

INTRODUCTION

This volume is concerned with a period of African history which has traditionally been defined by events emanating from Europe. The year 1790 roughly marks the beginnings of the effective impact of the British anti-slavery movement on West Africa, where the freed slave colony of Sierra Leone was already struggling to establish itself. Protestant missionary enterprise in West and South Africa had begun. In 1795 the British first occupied the Cape of Good Hope, while three years later Napoleon's occupation of Egypt launched the movement of 'modernization' in North Africa. In succeeding decades the impact of European traders, missionaries and consuls increasingly began to affect the internal social, political and economic balances within African societies. The choice of 1870 as the terminal date for this volume is obviously dictated by the beginnings of the European scramble for African territory which will be a major theme of volume 6. The period can thus be considered as one dominated by the theme of Africa's growing contact with Europe, as a time of slow penetration and preparation by Europeans for the coming of partition and colonial rule.

Such a perspective, however, offers a somewhat irrelevant pattern for the history of the continent as a whole. Though Bantu in South Africa, or Arabs in Algeria, felt the direct impact of European settler colonization, elsewhere in the continent the vast mass of Africans rarely saw a European, and Europe influenced their lives only indirectly or at second-hand, except for those who lived in coastal areas where there was a direct European presence. If African history in this period is to be viewed in a perspective of external impact, then that of the Arabs and Islam, rather than that of the Europeans and Christianity, must be judged the more formidable. The intermingling of the Arab-Muslim world with African culture along the frontiers of contact between north and tropical Africa was an ancient theme of African history, but after 1790 Islamic expansion became dynamic and aggressive throughout the West African savanna, across to the Nile valley, into Ethiopia and the Somali country, and down the East African coast. Egypt presented the threat of open colonial conquest to the peoples of the Nile valley and the Red Sea littoral, and by the 1870s was attempting to expand along the Somali coast, into Ethiopia, and to the shores of Lake Victoria. The

INTRODUCTION

Fulani erupted as a conquering Muslim race of empire-builders in the West African savanna. The decision of Sayyid Sa'id to move his state from Oman to Zanzibar was a stage in the creation of a vast network of commercial penetration in East Africa, whose repercussions would be felt deep into the Congo basin, north to Lake Victoria and south to Malawi. Whether Arabs in East Africa might have transformed their commercial empire into political hegemony is a question made purely speculative by the European intervention of the 1880s. The Egyptian threat collapsed with the financial bankruptcy of Turkey and Egypt in the mid-1870s. The success of the jihads of the western savanna, however, indicated that stable and viable political regimes, using Islamic political concepts, could work successfully among African peoples. Even more important in the long term was the way in which the penetration of Islam developed mixed Islamic-African cultures from the west African savanna to the Swahili coast, and penetrated substantially into areas of traditionally strong African politics such as Bunyoro and Buganda, or the Yoruba and Asante. A wide belt of peoples by 1870 were brought closer to the Muslim world than the Christian, representing bridging cultures between Arab and Black Africa. European contact in the period produced nothing on this scale, though the Cape Coloured group in South Africa, or the 'Creoles' of Sierra Leone or Liberia were comparable, though far less numerous, communities.

An Islamic perspective, however, though less 'external' to Africa than the European one, provides frameworks only for certain regions of Africa, and is irrelevant for most of southern Africa and the western Congo basin, while in the West African rain forest Islam was peripheral in this period. The ideal perspective for a volume of this kind would be a pan-African one developed from advanced historical research, in which the available sources had been exhaustively examined to the point where the historical events of the period had become an accepted corpus of 'facts', as in European history. Unfortunately African history is still in its infancy, despite the wealth of detail to be found in the chapters which follow. Some day it will become possible to range over the continent using historical typologies of states and societies which will have provided us with new regional patterns drawn from African history instead of from the geographical regions used in this volume. Some of these historical regions are already clear. The West African savanna is one used in a subsequent chapter. The rise of the Zulu and the *mfecane* created a new historical region linking Zulu, Lesotho, Ndebele, Barotse and the Ngoni of Malawi and Tanzania in a pattern

