracts malaria. Most schools lack books, desks, and blackboards; no wonder very few youngsters attend. At the hospital in the capital city of Malabo, beds are routinely pilfered; and because no one orders spare light bulbs for the lamp in the operating room, surgery is carried out under an ordinary 60-watt bulb.

Independence has not proved kind to most African economies, and it has been especially hard on Equatorial Guinea. After Spain granted the country independence in 1968, the former civil servant Francisco Macías Nguema was elected president. Africanists rate Macías as worse than Uganda's Idi Amin or the Central African Repub-



After socialism: The decay of order in many countries has spawned "microenterprises" that operate outside the law. Now, some economists believe that they are the key to Africa's revival.

lic's Emperor Bokassa. After a coup attempt in 1969, Macías began imprisoning and murdering real and imagined political opponents. Denouncing Spain and Western imperialism, he outlawed competing political parties, abolished the constitution, and declared himself president for life. He shut down churches and libraries and forbade the publication of all books, magazines, and newspapers. By the time he was overthrown in 1979, an estimated one-quarter to one-third of the population had been executed or driven into exile.

With political oppression came economic disaster. State controls were strapped on everything from banks to small enterprises to village markets, suffocating private initiative; the people returned *en masse* to subsistence farming. Spaniards who had remained in Equatorial Guinea after independence fled the country, taking their money and skills with them. Some 40,000 Nigerians who labored on the cocoa plantations also left. Cocoa production plummeted and coffee and timber exports fell by 90 percent. Before independence Equatorial Guinea exported fish, various foods, and palm oil; by the mid-1970s it was importing all three.

Macías's reign of terror ended in a 1979 coup led by his defense minister (and nephew) Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who still rules the country. The new president loosened Macías's links to Cuba, North Korea, and China and looked again toward the West. He reopened churches, denounced torture and secret arrests, and with Western help embarked on an ambitious plan to rebuild the economy. By the time I first set foot in Equatorial Guinea in 1985, the country had devalued its currency sevenfold to make exports cheaper and joined the French-backed Central African currency union. Obiang was taking steps toward a free-market economy. He lifted most price controls, radically reformed the tariff system, began selling off state-owned enterprises, and shut down the corrupt state development bank. As in more than 30 African countries, an economic revolution was, at least in theory, underway.

Three weeks after Don Bonifacio's ouster, I flew to Berlin for the annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). I was part of the delegation from Equatorial Guinea, which was led by the new finance minister, Don Fernando. (In Equatorial Guinea, everything is done on a first name basis, as long as you tack on that respectful "Don." Even the telephone book, about 50 pages for the entire county, is alphabetized by first names.)

I was introduced to Don Fernando at the inaugural cocktail party. He looked lost. Around us thousands of elegant delegates drank champagne and sampled smoked salmon. The stocky, round-cheeked finance minister was deferential, almost cowed. Though I worked for him and his government, I was paid with funds from a World Bank loan. As we chatted amid the evening's glitter, I wondered if Don Fernando saw me as another cog in the mysterious machinery of international capitalism, which could assemble from around the globe heads of central banks and budget bureaus, as well as fine wines and canapés.

I hoped not. Outside the giant convention center, 10,000 police shielded the 8,000 delegates from 30,000 protesters, who did. The demonstrators, radical young

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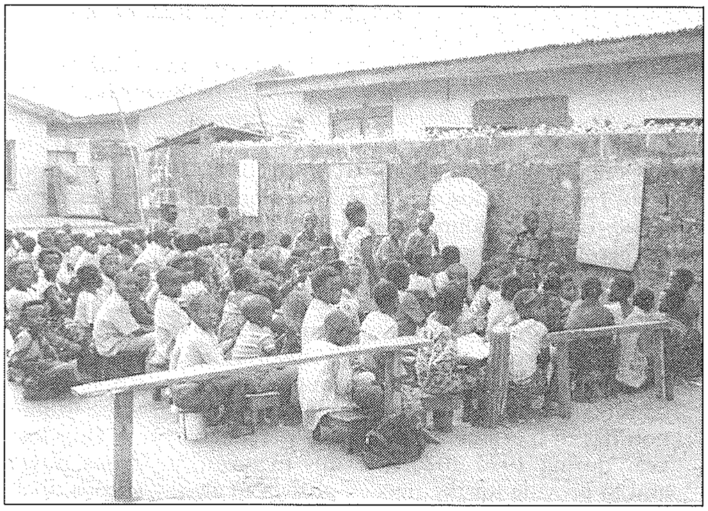


A painful decline in school enrollment has been one cost of Africa's ongoing economic crisis. Primary school enrollment dropped from 79 percent in 1980 to 73 percent just six years later.

