

THE AMBIGUOUS CHALLENGE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Whenever, therefore, any number of men so unite into one society as to quit every one his executive power of the law of Nature, and to resign it to the public, there and there only is a political or civil society. And this is done wherever any number of men, in the state of Nature, enter into society to make one people one body politic under one supreme government.

—John Locke

In the East the State was everything, and civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West there was a correct relationship between the State and civil society.

—Antonio Gramsci

For Africa, truly to escape the West involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from it. . . . It implies that we are aware of the extent to which the West, insidiously perhaps, has been moving closer to us. It implies that we know what is still eastern in that which permits us to think against the West, and that we assess to what extent our recourse against the West may still be a ruse.

—V. Y. Mudimbe

IN SEARCH OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Bula Matari and civil society evoke utterly antithetical images. In the preceding chapters I have argued that until the final hours of the colonial state its system of rule was rooted in an exclusionary hegemony. The rise of a civil society inevitably marked the decline of Bula Matari as both cause and effect. Yet embedded within the complex process of the crystallization of African civil society were ambiguities and contradictions that were to haunt the postcolonial state. Ghostly residues of Bula Matari were concealed within an apparently triumphant civil society.

No comprehensive review of the rise of African nationalism, normally considered the embodiment of civil society, is proposed, nor does this chapter seek to synthesize all aspects of African reaction to the colonial state. My more modest objective is to illuminate aspects of the crystallization of civil societies that seem particularly pivotal for an understand-

ing of the contemporary African polity. By way of prologue, let me begin with some reflections on the notion of civil society itself.

Although civil society as trope, a collective signifier for a politically defined human aggregate, has antique lineage, only during the 1980s did it acquire widespread currency in comparative African analysis and, indeed, more generally in everyday discourse. At the apogee of African liberation in the 1950s and 1960s, no one—actor or analyst—employed the term, whose return to current usage reflects a paradigmatic metamorphosis in how relationships between the state and society are perceived. This striking temporal dimension invites parenthetical notice; beyond any doubt conjunctural factors explain its lexical resurrection. Within Africa the transparent and widespread decline of the state as an agency of development led to a search for new instruments of progress. Powerfully reinforcing this trend was the stunning implosion of the most comprehensive form of the modern state, the Soviet-type system (“really existing socialism”). An increasingly assertive East European and Soviet intelligentsia characterized the space grudgingly abandoned by retreating state socialism as civil society, through which the last redoubts of a discredited “totalitarianism” could be breached.¹ The global pressures for democratization that swept across Africa and other regions in the late 1980s gave added force to these trends. As counterpoint, a more diffuse animus against a state deemed to be overextended and overweening permeated the Western world, symbolized in its most belligerent form by Reaganism and Thatcherism.

The return of civil society into the language of politics was not matched by a consensus as to its meaning. An academic conference in Jerusalem in 1992 devoted to “civil society in Africa” revealed a remarkable diversity of understandings.² These in turn reflect the intellectual history of the idea, whose schematic recapitulation could suggest why it may be helpful to impose on the past an analytical metaphor alien to the epoch that is our subject. I would stress three particularly important antecedents: Lockean, Hegelian, and Gramscian.³

COMPETING MEANINGS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

For Locke and other philosophers stressing the concept of social contract, civil society was an essential construct to juxtapose with the state. As a basis for the legitimacy of sovereign authority, and suggestive of limits to it, the idea of a collective human entity capable of rendering its consent was an artifact indispensable to the structure of the theory. What defined

the civil nature of society was its political vocation; one may note in the prefatory quotation that Locke used the words *civil* and *political* interchangeably.⁴ Civil society and state are at once clearly distinct and intimately—contractually—joined.

Hegel enveloped civil society in a new penumbra of meanings when he designated it as a “moment” in the unfolding of the world historical spirit. In this reading, civil society became dialectically joined to the state in a very different fashion. In a lucid gloss on Hegelian thought, Z. A. Pelczynski writes:

Men are primarily concerned with the satisfaction of their private, individual needs, which they do by working, producing and exchanging the product of their labour in the market. This creates bonds of a new kind. While individuals behave selfishly and instrumentally towards each other they cannot help satisfying other men's needs, furthering their interests and entering into various social relations with them. Men are “socialized” into playing socially useful roles for which they are not merely rewarded with money but also with respect and recognition.⁵

Avineri adds that civil society is “a necessary moment in man's progress towards his consciousness of freedom” but “is subordinated to the higher universality of the state.”⁶ Although bourgeois civil society is bound together by the reciprocities of exchange and necessities of cooperation, this “ethical moment” could not produce a sufficiently robust shared moral universe for a self-regulating system to operate. Only the state could discipline and rise above the egoism intrinsic to civil society.⁷ Thus, as an antecedent but transcended moment in Hegelian idealist dialectics, civil society is imaged in a manner quite different from the contracting partner proposed by Locke.

The Gramscian *lecture* casts a long shadow over contemporary African usages. Here civil society is defined above all by its structuration. It is the ensemble of “institutions, ideologies, practices, and agents . . . that comprise the dominant culture of values.”⁸ Intimately joined to civil society is his notion of hegemony, whereby the ruling bourgeois class achieves the acquiescence of the classes it dominates by its capacity to diffuse an ideology legitimating the social order through the organizational and ideological structures of civil society. The revolutionary project to which Gramsci dedicated his life could succeed only by challenging and contesting, trench by trench, the hegemonical ideology in the many battlefields that define civil society. But a fate worse than submission to the hegemonical bourgeois order was possible: a society not yet “civil” by its struc-

ture but rather “primitive and gelatinous”—and thus wholly helpless before a powerful state, as in Czarist Russia.

