

Edmond J. Keller Decolonization, Independence, and the Failure of Politics

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In 1957 Gold Coast (Ghana) became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence from European colonial rule. Over the next thirty-five years the number of independent African states continued to grow until, with the dismantlement of *apartheid* in South Africa, the entire region was under black political rule. After the initial spurt of independence movements, which in most cases led to orderly transitions, the struggle for independence tended to be protracted and violent. For example, the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau achieved their independence only after more than a decade of armed struggle. The same was the case in Namibia and Zimbabwe, where white settlers fiercely resisted the notion of black majority rule before finally agreeing to a negotiated independence. A war of national liberation was also waged in Eritrea by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), not against European colonialism but against what the Front claimed to be neighboring Ethiopia's denial of the Eritrean peoples' right to self-determination following the demise of Italian colonial rule of the country. In May 1993 Eritrea became independent, and a year later South Africa came under majority rule.

When most African states achieved their independence during the late 1950s and early 1960s, there were great expectations for a bright future. It was assumed that they would develop rapidly, with the help of the more industrialized countries, and fully participate in the world community. Poverty and underdevelopment would be eliminated; the population growth rate and the incidence of disease would be reduced; the benefits of education, safe water, and good health care would be made available to every African citizen. All African leaders had to do was to take control of the political destinies of their countries, and nothing but good would result. But, contrary to such early optimism, the road to self-sustained development in Africa has been long and difficult. Although formal, political colonialism ended, it did not completely disappear. In fact, it was simply transformed into *neocolonialism*, colonialism of a different form. Rather than European interests controlling Africans directly, they came to do so indirectly, mostly through economic relations.

Instead of being characterized by self-sustained development, the first three decades of independence on the continent were marked by the steady exacerbation of underdevelopment, poverty, and inequality. By 1990 the continent's total debt burden stood at \$272 billion, or two and a half times what it had been ten years before. This amount was equivalent to 90 percent of Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Africa's economic crisis cannot be attributed solely to the dependency syndrome. Much of the blame is due to corrupt, inefficient, and sometimes incompetent political leadership. Bad governance and bad policy choices made difficult situations even worse.

Regardless of the source of the continent's problems, there is now little doubt that political independence was not the panacea Kwame Nkrumah assumed it to be when he coined the dictum "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else will follow" during Ghana's independence struggle. Almost four decades after the independence of Ghana, Africa is still trying to come up with political formulas that satisfy the needs of political democracy and economic development. The reasons why this quest has so far been a failure can be found in the patterns of politics that began in the last days of European colonialism and have continued to unfold to the present day.

Background to Political Independence

A careful examination of the process of decolonization reveals no typical British, French, Portuguese, or Belgian way of granting independence. Although there were similarities in how colonizing powers approached the decolonization process in Africa, there were atypical cases as well. In some instances, special features of certain colonies, whether they were controlled by Britain, France, Belgium, or Portugal, forced them into similar modalities. For example, the movement toward decolonization in Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and to a certain extent Kenya, Namibia, Zaire, and Zimbabwe was a much more violent and traumatic process than that in Côte d'Ivoire, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Tanzania, or Central African Republic. In the former cases, the presence of European settler interests greatly influenced the nature of the national struggle, while in the latter, settler interests were of little consequence. The character and organizational abilities of certain nationalist leaders also often contributed to important variations.

Before exploring more fully the factors that determined the timing and character of the African independence movement in selected colonies, it would be instructive to briefly examine the historical and intellectual underpinnings of the nationalist period.

World War II was a critical time in African colonial history, a period characterized by events that fundamentally affected the existing relationships between African colonies and their European masters. During the war, the colonies, which in some cases were virtually cut off from their respective metropolitan rulers, were mobilized to play an important role in the war effort. For the first time, the emphasis was mostly upon developing local productive capacities and not just on the extraction of raw



Plate 29. Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana.
Photo courtesy United Nations/MB/vb.

materials. For example, forced labor was increasingly used in French, Belgian, and British colonies such as Côte d'Ivoire, the Congo, and Kenya, in order to extract record volumes of agricultural and mineral resources. During the war it became difficult to ship raw materials to Europe for processing because of military pressures from Germany. Conversely, it was a problem to ship finished goods from Europe to the colonies to satisfy the consumer demands of white settlers and colonial bureaucrats. In addition to stressing local economic production, colonial administrations were also responsible for mobilizing their African subjects to provide military and strategic nonmilitary products, such as copper and uranium in the case of the Belgian Congo. Such commodities were not only essential to wage war, they also provided much-needed hard currency for metropolitan state coffers.

