National Movements in Colonial Africa

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1. Introduction

The history of Africa in the first half of the 20th century is in a large sense a history of colonialism. At the beginning of the 20th century, almost the whole of Africa, with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, were under European colonial rule. However, the history of Africa during this period is also a history of intense struggles against colonialism, of decolonisation, and of the national movements that spurred on the process. These movements appeared across cities in Africa in the period between the two World Wars, which took place largely within Europe in 1914-18 and 1939-45 respectively, and accelerated in the post-World War II period (after 1945). Growing out of the most important urban centres in the colonies, these movements soon spread to other towns and into the hinterlands, where they succeeded in bringing different Africans together to join the movement for decolonisation.

However, nationalism in Africa did not begin in the 20th century. Many African colonies had nationalist organisations as far back as the early 19th century. These were not movements in the strict sense of the word, because they were limited to a few elites whose relatively high level of education and distinguished lifestyle set them apart from the rest of the people, even though they claimed to represent them. Although these earlier organisations were not mass movements, they nevertheless sowed the seeds from which the movements of the 20th century would grow. The 20th century national movements, by contrast, made deliberate attempts to connect with the non-literate urban poor, and to actively involve them in anticolonial protests and resistance. In the years leading up to independence, ideological differences arose within these movements which led to splits. These splits subsequently affected the character of the post-colonial African state, and in some countries, continue to exert influence on contemporary politics.

This chapter addresses the historical development of national movements during the colonial period in Africa. It sets off by introducing the concepts of nationalism and social movements. It proceeds to an analysis of the factors that led to the growth and spread of national movements across Africa towards the second half of the 20th century. The following section focuses on national movement activism across colonial Africa, and their role in the struggle for decolonisation. Finally, the chapter concludes by taking a look at nationalism after the end of colonial rule in Africa.

2. Conceptualisation

The term nationalism is derived from the concept of *nation.* A nation is a collection of people who share, or are perceived to share, some common characteristics. These characteristics include, among others, language, ethnicity, religion, and customs. On the basis of these shared values, people are seen as belonging to a 'community.' Scholars of nations and nationalism have come to think of nations as 'imagined communities.' Nations are said to be imagined communities because the sense of belonging exists only in the imagination of 'community members,' since it is impossible for a member of a nation to personally interact with every other member.

Nationalism can be defined as philosophies or beliefs that are intended to promote the interest of the nation. Nationalism has many forms and expressions; such as being a sentiment or a political organisation. As a sentiment, it involves a feeling of strong allegiance to one's national group, and a desire to further the progress and wellbeing of its members. Sometimes, but not always, it involves the sense that one's nation is better socially, morally, economically, or otherwise than other nations, and/or a desire to make one's nation better than others. This manifestation of nationalism is closely related to nationalism as a political or material manifestation.

Nationalism is expressed politically when members feel that the nation is threatened. This often happens during times of economic or political crises. In Africa during the 19th and 20th century, national movements emerged in response to European colonial rule. Hearing the term "colonial rule", everywhere in the world results in the perception of the colonised having their rights and dignity violated by the so called colonisers, and this was no different in the case of Africa. Resentment against foreign rule fed into the growth of nationalist sentiments. In many instances, these sentiments were generated or intensified by charismatic young leaders like Patrice Lumumba (Congo, today's DRC and shown in the photo below), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), and Julius Nyerere (Tanganyika, today's Tanzania). These sentiments were channelled into nationalist movements that sought to initially challenge some unfair or oppressive colonial policies, and eventually became the main vehicles for demanding political independence across colonial Africa.

A social movement is a relatively permanent collection of people with some organisational capacity that focuses on specific social or political issues. Social movements are committed to waging a sustained campaign to bring about a desired social aim. Social movements often emerge and thrive when they have a charismatic leader, but they also need bureaucratic organisation to take care of the day to day administration of the movement. Often, the most successful social movements are able to mobilise mass following through creative communication strategies. Movements can either be *reformist*, in which case they seek to change specific aspects of the society, or they can be *revolutionary*, in which case they attempt to totally replace the existing social structure with a radically different one. African national movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries were mainly reformists, but towards the second