INTRODUCTION

spanning South, Central and East Africa. Likewise the Lwo-Nilotic states stretch from the Shilluk to northern Tanzania. With a deeper and firmer corpus of knowledge, it might be possible to consider groups of states which together seem to form types. Morocco, Ethiopia, Buganda, Zulu, Barotse and others might be seen as showing a pattern of developing centralization, evolving royal bureaucracies, standing armies and external expansion. Other families of states fragmented and dissolved into near-chaos in the same period under many of the same stresses, states like those of the Wolof, Yoruba, Lunda-Luba and Ovimbundu. If such types could be firmly established, comparative analysis would then become possible, but the present state of African historical research is not sufficiently advanced to permit the confident comparison of types of states or historical regions.

In the planning of this volume a perspective drawn from the observation of European or Islamic activities has been rejected. A perspective based on historical regions created by African activities, or on comparisons between types of states and societies, seemed premature, for the reasons outlined above. Instead it was decided to construct this volume, like others in the Cambridge History, as a series of studies of geographical regions, each of which spans the entire period, with certain themes, such as the activities of Africans overseas and the impact of Europeans, to be dealt with in separate chapters. A broad division of Africa into cultural regions has been attempted, with the Maghrib, Egypt and the Nile valley, Ethiopia and the Horn, East Africa from the Lakes to the Indian Ocean, West Africa forest and savanna, Congo and Central Africa, Madagascar and southern Africa considered separately through the entire period of the volume.

The evident danger in such an approach is that the history of Africa might disappear from view in a plethora of regional histories. This possibility was judged a lesser evil than that of imposing a thematic structure based on the impact of external forces. In the event, as this volume took shape, it became apparent that the effect of the regional approach was to expose similarities as well as to delineate differences, and to suggest that there are some common themes in African history in its last phase before the imposition of colonial rule. Some of these themes appear more significant than, and do not always noticeably result from, contact with Europe or Islam.

In African political history the most outstanding phenomenon of the period was the creation of states bearing many of the attributes of nationalism. The concept of the nation and nationalism in Africa has,

INTRODUCTION

because of recent political history, come to take on peculiar meanings. We are accustomed to regard the leaders of the movement against colonial rule, and the post-colonial élite of independent Africa, as the first movement of African nationalism, because they couched their political demands in terms drawn from European nationalist thought. But contemporary African nationalists are men striving to create nations, or to strengthen recently developed concepts of loyalty to political units created after 1880 by European partition. In contradistinction, loyalties to pre-colonial political units or societies are described (often with a certain contempt) as 'tribalism', whereas in reality such feelings express loyalties to a common language, common forms of social organization and a sense of belonging to a wide community which in European history would be characterized as nationalism. Many of these so-called tribes number millions of people and are larger than the smaller nationalities of Europe. Contemporary 'tribalism' may thus be regarded as the survival of pre-colonial sentiments of African forms of nationality. It would be more accurate to describe groups such as the Asante, Zulu, Ganda or Hausa-Fulani as nations, at least when discussing African history before the colonial partition.

Many of these pre-colonial nations were the result of centuries of development, based on common language and culture, and were mature before 1790. Monarchical institutions expressing a political theory which claimed that the king was descended from divine ancestors who were the 'fathers' of the society had done much to develop loyalty and solidarity in the nation. The Luba and Lunda kingdoms of West-Central Africa, the Oyo empire and the Benin kingdom in Nigeria, the rule of the *malis* in Bornu, or the regimes in the interlacustrine states such as Rwanda, Buganda and Bunyoro, are examples of such developments over several centuries. Asante and Dahomey were more recent examples of monarchies founded more on principles of *realpolitik*, which nevertheless strove to weld their peoples together with a sense of national identity. In the period after 1790 most of these states faced severe internal and external problems. A few, like Dahomey, Asante and Bornu, survived intact and strengthened by 1870, but most experienced shrinkage of territory or severe internal upheavals.