Many Africans were also drafted into the armies of the colonizing powers, where they served in various capacities, such as combatants, porters, servants, cooks, and drivers. In many cases, the war experience enabled African soldiers to see another side of their European masters. Rather than being invincible, self-assured, emotionless gods, European soldiers proved to be as human as any African. There were rich and poor Europeans. In the heat of battle they displayed the emotions of fear and apprehension just as all people do. For many African soldiers, the experience of fighting side by side with European soldiers in the war had a tremendous formative impact, expanding their world view and forcing them to question their subject status



Plate 30. Kenya achieves independence, December 1963.
Photo courtesy Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Kenya.

and the professed benevolence of their European overlords. These Africans gained confidence that they could influence their own destinies if they were willing to take action, make sacrifices, and struggle for what they wanted.

After 1945, a significant number of Africans began to demand more formal education and a fuller role in the economy. This was particularly the case in urban areas. City dwellers, because of their active, instrumental roles as wage laborers in the nascent industrial and manufacturing sectors during the war, had high expectations that their lives would continue to improve once the war was over. At the time, most African schools were still either traditional Koranic schools or Christian mission schools. During the colonial era, formal education was usually only up to the primary level. Africans were generally assumed to need only a basic facility in literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate in the language of the colonialists. Too much education, it was felt, could result in rising expectations, which in turn might lead to incipient protests, and this was the last thing colonial regimes wanted. Only a few Africans had been fortunate enough to journey to Europe and the United States to pursue advanced education before the war, and it was from this small group that the nationalist leadership emerged. It had not been a conscious policy of any of the colonial powers to educate Africans to fill bureaucratic, technical, or political roles. It was often the determination of individual Africans and their communities that enabled them to seize opportunities to master the ways of their European colonizers and thereby improve their status. Some even went so far as to dream of changing the colonial situation.

The necessities of economic expansion in the colonies during the war dictated the entry of Africans into the market to fill technical roles. Pressures placed on colonial economies to expand served to highlight the paucity of semiskilled, skilled, and professional African workers. Attempts were made in some cases to employ European technicians on private contracts, but this proved to be costly and caused apprehension among Africans over what was viewed as renewed attempts at European entrenchment. Africans in cities who filled these new roles as wage earners represented an emerging social class which began to demand economic opportunities and equity in postwar society. The colonial powers had little choice but to respond positively, training more and more Africans for bureaucratic and technical roles.

Postwar development plans in almost all colonies emphasized a commitment to secondary and university education. Britain trained new African elites mainly in high schools and colleges on the African continent. France, however, trained its African administrators and technocrats in France, and its African teachers were educated most frequently at William Ponty School in Senegal. The demand for economic and political reforms led to increased opportunities for formal education, and this influenced the development of the nationalist movements which emerged after the war.

Educated Africans played an extremely important role in leading their countries to independence. They did so, however, with the support that they were able to elicit from the nascent working class, ex-soldiers, and local chiefs and rulers and their subjects. Individuals such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, who had gone abroad to study during the war, on occasion came together to exchange ideas about how Africans should relate to the colonial situation. These meetings had a formative impact on the future leaders of the independence struggle. Perhaps the most famous gathering of African intellectuals in the wake of World War II occurred in Manchester, England, in 1945. This was the Fifth Pan-African Congress, chaired by W. E. B. Du Bois, the noted black American Pan-Africanist. Africans from all over the continent and the diaspora attended this conference. The congress was significant because of its timing and the resolutions it adopted. The delegates approved a strongly worded resolution condemning colonialism wherever it existed, and called for various social and economic reforms in the colonies. They also demanded full independence for Black Africa, pledging to pay whatever price was necessary for this right. Significantly, several future African nationalist leaders, including Kenyatta and Nkrumah, were at the congress, and most of the political activity of African nationalists was in London and Paris and not on the continent itself. By the late 1940s, however, these African intellectuals returned home and began to mobilize their people in campaigns for independence. The tactics adopted depended upon local situations, and also on the type of leadership which emerged. In francophone Africa, the pattern was usually for elites to form patron parties and secure political offices which allowed them to represent their territories either at the national level, in the French National Assembly in Paris, or at the federal level, in one of three French territorial assemblies. They used these assemblies to press first for reform and later for independence. In anglophone Africa, mass parties led by charismatic leaders in opposition to the colonial regime were most common.

