Decolonization or National Liberation: Debating the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa

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When discussing the end of British colonial rule in Africa, many historians have highlighted the role of postwar international relations and the impact of domestic imperial politics on decolonization and have failed to recognize the role of African nationalists. This article argues that such a viewpoint is flawed because it conceives of colonial policy makers as isolated and autonomous entities impervious to changes taking place in the colonies. The national liberation movements in Ghana, Central Africa, Kenya, and other regions of East Africa are explored in this article to illustrate the central role that colonial subjects played in the British decolonization of Africa. While dominant scholarship on the failures of the post-colonial state has made studies of decolonization and African nationalism less fashionable, it is becoming increasingly clear that our understanding of the nature and mechanics of the crises that beset the continent requires taking fresh stock of the record of European colonial rule in Africa. In this regard, the study of colonialism and decolonization in Africa continues to be of critical relevance.

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In the aftermath of the Second World War, European empires in Africa faced insurmountable challenges. The internal and external conditions that sustained colonial rule were unraveling at an extraordinary pace. As one commentator aptly noted, the European colonial regimes could continue to exist only so long as three requirements were fulfilled: (1) that their colonial subjects acquiesced in their authority,

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(2) that the politicians and electorates of the metropolitan countries accepted colonial commitments as not entirely unethical and on the whole worthwhile, and (3) that these empires received international recognition (Gifford and Louis 1988). While recognizing the critical importance of these three factors in determining the fate of colonial rule, most historians of decolonization in Africa have emphasized postwar international relations and the impact of domestic imperial politics on decolonization and have discounted the role that the colonial subjects played. The reasons for decolonization, they argued, resided in the anticolonial sentiments of postwar U.S. and Soviet administrations and the deliberate planning of enlightened colonial bureaucrats and politicians in London and Paris. The impact of nationalist pressure was deemed insignificant; even in places such as Ghana, where the role of Kwame Nkrumah could not be ignored, it was the liberal policy of the Colonial Office in London that was credited with paving the way for African democratic expression and, ultimately, for the achievement of Ghana's independence in 1957. Thus, the planned decolonization thesis championed by Ronald Robinson and John Flint emerged as the dominant narrative of British decolonization in Africa (see Flint 1983; Robinson 1980).

The problem with this argument, mostly made by British scholars of imperialism working with Colonial and Foreign Office archives in Europe, is that it conceives of colonial policy-makers as isolated and autonomous entities impervious to changes taking place in the colonies and motivated solely by their political idiosyncrasies and metropolitan considerations. It fails to consider how the new international order was affecting African perceptions of colonial rule and overlooks the important impact that nationalist leaders, the rising political consciousness of the colonial subjects, and intensifying protest movements in the colonies were having on policy-makers in London. In reality, what was presented as planned policies for decolonization appeared more as bricolage aimed first at anticipating African political demands, second at containing those demands when they were not anticipated, and third at finding ways for preserving British interests when decolonization became inevitable. This contention becomes clear when we look at the processes and mechanics for the dissolution of the British colonies of West, East, and Central Africa, but it is important that we first consider the nature of international relations during and after WWII, changes taking place in the colonies, and the role that these events may have played in precipitating the end of colonial rule.

The End of the Colonial Empires in Africa

One major consequence of WWII for colonized people in Africa and elsewhere was that it destroyed France's and Britain's entrenched confidence that there would be no serious external challenge to their imperial authority. Even before the end of the war, at the different conferences held by the Allies at Potsdam, Yalta, and San Francisco and at the drafting of the Atlantic Charter, a new international order had dawned in which the former imperial powers were no longer able to

play leading roles. The greatest threat that this new international order posed to Britain was that it could potentially put its colonies under international scrutiny and eventually out of its control.