Various of these themes are interwoven in the contemporary search for civil society in Africa. Bayart, in the first extended essay on this theme, stresses the relational dimension and the heterogeneity of both state and civil society as juxtaposed entities.⁹ He joins Robert Fossaert in defining civil society as “not so much a structured set of institutions, but the ‘social space,’ large or constrained, as it is shaped by historical forces.”¹⁰ In colonial and in postcolonial times civil society finds itself in confrontation with a state driven “to seek to control and to shape civil society . . . to enlist the dominated social groups within the existing space of domination and to teach them to be subject to the state.”¹¹

Others have stressed more specifically associational life. Michael Bratton, drawing on Alfred Stepan, defines civil society as an “arena where manifold social movements . . . and civic organizations from all classes . . . attempt to constitute themselves in an ensemble of arrangements so that they can express themselves and advance their interests.”¹² The essence of the relationship with the state is interactive rather than necessarily confrontational; however, it must include a zone of autonomy. Joel Barkun et al., who also underline organizational action as a defining feature, borrow an implicitly Hegelian imagery in locating civil society in “the space that exists between the state and the household.”¹³ The suggested existence of a zone of private action, which is neither state nor civil society, implies a potentially large sphere governed by other mores and hierarchies. Naomi Chazan prefers to locate civil society above all in organizational life, excluding from her purview wholly parochial associations with only local concerns, communal agencies (ethnic associations), or fundamentalist groups with an exclusive vision of the true path; this sharply narrows the field.¹⁴

Patrick Chabal, in emphasizing structural dissensus, identifies civil society in Africa as “a vast ensemble of constantly changing groups and individuals whose only common ground is their being outside the state and who have . . . acquired some consciousness of their externality and opposition to the state.”¹⁵ In this view, two important dimensions are stressed. Civil society is defined by otherness and exclusion; its essence is its externality to the state. Further, that essence acquires meaning by consciousness. Transcending “primitive and gelatinous” latency requires awareness, a recognition of a collectivity perhaps defined by exclusion, or even multiple communities evoking a sense of attachment or belonging.

What, then, may be distilled from the foregoing review of civil society

as discourse? Meaning varies sufficiently, particularly in the stress given to particular aspects, to alert one to the elasticity of the notion. In my usage, which is closest to the Lockean conception, the essence of civil society lies in its relationship to the state. In the particular case of the colonial state (and for that matter, historically, most other states), the emergence or creation of the state is antecedent to civil society. The political space bounded by a state creates a sphere of public action and exchange within which a civil society may germinate. The greater the extent to which civil society shares this public space and actively interacts with the state in determining its modalities and rules, the more completely formed it becomes. Consciousness is a constitutive dimension; so is membership, not just in the collectivity but in the potentially vast array of organizations, institutions, and communal forms that provide its structuration. The relationship between the state and civil society combines cooperation and conflict in ever-changing measure. The state protects and provides while it dominates and extracts; civil society responds with exit, voice, or loyalty.¹⁶

THE COLONIAL STATE: CIVIL SOCIETY DENIED

From the foregoing it follows that there were precolonial civil societies reflecting the rich diversity of historical political architecture in Africa. The existence of states—of varying dimensions, degrees of centralization, ideological underpinnings, and economic bases—implies their interactive relationship with societies. Vansina, in his brilliant portrayal of the equatorial polity, shows how what he terms a political tradition was rooted in “a changing, inherited, collective body of cognitive and physical representations shared by their members,” which defined a political world of communities and big men, sometimes kings, in shifting symbiosis but stable guiding principles.¹⁷ The political tradition often had contractarian practices; Abraham, describing the Akan heritage, notes that “according to Akan political theory, the whole power of a ruler was derived from the people and held in trust for them. This was safeguarded in the provision for the removal of rulers, and the grounds for removal.”¹⁸ One need not claim that fully empowered civil societies were everywhere present to observe that in many precolonial states relationships with populations were not grounded in the exclusionary hegemony the colonial state was to introduce.

For most of the continent, what did exist by way of a shared political tradition commonly understood by rulers and ruled was swept away by

the nature of the colonial partition. In only a handful of instances did the pre-existing state units coincide with and to some degree persist within the territorial frame of the colonial order: Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Zanzibar, Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana. A much larger number retained some identity as subordinated units of native administration but were now enclosed within a novel territorial entity and stripped of even the merest shadow of their former sovereignty. In those cases where the former state retained a significant portion of its precolonial identity, the trajectory of civil society differed markedly from that in cases where it was extinguished from the outset. In contemporary Swaziland, for example, the notion of civil society as “Swazi nation” resonates more powerfully than most other African national identities.¹⁹

Chapters 4 and 5 detail the comprehensive nature of the hegemonical project of the colonial state in its construction and institutionalization stages. Nothing was more alien to the telos of the colonial state than a civil society. Sovereignty required forcible subjugation; there were few illusions that it could rest on any principle but overwhelming military power.²⁰

Not only was a radically reconfigured Africa imposed in a territorial sense; extant, perhaps partially “civil” societies also experienced a deconstruction in the cognitive realm. An “invented” Africa took form, the product of an external imagination, reconceived as the subordinated other. In the elegant semiotic exploration of V. Y. Mudimbe, the colonial state through its dominance of both physical space and discourse “transformed non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs.”²¹

Running through these constructs were two core notions that made subjugation imperative: savagery and childhood. The barbarian other extends back into Hellenistic thought and doubtless beyond; with the rise of European imperial expansion from the fifteenth century, it became tied to notions of race. The authoritative compilation of Enlightenment wisdom, the French *Encyclopédie*, summarized the prevailing in its 1780 supplement: “The government is nearly everywhere bizarre, despotic, and totally dependent on the passions and whims of the sovereign. These peoples have, so to speak, only ideas from one day to the next, their laws have no principles . . . no consistency other than that of a lazy and blind habit. They are blamed for ferociousness, cruelty, perfidy, cowardice, laziness. This accusation is but too true.”²² The emergence of Social Darwinism in the late nineteenth century provided a pseudoscientific gloss. Mission views of “paganism” as a defining attribute of the savage offered an alternative avenue to the same conclusion of barbarity.

The thesis of the incapacity of the African other rested on a second

pillar of arrested development, the premise of perpetual childhood. This robust mythology persisted through much of the life cycle of the colonial state. As late as 1946 a published memorandum of the Belgian mining giant, Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, summarized its operating philosophy with respect to its African work force:

The colonizer must never lose sight of the fact that the Negroes have the souls of children, souls which mold themselves to the methods of the educator; they watch, listen, feel, and imitate. The European must, in all circumstances, show himself a chief without weakness, good-willed without familiarity, active in method and especially just in the punishment of misbehavior, as in the reward of good deed. . . . [The European camp head] must interest himself constantly in the life of the natives, in their well-being; must guide them, examine their complaints; punish them when necessary with the tact, the calm and the firmness which are required.²³

With the African subject thus firmly constructed in the official consciousness of the colonial ruler as a savage child, systematic exclusion was the essence of statecraft. In those intermediary roles where African participation was necessary—above all, the apparatus of native administration—firm tutelage was indispensable. Even in areas where doctrines of scientific colonial management appeared to vest the greatest degree of responsibility in the African rulers recognized as anointed intermediaries—the British territories where indirect-rule ideology was most thoroughly applied—the inner spirit of administration was pervasively autocratic, and chiefs were viewed foremost as “stewards of British rule.”²⁴ The government anthropologist R. S. Rattray, working in Ashanti (the Gold Coast), remarked in 1930 on the irony of indirect rule as creating in reality a translation into local African society of the authoritarian principle so deeply imprinted on Bula Matari: “We are thus confronted with the curious paradox of the most ardent devotees of the principles of rule in Africa, by Africans, on African lines, having evolved a form of Native State, or government, really quite foreign to anything which the African left to himself could have conceived. It is, moreover, government from which a most important and ever-growing section of the African people seem at present largely to be excluded and debarred from being given a chance to play the part.”²⁵