The timing of African nationalist movements resulted in part from a conscious effort by nationalists to capitalize on opportunities resulting from the unstable international political climate after the war. At the same time the governments of European colonial powers came to be controlled by more liberal, anticolonial elites. Young colonial administrators and missionaries also began to express doubts about the policies their countries had been pursuing. And although decolonization was not part of a well-laid plan for any colonial power, immediately after the war, programs were set in motion which accelerated the rate at which the colonies moved toward self-government. France was confronted with increasing pressures for independence in its colonies in Indochina and North Africa; Britain was being similarly challenged in the Middle East and on the Indian subcontinent. Belgium was racked by internal political turmoil involving liberals and conservatives, clerics and anticlerics; the status of the Belgian Congo was the central issue in these disputes. Throughout Europe, the mood in the immediate postwar period with regard to the colonial experiment was one of reflection and doubt.

African Nationalism and Political Independence

The presence or absence of European settlers in African colonies greatly influenced the rate and pattern of decolonization no matter who was the colonizing power. Where there were no settlers, the colonizing powers looked more favorably on the notion of self-government by Africans; but where there were settlers, the process of decolonization was usually characterized by periods of violent conflict between Africans and Europeans.

The case of the Gold Coast represents a typical example of the British approach to decolonization in the absence of a sizable settler population. The Gold Coast, or Ghana, as it was eventually named, was the first colony in sub-Saharan Africa to secure political independence from Britain. The leader of the Ghanaian independence movement, Kwame Nkrumah, returned home in 1947 after completing his education in the United States and immediately became politically active. At the invitation of older, less educated nationalists, he became the secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). His responsibilities involved organizational activities aimed at securing internal self-government for Africans and eventually independence. Nkrumah was an advocate of nonviolence and civil disobedience. Between 1947 and 1957 he orchestrated what came to be known as the "Positive Action Campaign." In the process the UGCC grew until it had more than five hundred local offices throughout the colony, all capable of mounting local protest.

In the early days, the actions of the UGCC were confined to peaceful demonstrations growing out of specific economic or political grievances, but the organization gradually became more militant, and riots were not uncommon. Perhaps the most significant UGCC-sponsored protest occurred in 1949 in reaction to the high price of commodities sold to Africans in the capital city, Accra. What had started as passive resistance ended in violence and the arrest of the top party leadership, including

Nkrumah. Following this, Nkrumah split with the more conservative elements in the UGCC over strategy and tactics. Refusing to moderate his approach to dealing with the colonial authorities, he was forced to form his own progressive political party, the Convention People's Party (CPP), with the motto "Self-Government Now!"

UGCC moderates tried to work with the colonial administration in fashioning a formula for decolonization. The CPP used this as an opportunity and styled itself as the most legitimate representative of the hopes and aspirations of the Ghanaian people. Nkrumah became a charismatic figure, enriching his reputation as "the Father of African Nationalism" each time he was jailed.

In February 1951, during a period when Nkrumah was incarcerated, general elections, which were to lead to internal self-government, were held, pitting the UGCC against the CPP. Nkrumah's party was the overwhelming victor, outpolling the UGCC by a margin of 90 percent, thus winning thirty-four of the thirty-eight municipal and rural council seats. In securing nine out of every ten votes cast, the CPP demonstrated its numerical strength. The colonial regime had little choice but to ask Nkrumah to form the government that set the stage for the creation of independent Ghana on March 6, 1957.

