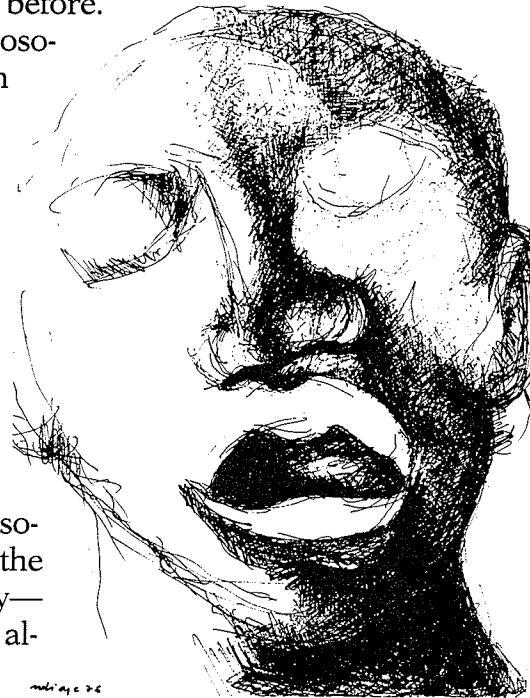


Africa Agonistes

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 be gu a, efiri 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 Af-

rica. 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

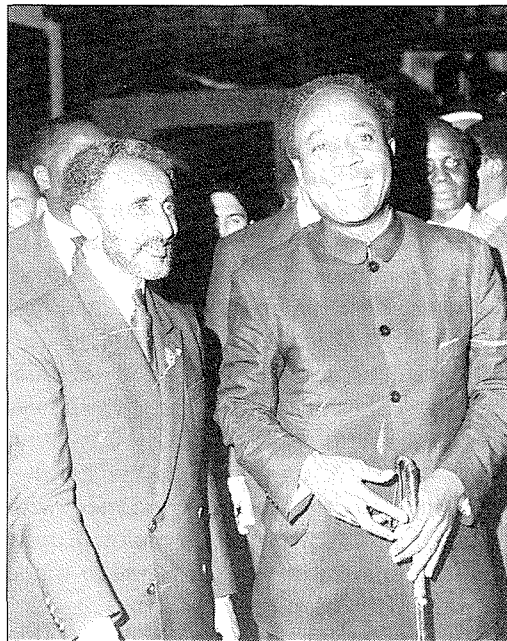
Kwame Anthony Appiah is professor of philosophy and literature at Duke University and Andrew A. Mellon Fellow at the National Humanities Center. Born in London, where his father was studying law, he grew up in Ghana. He received a B.A. (1975) and a Ph.D. (1982) from Clare College, Cambridge. His books include *For Truth in Semantics* (1986), *Necessary Questions* (1989), and the forthcoming *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Politics of Culture* (Oxford University Press).

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 non-aligned 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.

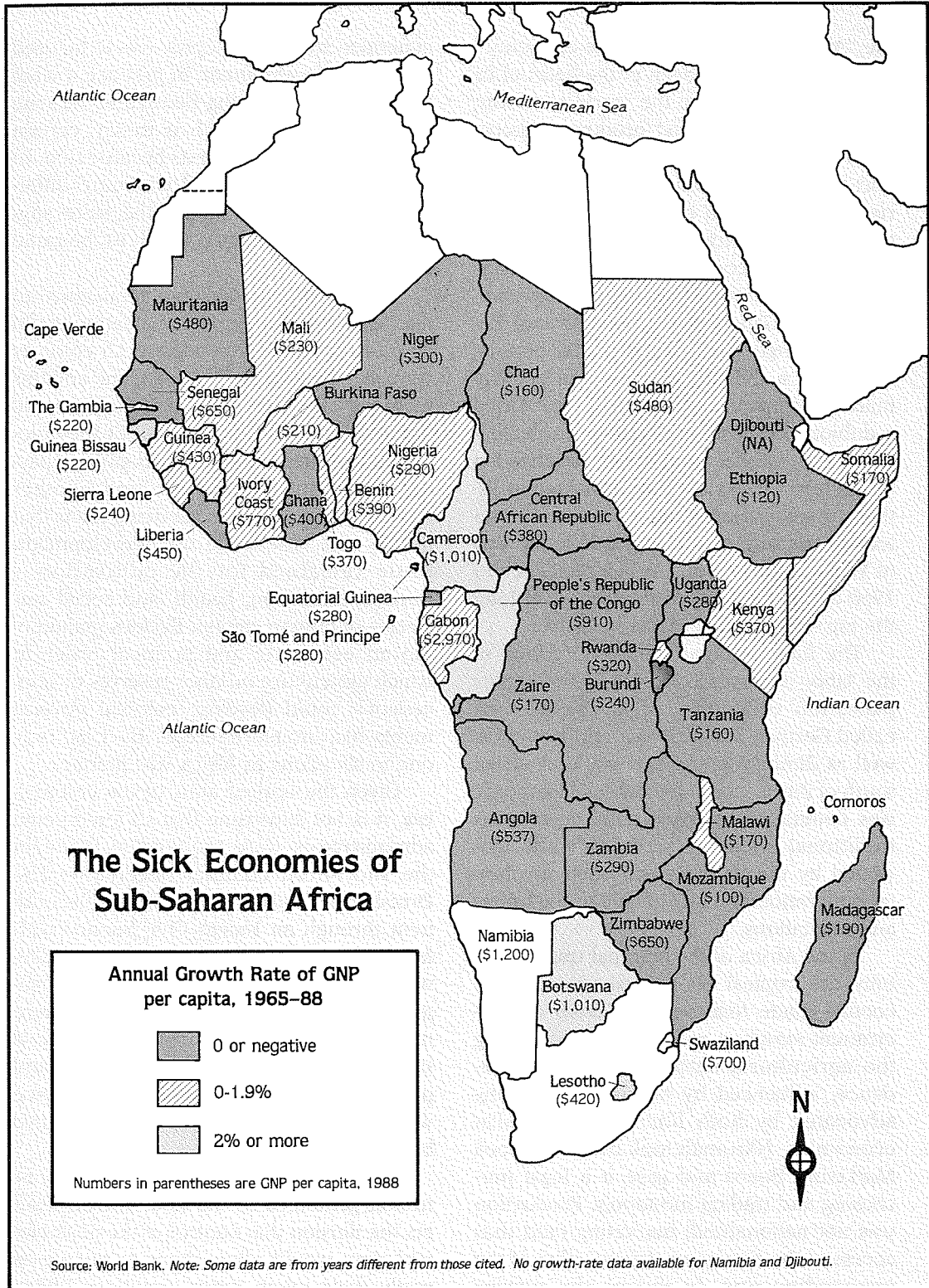
In the Africa of the colonial trade economy, the tropical cash crops—in our case cocoa—made financing the costs of government simply a matter of appropriating the agricultural surplus. After independence, influenced by notions of planning advocated by both liberal and socialist economists, Nkrumah took 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-



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 every-

where—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 ori-

gins 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 *évolués*, 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 with-

drawn 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 Mauritians 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 fam-

ilies 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 Soci-

ety—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.