The newly founded United Nations and its emphasis on human rights and the rights of self-determination for all nations provided a new international forum that undermined the discretionary policies of the imperial powers and helped to build an international consensus against colonial rule. The internationalization of the colonial problem had already started with the founding of the League of Nations after the First World War, the creation of the mandate system, and the introduction of the notion of trusteeship in the language of international politics. The establishment of the international community as legal custodian of the Ottoman and German colonies, in the Middle East and Africa, respectively, created a juridical precedent that undermined the rights of conquest, which, since the Berlin Conference in 1885, had served as legal framework for colonial rule. It also introduced a moral dimension in the colonized–colonizer relationships and imposed some measure of accountability on Britain and France, which were entrusted with the administration of mandate colonies. These two countries were expressly tasked, as laid out by Chapter XII of the UN Charter, "to promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and people."[1]

Of course, all of these generous stipulations existed only on paper, and the UN often failed to muster the will and the means to turn them into real policies. In the end, the mandate system did not affect, in any meaningful way, the administration of African subjects. There were no major differences in the everyday lives of subjects in mandate and nonmandate colonies in the manner in which colonial administration was carried out. But from a political standpoint, the new international status afforded colonies under UN supervision larger room for political maneuver. In due time, nationalists in Tanganyika, Togo, and Cameroon would take advantage of this opportunity to oppose British and French policies and advocate for special treatment. Accommodations made to satisfy the demands of mandate colonies in turn influenced policies in other colonies.

The emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as dominant postwar powers presented another major obstacle to colonialism and an opportunity for Africans to achieve self-rule. Both of these countries, for different reasons, appeared at least initially as natural allies of the people in Africa and Asia struggling to overthrow the yoke of European imperialism. The United States, a former colony that fought for its own independence (although it also experimented with colonial rule in the Philippines and the Pacific Islands), was by character and temperament drawn to anticolonialism; also, as a new economic superpower, its interests lay in equal access to the natural resources and markets of European colonies.

Although the influence of communist ideas on Africa south of the Sahara in the postwar era was rather limited, and the disruption of colonial rule in Africa never

became a priority for Stalin, the Soviet Union was nevertheless another threat to colonial tranquility. Yet aside from diplomatic efforts to embarrass the colonial powers in the UN and other international fora, in Africa this threat would unfold only in the 1960s and 1970s in the heat of the cold war and the wars of liberation in Portuguese colonies. It is revealing that none of the early nationalists who helped to pave the way to independence in Africa professed to be communist, although there is no doubt that they were all influenced by Marxist ideas about class struggle, capitalism, and imperial exploitation.

While changes in international relations brought about by WWII exerted some pressure on the colonial powers, their impact should not be overstated. The new international political and diplomatic environments alone could not have prompted European imperial powers to give up their colonies. In fact, as noted by Anthony Low, "international pressures on colonial powers could be irritants. But the ease with which the Portuguese and Smith regimes brushed them aside for so long serves to underline their ineffectiveness" (Low 1988, 70). It was the political, economic, and cultural changes that were taking place on the African continent before, during, and after the war that had an even greater impact on the process that led to the end of colonial rule in Africa.

World War II fundamentally impacted the existing relationships between African subjects and their colonial masters. Both those who were forced to fight in the battlefields of Africa, Asia, and Europe, as well as those who stayed on the continent toiling in the mines and farms to support the war effort, were deeply affected by their experience. Colonies were mobilized as critical resources to fund the war. In many colonies, cut off from the metropolitan capitals for the first time, emphasis was put on developing local productive capacities and not just on extracting raw materials. These economic changes allowed a small minority of Africans to fill low- and middle-level manufacturing and office jobs vacated by European conscripts or made available by the war industry, but the war economy was mostly felt in the colonies, which reverted again to forced labor. This practice was extensively used in British, Belgian, and French colonies, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, and Kenya, to produce record harvests of agricultural products and extract mineral resources, such as copper, uranium, and iron, necessary for the military industry. The pressure put on the farmers to intensify the cultivation of cash crops needed for hard currency and to feed the swelling urban population and the soldiers on the front lines created famines and anger throughout Africa. These hardships became the face of colonialism even among people in rural areas whose lives had not been fundamentally affected by colonial rule.