The premise of African backwardness, and its corollary of imperative disempowerment of the subject, opened the door to the settlers’ pretense that they constituted an embryonic civil society deformed by its restriction to the “civilized.” The consequences, particularly in Algeria, South

Africa, and Rhodesia, where a racialized civil society captured the colonial state, have been examined in preceding chapters. What requires notice here is that elsewhere the colonial state long had the capacity to impose its cultural definitions on the formative processes of an indigenous civil society. To have voice in a public realm the subject needed to repudiate otherness, to master the discourse of the colonial state, to learn—perhaps conform to—its behavioral code. *Evolué* as a social label perfectly captures this dynamic; this status classification—largely accepted until late in the colonial game—connotes distancing from ancestral background, a schooled movement from the eternal childhood of the indigenous to proximity to the dominant cultural domain. The colonial state had achieved an overpowering hold over the nature of discourse; challenges to it could be effective only if rendered in its own language. In this important sense the sudden and swift colonial occupation of Africa marked a profound historical rupture. Resistance to conquest was widespread and in many cases prolonged. Indeed, as A. Adu Boahen and his collaborators argue in the UNESCO *General History of Africa*, resistance can be used as the orienting analytical theme in the overall interpretation of African history in the first two stages of the colonial state.²⁶ Yet equally striking is the absence of any direct link between the initial forces of resistance and the civil societies that eventually drove Bula Matari to cover. An utterly different language of politics and governing metaphors of society were to construct the new realities.

THE INTERNALIZATION OF COLONIAL STATE DISCOURSE

The brilliant career of Blaise Diagne—who, we remember, won election in 1914 as the first French deputy of purely African ancestry, confirming citizenship for the Senegalese originaires—illustrates well the internalization of colonial state discourse. Of humble birth, he was raised in the household of a well-known mulatto family on Goree. He entered the French customs service in 1892 and served in various colonial postings (Dahomey, Gabon, Reunion, Madagascar, Guyana). Active in the Masonic order, he operated comfortably in French milieux, marrying a French woman in 1909. Although in his administrative career and the early years of his parliamentary service he was in frequent conflict with the colonial administration, his discourse was that of assimilation. He gave eloquent defense of the French colonial state at the 1919 Pan-African Conference, comparing it favorably to the repulsive racism dominant in the United States, and lent his prestige to the doubtful brief of

denial of colonial forced labor as head of the French delegation to the 1930 Geneva International Labor Organization conference drafting a covenant on free labor. In his declaration of belief shortly before his death in 1934, Diagne spoke as a tribune of the colonial state: "France, in my person, surprises the world by staying true to the principles of the Revolution of 1789. The unity of our country is above differences of skin color, so much that it stupefies with admiration or horror foreign peoples . . . a lesson of high moral probity which only France is capable of giving."²⁷

The magnitude of the cultural rupture imposed by colonial subjugation was characterized well by another important leader whose life and persona reflected its imprint, Ferhat Abbas of Algeria. For Algerians, Abbas observed in 1931, conquest was "a veritable revolution, overthrowing a whole ancient world of beliefs and ideas and an immemorial way of life. It confronts a whole people with sudden change. An entire nation, without any preparation, finds itself forced to adapt or perish. This situation is bound to lead to a moral and physical disequilibrium, the barrenness of which is not far from total disintegration."²⁸ Although Abbas ultimately rallied to the Algerian Revolution and for a time served as nominal head of the exile Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic, the singular power of colonial state discourse long held him in its grip. In the late 1930s he wrote:

If I had encountered the Algerian nation, I would be a nationalist and, as such, would have nothing to be ashamed of. Men who have died for a patriotic ideal are honored and respected every day. My life is worth no more than theirs. And yet I will not die for the Algerian fatherland, for this fatherland does not exist. I have not encountered it. I have questioned history. I have questioned the living and the dead. I have visited the cemeteries. No one has spoken to me of such a thing. . . . You cannot build upon the wind. We have eliminated all fogginess and vain imaginings to link our future once and for all to that of French endeavor in this country.²⁹

Inevitably, at the apogee of colonial state power its language shaped that of protest, especially the discourse that directly engaged the colonial state. Thus, endorsing assimilation was an assault on the hypocrisy of a situation where in the name of universalizing values the benefits of colonial domination were reserved exclusively to the French. Still, the discourse of the colonial state was above all invoked in conversations with European power. Diagne on the hustings often spoke a different language, avoiding reference to a colonial concept viewed with suspicion by rank-and-file subjects.³⁰

In the early colonial period there began to emerge an embryonic social class defined by its capacity to enter the new roles defined by colonial encounter. Some members of this class were the product of precolonial mercantile interactions: the Afro-Portuguese traders who pushed the slave frontier inward in Angola,³¹ the Creole community in Freetown, the "Brazilians" in Dahomey and Nigeria, the Senegalese originaires. Others were the product of the missionary endeavor that gathered momentum in the nineteenth century; the planting of Christianity required Africans capable of carrying the evangelical message, first as catechists, then as pastors or priests. Education and health—however rudimentary the networks—offered openings for African professionals; in anglophone West Africa the legal profession was accessible to Africans at an early date. The colonial administration itself needed subaltern personnel literate in the colonial language, as did the colonial corporations and trading companies. In these interstices of the colonial order a new elite took form. Its unique skill was its grasp of the discourse of the colonial state. Indeed, David Robinson perceives in this new social category the realization of a colonial state project; driven by its need for a fragmentary legitimacy in the eyes of its subjects, the colonial state "had to create the embryo of a 'civil society,' and to find the intellectuals, the persons of standing and relative autonomy, to achieve its formula of 'domination-hegemony.'"³²

The nature of the vision imposed by the colonial state in its salad days necessarily shaped the response. Before World War II the language of domination had no recognized end point. Thus, for example, in the Belgian case, the *évolué* class framed its revendications in terms of a status securely differentiating itself from the mass of the population, as a Europeanized social category. In the Belgian Congo the first major political statement came from the Cercle des *Evolués* in Kananga (Luluabourg), who in 1944 asked for "if not a special statute, at least a special protection of the government, shielding them from the application of certain treatments and measures which could be applied to a retarded and ignorant mass."³³