half of the 20th century, they became increasingly revolutionary, and started campaigning for a total dismantling of the colonial state.
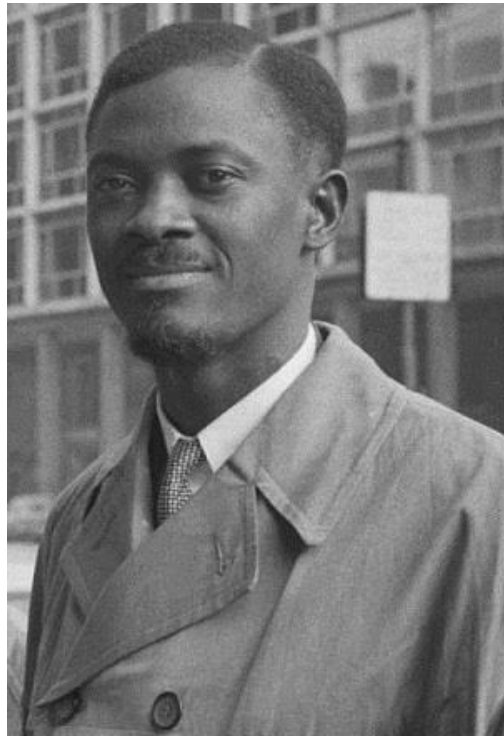
Patrice Lumumba, first post-independence president of the Congo in 1960.

3. Key factors that promoted African nationalism

In Africa, nationalism emerged in the first half of the 20th century as a movement to oppose and/or resist colonialism. After colonialism, it became a central focus for calls for the unification of Africa. The movements attempted to transform conceptions of African identity, from an initial focus on isolated ethnicities to a racial identification, or an identity based on the territorial state carved out by colonial rulers. Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912), a Liberian educator, writer, and politician, was widely regarded as founder of African nationalism. His writings became widely influential across West Africa. He led the call for a revival of African cultures and traditions in response to colonial and missionary denigration of African cultures as backward, barbaric, savage, or uncivilised. Later nationalist figures like James Africanus Horton (1835-83) from Sierra Leone who is depicted in the photo below and S.R.B. Attoh-Ahuma (1863-1921) from the Gold Coast (today's Ghana) followed in his footsteps. The rapid growth of national movements in Africa after the 1940s resulted from a variety of factors. Most of these factors were caused by, or resulted in, resentment against colonial rule. The discriminatory and oppressive colonial regimes across Africa led to a feeling of curtailed freedoms and loss of dignity, as well as economic hardships for the people.

Africanus Horton, a nationalist writer and British army physician from Sierra Leone

The following discussion outlines the most important ten factors that promoted the emergence and growth of national movements across Africa in the 20th century:

(i) Unfavourable economic policies and economic hardship
Colonial governments often imposed unpopular economic policies, such as forced labour, taxation, and compulsory cultivation of cash crops. These policies were unpopular not only because they were arbitrary impositions, but also because they resulted in a lot of hardships for the people. Settlement of Europeans in places like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and South Africa, resulted in the displacement of Africans from the most fertile lands. This often increased poverty, malnutrition, hunger, and racial segregation. Because many people were displaced from their ancestral lands, they feared the destruction of their cultures, especially in places where rituals were tied to the land. Economic crises as a result of the First and Second World Wars intensified resentment against colonial authorities. The diversion of resources to prosecute the wars affected development and welfare policies in the European colonies in Africa. The war also negatively affected trade between Europe and its colonies, because African colonies (and their primary commodity producing African farmers) crucially depended on the export of primary commodities (e.g. palm oil/kernels, cotton, coffee), they were seriously affected by the decreased global demand for African primary resources which resulted in a sharp fall in prices for African export commodities. For example, in the Gold Coast the international market price of cocoa beans severely declined during the inter-war years (1918-39), leading to several strikes and hold-ups. Nationalists took advantage of these hardships

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resulting from African farmers' and traders' reduced incomes from primary exports in order to spread opposition to colonial rule and to press demands for independence. Strikes, boycotts, and other kinds of industrial disturbances were common during this period. There was also the formation of trade unions by mine and railroad workers, especially mine workers unions in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s.