Europeans who had been organizing for months, denounced the Bank and the IMF as neoimperialist organizations that crammed unsound capitalist policies down the throats of impoverished, debt-ridden nations. "Structural adjustment" programs hurt the poor, they said, ravaged the environment, and promoted only a shell of modernization. They had a point, albeit not one often expressed within the conference hall.

The IMF and the World Bank are the prime movers of Africa's economic about-face. Over the past decade their clout has grown tremendously. The two institutions, set up at the end of World War II to help repair the global economy, concentrate today on the developing countries, offering low-interest loans with strings attached. (The IMF loaned $21 billion in 1989, $4 billion to African countries.) An agreement from either of them has become something of a *Good Housekeeping* Seal of Approval for other banks. If an African country does not have a program with the World Bank or the IMF, many aid donors and commercial lenders will not ante up either. Countries are forced to devalue their currency, cut government spending, deregulate domestic and international trade, and turn over public enterprises to private management or joint ventures. The power of these two multinational institutions is without parallel in history.

As any Equatoguinean will tell you, such reforms are painful. Imported goods are suddenly much more expensive. Credit and public spending are cut back. Subsidies for food and housing and transportation are slashed. Politically, too, the changes are traumatic, a radical departure from the socialist and nationalist policies adopted by many of independent Africa's founding fathers, men such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Guinea's Sékou Touré, and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere. These leaders hoped to leapfrog into the ranks of industrial nations by launching massive state-run enterprises in steel, cement, and other basic industries. To fund this massive restructuring, the government took over agriculture and trade and squeezed out their surplus profits, relying on foreign aid and loans to make up the rest.

Though this strategy was already failing by the end of the 1960s, a price boom in the 1970s for many primary products—cocoa, coffee, metals, sugar, and oil—created the illusion of prosperity. The rise of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) stimulated efforts to fix the prices of commodities such as cocoa, coffee, metals, even bananas, but their apparent success while prices were rising eventually proved unsustainable. Heavy borrowing from international banks flush with petrodollars, from countries such as China and

PUTTING AFRICA TO WORK

Africa will need 380 million new jobs by the year 2020, yet today population growth is outpacing job creation. A 1989 World Bank study, Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth, *concludes that unregulated "microenterprises" will have to provide most of the jobs.*

Agriculture occupies about two-thirds of the labor force in Africa, and it will continue to be an important source of new employment during the next generation. For instance, horticulture, dairying, and forestry could expand rapidly, and all these activities are labor intensive. However, there are limits to agriculture's capacity for labor absorption. To achieve food security throughout the continent, average per capita food consumption has to increase by about one percent a year during 1990–2020. For this to occur, and to provide for the needed growth in agricultural exports, value added per worker in agriculture has to grow by about 1.5 percent a year. Thus an agricultural growth of four percent would imply employment growth of no more than 2.5 percent a year in agriculture; this would enable the sector to provide jobs for almost half the increase in the labor force.

Only a fraction of the new workers who come on the job market each year will be able to find employment in the modern sector, even under the most optimistic of scenarios. The public sector is chronically overstaffed and needs to be trimmed back rather than expanded. In some countries budget constraints are already forcing cuts in public employment. Large-scale modern industries will be important sources of employment only in a few countries. However, much simple manufacturing—for example, furniture, clothing, and household goods—can be undertaken by small and medium-scale firms. Employment in these firms and in construction could be important. In the longer term it is to these expanding modern enterprises and their supporting services that countries must look for new jobs. But in most countries they will fail to absorb more than a fraction of the new workers who come onto the job market each year. At best, wage employment in the modern sector as a whole can be expected to grow at around three to four percent annually.

This leaves small and "micro" enterprises, now mainly in the informal sector, to absorb about half the new entrants to the labor force. Construction to meet the fast-expanding demand for housing is likely to be an important source of jobs, especially through owner-managed businesses that employ just a few laborers. The same is true of much construction of infrastructure, such as school buildings and clinics, as well as small sewerage, rural road, and other . . . infrastructure. A myriad of other activities and services can be imagined.

Overall, employment in small and microenterprises will need to grow on average by six percent a year. . . . Experience suggests that, except on grounds of health and worker safety, governments should resist interference in labor markets. If left alone, they work well. The political imperative is to interfere, but the economic logic is not to. Minimum wage legislation, regulations restricting the ability of employers to hire and fire, and related interventions tend to raise costs, reduce competitiveness, and constrain the growth of employment.

France, and from international agencies such as the World Bank—along with the international community's willingness to soft-pedal the corruption and ineptness in the new nations—maintained the illusion of prosperity until the the 1980s.