Political maturity was even greater among the many Africans who were forcibly drafted into the colonial armies, where they served in various capacities such as combatants, cooks, porters, and drivers. In many instances, for these Africans who fought alongside their European counterparts or visited the European metropolises, the war experience helped to destroy many of the myths associated with European power. The war humanized the European master. The myth of invincibility cultivated by Europeans in the colonies was forever buried in the battlefields of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Soldiers who were deployed in the devastated cities

of Europe—filled with beggars and the wretched—and who were sometimes called for duties of population control learned that Europe also had its poor people and its share of misery. Overall, as observed by one historian, "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 and the professed benevolence of their 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" (Keller 1995, 158–59). As we shall see in the following pages, WWII veterans were instrumental players in the nationalist movement.

The aftermath of the Second World War was also marked by a growing demand for more formal education and for a greater role for Africans in the economy and administration of the colonies. This was particularly the case in urban areas. Africans who had profited from the extraordinary circumstances of the war by carving out a niche in the colonial economy held high expectations that their lives would continue to improve after the war. Formal education was thought of as a primary means to achieve social mobility.

The vociferous demands for better education and greater roles for Africans in the political, administrative, and economic lives of the colonies sent a strong signal to the colonial rulers that it was no longer possible to conduct colonial business as usual. The imperial metropolises in Europe clearly understood the message but still believed that there were ways of repairing and revamping the colonial system. They were determined to breathe new life into colonialism by inventing a new legitimacy for colonial rule. This new political orientation started what some historians have called the "the second colonial invasion." Now the declared intentions of colonialists were to substitute counsel for control, to modernize Africa, and to share more equitably the costs and benefits of economic development. New economic plans were drawn in London and Paris, and even some of the money from the Marshall Plan intended for European reconstruction was committed to funding projects on the African continent. In Britain, economic investment was channeled through the successive Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1945, 1950, and 1955. Specialists, mostly Europeans, were recruited to implement new policies for agricultural production and marketing, to provide new social and medical services, and to work in fisheries or education. African labor was sought to staff larger projects geared toward improving communication, power, and water supplies.

Postwar development plans also included an important educational component. Britain trained a new African elite mainly in high schools and colleges built on the continent such as Achimota in Ghana and Makerere in Uganda. The new institutions of higher education were tasked with preparing the future leadership of Africa by gradually Africanizing the workforce in the colonies.

Political reform was another important dimension of postwar colonial policy. In the British colonies, it had become clear that indirect rule and its reliance on customary chiefs to control the population had outlasted its political usefulness. Now emphasis was put on the development of an "efficient and democratic system"

of local government that would require all those aspiring to a seat in the legislative and executive bodies of administration in the colony to go out and compete with local candidates. Yet this reform was not solely motivated by the declared intention of "sowing democracy in African minds." Colonial policy-makers and administrators branded radical nationalists as demagogues motivated by their own selfish interests and out of touch with the majority of their countrymen who appreciated the modernizing benefits of colonial rule (Cooper 2005, 26). Colonial officialdom hoped that the entanglement in local politics would deflect nationalists from operating on the national level and ultimately dim their rising popularity.