After 1790 many areas of Africa experienced political ferment in which new types of states emerged which were both nationalistic and expansionist. They varied greatly from region to region, but all displayed a common tendency not merely to form a community with common language into a state, but to use new forms of political authority

INTRODUCTION

and new military techniques to absorb and 'nationalize' other peoples of different languages and culture. Hitherto African nations had been built on pre-existing foundations of common language and feelings of kinship. The ancient empires of sub-Saharan Africa, like Mali and Songhay, were controlled by linguistic minorities which did little to impose their culture on the masses, and were content to rule subject peoples by indirect means as tributary nations. There now appeared assimilative states and empires which strove to absorb conquered and subjected peoples directly into the language and culture of the ruling group.

The nineteenth century was the age of European nationalism, and it is tempting to postulate an influence from Europe upon the African nation-builders. This can be traced in special cases, but the evidence will not support a theory of generalized European influence in all these phenomena. European pressures were important in North Africa. Napoleon's conquest of Egypt, and the penetration thereafter of British and French capital and technology in Egypt, Tunis and Tripoli, with the added threat posed by the French conquest of Algeria after 1830, all worked a ferment in North African Islamic thought. The efforts of North African rulers to secure their dynastic independence from Turkey, coupled with their failure to introduce controls which would make European finance and technology produce social benefits, produced movements of reform and discontent. In Egypt the rule of the Khedives, and the failure of their attempts to build a vast empire in the Sudan, Ethiopia and the Horn, led to the cry of 'Egypt for the Egyptians' and a nationalist movement among the army officers by the 1870s. European influence also played its part in the expansion of the Malagasy kingdom of Merina. Radama I consciously admired Napoleon, introduced European techniques and training into his army, employed a Jamaican, a Frenchman and an Englishman as generals, and brought missionaries to run schools and workshops. After his death in 1828 a long period of 'reaction' characterized by hostility to European influences was followed by a second opening of the country to Europe in 1861 under Radama II. Much weaker and more indirect European influence may have played some part in the renaissance of Ethiopia in the nineteenth century.

But the creation of the Zulu monarchy and the large number of Nguni-speaking states in southern, central and eastern Africa, the welding together of new nations such as the Sotho kingdom of Moshoeshoe or the new kingdoms of the Congo basin, the development of the increasingly homogeneous Hausa-Fulani culture in the

INTRODUCTION

Sokoto caliphate cannot be explained, even partially, by a theory of imitation of European models. Moreover, where direct European influence through missionaries, traders and consuls was strongest, as on the West African coast, this seems to have weakened rather than strengthened the building of national loyalties around language groups. English- or French-speaking Africans looked to colonial units as the bases for 'modern' types of nationality, wider than traditional language groups and built upon newly forming 'national' classes which would replace clan and lineage loyalties. The 'Creoles' of Freetown, the African clergy of Bishop Crowther's Niger Mission, or the early educated élites of Lagos, Dakar and Accra were the forerunners of the twentieth-century nationalist politicians, and like them were unwilling to identify African nationality with African languages.

The most outstanding examples of African nation-building after 1790 took place in southern Africa. Shaka's meteoric career transformed the Zulu from a petty clan of the Nguni into a fully developed nationality – so much so that the clan gave its name to the Zulu language. The military system of age regiments which made this possible was itself the instrument for assimilating conquered males and making them Zulu. In turn the Zulu spawned the new Nguni-speaking nations, which used the same regimental system and ideas of kingship developed by Shaka. Defeated rivals created new states in their retreat from Shaka's warriors, as did Sobhuza in Swaziland, or Shoshangane in Gaza. Seceding generals like Mzilikazi made new nations such as the Ndebele. In trying to stem the Zulu advance, non-Nguni welded new nations from refugee bands, the outstanding example being Moshoechhoe's Sotho. It is perhaps no coincidence that Lesotho and Swaziland are among the handful of pre-colonial African nation-states which have emerged autonomous and intact into the post-colonial period.

