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The Barrel of a Gun

Political Power in Africa
and the Coup d'Etat

Part II: The Colonial Sediment

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Part II

The Colonial Sediment

The crisis of Africa's independence governments, which one after the other have fallen victim to army coups d'etat, cannot be discussed without a close look at the colonial period.

Independence is seen as a watershed in the development of the contemporary African condition. And so it was. In 1960 there occurred changes scarcely credible ten years before. But despite the great wave from colonial to independent government, there remained continuity between the old dependence and the new. Many of the means and ends that made up colonial administration were inherited virtually intact by the independence governments. For the sediment of colonialism lies deep in African society. The armies are colonial products; the political system is largely a transplant, and a bad one at that; while the political rulers were trained or constrained by the colonial system. Africa was a continent of bureaucratic rule, with armies behind the administrators ready to prove whenever necessary that government existed by conquest.

Have we not had enough of the colonial period by now? It may be charged that such excursions only encourage the tendency to find excuses for failure on the African continent in the heritage of colonialism, or the machinations of outside forces; and that it is time we stopped blaming everything on the colonial past. For Africans have taken over now. But independence in many countries is not yet ten years old; and while it is said that, in such independence, there was an African revolution, we must ask – how complete a revolution? If Africans have taken over now, what have they inherited or discarded? Which of the faults in their politics are intrinsic to the condition in which colonialism left the continent? And which, given clearer purpose, properly pursued, might Africa have surmounted? To answer

these questions, it is necessary to examine the state structures built up during the colonial period and taken over at the time of independence; and how, in the phase of decolonization, power was transferred, through virtually unchanged institutions of government, to largely hand-picked heirs. These heirs are the new ruling groups of Africa. Their aspirations, their fears and their conflicts, in a system still subjugated within the world economy, and developing too slowly to make room for all claimants – among them, the military men – to membership of the ruling and privileged groups, are the political crises of Africa, punctuated so frequently by the coup d'état.

The Grid of Administration

The numerical weakness of the colonial general's troops impelled them to discover in the country to be conquered the resources necessary for completing the conquest: manpower by recruiting natives, intellectual power by studying the populations and getting used to them. Action undertaken in this way is patient and solid. It raises up native allies. . . . Conquest became organisation on the march.

R. Delavignette, *Freedom and Authority in French West Africa*

Conquest, diplomatically and officially speaking, became a sustained venture of the European powers after the Berlin conference of 1884-5, although the slaver, the trader, the fortune-hunter and the missionary had all come before the imperial army, each in his turn or all together softening up the continent for conquest. The division of Africa was an extension of the struggle among the European powers of the nineteenth century, and Africa under colonialism was ruled as a promontory of European interests. Colonialism was trade, investment and enterprise for the benefit of an alien society. Power lay outside the country. African trade, African free enterprise, far from

being encouraged, were ousted, or permitted to operate only as very junior partners.

In the conquest of the continent, a show of force was not always necessary; artful negotiation and deft displays of potential were often sufficient. Occupying powers met resistance and made enemies; but they also induced allies among groups which thought that self-interest would be served by joining the invader rather than by opposing him. There were regions of brave and costly resistance. But whatever the pattern of the conquest, whether by war or seduction, conquest it was, and the colonial power insisted upon unassailable authority. That it did not always immediately install this authority, outside of garrisons and the raising of local forces, lest needless trouble break out, did not obscure the fact that the colonial powers owed their presence and their claim to legitimacy to force.

From formal conquest until, more or less, the First World War, colonialism was characterized by pacification, trade and only the most rudimentary forms of administration. Traders, concession-holders and, in some regions, white settlers, were left to install themselves where they were inclined and to exact what premiums they could. French Equatorial Africa, for instance, was divided among forty concession companies at the beginning of the century.¹ Commanding only meagre forces in the field,² colonial rule had to be riveted like 'a great steel grid' over the continent.³ The grid had to be tight and durable, but it had also to be cheap. Lugard's improvised grid, the indirect rule system, was 'the offspring of expediency and parsimony'.⁴ It was economical not only of the colonial power's cash resources, on which a large bureaucratic machine would have made heavy demands, but also of its military capacity. Emirs were offered a settlement of conquest without dishonour.⁵ Government would be channelled through the chiefs, 'to maintain, strengthen and educate the Fulani and Kanembu ruling races', so that 'the regeneration of Nigeria might be through its own governing class'.⁶

The patents for the administrative grids fashioned in London or Paris, in Brussels or in Lisbon, varied in style and design, since variations had to allow for the aberrations of French,

British, Belgium and Portuguese history, as well as their respective philosophies and styles of administration. The French, once installed, set out to break the powerful Moslem dynasties that had fought them on the battlefield. Lugard himself, searching for a malleable and hierarchical system of authority, found one in the northern emirates of Nigeria. Indeed, this system was one that, in the rigid control of commoners by overlords, recalled, in thrifty combination, the iron discipline of his beloved army and Britain's own rigid class distinctions. To the British, the emirs of Nigeria, with court and protocol, not to speak of *purdah*, evoked the Indian Raj. Here in Africa were princely states that kept their subjects at a respectful distance, unlike the pushful southern society of the British colonies, whose imitation of British ways made the master writhe with discomfort at the familiarity of it all.

The French tied their territories close to France, seeking, with their penchant for philosophy and system, some coherence in a scheme said to embrace Frenchmen and adopted Frenchmen – the *evolues* – alike. The British were empirical, mostly, or opportunist; they felt easier administering from hand to mouth, stretching such theory as they managed to devise, like Lugard's indirect rule, to inapplicable proportions in regions totally unlike those in which Lugard made the emirs the pinnacle of authority – under him. And the proselytizing that the French undertook with French culture, the British tried with the Christian religion and the mission society. They permitted a bewildering array of mission societies; but through them all, the White man's God laid down the White man's superior morality, to those striving for acceptance through conversion. When it came to government, British administrators focused not on Westminster, the mother of Parliaments, but on her minor children: local government, local councils, local problems. Parochialism recalled a more static age, when the country squire and the justice of the peace kept order in the domain. The pinnacle of achievement was the life and manners of the English gentleman, the English public school, English phlegm.

The French found themselves more comfortable in the company of the *evolue* – and the *evolue* was suitably responsive to

the compliment.⁷ The British preferred not the jumped-up, educated black Englishman, but the 'unspoiled' villager or peasant tribesman, patiently trying out his model of local government, and knowing his place in the hierarchy of authority, under the chief, who was in turn, of course, under the administrator.