The process of decolonization in other anglophone countries with few if any European settlers, for example Tanganyika, Nigeria, Uganda, and Cameroon, was similar to the Ghana experience. On the other hand, Kenya, which was characterized by extensive settler involvement, was different. From as early as the turn of the twentieth century, Britain had encouraged settlement in this so-called "White Man's Country" known for its cool and fertile highlands, not unlike the British countryside. Europeans flocked to Kenya between 1904 and the 1950s. As settlers arrived and became entrenched, laws were enacted to protect their rights and to otherwise give them advantage over Africans. Deprived of their land, Africans in ever-increasing numbers were forced onto overcrowded and overcultivated reserves, and a pass system similar to that in South Africa was introduced to regulate population movements.

As early as the 1920s, Africans had attempted to make the relationship with European settlers in Kenya one of partnership, but the trend was consistently toward white dominance and black subordination. Racial discrimination and segregation were legalized. Through labor associations and other types of interest organizations, Africans pressed for fairer treatment, but achieved only limited success.

In the postwar era, political tensions escalated. Government repression and reciprocal African violence grew slowly until eventually, in late 1952, a state of emergency was declared after a series of violent acts attributed to the protest movement called "Mau Mau" by whites but which African fighters called the "Land and Freedom Army." For the next five years the colonial authorities attempted to put down this incipient rebellion. The period of most intense conflict lasted for only two years, but high-intensity government repression and low-intensity guerrilla activities continued for three more. Although this rebellion did not lead to immediate political independence for Kenya, it did set the wheels in motion. In contrast to the situation in South Africa, when the "winds of change" began to blow in the rest of Black Africa, white settlers in Kenya were not strong enough to force Britain to accede to their

desire for a white-dominated state. Instead, Britain opted to support nationalists who agreed to protect white rights and to let neocolonial capitalism take root. Under these terms, Kenya eventually achieved independence on December 12, 1963, with Jomo Kenyatta as prime minister.

Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) also had a sizable settler population, but it was much more entrenched and its economic activities were more diversified than was the case in Kenya. This relative strength was translated into action when Rhodesia's settler-based government, under the leadership of Ian Smith, issued a unilateral declaration of independence from British rule in 1965. Subsequently, international sanctions were imposed on the country by Britain, the United States, and other countries as well as the United Nations, in an effort to force the rebellious regime to allow for full African participation in government and politics. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) launched a war of national liberation against the white minority government, and for more than a decade attempted to bring it down through guerrilla warfare. Over the years, the combination of international economic sanctions and political pressure and African military action caused a deterioration of white Rhodesian solidarity. As the war dragged on in the late 1970s, the British Commonwealth was able to broker a negotiated settlement that resulted in the election of Robert Mugabe as Zimbabwe's first prime minister in 1980.

French colonies in Africa, with the exception of Algeria, were not characterized by substantial European settlement. In Algeria, a national liberation struggle erupted roughly at the same time as did the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya. Algerian nationalists were also able to wage a determined guerrilla campaign that forced France in 1962 to abandon its plans to make Algeria its most prized overseas possession.

In other parts of francophone Africa, the pattern of decolonization was quite different. Independence became a real possibility for most French colonies in West and Equatorial Africa when a referendum was held in these territories in 1958. As a result of public disagreement in France over France's role in Algeria, the Fourth Republic collapsed. General Charles de Gaulle, who assumed power in an effort to restore the country's stability, was granted almost dictatorial powers. Among his major priorities was finding a way to silence growing demands from the African colonies for political independence. On September 28, 1958, a referendum was held in which African colonies were asked to vote on whether they wanted to remain a part of the French community. It was felt that most colonies, recognizing their political weakness and economic vulnerability, would opt to remain French. Indeed, only Guinea voted for independence at the time. Over the next two years, however, the other colonies of French Equatorial and West Africa reconsidered their decisions to remain a part of the community, and asked for and were granted independence. Since the francophone African leaders who headed the nationalist movement in the various colonies had participated in local, territorial, and even national politics before independence, they were already steeped in the French brand of politics and government. The French assumed that there was therefore no need for constitutional conventions as had been the case in anglophone Africa.