In 1944 it was impossible for the emergent Congolese elite to imagine a future outside the framework of a reformed colonial polity that opened status opportunities to them. Even in 1956 Patrice Lumumba, already visible thanks to his febrile charisma that later made him the martyred hero of Zairian nationalism, still remained enclosed within the imposed metaphors of the colonial order and the circumscribed future that Bula Matari offered. In a manuscript published posthumously but drafted just after the 1955 royal tour of the colony by King Baudouin (who accorded him two audiences), Lumumba wrote:

Our sole attitude must be . . . to build together, in a spirit of harmony, of humanity, of justice, the solid bases of the Belgo-Congolese community . . . we recall to you with pleasure the declaration made by our beloved King, His Majesty Baudouin, that "BELGIUM AND THE CONGO FORM A SINGLE NATION." The thought of the King is clear: Belgians and Congolese are all citizens, just like Walloons and Flemish. We must jealously defend our common undertaking . . . a solid union between Belgians and Congolese which will be cemented by mutual esteem.³⁴

The colonial state was long ambivalent toward this elite class. Their skills were valuable, and they often played useful auxiliary roles in the colonial state apparatus. But their mastery of the cultural forms and modes of expression of the colonial state permitted them to articulate claims to indigenous rights. The statements quoted above, speaking of equal treatment within the frame of acknowledged colonial domination, contrast clearly with a representative declaration of initial resistance by the paramount ruler of the Mossi state in contemporary Burkina Faso: "I know that the whites wish to kill me in order to take my country, and yet you claim that they will help me to organize my country. But I find my country good just as it is. I have no need of them. I know what is necessary for me and what I want: I have my own merchants: also, consider yourself fortunate that I do not order your head to be cut off. Go away now, and above all, never come back."³⁵ The heroic defiance of the *moro naba* could not halt the tides of imperial conquest; the discourse of rights by Diagne or Lumumba was a major solvent of colonial empire.

Colonial officialdom long sought to dismiss these claims of elite rights as "unrepresentative" of the disempowered subject, seen as a savage child, which was its cherished invention. Over time, this voice was marginalized through stigmatization and was bound to fail. By subtle metamorphosis the discourse of rights became the language of liberation.

RECONFIGURATIONS OF SOCIETY, CLASS, AND ETHNICITY

In the shadow of the colonial state new lines of social division that were to define civil society took form. Two primary lines of cleavage beckon our attention here: class and ethnicity. In both these realms of consciousness the colonial order fundamentally restructured societal categories.³⁶

In class terms, the significance of coalescing patterns of stratification become apparent only in retrospect. At the upper end of the spectrum,

The primary categories widely employed in late colonial times were "modern" and "traditional" elites: the products of Western education, and the chiefly auxiliaries of the colonial state who often enjoyed ancestral connections with precolonial ruling classes. P. C. Lloyd, in an influential text, expressed a still dominant view in 1967 when arguing that class conflict was only an "incipient" aspect of civil society.³⁷ Its emergence was occluded by the overpowering saliency of the chasm between the European estate and nearly all Africans: a comprehensive political, social and economic fault line that Georges Balandier aptly characterized as the *situation coloniale*.³⁸ Around this was constructed a core postulate of anticolonial nationalism: the natural unity of all Africans in the struggle for independence. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania spoke for a nationalist generation in saying, "I doubt if the equivalent for the word 'class' exists in any indigenous African language; for language describes the ideas of those who speak it, and the idea of 'class' or 'caste' was non-existent in African society."³⁹ Only class societies required multiple parties; the classless nature of African society was a prime justification for a single-party system.

In its economic management and social policies, the colonial state had gradually suppressed one type of differentiation—unfree, or slave, status—and introduced two others: worker and peasant. I have argued in chapters 4 and 5 that midwiving the birth of a wage labor force and transforming villagers into peasant producers were indispensable to the survival of the colonial state; in no other way could its revenue and accumulation imperatives be met. In the first two stages the work force was largely migratory in many areas, which slowed the emergence of class ideologies.⁴⁰ Linkages with rural areas remained strong; often only the male sought urban work, while families remained in the rural area. Also, two types of large employers—mines and plantations—frequently housed their laborers and subjected their social being to such comprehensive tutelage that a veritable "totalitarian" environment was created; Fetter and van Onselen offer Zairian copperbelt and Rhodesian examples.⁴¹

A distinctive worker consciousness and revendicative disposition did emerge, most notably in the transportation industry (the railways and docks) and among subaltern state employees (in good part clerical or other white-collar staff, more of a petty bourgeoisie than a proletariat). But railway workers in particular played a legendary role in confronting colonial power in Senegal, Guinea, the Sudan, and Congo-Brazzaville, immortalized in Ousmane Sembene's lyric novel portraying nationalism, *God's Bits of Wood*.⁴²

If we understand the term *peasant* in the African context to mean

“agriculturalists who control the land they work either as tenants or smallholders, are organized largely in households that meet most of their subsistence needs, and are ruled by other classes, who extract a surplus either directly or through control of state power,”⁴³ then we may conclude that this category comes into full existence with the birth of the colonial state. In some areas, especially in the Nile valley, well-organized pre-colonial states had extracted peasant surpluses for millennia. But more typically African precolonial states required relatively little revenue. Their sustenance came from control of long-distance trade (Ashanti), sporadic predation on neighboring groups (Buganda), use of unfree labor for production (Abomey, Zanzibar); most did not enjoy the extractive machinery to impose regular forms of taxation on their free subjects. As chapter 4 argues, for this reason the imposition of widespread fiscal obligations on newly subjugated rural populations involved the colonial state in bitter struggles, evoked widespread rebellions, and led to the extraordinary brutality and devastation that marked the early colonial years.

As the tax collectors and labor recruiters fanned out over the countryside, the peasantry necessarily became aware of its incorporation into a broader domain. By force or by choice, a part of the household labor resources needed to be diverted into salable crops. Taxes had to be paid; the diverse labor demands imposed by an increasingly intrusive state apparatus (for portage, road construction, and not infrequently tilling the fields of the chiefs serving the colonial masters) were as difficult to evade as they were distasteful. Over time, the possibility of upward mobility that schools might offer the next generation, at least the boys, made school fees a crucial investment.⁴⁴ Although some have maintained that the peasant communities retained a large degree of autonomy and in the last analysis did not need the colonial state (or its successor),⁴⁵ the peasants were certainly aware of the state's existence and its claims to domination.