The French, said one of their former colonial governors superciliously, did not have 'a superstitious regard for monarchy'.⁸ The chief was not considered a potentate; rather, a useful administrative auxiliary. Cantonal chiefs were appointed only to transmit orders and to collect taxes. The French administrator 'is the commandant, the king of the bush, whose very presence creates a new political unit'.⁹ And, to be sure, whether the chiefs were supported under the British or degraded under the French, the colonial official himself was the king of the bush; and of the province, and of the capital, and of the colony. Students and Africanists have dwelt in earnest detail on the main colonial systems, the French, the British and the Belgian. But, scrutinized after the independence experience, the differences fall into academic obscurity. There was the national inclination of each towards its own 'system'; but lines between the French, British, Belgian and other systems are blurred in many places, with policy frequently pragmatic and in conflict with declared principle.

Colonialism in its different variations was more like than unlike in the form of rule it imposed. This was, whether conscious or not, military in conception and organization. More than anything else, colonial administrations resembled armies. The chain of authority from the top downwards was untouched by any principle of representation or consultation. For long periods in some territories, indeed, the colonial administrations not only resembled armies, in their para-military formation and ethos; they were, as in the Sudan, the instruments of military men.

The pacification of the Sudan was brought about by a series of military excursions; but these apart, the army shaped, during the pacification period, the Sudanese administration itself. The Condominium Agreement of 1899, under which the Sudan was governed (actually by Britain, but supposedly by the two Condominium partners, Britain and Egypt), declared a state of

martial law in the Sudan so as to give the governor-general full powers in the process of re-occupation, and this martial law remained in force until 1926.* The governor-general, who until 1925 was also commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army, was absolute ruler. Not until the Second World War was anything done to dilute the pure autocracy of government in the Sudan or to find some way of consulting the Sudanese themselves; and when steps were taken, they were too few and too late. The day-to-day exercise of the governor-general's authority devolved on government secretaries, governors of provinces and department heads; but ultimate authority remained unimpaired in the hands of the governor-general, with all officials responsible to him alone. The civil apparatus below him followed a distinct military pattern, with the civil, finance and legal secretaries, the heads of departments, and the governors of provinces, his staff and commanders in the field.¹⁰ All governors, inspectors, senior administrative officers, and even magistrates in the early years, were British officers seconded from the Egyptian army. Under them, in charge of routine work, were Egyptian army officers. The highest posts open to Egyptians were those of *mamur* (subordinate to an assistant-district commissioner) and *sub-mamur*. The Egyptian officials in turn had Sudanese of even lesser rank from the armed forces as their assistants.

The search for civilian administrators was cautious and tentative, though somewhat speeded up by the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the century, which drew from Sudan some of its military administrators, including Kitchener himself. Each year, through careful selection by a board sitting in London, a few young British civilians were recruited from the universities to meet Cromer's requirements of 'active young men, endowed with good health, high character and fair abilities'.¹¹ Six were taken out to the Sudan in 1901; by 1905 there were fifteen; and by 1933, forty, making up what was by then the Sudan Political Service, probably the most select and best-paid body of administrators in the colonial world. As late as 1912, no more than

*Article 9 of the Condominium Agreement reads: 'Until, and save as it shall be otherwise determined by Proclamation, the Sudan shall be and remain under martial law.'

two of the twelve provincial governors were civilians. Only very gradually was the administration transformed from a military to a civilian machine, though 'it continued to have a military flavour which survives to this day in the khaki uniform and coloured stripes of the civilian administrators of the independent Sudan'.¹² Between them, Cromer, Wingate and Kitchener, all products of the Royal Military Academy of Woolwich (Cromer and Wingate passed out as gunners; Kitchener, as a sapper)¹³ formulated policy for the Sudan – and Egypt – across thirty-six years. Wingate had been Director of Intelligence to Kitchener during the advance on Khartoum, and the man he chose to succeed him when he was transferred to Cairo as High Commissioner for Egypt, Sir Lee Stack, had at one time been his own Director of Intelligence.¹⁴

No specific Whitehall department in London, no parliamentary supervision (the occasional question in the House apart) controlled policy in the Sudan; and the Foreign Office, which was the only department concerned, could always find evasion and defence behind the fact that, by the clauses of the Condominium Agreement, the governor-general was in supreme control. Around this command, there grew, according to a doubtful tribute by a former senior member of the Sudan Political Service, 'a closely integrated corporation of willing servants of the State, undogged by the tyranny of the pen, concerned with little but their work, their hobbies and their families, and owing a ready allegiance to the embodiment of leadership and power in the person of the Head of the State',¹⁵

If governors of provinces or members of the secretariat at headquarters had received no previous administrative training, they made up for this or any other inadequacy with the confidence that, as military officers, they had unchallengeable superiority in 'handling men'. Alien as this notion might be to the principle of representative government, and destructive of its future practice, it was the only system operable by a traditional military hierarchy. Men in command, by the nature of their office, knew how to command other men. Any other influences were obstructive.

In the French empire, a military-type administration

developed as naturally as in the Sudan. Military conquest was followed by military administration. 'When the military were replaced by civilian administrators,' a historian of the period has written,¹⁶ 'the latter were inheritors of an administrative infrastructure that was essentially military in conception. Sole authority was vested in the Commandant de Cercle, who, like the colonel of a battalion, had jurisdiction over, if he did not carry out, all fields of administration, including the technical services.'¹⁷ The civilian administrator continued to require that the 'natives' salute him; and to enforce his authority, he had a para-military force at his disposal in the form of the *gardes de cercle*. 'These guards obtained great power in the community because of their police function and because they were frequently used as intermediaries between the administrator and the chiefs.'¹⁸ Just as the French army was organized so that there should be no duality of command but a logical chain of authority from the highest to the lowest, so 'the administrative structures introduced (by the military) in Africa were, even more than those created by Napoleon in the mother country, based on the hierarchical pyramid of the army'.¹⁹ The chiefs of the cantons and circles of the administration were grouped into a hierarchy: *chefs superieurs de province; chefs de cantons; chefs de village*. The chiefs were selected for their loyalty to France, on evidence that often involved service in the army or police. And only in 1936 were they granted official civil service terms of appointment.

Lugard's system, likewise, has been described as a classic example of militarism in government. It

stemmed from his military training and mind, and the system of one man rule which he set up faithfully reflects military rather than civil considerations. Instead of a commercial capital as the seat of government he chose a series of operational headquarters divorced from the economic life of the country. Instead of experienced colonial civil servants, he deliberately sought 'officers' and 'gentlemen' (without previous experience) as his administrators. Instead of embryo civil departments to provide commercial and social services, he created an autocratic command system, running from his headquarters to provincial outposts, and through them to the now-subordinate Fulani Emirates, themselves military in origin. 20

Whether Sudanese, French-military or Lugardist in form, a hierarchy of officialdom followed each colonial conquest in turn, creating an authoritarian system, in which power flowed from the top downwards and, ultimately, from outside. Here in small measure, there in larger, a handful of approved locals – chiefs or the new educated – might be recruited into the lower and middle ranges of the administrative system. But the system was answerable not to these favoured participants or to the communities from which they were drawn, but to the external, forcibly imposed authority of the imperial government in the metropolis. In the eyes of colonial power, effective self-government, social management from below, was totally incompatible with good government. The problem, after all, was one of administration, not of participation and politics; and who could be better administrators than those trained to administer? Until the late 1950s, colonial officials serving in Africa were still known, technically, as 'administrative officers'. The colonial system functioned in the conviction that the administrator was sovereign; that his subjects neither understood nor wanted self-government or independence; that the only article of faith on which administrators could confidently depend was that all problems of 'good government' were administrative, and that disaster would follow from attempts to conceive of them as political. Even in later years, when administrators were consciously trying to adjust their attitudes to changing situations, the structures were not fundamentally changed, and would not permit any official behaviour other than the administrative-autocratic.