Elsewhere nation-building in Africa after 1790 was a less self-conscious process, developing from dynastic, religious, territorial or economic ambitions. The renaissance of Ethiopia was a remarkable achievement of the period; in 1790 scarcely to be considered as a unit and torn by rivalries of virtually independent princes, Ethiopia by 1870 was a revived nation soon to defeat Egyptian invasion. Later it would not only escape partition, but itself become one of the partitioning powers. Though in reality an empire of many nations, rulers like Tewodros and Yohannes gave Ethiopia a concept of revival which drew strength from a long historical tradition and from the existence of the Christian Church as a single Ethiopian institution. Shoans, Tigreans,

INTRODUCTION

and even portions of the Galla, as well as the ruling Amhara, increasingly developed a sense of Ethiopian patriotism. This was to present the Egyptian and later Italian invaders with a unified and vibrant resistance such as few African states could mount.

Islam in the West African savanna, like Christianity in Ethiopia, could serve as an alternative to ethnicity and as an ideology for the state. In the jihads of the Fulani reformers, the ideal was the elevation of Muslims to office, and the creation of Muslim polities and Muslim culture. In the initial stages of these movements, the Fulani seemed to regard themselves as a ruling class, but had this alone been their goal the result would have been the creation of multi-ethnic empires which reduced the nationalities to tributary status, as in ancient Mali or Songhay. Instead Fulani dominance was used to control the processes of reform, and this was interpreted as the appointment of Muslims to administer the state. The empire of al-Ḥājj 'Umar remained a Fulani conquest state, and developed little sense of nationality. In the Sokoto caliphate, however, the nineteenth century was a period in which Islamic political ideas replaced traditional Hausa political loyalties. Fulani intermarried extensively with the Hausa, and by 1870 a Fulani-Hausa culture, loyal to the regime, had come into existence. Even this is an understatement which masks more complex achievements, for large numbers of Yoruba, Nupe, Gwari and a multiplicity of smaller ethnic groups came into the caliphate and began to accept its citizenship proudly. The Hausa themselves were not a 'tribe', but a culture, divided politically before the jihad into warring states. After 1800 'becoming Hausa' was a widespread phenomenon within the Sokoto caliphate. Thus a kind of northern Nigerian nation existed in the Sokoto empire by 1870. This would not merely survive, but strengthen and develop itself during the British colonial regime, and in modern Nigeria occupy the position of a powerful pre-colonial nationality.

Whether historical connections between all these phenomena can be perceived is a somewhat speculative proposition. The Fulani jihads and the *Mfecane* in southern Africa seem worlds apart. It can be argued that the nineteenth century saw an African, or perhaps an Arab-African, pre-partition of Africa, nipped in the bud by the European scramble after 1880. But this concept is more mystical than concrete.

More closely related to the evidence is the view that state-formation was stimulated by the development of trade and commerce, and particularly by the elaboration of long distance trade routes. In this respect there was in 1790 an evident and marked contrast between West Africa

INTRODUCTION

and Bantu Africa. In West Africa long distance trade was of ancient origin, and had been elaborated and expanded over many centuries. The trade had fostered an artisan class of gold, iron and silver smiths, cloth weavers and dyers, tanners and leather workers, clustered in urban centres which may have originated as market places. Commercial entrepreneurs were also an established and long-standing element in the social structure. The long history of complex and highly organized states and empires in West Africa is closely bound up with their strategic control of long distance trade routes, their command of the major sources of production of the trade items, their desire to tax and organize traders and markets, and to provide them with security and conditions for peaceful commerce. In Bantu Africa, by contrast, long distance trade was absent in most places, and small-scale where it existed in 1790. With the exception of the gold mines of the Mutapa kingdom, and places such as Bunyoro with useful salt and iron deposits, Bantu Africa had little to offer long distance traders until the demand for slaves and ivory made its appearance after 1790.