True, there were critics of this top-down, state-centered model of development, including private, voluntary organizations such as Oxfam and "small-is-beautiful" enthusiasts. But their success in rural development proved too limited and their voices too diverse to launch a cohesive program for change. One of the most celebrated efforts was Julius Nyerere's *ujamaa* brand of decentralized, village-based development in Tanzania. Between 1967 and 1977, 85 percent of Tanzania's people were herded into experimental communal farm villages. This experiment in African socialism attracted unprecedented foreign financing—especially from the World Bank and the Nordic countries.

The results were disastrous. The villages became money traps as the village governing councils ran afoul of the same corruption and inefficiency from which central governments suffered. Between 1969 and 1983, rural living standards declined steadily (at an average annual rate of 2.5 percent). And yet, while acknowledging that the program was not succeeding, Nyerere held fast to his faith that Tanzania's problems could be solved without abandoning socialism. "There is a time for planting and a time for harvesting," he said in 1977. "I am afraid for us it is still a time for planting."

But the economic daydream of the 1970s ended in Tanzania and other African countries with a brutal awakening. In the early 1980s, Africa was hammered by a combination of worldwide recession, an increase in world interest rates, bad weather, and a fall in the prices of primary products ranging from cocoa to copper. Many African governments went broke. Africans saw their tiny incomes shrink further. Today the yearly income of all 450 million citizens of black Africa is about equal to that of Belgium, a country of only 10 million. By the mid-1980s, debt service in black Africa averaged nearly half of export earnings; most countries could not meet these payments and private banks were no longer willing to lend to them. Desperate African governments turned to the IMF and the World Bank, the preachers of free-market economic reforms. To get their blessing and their funds, the Africans converted. And so it was that Africa took the lead in the worldwide move toward the free market, some five years before Eastern Europe.

State-led development had failed. That does not mean, unfortunately, that free-market strategies have succeeded in Africa. Despite rhetoric about "the magic of the marketplace," the best economists—even at the World Bank and the IMF—recognize that no one knows for sure how to get out of crises like Africa's. The fact is that so far in Africa, both socialism and capitalism have failed. Our work in Equatorial Guinea suggested some reasons why.

The second day in Berlin, Don Fernando took me aside for a long talk. He said he didn't know why Don Bonifacio had been fired, having himself just returned from several years abroad. He wanted to talk about the economy. He asked me about the country's problems with exports, corruption, small business. I gave him a few examples.

Take cocoyam, a potato-like tuber known locally as *malanga* and a staple of the local diet. It was a good crop for Equatorial Guinea's climate and soils, and our *malanga* were said to be larger and tastier than those grown in neighboring countries. Selling them, it seemed, should be quite profitable. I had interviewed many women who grew and sold *malanga*. Remarkably, each felt compelled to take her own harvest to market.

"I don't trust my neighbor to sell the *malanga* for me," one woman explained. "She would not give me the correct price or would take the money."

"Even a woman in your village, your neighbor?" I asked.

"Yes, I do not trust them."

As a result, each of the women would spend about three-fifths of her *malangas'* sale price travelling to and from the market and living there for the six days it took to peddle them. The women also complained about "taxes" on their produce. In the Malabo market, municipal officials and policemen tapped them for 15 to 20 percent of the sale price in official payments and decidedly unofficial protection money. Official taxes from such small venders accounted for two-thirds of municipal reve-

A BRIGHT SPOT

The gloom over Africa's future is not unrelieved. In Africa: Dispatches From A Fragile Continent *(1990), journalist Blaine Harden sees signs of hope in Nigeria.*

Even as things fall apart, pots boil over, signals cross, and bodies rot, Nigerians somehow are managing to meld themselves into that most unusual of black African entities—a real nation. Against all odds, things come together.

Out of the Biafran war of the late 1960s, which was Africa's bloodiest tribal conflict, has come a lasting tribal peace—a feat of forgiveness remarkable in world history. Out of the berserk corruption of Nigeria's oil boom has come a gritty, sober-minded program of economic reform. Out of the two-time failure of democracy has emerged a moderate military regime that is orchestrating its own dissolution in favor of elective government. Out of six military coups, and after the assassination of three heads of state, Nigeria has lucked into an extraordinarily beneficent Big Man—the gap-toothed general.

Ibrahim Babangida

President Ibrahim Babangida has the most sophisticated economic mind of any leader on the continent. He is a former tank commander who happens to be a nimble politician. He has the good sense not to lock up, torture, or kill his critics. While imposing a hated economic adjustment program on Africa's most disputatious people, he managed to remain personally popular. Most remarkable for an African Big Man, the general promised to step down in 1992 and the promise was believed.