The new effort to reform colonial rule, rather than assuage the discontent and demands that motivated its implementation in the first place, achieved just the opposite. Post–WWII economic and political reforms in the colonies exposed clearly to the public the deep-seated contradictions that lay at the heart of the colonial project. As noted by some scholars of decolonization, "European imperialism embodied a fundamental tension between the desire to represent the colonized as innately different . . . and the need to consider them sufficiently alike as to make the effort worthwhile" (see Nugent 2004, 11).[2] African nationalists shrewdly exploited these contradictions. On one hand, they insisted that they were the same as the Europeans and therefore entitled to the same political rights. On the other hand, "they had recourse to a rich field of cultural symbolism which underlined their essential difference from the Europeans and which could be used as [a] rallying point" (Nugent 2004, 11). The Négritude movement pioneered by Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Léopold Senghor of Senegal in the 1930s in Paris constitutes a good illustration of this contention (see Césaire 1956; Senghor 1963). Frantz Fanon's work put an even greater emphasis on the deep political meaning and psychological impact of European cultural alienation (see Fanon 1967). Imperial response to these contradictions was a gradualist approach, which no longer excluded the prospect of African self-government but instead hoped to push it back to an indeterminate future. The true goal for reform was to find ways of preserving the empire, but it soon became clear that any attempt to delay or stem political and social transformation in the colonies would breed anger and frustration and that nationalists' demands could not be satisfied or contained in the framework of improved local government (Hargreaves 1988, 109).

The Undoing of the British Empire in Africa

In the aftermath of WWII, while India was firmly on the path to political sovereignty and Britain was contemplating that for Middle Eastern colonies, the Colonial Office in London still believed that self-government for West Africans was decades away and that the prospect for East and Central African colonies was even more remote. African nationalism proved to have no respect either for the timeline that colonial bureaucrats drew or for the distinction made between West Africans and other colonies. By 1951, distinctions between different stages of local

autonomy, between self-government and independence, and between politically advanced and less advanced colonies had become increasingly irrelevant, especially in nonsettler colonies.

Events in the Gold Coast colony, later the Republic of Ghana, set in motion the British scramble for decolonization. There, in 1947, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was formed by nationalist members of the bourgeoisie as a political instrument to expedite the progress toward self-government, and Kwame Nkrumah was hired as its general secretary. Nkrumah was a staunch Pan-Africanist and nationalist who had spent 12 years abroad studying and traveling in the United States and Europe and meeting with political activists from across the British Empire. He was a prominent participant in the Manchester Pan-Africanist Congress of 1945 organized by W. E. B. Du Bois, which articulated clearly the demand for total sovereignty for the European colonies in Africa and outlined a strategy to attain it. Nkrumah's readings and experience had taught him the critical importance of a centralized and disciplined political party that could identify needs and establish roots in the urban and rural areas of the country. Soon he presented to the founders of UGCC detailed proposals to achieve just that.

The critical event that led to the undoing of the British Empire in sub-Saharan Africa took place in Accra, Ghana, in February 1948, when the police fired shots and killed two Ghanaian former servicemen involved in a veterans' protest. The killing led to rioting and looting in the city that spread to three other towns; eventually 29 people died. Nkrumah and five leaders of UGCC were quickly rounded up and then released. This event was a traumatic warning to the colonial administration that it was losing the political initiative to the nationalists and prompted Sir Hugh Foot, the British chief secretary in Nigeria, to note that "the most important thing is to take hold of the initiative [and] and not allow frustration to set in" (Low 1988, 39). The commission formed to enquire into and report on the disturbances in the Gold Coast and their underlying causes articulated sharp criticism of almost all aspects of colonial government in the colony and concluded that "in the conditions existing today in the Gold Coast substantial measure of reform is necessary to meet the legitimate aspirations of the indigenous population" (Hargreaves 1988, 116). But time was already running out for reform, and it would soon become clear that the pace and nature of changes to come would not be determined by colonial bureaucrats in London but by nationalists in Africa.

In 1949, Nkrumah and his followers broke away from UGCC to form the Convention People's Party (CPP). The following year, they embarked on a campaign of "positive actions," reminiscent of Gandhi's campaign of civil disobedience, to demand "self-government now." Strikes and violence ensued, followed by a declaration of a state of emergency and the arrest of Nkrumah. Despite the successful suppression of the positive actions campaign, keeping Nkrumah in prison was not an option. He had come to embody the aspirations of the Ghanaian people for self-government. Short of violent conflagration in the colony, which the British wanted to avoid at all cost, they had no alternative but to engage him. Furthermore, constitutional reforms adopted in hopes of bolstering moderate