(ii) Pan Africanist movement

Pan Africanism became a powerful ideological force in the 20th century, and energised national movements across Africa. The movement originated among persons of African descent in the Americas, in Britain, and the Caribbean. One of the key leaders of the movement was Marcus Garvey, a West Indian who moved to the US during the First World War. He called for the return (or remigration) of Africans back to Africa, and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914. Another celebrated Pan-Africanist figure was W. E. B. Dubois, the American scholar and activist, who eventually resettled in Ghana when Kwame Nkrumah was president. Pan-Africanists sought to create connections with Africans on the continent and in the diaspora. The fifth Pan-African Congress was held in Manchester in 1945, and was attended by leaders of national movements in different African colonies. Among the many resolutions of the congress was a strong push for the idea of African struggle for independence. Pan Africanism influenced African nationalist leaders like Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), Haile Selassie (Ethiopia), Albert Lithuli (South Africa), Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria). Some, like Azikiwe, disagreed with Pan-Africanism as a political project, and instead, advocated for informal cooperation rather than a united government on a continental scale. The example of never colonised Ethiopia and Liberia also provided examples of African self-determination. Leaders of African national movements could point to them as evidence that Africans were capable of self-rule and resistance to colonialism.

(iii) Improved transportation and communications networks

Improved transportation and communication networks in Africa brought erstwhile isolated communities into communications with each other. This enhanced the spread of information, including resentment against, and resistance to, colonial authorities. Related to this was the role of urbanisation in Africa. The growth of African towns and cities in the early 20th century brought Africans of different ethnicities together, which generated a sense of community beyond the limited purview of ethnic groups. Also, people were able to link what they previously perceived as individual level problems to policies of the colonial governments. Further, towns and cities acted as powerful centres of youth enthusiasm, arts, activism, and experimentation. The hardships of the early 20th century, partly the result of colonial policies, and partially the results of global factors, were most sharply felt in the urban centres. The experience of unemployment, poor sanitation, inadequate housing, and other hardships led to increasing demands on the colonial authorities. The rise of African political leaders led to these demands being framed in nationalist terms. It was perhaps no accident that the leaders of the national movements themselves emerged from the most important urban centres in the various colonies. The cities were centres of great promise as well as disappointment. In search of better lives young people migrated from rural areas into the cities. However, they often faced many barriers to the desired life after arriving there; some of which included limited options for

occupational mobility as a result of racial discrimination, and living in substandard housing or slums as a result of residential segregation.

(iv) Education

Education was one of the most potent factors promoting nationalism and the growth of national movements. Like urbanisation, education brought together people from different ethnic groups in primary and secondary schools, thus generating a sense of shared fate, which promoted the ideal that the national unit was more important than fragmented ethnic entities. Also, the colonial educational system exposed young people to new ideas, resulting into the rise and spread of new ideas of national pride, self-determination, and economic empowerment. In this sense, nationalism was the (unintended) consequence of colonial education. However, there was a gap between these values that colonial education promoted, and the reality that young people experienced after their education. Upon graduation, they typically were faced with limited employment opportunities and discrimination in the work place, because most high level jobs in the government service were reserved for Europeans. This resulted in resentment against colonial authorities. Colonial educational systems bred the generation of nationalist leaders who led the struggle for independence, including Milton Obote (Uganda), Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Patrice Lumumba (Congo), and Julius Nyerere (Tanzania).

(v) Religion

Religion played a crucial role in the African liberation movements. The missionary churches across Africa were crucial in this regard. The various narrations in scriptures of oppression, and of the oppressed as the chosen people of God, resonated with Africans under colonialism. Colonial rulers were likened to the accursed oppressors, like Egypt, Babylon, and Rome, in biblical accounts, and the colonised Africans looked for a 'Messiah' to free them from their oppressors. This worldview tended to give a moral character to the nationalist struggle, and made religion a powerful tool in the struggle. As the national movement intensified, Separatist Churches emerged. These were popularly referred to as 'Ethiopian churches,' to emphasise their independence from European missions. These churches highlighted their African backgrounds by incorporating African rituals, songs, and practices into their services. Breakaway African churches were active in the anti-colonial protest movements. African priests led some anti-colonial protests, including the Chimurenga uprising in 1896-7 in Zimbabwe ("Chimurenga" means uprising in the Shona language) and the Maji-Maji uprising in Tanzania (1905-7) which was led by Prophet Kinjikitile Ngwale, who rallied the people against oppressive labour and tax policies. Across Africa, these churches were formed and grew in memberships; e.g. Kimbaguist Christian Church which was formed by Simon Kimbangu in Congo in the 1920s. The Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, even inspired the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica, whose followers considered him to be the incarnation of God. These influences later returned to shape African nationalism, especially through the Rastafarian movement which founded reggae music.