This colonial pattern, wrote Rupert Emerson,²¹

rests on two assumptions familiar to aristocracies everywhere, that the backward masses, incapable of administering themselves and misgoverned by their own regimes, will receive a far better deal at the hands of their advanced overlords, and that they are primarily interested only in living their lives in peace and quiet, with rising standards of welfare to be provided for them from above. The proper focus of administration is the 'real' people, the simple peasant mass which gratefully accepts benevolent paternalism and which should be protected from the arousing of discontents since it has neither the desire

nor competence to play an active role in its own and world affairs. The occasional outbursts of political agitation reflect not the demands of the 'real' people, but only the self-interested machinations of an untrustworthy few, who, caught in transition between two worlds, represent neither east nor west and seek to make capital out of the academic yet dangerous theories of liberty and equality. It is not to these new pretenders to power that the guileless masses should look for sympathetic understanding, but to the disinterested imperial administrators.

Britain's army of colonial administrators, inbred and insular, was commanded by a senior corps, recruited in its later years from Britain's public schools by a man who has been called 'an unreconstructed Victorian gentleman'. This was Sir Roger Furse, who controlled appointments to civil service posts for thirty-eight years, from 1910 to 1948. Parliamentarians and Ministers of State rose and fell, but his highly personal and intuitive methods of selecting colonial officials screwed that administrative grid into place over the British colonies. Furse himself went to Eton and Balliol, but he confessed that he owed his success more to his training as a cavalry officer. In the years immediately after 1918, new recruits to the colonial service were young ex-officers from the war, selected by interview in London.²² When the supply of ex-officers dried up, recruits were drawn from the public schools and from Oxford or Cambridge.

Furse was searching for men with special qualities of leadership. Such men, he was convinced, came invariably from certain families and educational institutions. 'The District Officer,' Lugard had said, 'comes from a class which has made and maintained the British Empire.'²³ So Furse visited his friends in public schools, at Oxford or Cambridge, in country houses or in London clubs, looking for men capable of dealing with other men (though black, brown or yellow) and picking candidates by the thrust of their jaw, their firmness of handshake, their athletic prowess, their membership of worthy families and their gentlemanly bearing. His deafness, it has been suggested,²⁴ meant that he could not easily hear what the candidate up for the interview was saying, but his quick eyes took in personal

mannerisms. Following an interview in 1911, he wrote that the candidate was

tall, light haired, slim but well built ... a good open face with a good deal of grit in it ... a very good athlete ... brains I expect fair ... a fourth class honours degree ... but had influenza just before. He has a slightly affected way of shaking hands ... but made a good impression and is I think really up to East African standard.²⁵

Members of the recruiting staff were told to watch out for 'colouring, build, movement, poise', and 'such superficialities as style of dress and hair, health of skin and fingers'.

But your scrutiny will be directed chiefly to eyes and mouth, for they, whether in repose or in action, combined with speech and gesture, may tell you much. You will have in mind the truism that weakness of various kinds may lurk in a flabby lip or in averted eyes, just as single-mindedness and purpose are commonly reflected in a steady gaze, and firm set of mouth and jaw.²⁶

An official inquiry, scrutinizing the colonial recruiting system, in 1929, clearly agreed with the views of a Secretary of State, the Duke of Devonshire, when he said: 'The code which must guide the administrator in the tropics is to be found in no book of regulations. It demands that in every circumstance and under all conditions he shall act in accordance with the traditions of an English gentleman.'²⁷

Sir Roger Furse was right: the show could not have been run without the public schools. To Furse and his class and generation, the public school was the 'spiritual child of the tradition of chivalry'. Its product was characteristically set off from the rest of English society, and so could be expected to observe suitable aloofness from the people it would rule in bush or savannah. The men sent out to control the colonies lived by a code of paternalism that had already been eroded in the generation before their own. Some were born to rule; others became rulers through their role in the colonies, which they ran like eighteenth-century shires and parishes. The ethos of a ruling class, that in Britain was fast losing its exclusive claim, became the ethos of the colonial service. And very naturally, one 'aristocracy' gravitated to another: it was not surprising that officials in Northern

Nigeria 'instinctively buttressed the hierarchy they found in existence there, as did their colleagues in Uganda, Malaya and the Aden Protectorates'.²⁸

Only after Furse's retirement in 1948 was his service's code of recruitment substantially altered. Indeed, as the Second World War drew to a close, even Furse perceived that the time was past when the main function of the Colonial Office was to deal with traditional chiefs. The 'educated native' had arrived on the scene and challenged, by implication at least, the traditional authorities on which administration had relied. Whereas in earlier times Margery Perham had received inquiries from administrators in the field on how to deal with traditional chiefs, she was now getting requests for advice on how to deal with new and unfamiliar urban authorities.²⁹ Yet some officials changed not at all, and spent the best years of their lives trying to preserve societies which imperial incursion into the continent had irreparably shattered. These men viewed the urban African, created by their own economic order, as a threat to the stability of that order. 'What these people need,' remarked a District Officer, discussing the urban African, 'is not education, but the stick.'³⁰

Some of the men who administered France's colonial empire expressed themselves less like head prefects and more like romantic visionaries, at least in Parisian print. Metropolitan France smelt stale and felt cramped, wrote a one-time Minister of France's Overseas Territories. The fault lay with an impersonal, irresponsible, routine-ridden administration. There was no Command. In Africa, on the contrary, 'we are preserving that function of authority in which resides the vital spirit of the new world'. The Commandant was much more than an official at some district outpost. Not only did he send to the French in Europe the luxuries to which they had become accustomed, but he also 'transmits a sort of energy. . . . The colonial administrator is the unknown electrician in the power house of a new order of life, just as much for Africa as for France.'³¹ Europe, in opening Africa up to the world, was acting as a universal civilization rather than as any particular imperialism. In savannah and forest, these carriers of civilization were conducting a race towards civilization, not a conflict between civilizations. The

European powers competed against each other, not like the 'pontiffs of hostile sects', but like runners, to see who would win through first to river or town; who would mark the greatest number of points on the map. In Europe the powers were bristling with conscript soldiers, ruining themselves with armaments. Africa, on the contrary, endowed the powers with an astonishing unity.