To an important extent, peasantries closely approximated the Chabal definition of a civil society defined by its opposition. Multiple mechanisms of evasion and resistance sprang up, whose multiform dimensions are captured well by Allen Isaacman.⁴⁶ In some times and places there was open rebellion, but it was usually too risky and costly. What James Scott has termed “hidden transcripts” of subversion and subtle contestation were ubiquitous.⁴⁷ “Peasant intellectuals” crafted alternative discourses, often beyond the ken of the colonial state.⁴⁸

Thus, social hierarchies were profoundly reworked by the political economy of the colonial state. The politically critical class was the elite

whose work uniform was the white collar. This group did not view itself as a privileged category; rather, its members perceived themselves as appointed by history for leadership, as capable of translating the inchoate aspirations of the peasant countryside and a proletarianizing army of wage earners. Amílcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau was a rare voice in labeling this rising class as a “petty bourgeoisie” summoned to commit “class suicide.”⁴⁹ A more representative voice of the time was Nigerian nationalist leader Obafemi Awolowo, who noted that the politically conscious formed a small minority, but one with a sacred destiny. “It must be realized now and for all time that this articulate minority are destined to rule the country. It is their heritage.”⁵⁰

Colonial state doctrine and policy had an unequal impact on males and females, enlarging whatever gender inequality pre-existed. This outcome mirrored the masculine image of Bula Matari; colonial commanders were never women. Perhaps men experienced the whip more often than women and saw their labor power most directly channeled to the purposes of the colonial state. Still, such modest opportunities for social ascension or accumulation as the colonial order permitted were almost wholly reserved to males.

The functional requirements of the colonial state were invariably met by men: plantation or mine workers, construction teams, subaltern personnel for state or company. The missions in their first phase wanted above all catechists to spread good news, and they therefore directed their first rudimentary educational efforts at boys. The export crops assiduously promoted by a revenue-hungry state were cultivated and sold by men, who controlled the proceeds (or what was left after taxes and other state deductions had been levied). When a white-collar elite and, later, professional classes began to emerge, only a tiny handful of women appeared in their ranks.

As urbanization became an important social process, these imbalances intensified. Girls did begin to find school places in the terminal stage of the colonial era, but the gender disequilibria at the higher echelons of the educational system (secondary school and especially university) were immense. Women in towns thus had few options: petty trade, which they often dominated, sundry informal-sector pursuits, prostitution. In the rural sectors the colonial economy resulted in a new sexual division of labor: cash crops for men, food crops for women. To boot, in many regions men were absent from town or other employment centers for long periods of time, placing on their wives the full burden of assuring the subsistence of the family. Yet agricultural services of the colonial state worked exclusively with male cultivators.

The colonial codifications of customary law tended as well to follow a subliminal patriarchal text drawn from Western legal thinking. In succession, family relations, and property rights men were doubly advantaged: by those aspects of life governed by imported Western law, and by the remodeling of indigenous jurisprudence. One measure of the pervasiveness of the gender impact of the African colonial state is the relative frequency of female ascension to chief-executive office in postcolonial Asian societies—in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines by electoral mandate, but aborted by military intervention in Burma (Myanmar)—compared to the absence until the 1990s of any woman head of state in the far larger number of states in independent Africa.⁵¹

Although the class categories linked to the colonial order were not marked by a strong consciousness, the new ethnic map produced by the imperial era was another matter. The precolonial political order was not rooted in notions of nationality, nor were its borders coincident with the ethnic patterns that had crystallized by the end of the colonial epoch. The larger states generally incorporated a number of ethnolinguistic zones; the more diminutive polities were much smaller than the zones of cultural affinity that form the contemporary array of ethnic categories. There was a discourse of identity that antedates the colonial state, of course. The crucial point is that the vocabularies of classification were complex and fluid, giving recognition to ancestral descent, political grouping, ritual practice, and language. Distinctions considered socially important to establish could differ depending on whether the “other” was a subordinated group or a hostile adversary, a trading partner or an armed competitor. Identity issues were not commonly translated into political ideologies, nor would rulers have dreamed of commissioning anthropologists to prepare ethnic maps of their domains.

In the construction of its hegemony, the colonial state soon acquired a compulsion to classify. Particularly for the British and Belgians, administrative organization was rooted in a “tribal” image of Africa. The task of the ruler was to identify, rationalize, and streamline ethnic cartography. As Patrick Harries remarks, “Europeans implicitly believed their concept of ethnicity to be the natural order and not merely one convention amongst others used to make sense of the world. Caught within this mental structure, Europeans applied to Africans their own system of ethnic classification and accepted without question that Africans should use the same distinctions and concepts.”⁵²

Thus, ethnic boundaries were territorialized, and often novel taxonomies acquired the weighty sanction of official texts and printed maps.

Small entities, deemed unnaturally or unhealthily fragmented, were amalgamated under a common label. Large states were dismantled to form units of convenient scale, in the name of freeing “tribes” held in thrall to tyrannical rulers.

As Apthorpe observed of anglophone Africa (but with broader applicability), “what happened was the colonial regime administratively created tribes as we think of them today.”⁵³ But administrators were not alone in their labors; missionaries had an equally far-reaching impact, although they were driven by a different logic to create an ethnic map. Particularly in the Protestant missions, the early translation of the scriptures was an urgent task, which in turn necessitated preparation of written forms for languages chosen as vehicles of evangelization. Much was at stake in these choices; in relation to the precarious resource base of early missions, the investment in a language chosen for transmitting Christianity was huge. Thus, a rudimentary sense of cost-effectiveness propelled the missions toward a preference for languages that seemed to cover significant areas and populations. In addition, once the written version with its paraphernalia of dictionaries and grammars existed, the missions automatically acquired a commitment to standardize and unify closely related speech codes as a single language. “The more bewildering the linguistic situation appeared, the more urgent became the need to create order, either by imposing ‘vehicular’ languages that already existed, or by promoting certain local languages to vehicular status,” writes Fabian in a seminal account of language policy as an instrument of colonial power.⁵⁴ School and chapel were singularly powerful tools for this purpose.

The science of colonial anthropology, in its early years, was largely the province of administrators and missionaries, many of whom devoted years of dedicated effort to the ethnographic venture. The first generation of published monographs, generally bearing tribal designations, owes its existence to their labors. Often containing a wealth of descriptive information, these tomes were also, in a potent way, ethnic charters; their maps proposed a territorial definition (often vastly inflated, as their authors were proprietary advocates of the groups whose discovery was their copyright), as well as an official history. Through the schools, the young generations absorbed this distillation of an ethnic idea and frequently made it their own.