(vi) The role of women

Women constituted a potent force in the African national movements that fought for independence from colonial rule. For example, Yaa Asantewaa, an Asante queen-mother who is portrayed in the photo below, led the Asante in a battle against the British in 1900, in what has become popularly known as the Yaa Asantewaa War or the War of the Golden Stool (because the war was fought to resist demands of the British Governor, Sir Frederick Hodgson to be handed the Golden Stool on which the King of Asante sits). In 1929, a revolt in Nigeria by thousands of Igbo market women against colonial policies which had limited their roles in politics, led to what became popularly known as the Aba Women's War. The revolt was directed against the warrant chief system in Nigeria which had been instituted by the British colonial government in furtherance of the indirect rule system. In many other colonies, market women were important actors in the anti-colonial movement. They provided needed support for the national movements, especially financial support. In colonies like British Kenya and French Algeria, where the resistance took a violent form, women took active part in the armed struggle. In South Africa, about 20,000 women from different parts of the country famously marched to the apartheid capital of Pretoria on 9th August 1956. And many other examples could be given. Unfortunately, the role of women in African national movements has not gotten enough attention in most historical accounts.

Yaa Asantewaa in battle gear from the Asante kingdom in Ghana.

The next set of four factors to be discussed below can be considered as consequences of the initial growth of the spirit of nationalism. But even though they are the consequences of growing nationalism, they had a feedback effect on national movements.

(vii) Newspapers and pamphlets

Newspapers were a powerful source of nationalist sentiments. Most of these newspapers crafted a public image as outspoken critics of colonial governments. The *Gold Coast Times,* for instance, had this motto on their banner: 'AS LONG AS WE REMAIN WE MUST SPEAK FREE,' shown in the newspaper clipping below. Furthermore, Table 1 provides a list of some of the African-led newspapers published across colonial Africa. African run newspapers were the mouthpieces of the nationalist movements and a crucial means of communication. They were used to disseminate notions of racial and national pride, as well as to voice opposition to unpopular colonial policies. In fact, newspapers were so successful in this that they became targets for suppression. Many colonial regimes introduced laws on sedition and criminal libel in an attempt to silence the press. Using this law, many newspaper editors, like Nnamdi Azikiwe and I.T.A. Wallace Johnson were arrested and convicted for writing what were considered to be seditious articles.

Banner of The Gold Coast Times in 1884.

Table 1: Selection of colonial era newspapers across African colonies

Colony/country	Newspaper title	City of publication
Gold Coast/Ghana	*Gold Coast Chronicle*	Accra
	Gold Coast Aborigines	Cape Coast
	Gold Coast times	Cape Coast
Nigeria	*Lagos Observer*	Lagos
	Times of Nigeria	Lagos
	Nigerian Chronicle	Lagos
Kenya	*East African Standard*	Mombasa
	East African Chronicle	Nairobi
	Times of East Africa	Nairobi
Uganda	*Uganda Herald*	Kampala
Tanganyika/Tanzania	*Dar es Salaam Times*	Dar es Salaam
South Africa	*Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser*	Cape Town
	Izwi Labantu	East London
	Indaba	Cape Town
Rhodesia/Zimbabwe	*Buluwayo Chronicle*	Buluwayo
	Rhodesia Herald	Harare

(viii) Political parties

Political parties were the quintessential of national movements. They emerged in the period between the two World Wars to give a more organised character to national movements across Africa. Popular parties during this period include the Kenyan African Union, later to become Kenyan African National Union (KANU) in Kenya, National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons in Nigeria, Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in Tanzania, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in Zimbabwe, and the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. Many of these parties experienced internal conflicts which resulted in party fragmentation. In the Gold Coast, for instance, the Convention People's Party (CPP) broke away from the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), and in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was formed out of ZAPU. These breakaway factions were more popular and more radical than their parent organisations, and many of them became the political parties that finally won independence. For instance, ZANU, under the leadership of Robert Mugabe, was able to win the 1980 Zimbabwean elections. In general, these political parties were led by charismatic nationalist figures like Kwame Nkrumah (Gold Coast), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Nelson and Winnie Mandela (South Africa), Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo (Nigeria), Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Patrice Lumumba (Congo), and Julius Nyerere (Tanganyika/Tanzania). They were all ardent proponents of national independence and promoters of the concept of African dignity and the African personality.

(ix) International factors
Africans were recruited (as soldiers, porters, and scouts) to fight for the imperial armies in the WWII against Nazism and Fascism. Returning veterans came home with the same zeal, and expected more freedom and dignity which they had helped the colonisers fight for. Also, the *Atlantic Charter* by Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt declared that:

> 'They respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.'