And the representative of the commercial house was as much part of the civilizing mission as his colonial office counterpart.* 'The wife of an agent of a chartered company radiates authority as though she were the daughter of the stateliest house in England,' wrote Delavignette. But the French high-born or well-off of the capital was not interested in service outside France except in the army. Most colonial posts were filled from families already in government service, or by those ambitious to achieve a respectable social standing. In French West Africa in 1943, nearly a quarter of the officials, including four governors, were Corsicans;³² others were from the West Indies and Brittany. Selection for the French overseas service was by examination, not interview. But if the successful candidates often came from social areas below those which provided British administrators, the Ecole Coloniale made sure that if a sense of vocation was not inherited it was none the less imbibed.

The colonial official, French, British, Belgian, or any other, was not the servant of government; he *was* government. His administration was a series of untidy, crowded pigeon holes, buff files and inter-office memoranda. No one who had not read the documents could guard continuity and precedent, and thus take part in the process of government. There was a single column of power in the system, rigidly hierarchical, insulated from outside pressures. Where authority was delegated, it was played out tightly to chiefs-cum-administrators, who were themselves made part of the closed administrative system by being put on the payroll, and made subject to arbitrary dismissal. There

*Colonial society is divided between Administration and Commerce, wrote Delavignette. He gave figures showing that French Colonial administrators were recruited from families already serving the State and Commerce (*Freedom and Authority in French West Africa*, p. 24).

The Colonial Sediment

was no place for representatives, only for intermediaries of the system. When a council system was devised on a partly elective basis, it was used not as a forum but as a facade; its members were not to represent the people in government, but to represent the administration to the people. The colonial bureaucracy ruled; as Louis XIV had proclaimed of himself, it *was* the state: though with this difference, that the administrator-kings of the colonial services were not even of the country; and for all their insistence that they were motivated not by political but by administrative needs, it was the needs and the politics of the metropolis which almost exclusively determined the fate of the colonial subject.

At the hands of a colonial bureaucracy, local initiative or popular political organization – the ingredients of self-government – were, if not crushed, at least controlled, or wasted. In the subsequent period the colonizer based his rule and his hopes for a successful decolonization on the bureaucracy and the army. It has been said of the Congo³³ that these were the elements which emerged strongest from political crisis. This is true not only of the Congo, but of all Africa that has fallen victim to an army intervention in politics.

If there was any training and adaptation before independence, it was a schooling in the bureaucratic toils of colonial government, a preparation not for independence, but against it. It could not be otherwise. Colonialism was based on authoritarian command; as such, it was incompatible with any preparation for self-government. Africa was the continent of bureaucratic rule. In that sense, every success of administration was a failure of government. Government was run not only without, but despite the people.

Ways and Means of Decolonization

... if, in both colonisation and decolonisation, force has always been the ultimate sanction, it has not always been used. A few decisive military-political actions have established new balances of power for whole regions. The repercussions of the most decisive revolutions, too, established more than a local or even a regional change; they altered the whole field of forces on the world level. In the post-war world, such crucial events were the independence struggle of Indonesia, the Chinese revolution when, in Mao's graphic phrase, China 'stood up'; or Cuba where social revolution, long incubating in Latin America, was placed firmly on the order paper of the century.

Peter Worsley, *The Third World*

The Second World War broke shatteringly into the staid pace of colonial rule. The Dutch tried holding on to Indonesia, by massive force, as the French tried in Indo-China, and subsequently in Algeria, at disastrous cost. The sporadic troubles of the British empire, previously put down by punitive expeditions, were tending to grow into prolonged guerrilla war. Battalions were needed to put down the 'terrorists' in Malaya, and the 'Mau Mau' in Kenya. Cyprus took to arms; the Middle East was seething. The Royal Indian navy mutinied in 1946. The longer the empire lasted, the higher the expenditure on retaining it seemed to grow. Trials of force cost money, and Britain, struggling to maintain the value of the pound and achieve the transition from a war- to a peace-time economy, was in no position to pay for a decisive series of such trials. So, India was allowed to go first in 1948, followed closely by Ceylon and Burma. The withdrawal from Africa started a decade later, by when France, for similar reasons in the altered post-war balance of power, was likewise forced to adjust her imperial rule. In the 1950s and the 1960s, constitutional formulae, constitutional conferences and bargaining dominated African politics. It began with cautious changes, like allowing Africans to enjoy unofficial majorities in legislative councils, and it ended with the cascade of independence constitutions in the 1960s. There was, of course, an agitated fluttering of the old Africa hands. They protested at this ignominious scuttle of empire before Africans and Asians

had proved themselves 'fit' for self-government. All the same, argued a former colonial governor and head of the African division of the Colonial Office, Sir Andrew Cohen, Britain needed a changing policy for Africa. She should recognize that 'successful co-operation with nationalism' was the 'greatest bulwark against Communism'.¹ The transfer of power to colonial people need not be a defeat, but a strengthening of the Commonwealth and the Free World.

Decolonization came to Africa in two phases. The first, *in* the first decade after the end of the war, occurred in those regions which European armies had used as actual theatres of war: Ethiopia, Libya, Egypt, the Sudan, Morocco and Tunisia. The defeat of the Italian army restored to Ethiopia an independence dating from the eleventh century and interrupted only by the Italian invasion of 1935. Libya, another former Italian colony, found herself independent in 1951 by vote of the United Nations, because the big powers could not decide what to do with her. (During the final negotiations, a UN delegate is supposed to have remarked to a colleague, 'At three o'clock this afternoon we free Libya.' His colleague replied, 'Impossible. We freed Libya yesterday.'²)

Uniquely in Africa, and for reasons closer to Middle East than African developments, Egypt in 1952 achieved more than formal independence in a seizure of power by an army coup d'etat that set afoot a social revolution. Egypt's conspiracy of army officers against an ancient and corrupt order of privilege may be matched by several score Latin American and Middle East coups d'etat in which generals have displaced politicians. But there, the more that the shadow of power has changed, the more its substance has remained the same. The distinction held by Egypt's Free Officers is that, in a pragmatic stumble towards policy, as in the aftermath of the Suez gamble, they identified with the movement for social change and became, almost despite themselves, its main instrument. Egypt's social order, like China's, had been ripe for toppling; but whereas in China, a political movement with a finely articulated policy for social revolution adopted mass armed struggle to seize power, in Egypt army officers seized the state in one sharp blow at the

apex, and then looked about for a political force and a policy to express the change. From his first conventional disavowal of the political interest and role of soldiers, Nasser graduated by 1962 to the thesis that the role of the army was to clear the path of the revolution.³ Egypt did not want politicians in the army, but the army as a whole would constitute a force in the political process. The ensuing years were to show – not only in Egypt, but also in the Sudan and Algeria – how far an army could 'clear the path of the revolution'; or for reasons intrinsic to the control and style of armies, and such interests as were represented in Egypt's officer corps, it might proceed instead to undermine it.