There were no guarantees that any of this would endure. There are sound reasons to fear catastrophe. Like Sudan, Nigeria is rent by religion. It is divided north and south between Muslims and Christians, and economic hard times have ratcheted up religious tension. Religious riots are common and could spill over into civil war. Coups always threaten. Babangida sanctioned the execution of 10 military officers who conspired in 1986 to overthrow him. (He personally has been on the winning side in three coups, including the one that brought him to power in 1985.) Nigerians deeply resent poverty. They have watched in disbelief and anger as their average annual income was sliced in half, from $670 to $300, in the past decade. The country slipped from low middle-income status to what it really is: a least developed country. The strikes and economic riots that erupted in the late 1980s will probably recur.

And yet Nigeria—horrible, ugly, boastful, coup-crazed, self-destructive, too-goddamn-hot Nigeria—is black Africa's principal prospect for a future that is something other than despotic, desperate, and dependent. If the world's poorest continent is going anywhere, Nigeria is likely to get there first. Two reasons are size and wealth.

The place is not a banana republic. One of every four Africans is a Nigerian. One hundred and fourteen million people lived

nues in the country's two largest cities.

The would-be *malanga* exporter faced further problems. Despite the supposed liberalization of trade, there remained an array of permits and bureaucratic hurdles, not to mention a 25-percent export tax collected by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. "Look here, I have to see things from the point of view of making money," explained one of the traders I spoke with. "With exports the government imposes so many obstacles. I do not believe that I can make money in exports."

Still other factors discouraged exports of *malanga*: a lack of credit, few agricultural specialists who knew the crop, and an absence of product grades and quality standards. I explained to Don Fernando that the troubles Equatoguineans had exporting *malanga* were part of a more general syndrome—not just in Equatorial Guinea but throughout Africa. Big ecoin the country in 1989. The population is growing at a rate that is among the highest in the world. In less than 50 years, Nigeria will have at least 618 million people—more than the present population of all of Africa, more than double the population of the United States. Besides sheer numbers, Nigeria has world-class wealth. It is the world's ninth largest oil producer and ranks fifth in natural gas reserves. Below ground, there are about 40 years' worth of oil and a century worth of natural gas. The country's gross national product is bigger (in years when the world oil price is strong) than that of white-ruled South Africa and more than half that of all black Africa combined. Above ground, there is a wealth of well-trained and frighteningly ambitious humanity. There are an estimated two million university-trained professionals. They constitute the largest, best-trained, most acquisitive black elite on the continent.

Finally, Nigerians have a penchant, indeed a mania, for self-criticism. They obsessively pick apart the failures of their leaders and of themselves. Masochism is a national birthright. Titles of popular books by Nigerians include *Another Hope Betrayed, The Trouble with Nigeria,* and *Always a Loser—A Novel About Nigeria* . . . . Novelist Chinua Achebe upped the ante on national self-flagellation by writing, "Nigeria is not a great country. It is one of the most disorderly nations in the world. It is one of the most corrupt, insensitive, inefficient places under the sun. It is one of the most expensive countries and one of those that give least value for money. It is dirty, callous, noisy, ostentatious, dishonest and vulgar. In short, it is among the most unpleasant places on earth!"

All true, and yet dictators—Big Men in the African mold—are not acceptable in Nigeria. They are lampooned in newspaper cartoons. They are overthrown. They are murdered. General Yakubu Gowon, a head of state who backed away from his promise to return the country to civilian rule, was tossed out in favor of a general who kept his word. General Mohammed Buhari, a head of state who muzzled the press and tried to run the country as though it were Kenya, was overthrown in favor of Babangida. Babangida could not survive if he were to back away from his promise of a return to democracy. Although they have badly botched it up, when they achieve democratic rule, Nigerians refuse to settle for anything less. It is a measure of the contrary, contradictory, mule-headed nature of the people that, after 30 years of independence, civilians have been in power for nine years, generals for 21, and the national consensus is that only democracy works.

In their lacerating self-criticism, and their refusal to abide megalomaniac Big Men, Nigerians refuse to commit a corrosive crime common to most of black Africa—passive acceptance of tyranny. It is no accident that half the continent's newspapers, half its journalists, one-quarter of its published books, a Nobel laureate in literature, and a growing number of world-class novelists and poets are Nigerian. "The worst sin on earth is the failure to think," writes Nigerian novelist and television producer Ken Saro-Wiwa. "It is thoughtlessness that has reduced Africa to beggardom, to famine, poverty, and disease. The failure to use the creative imagination has reduced Africans to the status of mimic men and consumers of the product of others' imagination."

nomic reforms have been put in place throughout the continent; prices and exchange rates have been set straight. But food production and exports have not taken off because in other countries, as in Equatorial Guinea, private-sector institutions and government regulations remain deficient. Free-market reforms, it turns out, have so far made little difference in, of all places, the market.