Other international/global factors, like the emergence of the US and Soviet Union as superpowers, and the decline of the powers and influence of European empires like Britain and France, also shaped the emergence and spread of national movements in Africa. The desire of the US to spread capitalism and of Russia to diffuse the principles of communism shifted the balance of power after the Second World War, especially after the weakening of the Western European empires following the War. The formation of the United Nations also popularised notions of national sovereignty and self-determination.

The successful opposition to colonial rule in Asia also provided encouragement to nationalist movements in Africa. India and Pakistan became independent in 1947. In particular, Mahatma Ghandi's programme of non-violent opposition to colonial oppression was emulated in places like the Gold Coast, where Kwame Nkrumah adapted it to his more radical programme of positive action campaigns, including strikes and boycotts. In other places like Kenya and South

Africa, however, where colonial oppression was more ruthless, non-violence was not a viable strategy of opposition. But even in Ghana, the strategy was not always peaceful. In 1948, a peaceful march by ex-servicemen to demand salaries for fighting in the WWII turned violent after the ex-servicemen were fired upon.

In the 1950s and 1960s, struggles by blacks in the US for constitutional rights intensified. African national movements and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America mutually affected each other. In 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr visited Ghana at the invitation of the Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah to witness the official replacement of the Union Jack with the new Ghana flag. Another Civil Rights leader, Malcolm X, travelled widely in Africa, visiting Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Tanganyika. He met with all the prominent African leaders of the time, including Ahmed Ben Bella (Algeria), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), and Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana).

(x) Harold Macmillan's 'wind of change' speech
Weakened economically and militarily from their participation in the Second World War, European colonial powers became less able to repress the national movements that were growing across the African continent. They, therefore, became more open to the idea of granting independence. On 3rd February 1960, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made what came to be known as the 'Wind of Change' speech to the South African parliament in Cape Town. In his speech after he had visited a number of British colonies in Africa, Macmillan said:

> '...We have seen the awakening of national consciousness in peoples who have for centuries lived in dependence upon some other power. Fifteen years ago this movement spread through Asia…. Today the same thing is happening in Africa, and the most striking of all the impressions I have formed since I left London a month ago is of the strength of this African national consciousness. In different places it takes different forms, but it is happening everywhere. The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it…. This tide of national consciousness which is now rising in Africa, is a fact, for which both you and we, and the other nations of the western world are ultimately responsible….'

This speech, coming from a British prime minister from the Conservative Party, signalled to nationalists across the African continent that finally, the colonisers had come to accept the inevitability of decolonisation.

5. National movements and decolonisation in Africa

Having considered above the main factors that promoted the rise of African national movements, next we turn to a more detailed discussion of these movements, and how they led the struggle for independence. By 1950, most African colonies had some organised national movement of one form or another. Most of these were in the form of political parties that led the demand for independence. Before the rise of these political parties, however, there had been earlier movements which had made less radical demands on the colonial government. In the early decades of the 20th century, resistance and opposition to colonialism came in the form of protest against specific colonial policies. The demands during this period were mainly for increased rights and freedoms for African people. In the Gold Coast, the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society was formed to protest against a bill designed to vest all 'unused' or 'waste' lands in the hands of the colonial government. During this period, independence, at least in the short term, was out of the question. As Casely Hayford, a Gold Coast nationalist figure, stated in 1920 at the inauguration of the National Congress of British West Africa:

> 'The National Congress was not making any fatuous demand for the Gold Coast to be declared an independent nation or to be allowed to create its own federal government apart from or in substitution of the existing government of the English Sovereign. All that they ask was a right to take a share by representation in the government of their own country.... We do not mind being members of the British Empire, and we do not mind remaining members; indeed we are glad of our membership.... But give us the rights of free members and do not treat us as slaves in the household of the Empire.'

In contrast to the 'movements'/organisations of the early 20th century, the national movements which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s were more broad-based, and appealed to almost all segments of the population, not simply the educated elite. They were also more radical in their demands on the colonial administration. They intensified the calls for independence, and in some colonies, this led to armed confrontations between nationalist insurgent groups and colonial armies. In Kenya, the *Mau Mau* uprising, under the leadership of Dedan Kimathi, carried on guerrilla warfare against the colonial government for most of the 1950s. In Algeria, the National Liberation Front (NLF) led an armed resistance against the French colonial government, but it was violently crushed by the French Army led by General Jacques Massu.