The Belgian Congo (Zaire) was characterized by significant white settler involvement; as a result, Belgium only reluctantly began to contemplate the idea of black majority rule and independence in the late 1950s. Before 1957, Africans were involved in politics only through their association with European political groups that had set up branches in the colony and through ethnic associations.

Belgium practiced a form of pragmatic paternalism, claiming that it dominated Africans only to serve them better. The colonial welfare state was supported by a "Platonic Trinity," which included the colonial bureaucracy, large foreign economic concerns, and the Catholic Church. The state regulated African social behavior; the concessionary companies employed Africans in menial, low-paying jobs; and the missions educated and socialized Africans to accept their subordination. In the postwar era, Belgium began to cultivate a select African bourgeoisie with the intention of creating an indigenous "buffer" class, educated in Belgian culture and supportive of the system. Instead of developing supportive attitudes as the Belgians had hoped for, however, many African elites began to question the contradictions existing in colonial society. They were largely inspired by the nationalist struggles which were being waged in other parts of the continent and elsewhere and by the writings of a young Belgian professor who in 1955 published a proposal for the independence of the Congo, but not until 1985!

African nationalist organizations mushroomed in the latter half of the 1950s. At first these groups had not been political parties, but cultural or ethnic associations. By 1959, on the eve of independence, party activity was at its peak, with more than one hundred separate, predominantly ethnically based political parties concentrated in urban areas. However, only one party, Patrice Lumumba's National Congolese Movement (MNC), approached being a national movement, with a broad base of support. Despite this, the MNC was never able to become a dominant national movement. Independence fever spread too quickly. Belgian efforts to temper African demands led only to violence. In response to these pressures, a conference to discuss the possibility of independence was held in Brussels in January 1960, and six months later, in spite of European settler protest, the independent state of Congo was born. African demands for an end to colonial rule had become irrepressible, and this, coupled with anticolonial sentiment at home, forced Belgium to abandon its colonial experiment. Within the next two years, Belgium left its final two African colonies, Rwanda and Burundi.

The last major European colonies before Zimbabwe to achieve independence were the Portuguese possessions of Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola, and the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe. Of all the colonial powers, Portugal had the longest presence in Africa, occupying coastal enclaves as early as the fifteenth century. Until the 1930s, Portuguese colonial policy could best be described as exploitative neglect. Africans were either left alone or forced to work as slaves or contract labor, depending on the exigencies of the moment. Following World War II, Portugal began to become more actively involved in Africa, encouraging European settlement in Angola and Mozambique. However, even where there were few settlers, as in Guinea-Bissau, Africans were kept in a state of near-servitude, with little opportunity for education or socioeconomic advancement.



Plate 31. Political meeting near Cotonou, Dahomey (Benin), 1964.
Photo courtesy United Nations.

The Portuguese government, which was a dictatorship at home, used the same authoritarian zeal in Africa; but in the colonies, ethnic origin as well as class determined the structure of relationships. Since the colonies were conceived as provinces of Portugal, it was unthinkable that they could be set free. It was this rationale that eventually led Angolan liberation movements to begin armed struggle in 1961, to be followed by similar movements in Guinea-Bissau and in Mozambique, starting in 1962 and 1964 respectively.

The factor in lusophone Africa which seems to have determined the character of the nationalist struggle was not so much the number of white settlers as it was the way in which Portugal perceived its colonies. Since they were seen as mere appendages of the metropole, Portuguese leaders felt justified in spending well over half of the country's annual budget for military purposes, mostly to maintain control of its

African colonies. In the end, the weight of anticolonial public opinion inspired a military coup in Portugal in April 1974, ushering in a reform-minded military regime. The economic as well as the human cost of maintaining the colonies had caused Portuguese society to enter into a period of severe political instability, and this, almost as much as African nationalist military pressure in the various colonies, was important in explaining the timing of Portugal's disengagement from Africa. Guinea-Bissau secured independence in 1974, and Mozambique and Angola in 1975.