political forces failed as the CPP swept the election of 1951, winning 34 of 38 elective seats. Charles Arden-Clarke, the new governor of the Gold Coast, who had some experience negotiating with nationalists in Southeast Asia, released Nkrumah from jail. Without delay, Nkrumah became the Gold Coast's leader of government business and later prime minister. Britain was now set on a constitutional course to grant self-government to Ghana, and the subsequent victories of the CPP in the elections of 1954 and 1956 convinced them that independence could not be delayed or denied any longer. In 1957, the Gold Coast achieved independence under the new name of the Republic of Ghana.

Once independence was conceded to Ghana, it could not be denied to Nigeria, the largest British colony in sub-Saharan Africa, where there was already a burgeoning nationalist movement. But the size of Nigeria and the religious and ethnic entanglements of nationalist politics there dictated a different pace. The preservation of the emirate in the northern part of the country through the policy of indirect rule had largely restricted access to Western education and kept this area immune to outside political influences. The southwestern and southeastern provinces dominated by the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups, in contrast, had long benefited from mission education and greater contacts with the outside. The influence of Pan-Africanist ideas, already perceptible there in the 1930s, underlines the extent to which southern intellectuals were connected to the wider Atlantic World.

Nigerian politics in the run-up to independence was dominated by three regional political blocs: Nnamdi Azikiwe's party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), based in the east with a mainly Ibo constituency, but aspiring for nationwide presence and influence; the Action Group (AG), the party of Obafami Awolowo, which mobilized the Yoruba ethnic group in the west; and the latecomer, the mainly Muslim Northern People's Congress (NPC), which was supported by the large population of Fulbe and Hausa in the north of the country. Because of cultural and political differences among these three regions and the particular intellectual itineraries of the leadership, the three parties showed significant differences in their approaches to decolonization and their perception of the future of the colony of Nigeria. When, in 1943, the AG introduced a motion to the Federal Legislative Council for self-government by 1956, the NPC refused to back it and threatened secession of the Northern Province. Faced with a crisis that might have led to a violent confrontation, the British brokered a new constitution in 1954. This constitution devolved significant decision-making powers to the Nigerians but also gave its imprimatur to the de facto division of the country by shifting the center of the federation to the three ethno-religious regions. This meant that the political voices of the dozens of other minority ethnic groups were ignored and that the north, with a population larger than that of the west and east combined, could achieve permanent control of the country if it managed to muster political cohesion. Finally, after nationally held elections in 1959, power was transferred to a shaky coalition of the NPC and the AG. Britain's failure to address correctly the minority question in its rush to decolonize portended fatal consequences for post-colonial Nigeria: the Biafran War between 1967 and 1970

and the continuing struggle more than 40 years after independence to solve the conundrum of ethnic nationalism. After the independence of Nigeria, the smaller colonies of The Gambia and Sierra Leone soon followed.

The contention that events unfolding in Africa rather than colonial planning in London dictated the pace and trajectory of decolonization is even more evident in the case of the British colonies of East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika) and Central Africa (Nyassaland, Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia). In 1959, an influential official in the Colonial Office estimated that Kenya could not expect independence until 1975 (Goldworthy 1970, 278). For Central African colonies, independence was forecast decades after West Africa and envisioned only in the framework of a federation.

In the views of colonial officials, five major reasons explain the special treatment reserved for the British East and Central African colonies: the presence of a demographically small but economically and politically powerful white settler community, the need for economic integration of the different colonies if they were to stand a chance of survival, pressure from the racist Republic of South Africa, the lack of a strong and well-educated class of intellectuals ready to lead the country after independence, and the absence of strong nationalist movements.