During the next few days Don Fernando and I talked about other obstacles to economic advance. Property rights, for example, are poorly defined. It is difficult to buy and sell a piece of property, even sometimes to know who owns it. A Spaniard who had lived in Equatorial Guinea for 40 years once tried to explain this to me.

"You have to understand the traditional system of property here. The people were hunters more than cultivators, and even the cultivators were nomads. Land was not stable; it would be used and then abandoned. When the tribe moved to a new area the chief would assign the land to the tribal notables, the closest land to the new settlement to the biggest of them, further out to the rest of the people." Later, in colonial times, as a protection against native exploitation, land was not sold but leased to colonists for 99 years. "So the idea remains—land is not yours, it is of the state."

After independence, some lands were nationalized. Some were sold off by the government but remained subject to renationalization. Property lines are often unclear, crippling private economic initiative. Stories abound of people buying buildings or property only to find that they belonged to someone else.

Fernando and I talked about other weaknesses. The legal system is inefficient and corrupt. Contracts are precarious, since the courts, whose judges are often bribed or intimidated, cannot be counted on to enforce them. During my stay in Equatorial Guinea, two state-sponsored banks went belly up. For months, it was impossible to withdraw savings, write checks, even exchange foreign currency. The banks had been making generous loans to government higher-ups and other well-connected people, often with the tacit understanding that they need not be repaid.

Corruption of this type is widespread in Equatorial Guinea and across Africa. Indeed, in much of Africa, the lines between the public and private sectors are vague, even invisible, given all the illicit payoffs, joint ventures, and cooptation. Even with macroeconomic reforms, arbitrary economic regulations and informal favors are still pervasive.

With so many institutional foundations lacking, the so-called private sector in Equatorial Guinea and elsewhere in Africa does not resemble what we know in the West. Africa's middle class is meager, perhaps five percent of the population in many countries. A huge "informal sector" comprising small traders and producers operates outside the official tax and regulatory systems. In the cities of Zaire and the Congo, it is thought that up to 80 percent of all jobs are in unregistered, unofficial "microenterprises" with one to five employees. What markets do exist are thin and volatile, and they are vulnerable to monopolies and old-fashioned exploitation. Many government officials are themselves in business, in several senses. And so our Western concepts of property, enterprise, and regulation do not fit the African reality. Simply declaring that prices will be determined by market forces is hardly likely to produce economic efficiency. This was why, I explained to the new finance minister, we had begun to move beyond macroeconomic reform in order to fortify the institutional foundations for free markets.

We shut down one corrupt bank, for instance and moved to restructure another. Borrowing ideas from successful small-scale credit programs in Bangladesh and Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), we proposed a new effort to enforce the repayment of loans and to emphasize small producers. At the same time we began to reorganize the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, cutting away the fat and redefining its mission as the promotion, rather than restriction, of the private sector. We proposed to strip the cocoa marketing board of its monopoly powers. We created new economic incentives for government workers in agriculture, road and water repairs, and public utilities. And we installed a system to hold public officials accountable for their actions.

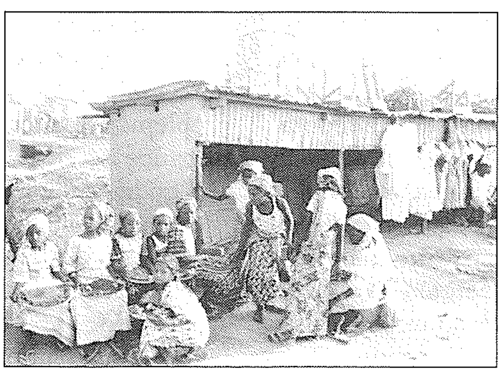
Even as we dismantled Equatorial Guinea's state-led economy, we came to recognize the necessity of state power. Not the state of the past, which had suffocated business and agriculture with controls, but an efficient state dedicated to laying the foundations for free markets—to promoting competition, controlling corruption, enforcing contracts and adjudicating disputes, ensuring the repayment of loans, and providing basic economic and social services. Government is also needed to build and maintain the country's roads, communications networks, seaports, and bridges, many of which have become expensive relics for lack of care.