One of the first fruits of Egypt's own newly seized independence was the independence of the Sudan, her one-time colony. After the reconquest, the Sudan found herself under the control of both Britain and Egypt, though the latter was represented more in the name of the Condominium Agreement than in actuality. Egypt's young officer coup d'état placed Egypt in the position where she could unilaterally make an independence proposal to the Sudan and, having negotiated its terms, present these to Britain as a virtual *fait accompli*. For the first time in her history, the Sudan reaped benefit from having been a bargaining counter between the two states; and the young officer coup in Egypt accordingly resulted in changes not in one African state but in two.

In the French African empire, it was the independence struggle in the Maghreb that was principally responsible for France's accommodation to new policies. In both Morocco and Tunisia – though not in Algeria – France astutely timed independence offers to forestall guerrilla actions and install moderate leaderships: in Morocco, urban underground action and rural struggle were already under way; and in Tunisia, a section of the Neo-Destour Party was advocating the continuance of armed struggle, begun in 1954, when in 1956 France granted independence.

Ghana and Guinea attained independence in the tail years of this first decade. Then came the avalanche of West and Central African independence in 1960, when seventeen colonies of the British and French empires in Africa became independent, and even Belgium, seemingly the most intransigent of the colonial

powers, suddenly shortened her timetable for the independence of the Congo from thirty years to seven months. Another five countries became independent during the next two years; then Kenya in 1963, a full ten years after the armed rebellion that disturbed the pace of negotiated independence; then in East and Central Africa, the states of Tanganyika, Malawi, Zambia and Zanzibar, the latter one month before an armed uprising in 1964. The ensuing years saw the conclusion of the process, as small states like Gambia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mauritius joined the independence round.

It looked deceptively easy, this evacuation of empire. True, members of the West African elites, first inspired by Edmund Blyden's messages, had been meeting spasmodically in Pan-Africanist conferences: in 1900, after the First World War, and, more intensively, after the Second World War. They had launched students' federations in London and Paris; nationalist newspapers; and finally, fully fledged political independence movements which, for long patient, mild and pliant, received a stiffening of ex-servicemen, trade-union and radical agitation after the war. Quoting the promises of the Atlantic Charter for a bright new world, these movements began to insist that if Whites, and then Asians, were fit to govern, why not Africans? In Ghana Nkrumah catapulted a positive action campaign into the orderly pace of constitution-making; there were demonstrations by ex-soldiers, with riots and boycotts, in the late 1940s, at a cost of twenty-nine killed and 237 injured. It was events in Ghana, and the British preparations for the transfer of power there, as well as the turbulence of the independence struggle in the Maghreb, that stimulated France's own cautious experiments with the *loi cadre* and other circumspect constitutional reforms.

But inside Africa, apart from Algeria and the other countries of the Maghreb, Kenya, the Cameroun and Madagascar, it was hard to find turbulence enough to explain why, having earlier seemed so resolved to keep the continent, the colonial powers – with the exception of Portugal and the settler-dominated communities – now, after the war, seemed so preoccupied with how to get out of it.

Macmillan's wind of change, which blew independence even into settler-dominated countries, was not a dramatic Cabinet

decision, wrote a former Minister of State for the Colonies,⁴ but a comment on a decision the tempo of which had been accelerated as a result of a score of different decisions. In East Africa, the tempo was accelerated by the 'Mau Mau' rising; in French Africa, by Algeria's war for independence. It was the struggles in these two countries, though different in scale and duration, that provided the exceptions to Africa's licensed advance to constitutional independence. Both countries, significantly, were dominated by White settler power that had ruthlessly dispossessed the colonial peasantry, and enjoyed a voluble say in metropolitan decisions.

In Kenya, a dominant local white community and the colonial regime between them met African grievances with repression and precipitated the very revolt that these measures had been designed to deny. African political organization had stirred in the early 1920s and been suppressed, had revived, and been beaten back again the following decade. But it continued to sprout in a variety of shapes and forms, an amalgam of 'the secular and the religious, the tribal and the African national, the old and the new, increasingly interwoven in the complex ideological fabric of the Kikuyu peasant masses'.⁵ The state of emergency unleashed in 1952 against the underground movement that was preparing for armed resistance was intended to savage the leadership and terrorize discontent into submission. It did the opposite. A plan for revolt, only partly prepared, was triggered into action by lower levels of the leadership, who escaped the police net by moving into the forests and turning them into bases of operation for a guerrilla war. But the struggle began 'without a master-plan for revolution, without cadres trained in the art of guerrilla warfare, without an adequate supply of arms and ammunition, or arrangements for their supply from outside the colony, without the necessary support of tribes other than the Kikuyu, the Embu and the Meru, who had not entered the movement in significant numbers, and without any contact with the outside world'.⁶ The fighting groups that remained in the forest after 1956 were small isolated bands, constantly pursued by government troops and offering little co-ordinated resistance.

The revolt lasted for more than three years and was defeated by a combination of overkill and terror against the Land and Freedom army, and the civilian population at large. Though the fighting was virtually over by the beginning of 1956, the state of emergency was lifted only in 1960. The intervening years were almost as important as the years of armed conflict in breaking the back of African resistance and grooming a tame and emasculated generation of politicians for the independence era. For by the time that independence constitution-making for Kenya was begun, less than a decade later, the peasant revolt was defeated, and its aims were all but obliterated.

In the space of a few devious years, Kenyatta, once execrated as a black nationalist leader to darkness and death, had become the grand old man of the settlers. He headed a government of politicians preoccupied with constitutional niceties. White settlers had not only joined but were helping to lead African political parties. The fighters of the forests and the camps, broken in health, landless and unemployed, belonged to a past which the dominant political class of independent Kenya was only too anxious to forget.⁷

Despite the armed rebellion, therefore, independence for Kenya came only after the colonial power had prepared the timing and the manner of the take-over. It came not with victory, at the climax of the military rising, but only five years later, when settler intransigence had turned to 'realism', and the policy of confrontation with African demands had become one of bargaining and negotiation. The generation of militant fighters was dead, imprisoned or black-listed. In its place was a generation that, for the most part, was ready to accept independence as a gentleman's agreement, with the political process as the prerogative of a privileged elite. The 'Mau Mau' had fought a war, but lost it, and the landless poor which that struggle had represented were given no place in the independence settlement.

Algeria's war, by contrast, lasted twice as long and ended in the victory of independence. Far from her conflict being blockaded in the forests, it spread to France, brought down the Fourth Republic and threatened the survival of the Fifth, in a decisive

display of the dangers in the settler slogan '*L'Algerie, c'est la France*' (or *Algerie Franfaise*).