Unlike West Africa, all British colonies in East, Central, and Southern Africa incorporated white settlers. These Europeans were successful in wresting substantial political and economic privileges from the imperial state. As early as 1923, the white population (nearly 200,000 in the 1950s) of Southern Rhodesia (current-day Zimbabwe) had largely secured internal self-government. In Kenya, where the settler community was even smaller (130,000 in 1950), the settlers, nevertheless, succeeded in acquiring a special status by forcing the abandonment of the principle of equal representation envisioned in 1948 in the High Commission and Legislative Assembly. Throughout East and Southern Africa, settlers adamantly opposed the notion that universal suffrage might be applicable to Africans, at least for the foreseeable future. They saw themselves as rightful trustees of the majority black population. As noted by Paul Nugent, they were "fixated on the discourse of perpetual colonialism and to a substantial degree they enjoyed the backing of local administrations" (Nugent 2004, 31). What was offered to the Africans was multiracialism in a political system that established parity of representation at both the center and lower levels of administration among blacks, Asians, and Europeans, regardless of demographic weight. This offer was regarded by dismayed African nationalists as an attempt to perpetuate white minority dominance.

Along with the idea of a so-called multiracial partnership, federalism was another argument concocted to satisfy settler aspirations through concealed rhetoric about economic efficiency. As observed by one noted historian in the case of Central Africa, "Many who supported Federalism as a road to independence did so precisely because it would exclude the danger of Black Power which was now raising its head in West Africa" (Hargreaves 1988, 135). Federalism was conceived as a means of combining the complementary strengths of the different East and Central African colonies' economies and reducing the cost of administration. In

the East African case, it was argued that a closer union among Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika would make the vast population of farmers in the two latter colonies benefit from the skills and know-how of Kenyan white settlers. In Central Africa, the backers of federalism pursued two major aims: the creation of a viable state sympathetic to imperial policy and the combination of the economic assets of the three colonies. The plan was to combine the rich mineral resources of Northern Rhodesia with the labor reserve of Nyassaland and the entrepreneurial skills of the Southern Rhodesian white population. What was not said and what African nationalists clearly understood was that the unification of the colonies would also consolidate the white settler population and give them an even greater power in the administration and economy of the future federations.

Across East and Central Africa, multiracialism and federalism met staunch opposition from Africans. In Tanganyika, the opposition to multiracialism and federalism was led by Julius Nyerere and his political party Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). This colony was particularly targeted as a land of immigration for white Europeans in the post-WWII era. In the decade after 1948, its white population doubled from 10,648 to 20,598, and these settlers benefited from the political arithmetic of racial parity, which gave them 10 representatives in the Legislative Council on par with 80,000 Asians and 8 million blacks (see Hargreaves 1988, 132; Nugent 2004, 32). Already in 1929, the suggestion of a closer union among the British East African colonies had led to the formation of the African Association, which was the first political party with national coverage in Tanganyika. In response to the postwar plans to make good on the projects of multiracialism and federalism, Nyerere transformed the African Association into the more cohesive and better organized TANU in 1954. He was able to capitalize on mounting discontent in urban and rural areas, which was spawned by attempted reorganization of local government and heavy-handed agricultural improvement schemes. Emulating the example of Nkrumah, Nyerere was highly successful in building youths' and women's branches of the party and in weaving a web of supporters across the colony. He also skillfully played on the special status of Tanganyika as a UN trusteeship to Britain. This status set limits to what the British could impose on Tanganyika, while providing Nyerere with an international forum sympathetic to his demands. Here, as in Ghana, the colonial administration leveraged loyal political forces in an effort to undercut the nationalist movement by sponsoring the multiracial party, United Tanganyika Party (UTP). But when elections were held in 1958–1959, UTP fared badly and thereafter disappeared from the political scene. In 1959, a conference of East African governors proposed a timetable for decolonization, with 1970 as the date for ultimate transfer of power. TANU rejected the proposal, and when they swept the first nonracial elections of 1960, conceding only one seat to their competitors, the British government had no choice but to bow to the demand for immediate independence. Full independence was granted in 1961 with Nyerere as head of the new state.