Over the past three decades, development specialists have paid little attention to issues of poor government and corruption. For years it has been taboo for aid-givers and lenders even to discuss such things, although everyone knew that they were brakes on Africa's development. Many policy analysts and academics also avoided these issues, perhaps because they smacked of blaming the victim, of seeming to agree with reactionaries who blamed Africa's problems on Africans. Official corruption is not new in Africa and certainly is not exclusive to it. But corruption has become the defining feature of the African state, and poor governance remains the key institutional constraint on African economic development.

It is, of course, easier to decry shortcomings than to work through ways to improve them. Experience in other continents shows that success is possible. Several Third World countries have succeeded in reducing corruption. In 1975, for example, the Philippines' Bureau of Internal Revenue, for years awash in corruption, drastically reduced it when a new leader publicly fired leading offenders and provided civil servants with incentives to improve their performance. Similarly, Hong Kong and Singapore have enjoyed dramatic success with anticorruption agencies, which enacted, among other reforms, stiff penalties and strong antinepotism regulations.

Corruption obeys a formula: Corruption equals monopoly power plus official discretion minus public accountability. So it is essential to leaven government monopoly, keep officials' autonomy in check, and increase accountability. Privatizing state-run industries can also help. Finally, and in my mind most importantly, governments must throw open the floodgates of information. Corruption thrives on ignorance. Democracy and free markets depend on public accountability and an active, free press.

Lessons from elsewhere are encouraging, but in Africa efficient markets and good government have proved particularly elusive. Africa seems to break the rules, foul up the templates, ruin the recipes. Particularly in such areas as property rights, incentives, and greater accountability, success hinges on cultural fitness as well as economic efficiency. Reforms must fit Africa's political and cultural realities.


The seeds of economic and political renewal? Market women in Lagos, Nigeria.

Put so simply, this seems like common sense. And it is. Still, it is surprising how often aid donors, researchers, and even Africans themselves seem to neglect it. Rarely do such people mention the importance of studying a country's culture before tinkering with its politics. Critics often write off failures for having "overlooked local realities." But turn the question on its head—ask "how by taking local realities into account might the project or policy have gone better?"—and the critics become silent. So far, Africa's reforms have focused on the "macro" side—reducing the economic role of the state, for example, or, in the case of political reform, moving toward multiparty elections. I fear that these welcome changes will not work without stronger institutions at the "micro" level—clearer property rights, for example, fair courts, stronger private-sector institutions, and fewer restrictions on business. If "free market" and "democracy" are to be more than words in places such as Equatorial Guinea, we must take governance seriously, which means seeking not just less government but better government and cultural supports for it.

These are the needs, but I think we must admit our vast ignorance of how to satisfy them. How to adjust the foundations of development to the realities of African cultures and politics remains a big unknown, perhaps the biggest challenge for Africans and those who wish to help them. For now, in our ignorance, we grope together for workable answers amid illiteracy, violence, and distrust.

In Berlin I lectured Don Fernando on the institutional foundations of development. When we returned to Equatorial Guinea, it was his turn to lecture me on the cultural and political side.

I met with him for the last time a month after our meeting in Berlin. In the wake of the coup attempt, many innocent people, including one of my assistants, had been tortured. I was trying to organize the international community to petition President Obiang for an open investigation. I had also prepared a final economic report. Don Bonifacio's firing threatened the reforms that after two years we had been so close to implementing. I would be leaving the country soon, and I wanted to see Don Fernando before I returned to the States.

I thought of our conversation often after I left Equatorial Guinea, as the reforms unraveled. The government went back on its plans to improve property rights, and spending outside the official budget began again to soar. Don Bonifacio and my assistant who had been tortured were accused of corruption, and our project's records were pilfered in an eventually unsuccessful attempt to destroy evidence and frame them. The corrupted banks remained closed, and the incentive systems and accountability reforms we created were still in place; but the news from Equatorial Guinea was that the old politics of control and patronage had returned in force.

It was late afternoon when we finally got together. Don Fernando had abandoned his necktie and was smoking a cigar as we walked together up the battered back stairs of the ministry and entered his office. I sat on the couch and he plopped down on a chair of slick, light-green Naugahyde.

Fernando wanted to talk about the political situation. "You know, in Africa there are certain differences from the West and here even more so. People are suspicious, people are jealous. If you have a car and someone else does not, he starts saying bad things about you. He wants the car, you see, and is envious. Then you find out he has been saying bad things and you try to get him. I will tell you the truth, these recent problems are a lot like that. There is a disturbance so they round up other people and go after them."

Don Fernando's speech was animated, his voice didactic. He hardly resembled the meek man I'd encountered in Berlin.

"In Africa you have to understand that people do not have a common interest," he continued. "Without a common interest, there are fights. In Africa first comes the family, then the clan, then the province, then the region, and finally the country. But the country is the last thing."