Although Eritrea was not a European colony, its people claimed that they were denied the right to self-determination by neighboring Ethiopia, which treated Eritrea as one of its provinces. The ensuing war lasted for thirty years, culminating with the victory of the EPLF on the battlefield in 1991. After a UN-sanctioned referendum, the independent state of Eritrea was born in May 1993.

The Failure of Politics

At independence, the first wave of African states to secure independence from European colonizers were bequeathed political institutions patterned on those of their former colonial masters. There was great expectation among observers that these new African states would simply take the best institutions of Western democracies and use them to form efficient, effective, and equitable models for their own societies. Soon, however, it became apparent that it was not as easy as it had seemed to graft these institutions and patterns of behavior onto Africa. One African state after the other began to reject these forms and to create hybrids of their own. In some places, dominant political parties became single-party systems in the service of authoritarian civilian regimes. In others, competitive party systems were replaced by authoritarian military regimes.

In the 1970s and 1980s, African states were involved in a constant struggle not only to develop their societies, but also to maintain the territorial integrity of the state and to manage or control political conflict. In Africa's quest to achieve these objectives, ideology emerged as a common instrument for manipulating political behavior as well as for organizing society. Initially the trend was toward some variety of "African socialism." The content of these ideologies varied from one state to the next, but all could best be seen as strategies for moving away from the foreign exploitation of the colonial era and for reviving the communal egalitarian elements of the precolonial African past. In this period three main ideological forms predominated: populist socialism, capitalism, and Afro-Marxism.

Populist socialism was based on the assumption that the people in a given country shared common historical and cultural traditions. Precolonial African society was portrayed as having been communal egalitarian and characterized by cooperation and reciprocity among its members. Another important element in this perspective was its radical tone. For instance, Tanzania's *Ujamaa* socialism, the quintessential example of populist socialism, proclaimed war against poverty, rampant capitalism, and neocolonialism. Tanzania was further declared to be committed to the principles of



Plate 32. President Julius Nyerere addressing the United Nations General Assembly, 1985.
Photo courtesy United Nations.

self-reliance and nonalignment. Julius Nyerere, the architect of *Ujamaa* socialism, proclaimed: "The choice for new nations lies effectively between socialism and capitalism . . . yet having said that . . . there is no real choice. . . . Our present poverty and national weakness make socialism the only real choice for us." Significantly, populist socialism did not look to Marx or Lenin for guidance and a socialist framework, but to some mythicized African past. The aim of the state was to provide the disparate groups in society with a common focus for unity, independence, and cooperation.

African capitalism of the period was a less explicit ideology than either populist socialism or Afro-Marxism. It could be observed mainly at the level of government economic policy. African capitalist states attempted to achieve development by using "neocolonialism as a development strategy." They relied heavily upon foreign aid and foreign private investments to develop their economies. In 1972, for example,

Kenya's president, Jomo Kenyatta, argued: "If we respect ourselves and our *uhuru* (independence), foreign investment will pour in and we will prosper." Whereas populist regimes viewed development as best pursued from the bottom up, capitalist regimes chose the opposite course. Foreign capital and technology were used to promote both industrialization and large-scale agriculture. The capitalist state preached free enterprise, but, as in socialist states, it was heavily involved in directing the economy. Nonalignment was less important to Afro-capitalist states than to populist ones. Although there was a good deal of variation in the success of this strategy, in all cases the main aim was to mobilize capital rather than the populace. Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire were the best examples of the African capitalist strategy.

From the mid-1970s, there emerged yet another ideological strand in Africa: Afro-Marxism. The states which claimed to adhere to this brand of ideology also claimed to be "scientific" in their socialist orientation. What this meant was open to interpretation, but the states which shared this perspective generally insisted on a materialist interpretation of history, the necessity of class struggle for historical change, and the need for the international unity of all oppressed classes rather than only national unity. Although Afro-Marxist regimes claimed nonalignment, they tended to be aligned mainly with the Soviet Union or with other Eastern Bloc countries or Communist parties. As in the other two types of systems, the state was heavily involved in the economy. In fact, it professed commitment to a centrally planned economy and state control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Angola were the most clear-cut examples of the Afro-Marxist state.