The war, begun in November 1954, was fought with unabated ferocity on both sides. And by mid-1958 French military operations were apparently beginning to bear fruit. ALN guerrilla units were scattered, with their command interrupted. But France had herself experienced three crises of government in the space of a year. Power in parliament was an incoherent mixture of Paris and Algiers,⁸ racked between the left that was pressing for peace negotiations, and the right wing in France, the lobby of the colons and the army, which had made its influence felt since Indo-China, but never as vehemently as during the Algerian war. The danger rapidly mounted that the army, far from being in the service of the French government, would supplant the government altogether, bringing army and nee-fascist rule not only to Algeria but to France. The generals' putsch in Corsica and the shouts in Algiers of '*les paras à Paris*' were signals for the advance on France. The attempted putsch of 13 May 1958 brought de Gaulle to power at the head of the army. But an army victorious in Algeria would be impossible to subdue in France; driving the conflict to a bitter end in Algiers would transplant it to Paris. The terrorism of the OAS, the combat force of the colons, was proving that. De Gaulle cracked down heavily on the army, especially after the 1961 generals' revolt, led by Salan and Challe. Then, armed with exceptional powers, he felt his way gingerly towards a formula for negotiation, peace and independence. On the Algerian side, the politicians of the government-in-exile, the GPRA, proved amenable to bargaining; and in the latent conflict which had existed in the Algerian leadership, between the fighters of the interior and the old-type politicians like Ferhat Abbas who had joined forces with the FLN, the moderates now had their chance. The Evian Conference decided that Algeria would become an independent state, within limits.

Alone in Africa, Algeria fought a national liberation war for independence which struck at the very basis of French settler-colonialism. But the seizure of power through armed struggle was not followed by a period of concentrated mass mobilization,

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without which a revolutionary transition to independence cannot be secured. In part this was because Algeria emerged from the war economically exhausted, bonded to her former colonial power and unprepared, in the shape of economic blueprints, for victory. In addition, de Gaulle's initiative for a peace settlement at the Evian talks created a psychological as well as an economic dependence on France. But, above all, Algeria's revolution was stunted because her leadership was locked in conflict. There were the competing claims of the military and political wings of the independence movement, of the army of the exterior, which had waited in reserve during the war, and the peasant guerrilla force of the *wilayas* that had borne the brunt of the combat; and of the divergent strains in the political leadership that could not agree on the post-liberation restructuring of Algerian society.

Despite her own setback, it was Algeria's war for independence that achieved more for the other French colonies than anything that they dreamt of doing for themselves. And yet, in the main, the tempo for change in Africa was accelerated more outside the continent than within it, in Asia rather than in Africa; France's colonies gained their independence as a direct consequence of crisis in other parts of the French empire. In 1944, at the Brazzaville conference, reforms had been suggested for the African territories on the understanding that there was to be no independence other than the independence of France. As for colonial peoples, said the Free French Commissioner for the Colonies, M. Rene Pleven, 'In the great colonial France there are neither peoples to liberate nor racial discrimination to abolish.'⁹ Suddenly, six years later, decolonization flooded first over one colony, then another. What had happened? The French had been defeated at Dien Bien Phu, and this altered the French course not only in Indo-China, in Asia, but also in Africa. Faced with a Dien Bien Phu, Frantz Fanon has written, a veritable panic overtakes colonial government.

Their purpose is to capture the vanguard, to turn the movement of liberation towards the right, and to disarm the people: quick, quick, let's decolonise. Decolonise the Congo before it turns into another Algeria. Vote the constitutional framework for all Africa, create the

French Community, renovate that same Community, but for God's sake let's decolonise quick.... And they decolonise at such a rate that they impose independence on Houphouet-Boigny.¹⁰

Independence was breaking out all over the French empire, and the British; and over the Dutch and the Belgian, as well. There were international reasons why. Already by 1945 the war had fundamentally altered the pre-war structure of power, United States policy was to supplant European imperialisms with paternalist and profitable economic ties; in place of old-style colonies, would be put the new containment, in United States free enterprise. There was, thus, a perceptible shift in the priorities of Western powers, which had to take their cue from the most powerful among them. The United States was interested, for its own reasons, in confining traditional European power and its financial freedom to pursue an independent course. For the United States, a historian of the politics and diplomacy of the Second World War has written/¹ support or opposition to European colonialism would depend on the extent to which the interested European nation respected American global goals elsewhere; and also, most significantly for Africa and Asia and Latin America, on the nature of the local political opposition within the colony. If left-wing forces led the independence movement, then the Americans would sustain collaborationists if possible, or a colonial power if necessary.¹² Decolonization was a move to shore up 'stabilizing' forces in restless regions, rather than a recognition of the right of peoples to the independence and the freedom that the phrases of the United Nations so eloquently embodied.

Africa's rapid transition to independence, if it made the early 1960s heady with optimism, left behind a damaging legacy of myth and illusion. Independence came by too many to be seen as a single, sharp act, like running the national flag up the flag-pole. The constitutional agreement once signed, an African state was independent. Indeed, independence was seen by the political careerists not as the beginning, but as the end in a process of change. To them independence was reduced to a constitutional formula in which contesting elites, serviced by lawyers and public relations men, bargained on terms and fixed indemnities for the

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departing power, which for their part were intent on handing over political power as long as this did not affect their economic stakes.

This is not the version of history that the independence generation of politicians cares to recall. And it is not, to be sure, invariably the whole story in each individual country. But, on the whole, the experience of decolonization in Africa is not one of grass-root struggle, except for brief, unsustainable periods. For each individual state, the details and the differences are important. Here, a generation of political leaders that would have fought for sterner guarantees, better terms and a policy of social change, was suppressed, sometimes by the colonial government, sometimes by the authorities acting in collusion with a more conservative branch of the independence movement. Here, the colonial power manipulated the competing wings of a movement across the conference table; played off one delegation against another from the same country. There, withdrawal took place only after the studied creation of constitutional and political structures that were bound to buckle, even break, under independence needs.

In much of Africa, the leaders of the independence movement accepted without undue perturbation the form of independence ordained by the departing colonial authority. 'Gabon is independent,' President M'ba is reputed to have said, 'but between Gabon and France nothing has changed; everything goes on as before.' The only change in fact, commented Fanon, 'is that Monsieur M'ba is President of the Gabonese Republic and that he *is* received by the President of the French Republic.'¹³

Many of this generation of independence leaders dung with pathetic endeavour to the forms of government transferred to them, or those practised at home by the colonial power. British or French or Belgian constitutional traditions seemed the only permissible, even possible, form. Regular electoral competition within a European-type constitution became the 'pubertal rite'¹⁴ on the independence scene; though, so shortly before independence, the colonial system had been busy locking up its opponents and had never dreamt of paying them salaries to oppose. Nkrumah remarked on the tenacity with which Colonial

Secretaries argued the case for adopting certain types of constitutional arrangement at conferences held to negotiate the independence of African states.