In most colonies, however, national movements used a combination of armed resistance and constitutional protest to fight for independence. Armed struggle was often used only as a strategy of last resort, when other more peaceful means of protest had proven futile or were repressed. The first African countries to gain independence were Egypt (granted limited independence by the British) in 1922 and Libya in 1951. In sub-Saharan Africa, the Gold Coast (Ghana) was the first to gain independence in 1957. Fourteen African countries gained independence in the year 1960. By 1966, most African countries had attained independence from colonial rule. Figure 1 shows a map of Africa indicating the date at which countries attained independence. South Africa became a self-governing British dominion in 1910, and in

1961 became a sovereign republic. Southern Rhodesia unilaterally declared independence from Great Britain as Rhodesia in 1965. However, in both South Africa and Rhodesia, white minority settlers still controlled the government and Africans continued to live under subjection.

Figure 1: Map of African decolonisation

Source: http://thelandofmaps.tumblr.com/post/70536171081/africa-former-colonial-rulers-and-dates-of
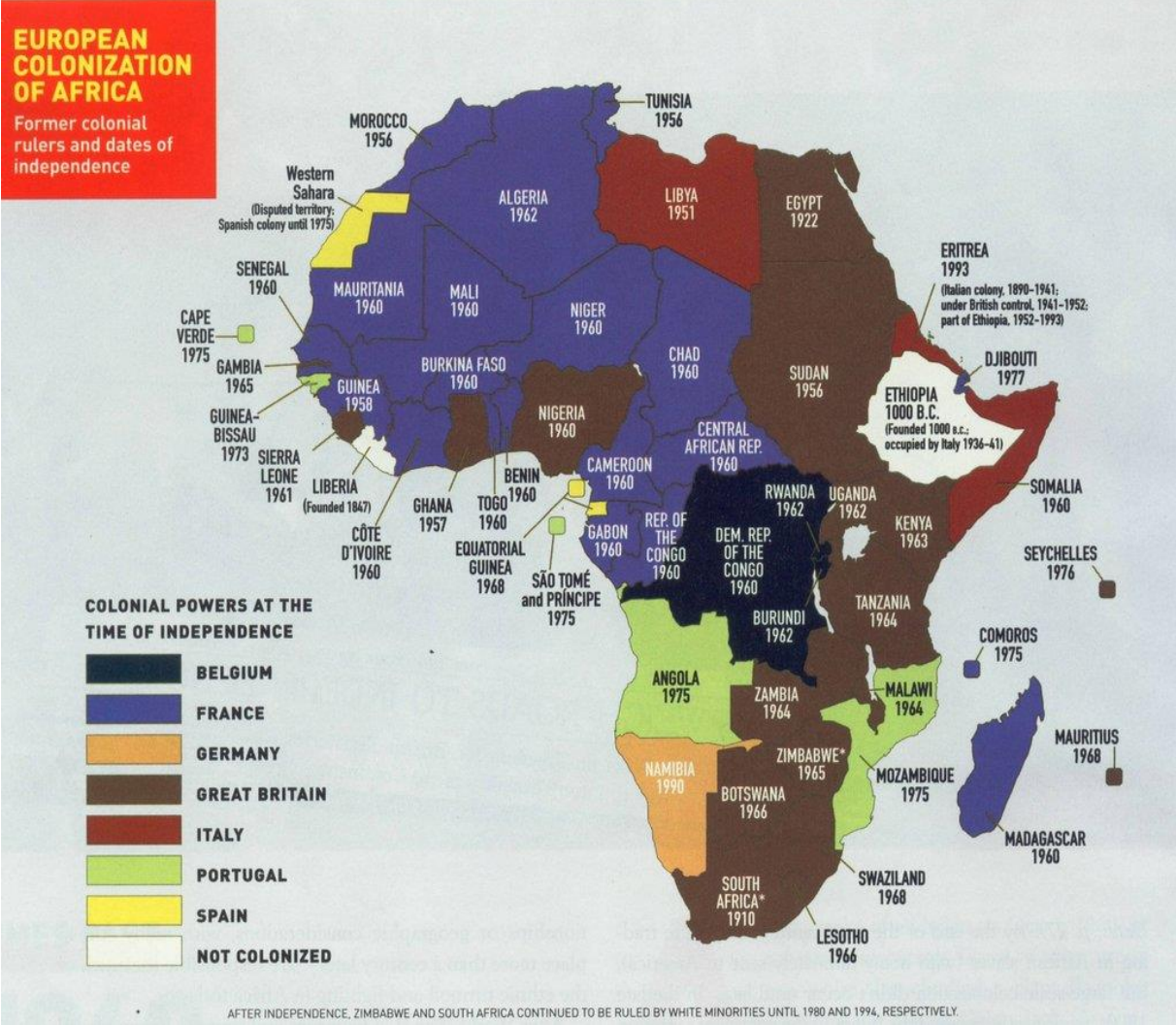
As can be seen in Figure 1, after the 1960s, four African countries remained under European rule. Three of these were under Portuguese rule (Angola, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, and Mozambique) and one, Namibia, was a Protectorate of South Africa. The reason for this was that the Portuguese state, under the conservative, nationalistic, and authoritarian Estado Novo regime (1933-1974), resisted African demands for independence. White minority governments in settler colonies similarly responded to non-violent demands by the African nationalist leaders with suppression. Many of the leaders of these national movements were arrested and imprisoned for many years; Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress (ANC), for instance, was jailed for 27 years. Robert Mugabe was arrested with other leaders of the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwean African Peoples Union (ZAPU), and spent more than 10 years in prison. These suppressive tactics of colonial government force African nationalist leaders to resort to violence.