Colonial anthropology supplied a library of ethnicity, its shelves lined with tribal monographs. The traits of a community closely examined through the classical participant-observation methodology were projected onto a much larger ethnically labeled collectivity, portrayed as a once and future reality through the premise of the ethnographic present.

The colonial state was a remote *ceteris paribus*; the collective representations of dehistoricized, pristine ethnic units were, in the words of a historian of the discipline, “the shadowy dance of archetypes from the dreamtime of anthropology.”⁵⁵

In an ultimate sense, all identities are doubtless socially constructed. In the African case, the extraordinary impact of the colonial state and allied agencies of external domination has meant that the salient metaphors of civil society are of more recent vintage than is the case in most other regions. Also, the exceptional capacity of the colonial order to impose its own images of society means that contemporary geographies of identity have a larger alien imprint than is usual. But the novel communal partitioning of society was not simply implanted from above and beyond. An intricate dialectic unfolded, as Africans found the politics of identity to be one weapon in the long unequal battle to constrain and limit the oppressive intrusion of the colonial state and, in the state's latter stages, to build larger spaces of autonomous action.

Local administration, in its various forms, produced native authorities whose own standing was tied to the cultural categories through which domination was mediated. Uganda offers a particularly clear example of this dimension. Although Buganda and Bunyoro were large precolonial states whose political identity readily translated into ethnic ideology, most of the districts that served as the basis for British rule fell clearly in the category of “imagined communities.”⁵⁶ Acholi, Madi, Bugisu, Kiga, Teso: all were novel ethnic entities whose district elites acquired a proprietary interest in the nurture and promotion of these identities.⁵⁷

The uneven access to social advance that characterized the colonial era everywhere likewise gave incentives to exploit an ethnicized world, particularly to those categories who benefited from relatively positive stereotyping as being “open to civilization” or apt pupils of “modernization.” Igbo, Kasai Luba, Chagga, and Ganda found advantages to using these images—indeed, internalizing them—to seize the slowly expanding opportunities in the interstices of the colonial order. Those laboring under negative stereotyping—like the “wild and lazy” Lamba of the Zambian copperbelt—were driven to accept a constructed collectivity to reverse the status attached to it.⁵⁸

The social environment of urban life—which took on increasing significance in the decolonization era as cities began to grow rapidly—virtually imposed assimilation of the transcripts of identity now extant. Ethnicity as an active sociopolitical force was first noticed in the 1950s, above all as an urban phenomenon, in seminal monographs by Paul Mercier, Im-

manuel Wallerstein, and several scholars associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Zambia.⁵⁹ Solidarities defined by ethnicity could serve as a veritable lifeline in surmounting the survival challenges of urban existence—employment, housing, schooling, assistance in life crises (sickness, death).

Solidarity became more efficacious when organized and led. Particularly in the last stage of colonial rule, ethnic associations proliferated, giving organizational expression to new identities. Political entrepreneurs and cultural brokers found leadership niches in this associational web, and they became articulate spokesmen for ethnicity, however recently constructed. Missionaries of identity then emerged to carry the message back to the rural hinterland, a dynamic vividly captured by Abernethy:

What was the best course of action open to the urban migrant who was acutely concerned lest his ethnic group fall behind others in the struggle for wealth, power and status? Certainly the rural masses had to be informed of the problem. If the masses were not aware of their ethnicity, then they would have to learn who they really were through the efforts of “ethnic missionaries” returning to the homeland. These “missionaries” would also have to outline a strategy by which the ethnic group, once fully conscious of its unity and its potential, could compete with its rivals. . . . The gospel of ethnicity and the gospel of education were thus mutually reinforcing. Educational schemes sponsored by the tribal unions fostered ethnic consciousness in the rural areas; a heightened sense of ethnicity, in turn, facilitated the spread of education.⁶⁰

The swift reconfiguration of identity patterns in the colonial era was further shaped by a parallel process of primordialization. The metaphorical oath of identity among the Kikuyu with which Harold Isaacs opens his ode to the primordial face of ethnicity—“I shall never leave the House of Muumbi”—captures the inwardness of communal consciousness once it has been internalized.⁶¹ Ethnicity as discourse of consciousness inevitably absorbs the potent metaphors of kinship, attracts like a magnetic field emotion-laden symbols of selfhood. It takes on womb-life qualities of nurture and security; in turn, threats perceived in ethnic terms become more deeply troubled and emotionally charged.

One need not assume a Machiavellian master plan of deliberate division for economical hegemony; the colonial impact on identity dynamics was haphazard as well as intense. Perhaps suggestive of the limits of

purposive ethnicity is the essential failure of French "Berber" policy in Morocco. In imagining a possible congealing of the many clans speaking related Tamazit dialects as a collectivity separated from the dominant Arab-Islamic cultural zone of core Morocco, Lyautey and his heirs contemplated a Berber ethnicity whose primary negative other was the Arab. "Arabic," wrote Lyautey, "is a factor of Islamization because this language is learned in the Koran; our interest commands us to promote the evolution of the Berbers outside the framework of Islam."⁶² From this fostered antagonism would naturally spring a deepening affinity with France and even a predisposition to assimilation. But Berber policy proved so transparent a maneuver of division that it provided a potent unifying grievance for emergent nationalism. The underlying premise of a natural animosity toward the dominant Arab culture of those projected as Berbers was false; Bidwell notes that "they did not reject the idea of assimilation, but it was assimilation to the Arabs and not to the French that they sought."⁶³

In sum, in asymmetric dialectic with the colonial state, subject societies acquired an array of ethnic fault lines far more pronounced than those in the precolonial world. Some of these lines had their origins far in the past; many others were constructions of the colonial era. Even established ethnic categories were altered in important ways. The instrumental incentives for mobilizing and using cultural solidarity, above all in the decolonization era, deepened its political impact and reinforced a process of primordialization already in course.

CIVIL SOCIETY EMERGENT: NATIONALISM

The organizational activity of an emergent civil society, first visible in the interwar years, crisscrossed the social field at the hour of decolonization. A proliferating web of associational life knit society together in ways that supplied the structuration indispensable for the coming nationalist challenge. Indeed, Thomas Hodgkin's masterful monograph *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, long the scriptural touchstone for studies in African nationalism, devotes much of its space to cataloguing diverse forms of associational activity.⁶⁴

In its earlier phases the colonial state maintained strict scrutiny of African associations, viewing them with suspicion as possible centers of subversion. There was usually legislation that required administrative screening of organizations before they could obtain legal existence, thus empowering colonial officers to ban unregistered organizations.