No matter what the ideological character of African states, there was no magical formula for development, and populist, capitalist, and Afro-Marxist regimes saw their economies falter and stagnate. Each type of regime was forced to compromise its ideology and yield to the dictates of pragmatism.

By the mid-1980s, 60 percent of Africa's countries had come under military rule, and among the remaining civilian regimes, only six, Senegal, Swaziland, Botswana, The Gambia, Mauritius, and Zimbabwe, had competitive party systems. Even where civilian regimes existed, national elections tended not to present voters with clear policy choices. Instead, elections served merely to present the illusion of democracy, and many other aspects of democracy were also compromised over the first three post-independence decades. Violations of human rights became common; official corruption and lack of governmental accountability also came to characterize African politics.

Poverty, underdevelopment, economic dependence, ethnic and class conflict, the absence of democratic practices, fragile political and economic institutions, all proved to be structural obstacles, part and parcel of the legacy of European colonialism. At the same time, there was a "revolution of rising expectations" among the African masses, who wanted to realize all that was promised to them during the struggle for independence. However, the objective conditions were not favorable for such developments, and political leadership in most countries was not sufficiently committed to accountable, transparent, responsible, and effective governance. Con-



Plate 33. Voter registration under United Nations supervision for Namibia's first free election, 1990.
Photo courtesy United Nations/Milton Grant.

sequently, the trend was away from democracy and toward autocracy. Authoritarian regimes came to closely control politics, rationalizing their actions in the name of national unity and the need for political stability as a prerequisite for economic development. While some observers looked upon this trend as a real tragedy, there were many who seemed not to be concerned. They rationalized that perhaps what was needed for Africa to develop rapidly was "developmental dictatorships" that prioritized economic growth ahead of participatory democracy (see chapters 17 and 18).

By 1986, Africa not only was a continent in "economic free-fall," and characterized by poor governance, it also was the subject of growing attention for international donors. Dictatorships had not fostered development, and donors came to feel that they were "throwing good money after bad." At the same time the African people themselves began to raise their voices and take action against irresponsible and unresponsive governments. By the dawn of the 1990s, African governments were being pressured at home as well as from abroad to liberalize both their politics and

their economies. This convergence of interests and the effects that it had on African political economy can be understood only if we consider changes taking place in the world at large. The Cold War had ended; the superpowers no longer competed ideologically and militarily; and international donors were now demanding economic and political reform as a condition for economic assistance to African countries (see chapters 19 and 20).

With the ending of the Cold War, former patrons are attempting to divest themselves from Africa, and in the process Africa is being threatened with marginalization. This has forced Africa's leaders to begin to reexamine critically their roles in creating the current African predicament and to consider ways of finding African solutions to African problems. In this vein, in 1991, the African Leadership Forum, the OAU, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa cosponsored a historic conference at Kampala, Uganda, to discuss the continent's problems. The five hundred conferees agreed that in order for democracy to have a real chance, African leaders would have to come to the realization that, although their countries are sovereign, they are also interdependent. Therefore, the security, stability, and development of every African country affects every other African country. The conference made it clear that the denial of democratic rights and fundamental human rights, and the emphasis by African governments on oppression and militarization, greatly contributed to insecurity in Africa. Military insecurity, then, had a ripple effect, causing insecurity in other social areas.

Pressures from foreign donors for African governments to liberalize both politically and economically have contributed to an opening up of the political process. Ordinary people in many parts of the continent have taken advantage of this window of opportunity and succeeded in forcing authoritarian regimes to reform or be ousted. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s the political pendulum was swinging in an authoritarian direction, today it seems to be swinging toward democracy. Presently only a handful of military governments exist in Africa, and continuing authoritarian regimes are under constant pressure from outside supporters of political and economic liberalization to open more space for popular participation in all aspects of life. This development has prompted some observers to herald the onset of Africa's "Second Independence." However, it is unclear how deep and durable these changes will be.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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