The resulting military contest was an unmatched one. The armies and militias of African national movements lacked well-trained soldiers as well as resources to acquire weapons. Newly independent African countries provided support to these insurgent nationalist armies in the form of logistics, training bases and providing them with weapons. In an attempt to win allies to their sides during the Cold War, the two world powers at the time, the Soviet Union, the United States, as well as countries like China, Cuba, and South Africa, provided military assistance to some of the national movements.

6. Post-colonial nationalism in Africa

Upon attaining independence, most of the national movements that fought against colonialism formed themselves into national governments. African leaders found themselves faced with the task of modernising their economies and inserting themselves into the world economy. Because the Soviet Union had been assisting many of the national movements in their struggle for independence, several newly independent African countries allied themselves to Soviet ideology in the Cold War politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The alignment of the various African countries during the Cold War is illustrated in the Cold War map of Africa in Figure 2. The Soviet allies adapted Marxist economic philosophy into what became known as African Socialism. However, because most African economies had not developed under the era of colonialism, many of these newly independent countries had to continue relying on their former colonisers for investment and technical assistance. Kwame Nkrumah, first president of Ghana, coined the term *neo-colonialism* to describe this situation where African countries had political independence but lacked economic independence.

Figure 2: Cold War map of Africa, 1980
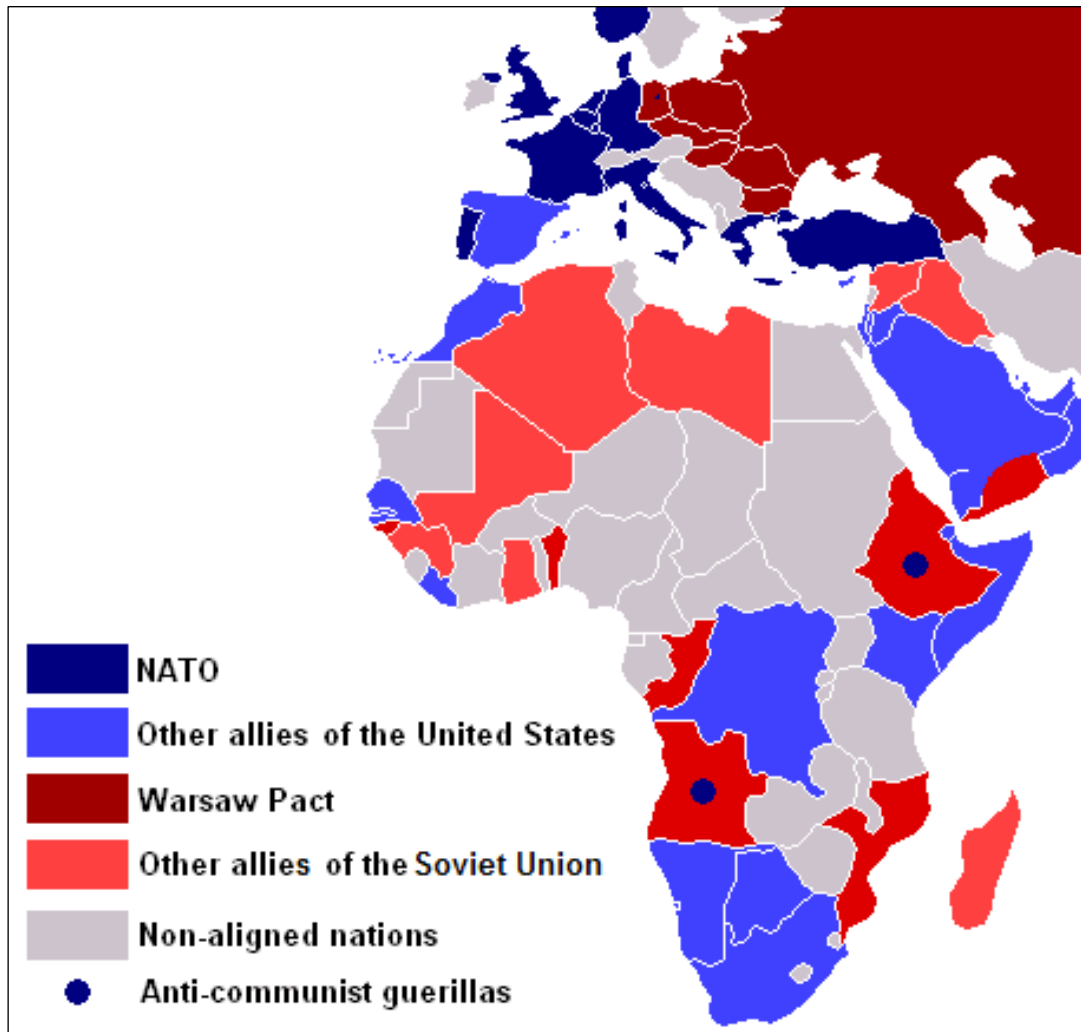
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACold_War_Africa_1980.PNG