Group activity under the paternal supervision of the mission churches or corporate sponsorship was more acceptable. Ethnic associations were more likely to enjoy informal tolerance as harmless outlets for collective energies.

In the altered political environment of the postwar years, associational activity acquired formidable momentum. Indeed, if one defines civil society by its organizational life, the decolonization era was its golden age. Metropolitan civil society for the first time took a proprietary interest in promoting overseas auxiliary bodies; unions, religious movements, and political parties sponsored colonial affiliates and also provided training personnel and opportunities for overseas travel. The colonial state and its metropolitan parent hoped to superintend these efforts, to ensure that colonial unions and other organizations were instilled with a civic ethos of "responsible" collaboration with colonial authorities in the political reforms now promised.

These tutelary efforts were at best partially successful. In colonial Zaire associational life was contained within the frame of évolué circles, unions affiliated to the major metropolitan centrals, ethnic associations, and social movements sponsored by the mission churches or large corporations until the late 1950s. But containment was not usually as effective; the postwar years were punctuated with militant actions by unions, youth movements, student organizations, or ex-servicemen's associations.

The urban centers were the vortex of organizational life, but associational structuration spread into the countryside as well. Aside from political parties, the most noteworthy organizations were the marketing cooperatives, which in some instances became major focal points of rural identity, voice, and discontent; this was particularly true in Uganda, Tanganyika, and Ghana.⁶⁵ Although departments of cooperative development had supervisory powers and the audit weapon, the more assertive and effectively led cooperative unions slipped through the net of colonial tutelage, their influence augmented by the substantial assets and large cash flows they acquired.

For a brief moment in history—which passed totally unperceived at the time—a swiftly congealing civil society basked in the sun of relative autonomy. The weakening will and authority of the terminal colonial state opened hitherto closely guarded social space. With swelling voice, civil society demanded liberation, the dismantling of the oppressive colonial state. Nationalist protest was its medium, articulated with growing force by the political parties to which civil society gave birth. No one at that

moment of millennial expectations anticipated that these movements would by metamorphosis become the state instruments for a resubordination of civil society.

The idea of anticolonial nationalism offered a message of salvation and redemption. Although its lineages can be traced to the nineteenth century, except in Egypt, the Sudan, Tunisia, and South Africa, before World War II the dream of liberation was too remote and the obstacles to its articulation too severe for ideologies of protest to command a strong following. The various factors examined in chapter 6 that compelled the colonial state to temper and finally abandon its mission of domination facilitated the rise of nationalist organizations. As time went on, initiative increasingly passed to nationalist forces, whose growing strength drove Bula Matari to cover far more swiftly than initial timetables had anticipated.

Nationalism was foremost a discourse of protest, better recognized in a call to action than in the texts of classic works. In flood tide, as the bringer of liberation, it came to appear as a beneficent and irresistible historical force: in the words of one of its most thoughtful students, nationalism "intrudes itself not only with an aura of inevitability but also as the bearer of positive goods."⁶⁶ In its earliest voice, nationalism in a pan-Africanist guise beckoned to a global solidarity of Africans around the world. The scornful demeaning of the African heritage that permeated the colonial mind was challenged by historian-philosopher Cheikh Anta Diop, who argued that a black Egypt was the prime center of early civilization,⁶⁷ and by poet-politicians Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, who asserted a uniquely African ontology (*négritude*) whose naturalist, non-material values contrasted favorably with the hedonistic materialism of the West.⁶⁸ The sheer force and trauma of colonial oppression elicited a singularly powerful exegesis in the polemics of Frantz Fanon, a Martiniquan psychiatrist in the service of the Algerian Revolution.⁶⁹ Finally, nationalism held the promise of a revolutionary transformation of society, although by ways and means that were left unspecified.

Political parties were the organizational weapon of nationalism.⁷⁰ Ideologically, they articulated the message of nationalism and stitched it to the many-colored fabric of grievance woven by the colonial state. Structurally, they drew together the rich array of organizations in support of the liberation project; in a number of instances (like the "congress" type of party identified by Hodgkin), they were simply federations of such organizations. But they were much more, carrying their message beyond the collection of intermediary organizations to the far ends of the country.

The moment is vividly caught by Basil Davidson, a lifelong apostle of African liberation and companion of many nationalist campaigns:

One's memories of those years are of jubilant young men . . . setting out on endless journeys delayed and harassed by endless troubles and upsets, lack of petrol, spare parts, cash, and even food. . . . By whatever transport they could find, on foot or horseback, in truck or "mammy wagon," their arrival was often "accompanied by brass bands, flute bands, cowhorn bands and dancers" in places never visited before. Meeting the "masses" in "schoolrooms, compounds, cinemas and churches, they touched the lives of hundreds of isolated communities in a way never known before."⁷¹

I recollect attending political rallies by the Neo-Destour Party in Tunisia at the time of independence in 1956, at which President Habib Bourguiba spoke. The air was electric, the crowd's adulation overpowering. Equally memorable was the almost universal esteem of the university student population, repeatedly expressed in speeches and resolutions at a congress of the Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens I attended, in an atmosphere free of the fear and intimidation that years later might influence public debate.

The energies of political party mobilization originated in part from the inner impulses of liberation. Circumstances created their own imperatives; the rules of the terminal colonial game made the search for a mass audience indispensable. Once the inevitability of power transfer was acknowledged by the colonial state, the nationalist leaders were asked to demonstrate electorally their mandate to claim the right to succession. In most cases there were multiple contenders, often with regionally defined clienteles. Not infrequently, competing parties differed in their ideological images—less in explicit divergences of doctrine than in tone and style. Some movements employed a more radical, aggressively confrontational language; others transparently enjoyed the state's favor, speaking of the coming independence in terms of a harmonious postcolonial entente (for example, the Union Camerounaise of Ahmadu Ahidjo in Cameroon, and the ill-fated Parti National du Progrès in Zaire). The nationalist movement thus had to become an electoral machine.

In the instances where the colonial state was dominated by an intransigent white-settler elite tenaciously defending minority racial privilege (Algeria, Rhodesia, Namibia), or in the Portuguese case where a beleaguered autocracy had tied its Estado Novo legitimating ideology to the permanence of empire, independence through the electoral and negoti-

ated route was not available. The sole pathway for nationalism was the long, costly one of armed insurrection. As chapter 6 argues, these cases were supremely important in revealing the bedrock historical fact that sheer force, once the architect of empire, no longer sufficed to preserve it.