Fernando told a story about the previous year's preparations for a Central African conference held in Equatorial Guinea. People had been conscripted to work on an airport runway extension and the renovation of a soccer stadium.

"Boom, boom, boom, they worked and worked till late at night. And you know when the stadium was done, my God, compared to what was there before it was something—and the people were so proud. And when the big jets came into the airport where before the runways were too short, when people saw them land, the people were proud of themselves.

"That is what we have to do when everyone is poor. When there is hunger there is no common interest. And everyone thinks of families and clans. So to create a common interest we need strong leadership, we need to launch works like hospitals, roads, and schools with the people working, where they can see the results and feel proud." I shook my head. Despite the free-market reforms, he still believed that Equatorial Guinea needed a dictator and forced labor; I objected that there are no examples of either of them succeeding in Africa.

We talked about the coup attempt, about dictatorship and corruption and torture. I said there had to be a strategy for change. Don Fernando said that one had to be realistic. "The problem of the president is that most of the people in government are incompetent and uncultured, they have no exposure to the outside world. These people are jealous of the few with outside training. But there are too few trained people for the president to have any choice. He needs the Guineans who emigrated to come back, all the lawyers and engineers. They won't come because they talk about democracy and rights. But we won't have that until we have more trained people. The president faces a balancing act. He has to keep the uneducated top people happy, the jealous ones, because they have the ear of the people in the villages. If the president goes only with the educated few, that three or five percent, then he would be out of office in a week. It is a dangerous situation—he has no choice but to humor the backward, the reactionaries.

"What has recently occurred must be seen in this light. Something happened within the group, everyone gets excited and casts aspersions on many others, innocent people. Then things happen. I am by no means defending torture or anything else. But we cannot have a democracy like England's." There was no way, he cried, "to appreciate this country without having known it under the terrible dictator of the 1970s, Macías Nguema.

"You have to compare with the subject itself, not its neighbor. If we were under Macías, there would be 60 people dead now. Including Bonifacio and your friend who was tortured. If you had come to my office like this after hours under Macías, then I would be in jail. Now these people are on the streets with their rights."

I reminded him of the torture.

"We started at minus 10. You can't just look at our current situation, say plus five or zero or minus five. Few countries have suffered as we have," Fernando said. "You cannot help but think like an American." I shook my head but Fernando went on.

"No, listen to me, if you had seen Equatorial Guinea under Macías, you would see that we have come the furthest of any country. That comparatively, it's a paradise."

AFRICA AGONISTES

Seek ye first the political kingdom, "and all the rest shall be added unto you," exhorted Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first head of state and Africa's premier nationalist.

Now more than 30 years and some 70 coups later, all the rest has not been added—and some things even have been subtracted from Africa. Today, its per-capita income is lower than it was 30 years ago, and 70 percent of the world's poorest nations are in Africa. In his recent **Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent** (Norton, 1990), Blaine Harden of the *Washington Post* notes that if Africa is in last place in many categories, it is unfortunately first in others. Its foreign debt burden is the highest in the world, with interest payments bleeding away one of every three dollars Africans earn. In Africa, civil wars have spawned the world's largest refugee problem. To these difficulties must be added uncontrolled population growth and inadequate food supply: Africa today, writes Harden, "is the most successful producer of babies in recorded history and the world's least successful producer of food."

This dire African situation is a sad contrast to the bright hopes of 30 years ago. That heady period of the late 1950s saw the emergence of an impressive group of men—the poet L. S. Senghor (Senegal), the orator Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), trade union leaders Ahmed Sékou Touré (Guinea) and Tom Mboya (Kenya), and rural radicals like Oginga Odinga (Kenya)—who all used anticolonial grievances to become, at least initially, popular leaders of the newly independent nations. These movements were commonly dubbed "nationalistic" by both African intellectuals and Western social scientists.

James Coleman's **Nigeria: Background to Nationalism** (1958) captured the mood of the buoyant period, while also defining what that nationalism was: only those movements whose political parties had a territorial following (as opposed to a tribal one) and had set up independence as an ultimate goal.

Using nationalist slogans, postcolonial leaders hoped to integrate their subjects. But, as Coleman and Carl Rosberg pointed out in **Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa** (1964), nation building required more than stirring political rhetoric. Modernization was needed, and African leaders were determined to drag, push, bully, or borrow their new nations into the modern world. All modernization theorists, whether liberal or Marxist, shared the assumption expressed by David Apter in **The Politics of Modernization** (1965), namely, that a centralized state on the Western model was needed to coordinate all elements of society and direct development. A second assumption of Apter's was also widely shared (except by Marxists): The centralized state could only succeed with the help of the foreign powers, which would supply technical expertise, loans, and training facilities.