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU: the OAU was disbanded in 2002 and replaced by the African Union) was formed in 1963 to, among other things, safeguard the independence of African countries. The organisation was founded with 37 member states, with Kwame Nkrumah as the first premier. Headquartered in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, it was committed to helping countries, like Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, and Zimbabwe that still were under colonial rule to shake off the shackles of colonialism. The OAU also sought to disseminate sentiments of racial pride by invoking histories of glorious African empires. Afrocentric scholars, like the Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop, were especially crucial in this attempt. They sought to trace a link between ancient Egypt and countries of sub-Saharan Africa. They also recounted achievements of African empires like Asante, Mali, Ghana empires, and Great Zimbabwe. The histories of great African rulers of antiquity, like Sundiata Keita, founder of the Mali Kingdom in the 13th century and others of more recent history, like Shaka Zulu (c. 1787-1828) from eastern South Africa, Osei Tutu (c. 1660-1717) co-founder of the Ashanti Empire in present-day Ghana, and Menelik II (1844-1913), Emperor of Ethiopia were often recounted.

However, the political and economic pressures that newly independent African countries faced meant that virtually all of them had to effectively abandon the pan-Africanist ideal. They became ever more focussed on their own national states. A wave of political instability starting from the 1960s forced national leaders to focus more on national security and state politics. Furthermore, the devastating economic crises which most African countries experienced in the 1970s and 1980s also led many African leaders to abandon the quest for continent-wide politics in order to focus on domestic affairs.

Pan Africanism was not the only nationalist ideal which suffered in the decades following the attainment of independence. Economic decline and political instability in many African countries in these decades negatively affected national unity. Struggle for the limited resources of the state in many places degenerated into factional disputes, and this resurrected many ethnic antagonisms. Politicians sometimes appealed to their ethnic bases in order to enhance their chances during elections, or to support their governments to hold on to power. These ethnic antagonisms and divisions in many instances blew up into full scale civil wars. Countries like Nigeria, Congo (present-day DRC), Rwanda, among others, have suffered devastating civil wars and even genocides during the post-independence period. Thus, the strong nationalist sentiments which swept across Africa towards the end of colonialism had largely dissipated by the turn of the 21st century.

Study questions

1. What is a nation? What is nationalism?
2. Nationalist political parties were reformist, not revolutionary, social movements. Discuss.
3. Discuss five of the factors that led to the growth of nationalist movements in colonial Africa.
4. Who delivered the 'Wind of Change' speech? Why was this speech so influential?
5. What was the influence of Pan Africanism on African national movements?
6. What has been the faith of nationalism in Africa after decolonisation?

Suggested readings

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. (*London, Verso Books, 2006).

William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).

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