In Kenya, Britain faced perhaps its most traumatic experience of decolonization in Africa. Here the combination of population growth, especially among the Kikuyu, postwar settler immigration, the scarcity of available agricultural land for

Africans, and ill-fated economic improvement projects created an explosive mix that detonated with the Mau Mau rebellion between 1952 and 1956.

From 1924 on, political organizations, such the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) founded by Harry Thuku, were formed to articulate local grievances and to defend the economic and cultural interests of the Kikuyu people. But it was not until the founding of the Kenyan African Union (KAU) in 1944 that an attempt was made to organize an African political party with territorial ambitions. This party was formed by the mainly Nairobi-based elite, many of whom worked for the colonial government. The party benefited from the fact that it was the only nationalist party in Kenya at the time. And expectations were heightened when Jomo Kenyatta, returning from London, assumed the party's presidency. Kenyatta had been in Europe for 15 years, mainly in England, where he earned a university degree as an anthropologist and wrote the first academic interpretation of Kikuyu culture (*Facing Mount Kenya*). His political career had started earlier as a member of KCA, which he joined in 1924 before becoming its general secretary in 1928.

Kenyatta returned to Kenya in 1946 as the best-educated and most sophisticated African politician of the colony. Under Kenyatta's leadership, up to 1952, the KAU continued to articulate the same grievances of past associations: the restitution of land that Europeans had stolen, the increase of African representation in the different levels of colonial legislative bodies, the recognition of equal elective representations with Europeans and ultimately full control, the restriction of European and Asian migration, the end of restrictions on Africans' access to the civil service, and finally, the abandonment of spatial discrimination (Maloba 1998, 57). The failure of the colonial state to act on these grievances discredited the gradualism advocated by the proponents of constitutional nationalism in KAU and opened the door for frustrated Kenyans to act.

In 1951, strikes by low-paid workers had caused violent confrontations in Nairobi. Ex-servicemen, the so-called Forty-Group, landless squatters displaced by settler expansion, and radical trade unionists infiltrated KAU and radicalized the organization, sidelining the moderate elite. They formed a new central committee and adopted the Kikuyu tradition of oath taking as a tool to build loyalty among their followers. By mid-1952, the colony experienced an outbreak of arson, cattle maiming, and targeted violence aimed mainly at Kikuyu supporters of official colonial policies and white settlers. The disturbances were so violent that the administration lost control over much of the Kikuyu land, which was the epicenter of the events. A state of emergency was imposed, and Kenyatta, who openly dissociated himself from the violence and its perpetrators, was thrown in jail. The colonial state was able to restore order only after four years of intense fighting in the forests and protracted guerilla operations against an elusive enemy they called Mau Mau but who branded themselves as the Land and Freedom Army. In the end, 2,000 Africans, 32 Europeans, and 26 Asians lost their lives in the war. Historians have disagreed in their assessment of the objectives of the leaders of the Mau Mau and the meaning of the movement, but it is safe to note, as Paul Nugent does, that "it would be difficult to maintain that African opposition was anything other than the

crucial factor here, even if nationalism assumed an ethnic form" (Nugent 2004, 35). By 1956, after peace was reestablished, Britain was seriously reconsidering its options in Kenya. In a now-familiar pattern, the colonial administration engaged in an effort to find moderate nationalists who would be willing to strike a deal with moderate settlers to preserve imperial interests. But the effort failed as none of those who enjoyed popular African support took the risk to accept a settlement that might reenforce settler power. Finally, under nationalist pressure, Britain agreed to release Kenyatta from prison and grant independence under majority rule. In 1963, Jomo Kenyatta was elected the first president of independent Kenya.