When colonial power, on the other hand, for reasons of its own occasionally suggested a variation of its own governmental forms, African politicians protested that they wanted the model intact. So, London or Paris or Brussels models were prepared for export; and universities, law courts, local government and the civil service were cut according to the master pattern. The elites of the British territories hankered after the so-called Westminster model. The French political leaders copied the autocratic presidential powers that de Gaulle had assumed. These made it difficult for an Assembly to overturn a government; gave the executive comprehensive powers, enabling it to appeal over the heads of the Assembly to the people, by submitting measures to referendum; and eliminated, in large measure, ministerial responsibility to the legislature. There was one de Gaulle in Europe, and a dozen or more little de Gaulles in Africa; though they didn't all prove as secure in office as Senghor and Houphouët-Boigny, or even, for so long, de Gaulle himself.

Transferring the so-called Westminster model was an exercise of dubious value.¹⁵ The British constitution, unwritten just because it is rooted in age-old precedent and tradition uniquely British, serves a society which could scarcely be less like those for which its export model was prepared. The Parliament at Westminster owes its present character to a civil war and several centuries of bitter struggle.¹⁶ The legislature is anything but the sole seat of power; beyond it function the great institutions of the economy from the banks to the stock exchange; the civil service; the education system; the great families; the newspaper chains; the Institute of Directors and the Trade Union Congress; all forms of power diffused through the society. In new African states, patterns of power-or lack of it—are quite different; and, most often, unsettled and unresolved. What sort of a system, political and economic, is it? The issue opens out only with the onset of independence, and sometimes not even then. Who rules? Does power not lie without, rather than within the country? In largely peasant societies, where local elites derive power and

authority from a village, district or regional society, does a national parliament automatically displace or unify these power systems? Are there, nationally and locally, competing forces advocating competing policies? Or, under the imported constitutional system, were parties not artificially pressed into the game of parliamentary shuttle-cock between government and opposition, even when these were artificial divisions? In the shadow of Westminster, the constitutions made place for oppositions even where these did not exist, as in Tanganyika, where TANU won every seat but one in the 1961 elections.

In reality, though, the constitution-drafters did not stick precisely to the Westminster 'model', but wrote clauses into its export variety which were in sharp conflict with the British system. The essence of the British system *is* that there is absolutely no limit on the sovereignty of Parliament. The export models incorporated all sorts of checks and balances for parliamentary power. They made laws subject to judicial review. Bills of Rights were prepared, ostensibly to protect minorities but in fact to hand them extra-parliamentary levers. The notion of transplanting a standard form of government to countries as widely divergent as India, Malaya, Trinidad, Malta and Ghana, did not seem to appal the Colonial Office drafters. The fact that few of the models lasted more than a few years in Africa reflected on the value of the original exercise. From the end of 1960 to the beginning of 1962, thirteen states revised their constitutions or produced altogether new ones.

The assumptions of the imported systems proved untenable in the new states. With the onset of independence, African parliaments seemed notoriously to debate the least important issues of the day. This was because the parliamentary convention of government and opposition politely exchanging the seats of office assumes that the crucial ideological questions have been settled; but, neither settled nor even debated in Africa, they tended to drop into oblivion. Land and economic policy were not scrutinized; social policies and administration were inherited from colonial days, and, for the most part, kept intact. Caught in the parliamentary round, the politicians devoted themselves to electioneering and party manoeuvring, rather than to national

mobilization for national needs. A pursuit of expediency and political profiteering began, rather than a search for national policies to defeat poverty and backwardness. It did not take long before the constitutional models showed in practice their manifest irrelevance. One country after another sank into political crisis. The political parties seemed to be dying on their feet, till army juntas swept them away altogether. The causes lay deeper, by far, than a failure of the parliamentary model. Yet, so firm was the faith in the transfer of 'superior' and tested Western systems of government, that many continued to seek explanations in the inability of Africans to govern themselves.

Its very widespread transfer implied that the metropolitan model was the acme of achievement in self-government. The colonial power had itself judged the colony ripe and ready for independence, and the natural prize was a Westminster Parliament, or some other metropolitan equivalent. This in turn implied that the colonial presence had existed to train; and that the training period had been successfully completed. The apologia of colonialism, that it was a preparation for independence, is, in fact, largely fantasy. Studies of particular colonial records, wrote Schaffer, 'show that it is very difficult to trace any continual preparatory process at work, or any signs of a prepared policy until after the war'. Even then the post-war years were too late for preparation, save as a purely political, almost desperate effort to provide an ideology of delay (in the granting of independence). The notion of preparation was to justify the colonial record, as a tactic of delay in the sense that 'you would not seem to be delaying, only training and educating'. The theory of preparation 'emerged after the event', Lord Hailey agreed. A decade after the end of the war, he wrote that there was no trained machinery of administration ready to hand.¹⁸ Little or nothing had been done in the years gone past to prepare Africans for assuming new powers.

If there was a course of preparation, it was not only grudging and late, but notoriously badly planned and timed, with precipitate spurts towards the end to make up for decades of earlier stagnation. In any event, if independence was to provide Africa

with Western European-styled political systems, the 'preparation' period should have encouraged direct elections, free political campaigning, full opportunities for all political parties to solicit the support of the electorate with their programmes. In the Belgian Congo, there was virtually no devolution of legislative authority in half a century, and a Legislative Council was set up only after the troubles of 1958 and 1959, less than twelve months before independence. In Tanganyika, the first election in which Africans were allowed to stand as candidates was held in 1958, only three years before independence. In Kenya, the first African was nominated, not elected, to the Legislative Council in 1944; and by 1958, five years before independence, only one in four members was African. In Uganda, the Legislative Council in 1950 had thirty-two members, of whom only eight were unofficial African ones. Nigeria had an unofficial majority in the Legislative Council for the first time in 1947; but the constitution provided for three separate regional Houses of Assembly, and a House of Chiefs for the Northern region, so that the constitution contributed to the fragmentation rather than to the integration of a so-called national system. Colonial administrators fought delaying actions against direct elections, precisely because they wanted checks on the so-called 'professional politician'. Full-time political campaigners were bad enough; radical politicians were anathema. In colonial Gabon, Chad, Central Africa Republic and Congo-Brazzaville the administration had the power to deny recognition to any association, or even to dissolve it. The French administration was markedly skilful in suppressing or defeating the radical wing of the independence movement, to make for a 'safe' transfer of power. A battery of techniques was devised to block the rising Jacobins among African political leaders.