Despite all the fine theories, it became obvious by the end of the 1960s that Africa was *not* developing. A radical pessimism set in, expressed in René Dumont's **False Start in Africa** (Praeger, 1969). Dumont's long chapter headings—such as "Too Many Tractors and Coffee Plants, Not Enough Oil Palms and Food Crops"—are in themselves revealing. They reveal a tendency to blame Africa's failure to develop not on Africa but on outside factors, among them development aid itself. This "defense" of Africa was expressed most violently in Franz Fanon's **Wretched of the Earth** (1965).

The "generation" of social scientists following Dumont and Fanon tried to excuse the Africans' failures by using "dependency" theory, smuggled in from Latin America, to explain the new states' inability to fend for themselves. Thus, Walter Rodney described **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa** (Howard Univ., 1974) through four centuries, from the slave traders of the 16th century to the multinational corporations of our own time. Colin Leys's **Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism 1964–1971** (Univ. of Calif., 1974) became the prototypical case study, illustrating how foreign investment dominated the economic structure of the emerging nations, turning the African petty bourgeoisie into little more than agents of these foreign interests. To call the new African nations independent was for these social scientists less accurate—and certainly less fashionable—than calling them neocolonial.

Rodney and Leys were only the pioneers of a scholarly industry that showed how foreign influence and foreign aid have failed Africa. But if the original formula for Africa's success envisioned, in addition to foreign aid, a strong centralized state, the record of those states makes an even more appalling tale. The Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake puts the blame, in "Sustaining Development on the Indigenous" (paper prepared for the World Bank, December 1987), on the African states themselves for the "pervasive alienation, the delinking of leaders from followers, a weak sense of national identity, and the perception of the government as a hostile force."

It is easy to see, in retrospect, how those new states connected by only the loosest of ties were ripe for dictators—like Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire, Daniel arap Moi in Kenya, and Gnassingbe Eyadema in Togo—who could hold diverse populations and interests together by terror and tyranny and by promoting factions and patrimonialism. While such leaders turned their governments into "kleptocracies," they also promoted a class of middlemen—pictured in Robert Bates's **Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Politics** (Univ. of Calif., 1981)—who further sabotaged any chance for development by collaring concessions, contracts, commissions, kickbacks, and bribes. Jean-Francois Bayart's **L'Etat en Afrique** (Sayard, 1989)—which represents the fruits of French scholarship in the 1980s—proposed a different way of even understanding the African state. With his subtitle, *la politique du ventre*, or "politics of the stomach," Bayart suggested that the African state has become "indigenized," personalized, and custom-designed for manipulation. Any attempt to understand it in European or theoretical or Weberian terms will lead off into a wild goose-chase of miscomprehension.

Is Africa then simply to become the lost continent again, relegated from the Third World into, what Harden calls, "its own bleak category, the Nth World"? Bayart provides a possible way out of this quandary when he proposes bypassing European categories to discover what is indigenous to Africa. Goran Hydan in **No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective** (Univ. of Calif., 1983) anticipated Bayart when he "open[ed] the door to a field of inquiry that has normally been ignored by writers on Africa." Hydan studied "old-fashioned" peasant methods of production and exchange, particularly in agriculture, that had been ignored—if not despised—by both government planners and foreign-loan officers. Likewise, Robert Chambers in **Rural Development: Putting the Last First** (Longman, 1983) advocated a populist, agricultural-based approach to African development because it represents "the single largest knowledge resource not yet mobilized in the [bankrupt] development enterprise." John Iliffe, in **The Emergence of African Capitalism** (Univ. of Minn., 1983), also found a source of hope in Africa's homegrown enterprises, such as dye and textile manufacture in Nigeria, supported as they were by a complex interaction of business and family and religion. This traditional or indigenous African capitalism, Iliffe noted, supplied methods and "code[s] that helped foster trade and cooperation even in the absence of political unity in late precolonial times."

In going beyond Western notions of capitalism and the state, such scholars are penetrating beneath what V. Y. Mudimbe has described as the European **Invention of Africa** (Indiana Univ., 1988). Harden's *Africa* is the most notable recent attempt "to make the world's poorest continent more understandable—and less piteous—by making it more human." For Harden, Africa's values, especially those centering around family and kinship, do much to counterbalance the continent's vast problems. Those values may be more permanent, he suggests, than the authoritarian political artifice created by the Europeans in their brief 60-year reign in Africa. Instead of writing off the African experiment, Harden subscribes to a graffito scrawled on the backs of African trucks: "No condition is permanent."

—*E. S. Atieno Odhiambo*

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