The last blow to multiracialism and federalism came from African and white nationalists in the Central African Federation. Because of the threat represented by South African imperialism, white settlers in Central Africa enjoyed a stronger bargaining position than their counterparts in East Africa. In the run to independence, they could trade their loyalty to the British Empire for political and economic concessions. The establishment of the Central African Federation, regrouping the two Rhodesias and Nyassaland, owed much to the pressure white settlers exerted on the Colonial Office in London. But by the 1950s, the makeshift partnership between the African constituency and white settlers was under growing stress. First, the promise of economic betterment that underpinned the federalist idea was slow to materialize for Africans, especially in the poorer colony of Nyassaland. It was the white population who monopolized the modern sector of the economy, especially in Southern Rhodesia, that most benefited from imperial investments and subsidies. In 1957, when Britain advanced the idea of granting dominion status to the Central African Federation, Africans were alarmed. For them, this meant the removal of British oversight and the prospect of permanent white settler domination akin to what was going on in South Africa. African nationalists were further disturbed when the Colonial Office refused to heed an amendment by the African Affairs Board aimed at blocking discriminatory voting regulations, which, if enacted, would give the whites de facto control of the Federal Assembly.

This situation clearly highlighted the complicity between the imperial government and the white settlers, galvanizing African nationalists. There was now a rapid acceleration of nationalist activity both in the urban and rural areas and the emergence of a political leadership ready to organize and channel the discontent toward achieving self-government. The Zambia National Conference was formed in Northern Rhodesia in 1958 by Kenneth Kaunda. In the same year, Dr. Hastings Banda returned to Nyassaland, after a 40-year absence to study in the United States and Europe, to lead the Congress Party, in existence since the 1940s, in its fight against the federal constitution. Both Kaunda and Banda were among Nkrumah's guests during the All-African People's Congress in 1958. In 1959, popular protests broke out throughout the federation in the form of strikes and riots. States of emergency were declared and nationalists were arrested. But these events convinced colonial officials that the settlers would be able to hold power over Africans only through massive use of force; furthermore, if delaying the process of decolonization was to invite violence, then premature independence and the transfer of power

from Europeans to Africans was preferred. After elections were won by the same nationalists who were imprisoned, the British government agreed to dissolve the federation. In 1964, the Central African Federation ceased to exist. Nyassaland became independent as Malawi under the leadership of Banda, while Kaunda took power in Northern Rhodesia, renamed Zambia. In Southern Rhodesia, it was the white population that issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 with the support of South Africa, but they soon confronted a war of national liberation led by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, who succeeded in ending white minority rule in 1980. And Southern Rhodesia was renamed Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

The study of colonial rule and decolonization has largely gone out of fashion, as the dismal record of the post-colonial African leadership, whether revolutionary or accommodationist, has dimmed the enthusiasm of progressive historians, who worked hard in the 1960s and 1970s to establish African nationalism's role in ending European colonial rule in Africa. Now corruption, genocide, refugees, civil wars, military coups, and ethnic conflicts have become the favored topics of historians and social scientists studying Africa. But while the outbreak of these scourges owes a lot to the ineptitude and corruption of the post-colonial African leadership, it is becoming increasingly clear that unsolved problems bequeathed by the colonial state continue to cast a long shadow on modern African nations.

The economic and political viability of many African countries in their inherited colonial borders is being questioned. The emergence of ethnic nationalism in many areas constitutes a challenge to the centralized national state inherited from colonial rule. The continuing influence of the colonial state's authoritarian modes of operation enshrined in colonial-era constitutions and laws provides the foundation and justification for bad governance today. The great disparity in natural resources between neighboring states, as is the case between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire and their neighbors, is now seen as a potential source of violent conflict, and calls are being made for the sharing of resources across national boundaries. While the presentist orientation noted in the scholarship on African politics remains critical in our understanding of the nature and mechanics of the crises that beset the continent, the resolution of all these problems requires taking fresh stock of the record of European colonial rule in Africa. In this regard, the study of colonialism and decolonization in Africa continues to be of critical relevance.

Notes

1. See the United Nations Charter, International Trusteeship System, Article 76. Available from http://secint50.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter12.shtml (accessed 19 September 2009).

2. Nugent is commenting here on the works of Whomi Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee.

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