Colonial administrations manipulated local, regional and ethnic differences to emphasize divisive rather than unifying national interests.²⁰ And such divisions were deposited in independence constitutions, to assail the cohesion and survival of the new states from their inception. The Nigerian constitution, most notoriously of all, not only ensured that politics would be regional, but that the Federation itself would be

perpetually on the brink of crisis. In Kenya, the constitution introduced a system of regional government calculated to give the minority settler-backed party, KADU, a built-in advantage over KANU, the majority party that had refused to work any constitution until Kenyatta was released from detention. KANU's first years in office, which the party captured in spite of the obstacles provided by the constitution, had to be spent dismantling a regionalism which undermined the working of the country's independence government. In Kenya, too, the independence settlement bequeathed the dispute with Somalia over her far north-west territory inhabited by Somali, which has flared into persistent warfare. The Somali demand had been voiced long before Kenya's internal self-government period; but by the time Britain called a joint Kenya-Somalia conference in August 1963, Kenya independence was only four months away, and it was too late to act on any of the conference proposals. The Somali issue was left unresolved, to create for the newly independent government of Kenya a major problem of internal security, in the tackling of which they would have to rely heavily on British logistic support.²¹

In Uganda, Britain entrenched a special status for the Buganda Kingdom in the 1963 constitution. (The only way to rule the country was through the Kabaka, Lugard had said.) The country thus had two competing systems of power, two heads of state, two prime ministers, two cabinets, even two armies. This conflict culminated in an abortive plot against Obote that he suppressed only by calling in his army, with whose support he has ruled uneasily ever since. In the Sudan, the independence government was inaugurated to the sound of gunfire in the south. There, the people had been led to expect a future independent of the Arab north; and a section of the army staged a mutiny to hold Britain to her commitment. But by then, Britain had already ceded authority to Khartoum. With that authority went an endemic state of rebellion in the south, the suppression of which has demanded a huge army and military budget that have undermined the Sudan state ever since.

Independence arrived already crippled by the colonial past. And most serious, that heritage was assumed virtually intact by

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many of the new rulers. Judging by the structures which they took over and left almost unchanged, the new governments of Africa were planning not to break with the pre-independence past, but to maintain close continuity with it, unaware – or, if they were aware, unable to do much about it – that the 'experience' gained under the colonial administration was not only irrelevant, but dangerous, to the new needs of African states.

In much of Africa, and especially in West Africa, where the course of independence was auspiciously placid by comparison with the regions of White settlement, there was markedly little sustained policy for the radical transformation of society; and little prolonged mass or militant struggle for independence. Movements with mass memberships were built to reinforce elite claims for control of government, but they functioned in a largely vacuous electoral fashion. Mass mobilization was limited to brief periods and limited purposes. Government was in the great majority of cases transferred to a virtually hand-picked group that had made its compact with the departing colonial authority.

Though African independence in general follows this pattern of negotiation and circumscribed change, the leaderships of the national movements were not uniformly compromised by their independence agreements with the colonial powers. Ghana, Guinea and Mali in the west, and Tanganyika (Tanzania) in the east, were the few that were committed to social change, even if it had to be initiated from the top by the party leadership. But these states, too, experienced not a revolutionary transition to independence, but a negotiated transfer. 'The characteristics of the resulting state structure will vary appropriately,' writes Peter Worsley. 'Yet in all these cases there is one major common feature: politico-bureaucratic machines are in the saddle from the beginning, and there is no "heroic" period of Cuban-type mass participation in government. Radical social change, if initiated at all, is initiated from the top.'²

In the phenomenon of decolonization, the idea of compromise is central, Fanon wrote. Compromise is needed from both sides. Martin Kilson²³ has traced for Sierra Leone that intricate pattern of compromise. Colonialism ruled through the chiefs and reinforced their powers, but at the same time set up new

tensions in rural society. In the 1930s there was widespread peasant revolt against traditional rulers and authority. It became particularly strong in the immediate post-war years, and has sometimes flared since then. A commission of inquiry referred to a 'mass disobedience of authority'. These were tax riots. Similar peasant troubles occurred in other African territories: in Nigeria, in Chad, in Uganda, in Kenya. These were Max Gluckman's peasant rebellions, distinct from revolution, for they aimed not at destroying the system of traditional authority, but at ameliorating aspects of its use.²⁴ Peasant violence was aimed at the property, the person and the authority of the chiefs, because the chiefs were the main rural agencies of the colonial power. Unwittingly, thus, this form of colonial administration had stimulated a mass reaction in the countryside. The behaviour of the rural population was anomie; it lacked sustained, articulate action and demands; but it did create conditions of political instability in colonial society.

It was this 'rural radicalism', Kilson argues from the Sierra Leone experience, that elite leaderships exploited during the pre-independence years, in their drive to 'Africanize' colonial society. As rural protest spread, it was the new middle-class elite that presented itself to the colonial authority as the force to contain this.

The new elite and the colonial oligarchy had common interests in facilitating constitutional change: the elite required such change to advance their own socio-economic standing; the colonial masters obtained greater efficiency through the advancement of the new elite. The colonial oligarchy also expected greater stability in local society as the new elite, abetted by constitutional change (including ultimately the mass franchise), spread their political influence and leadership into rural society.

It was ultimately this curious identity of interest between the new elite and the colonial oligarchy that facilitated the peaceful transfer of power to African regimes in most of colonial Africa.*

Once it had become apparent that the trade and economic policies of the colonial power could be conducted without the apparatus of direct political control, decolonization as a bargaining process with cooperative African elites did not end with the

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onset of independence, but continued beyond. The former colonial government guarded its options and interests; the careerist heirs to independence preoccupied themselves with an 'Africanization' of the administration which, more than even the transfer of political power, gave them openings previously filled by white men. Africanization, like the transfer of power, occurred within the largely unaltered framework of the colonial system. Power was transferred from a colonial bureaucracy to African auxiliaries in politics and administration. This is Fanon's 'false decolonization'.

In some newly independent African states, African leaders and parties harboured a more radical purpose. They saw decolonization as only the first step. Mass parties were built in Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Tanzania as explicitly anti-colonial instruments. They aimed not to inherit but to transform the system. Their political aims and strategy were to be tested not against the ring of their radical intent, but against the whole substance of colonial dependence – economic, cultural, military and political – that persisted, even tightened, in the independence era.

In states of more conservative cast, outstanding radicals like Ruben Um Nyobe of the Cameroun, and Morocco's Mehdi Ben Barka, who not only led principled opposition struggles but were also formulating a theory of African revolution, were killed in their political prime. Other militants were persecuted into the wilderness for the challenge they offered to elitist politics. Africa has had her political martyrs as well as her political careerists.

But taking the continent as a whole, the independence 'revolution' in Africa was brief, makeshift and leaky. It came precipitated as much if not more by thrusts from beyond the continent as by sustained and articulated social revolution from within. This does not mean that independence was unwanted in Africa, or that her peoples were any less ready for it than any other peoples in the Third World. It means that, in the circumstances of its coming, it could accomplish and change only so much, and no more.