The civil society constructed out of liberated zones, guerrilla armies, and militarily enforced solidarity was different from the kind that emerged from voluntary associations and electoral campaigning.⁷² At the time of independence many believed that the character of the mobilization that warfare involved, and the intimacy of the links forged between guerrillas and populace (civil society as an aquarium for the freedom-fighting fish, in the Maoist metaphor), offered a different and more hopeful future for the countries concerned. By the time of the 1981 coup overthrowing Luis Cabral in Guinea-Bissau a consensus had taken hold that, whatever the differences in itinerary of civil society, the similarity in the operating modes of the postcolonial states created broadly similar contemporary circumstances.

In its first stirrings anticolonial nationalism was essentially a discourse of protest. Its contours were to a degree defined by its hostile other: the colonial occupant in question. But the specific nation to which nationalism referred remained opaque. It was obvious enough in instances of historical states like Egypt, Morocco, or Tunisia but entirely obscure in the vast sub-Saharan zones under French rule. When the colonial state weakened, a territorialization of nationalism set in, embracing imperial partition. The British, persuaded of the higher viability of larger sovereign units, tended to promote regional units, such as the federations in Central and East Africa; they preserved Nigeria and the Sudan as single entities (opposing, as I noted earlier, a Sudanese reunion with Egypt). But these multiterritorial groupings were fatally compromised by their linkage to the preservation of exorbitant privileges for immigrant European and Asian communities, although elements of an East African Community survived until 1976. The individual territories into which British colonial sovereignty was divided served as successors.

Fragmentation was the more powerful force in the dialectic of decolonization, most dramatically triumphant in the sundering of the colonial federations of AOF and AEF. Political life—and consciousness of a civil society—took form mainly at the territorial level; the “federal” institutions at Dakar and Brazzaville were quintessentially colonial bureaucratic instances. Multiterritorial political movements did play a major role, most notably the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA); the opportunity in the French case for parliamentary participation at first provided important incentives in this direction, and during the period up

to the mid-1950s, when this forum for action seemed most visible and efficacious, multiterritorial parties were the rule. But the large opening for local African participation offered by the political reforms for sub-Saharan imperial organization (formalized as the 1956 Loi-Cadre) altered the balance, placing African leaders in charge of newly autonomous territories and introducing a different calculus of relative advantage. The wealthier territories (the Ivory Coast and Gabon) calculated that they would be drained of resources to support the impoverished inland units (Niger and Chad). Dahomey long harbored resentments over Dakar's tutelage and nursed historical memories of net revenue losses to support the colonial federation.⁷³ France invested little energy in saving these federations and was widely suspected of a secret preference for smaller, more pliable postcolonial partners. Although the leading nationalist figures—Léopold Senghor, Sékou Touré, Félix Houphouët-Boigny—had at one point or another favored political spaces larger than those provided by the individual territories, the conflicting visions they held, and the pull of the divergent interests of the individual territories, introduced a fatal dialectic of fragmentation.⁷⁴

NATIONALISM AND THE COLONIAL STATE: AMBIGUOUS TRIUMPH

What stands out above all was the capacity of the individual colonial territory to imprint its personality on its nationalist adversary. However alien the geographical grid of imperial partition, the logic of struggle compelled nationalist movements to embrace it. The most politically aware and articulate groups, in whose name nationalism spoke, had thoroughly absorbed this territorial identity, through their greater proximity to and interaction with the colonial state. In subliminal ways, the associational infrastructure of civil society territorialized identity; the peak organizations invariably bore the label of the country and deployed their activity within its boundaries. Formerly acknowledged as determining the boundaries of anticolonial engagement, the units of colonial partition became sanctified, even sacralized—a process symbolized in the 1963 charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which declared colonial boundaries definitive and immutable.

The triumph of nationalism seemed, in its *annus mirabilis* of 1960, well-nigh complete. Although the term *neocolonial* quickly entered polemical vocabulary, to denote the continued economic dependence of the new states or their political subservience to the former metropolises, only gradually did it become apparent that independence had a more costly

ransom. The silent revenge of the colonial state was surreptitiously to embed in its postindependence successor the corrosive personality of Bula Matari.

African independence remains a historic accomplishment of epochal dimensions. The robust growth of a civil society during the final colonial years serves as a beacon in the historical memory, more luminous than ever in the 1990s with the search for a democratized relationship between state and society. In the dispiriting years of African stagnation during the 1980s, one would occasionally hear from ordinary Africans expressions of nostalgia for the colonial era. Such jarring statements mirrored a profound disenchantment with the present condition; were they really an invitation to Bula Matari to return? Such affirmations applied to the recent years of crisis a yardstick fashioned in the gilded years of the 1950s—the one decade of the colonial era when real per-capita incomes at all levels of society were indisputably rising, when the colonial state for the first time was making major public investments in expanding the social infrastructure serving the mass of the populace, when an entire young generation had great expectations. One might perhaps also detect a trace of a recollected civil society. In this selective remembrance, the harsh oppression and relentless extraction of the colonial state for most of its life cycle disappear; none can wish the return of those years.

But the political history of the past three decades raises new questions. In using the discourse of the colonial state to confront and challenge it, the independence generation of leaders unwittingly absorbed elements of its inner logic. In Davidson's eloquent words, "Acceptance of the post-colonial nation-state meant acceptance of the legacy of the colonial partition, and of the moral and political practices of colonial rule in its institutional dimensions. . . . Along with the nation-state as necessary aim and achievement, the legacy of the partition was transferred practically intact, partly because it seemed impossible to reject any significant part of that legacy, and partly, as one is bound to think in retrospect, because there was as yet no sufficient understanding of what the legacy implied."⁷⁵ The fatal attraction for the nation-state vision of the polity, superimposed on the colonial territory, reinstated a superstructure of domination severed from civil society. "National integration" became an imperative that justified the single party and military forms of rule in the name of a national unity menaced by the activated and transformed ethnicity bequeathed by the colonial state. At the same time, the discourse of development, which only the central institutions of the state

could rationally plan and competently execute, implied "bringing the state back in"—as undisputed master.

In fully committing itself to the nation-state model of modernity, nationalism unwittingly repudiated its ancestral heritage. "Africa's past achievements," writes Davidson, "could be useful as food for anti-colonial argument—essentially, by this time, anti-racist argument—but could offer no useable design for political action."⁷⁶ Accordingly, the moral realm associated with the state, as Peter Ekeh has argued, lacked any normative ties with civil society. The state domain, thus, was a site of amoral behavior by all hands.⁷⁷ Independent Africa, adds Vansina in a powerful argument, can "finally flourish" only when this "baneful dichotomy" between Western influences and the majority tradition, epitomized in the gulf dividing state and civil society, is at last overcome.⁷⁸