Trading activity, trade routes, the number and size of markets, and development of professional traders and artisans underwent a remarkable expansion after 1790 in all parts of tropical Africa. In West Africa this took place upon an established base, and before 1870 it would seem that while traditional trades and routes (except for the Atlantic slave trade) held their own or expanded, the new European demands for palm oil and other tropical produce created a larger scale of economic activity and a widening of routes and markets. In general West African peoples were well able to satisfy these new demands, and to make the political adjustments which were needed. In Bantu Africa, as the authors of the chapters dealing with this area show, the impact was more fundamental, and its effects more violent and far-reaching, precisely because Bantu Africa lacked the basic structures built in West Africa over many centuries. Moreover the trade of Bantu Africa was more narrowly based on a single wasting asset, ivory, the source of which might be controlled for twenty years or so by a state, which would then have to adjust itself to command a middleman position dominating more remote suppliers, or perhaps lose the trade altogether.

In all the interior parts of the continent, Africans after 1790 began building complex trading networks to supply the demand from Europeans or Arabs on the coasts for palm oil, ivory, slaves and other exports, and to take goods from the coasts to supply the inland peoples with newly acquired wants, cheaper manufactured goods, guns and

INTRODUCTION

firearms. These developments gave the opportunity to peoples who were strategically placed across developing trade routes to tax trade and give protection of markets and routes in return. Traders would be attracted to large efficient states, like the Sokoto caliphate, which were capable of ensuring peaceful conditions for commerce. Markets could become embryonic urban centres, attracting the state's administrative attentions. Fortified royal camps would naturally attract traders looking for a secure place to buy and sell. Contact with foreigners, rarely European, sometimes Arab, but generally stranger Africans, led to the exchange of ideas, as well as of goods, and to political and military innovations.

The roots of the partition of Africa may be seen, with benefit of hindsight, in the period covered by this volume. If the larger effects of European and Arab trading demand were indirect, they began to display substantial erosions of African sovereignty, especially in coastal areas. The creation of the Zanzibar empire entailed true colonization by Arab settlers on Zanzibar and Pemba islands and in the mainland coastal strip, with the reduction of substantial numbers of Africans to slave labour status in a colonial plantation economy. Egyptian expansion foreshadowed the later endeavours of European powers, employing the paraphernalia of governors and colonial bureaucracies, and proclaiming the imperialist morality of the 'civilizing mission'. The efforts of African state-builders indicated the beginning of the end of African ethnic particularism.

The direct European partition of Africa also began towards the end of the eighteenth century, but as a slow process, quite unlike the scramble for African territory which erupted after about 1880. There is considerable irony in the process of European colonial expansion in Africa. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Atlantic slave trade grew to form an essential element underpinning the European imperial systems, without which the Caribbean or mainland American plantation colonies could not have been developed or maintained. But formal imperial rule in West Africa proved unnecessary, for African middlemen supplied the demand for slave labour with efficiency and despatch. The legacy of the slave trade was a string of European forts and castles on the West African coast. It was the emergence of anti-slave trade sentiments in Europe and North America which brought the establishment of colonies in West Africa, designed to serve aggressive attempts to force legitimate trade by political and naval pressures. Freetown was the first British colony of settlement in Africa. Later,

INTRODUCTION

Liberia and Libreville were American and French equivalents. The difficulties of expanding legitimate commerce, and the moral righteousness with which the British in particular pursued it, led to a steady erosion of African sovereignty along the West African coast. This was seldom as formal as the British annexation of Lagos in 1861, but generally took the form of diplomatic intervention, sometimes backed by naval and military threats, in the internal affairs of recalcitrant African states. In this way the Fante and other peoples of southern Ghana fell gradually into quasi-colonial dependence on the British after 1828, the French pushed their influence up the Senega valley, while the British created mixed courts and interfered in succession disputes in the states of the Niger delta.

In South Africa there were signs by the 1770s that the Dutch settler population had outgrown its simple status as a provision ground for Dutch shipping on its way to India. The British occupation of the Cape, made permanent in 1814, introduced humanitarian pressures and the missionary factor, judicial reforms, and the abolition of slavery in 1833. The response was the Great Trek, which partitioned African lands among the Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free state, established the new British colony of Natal, and left a temporary balance of power between Bantu, Boer and Briton which would last until the age of diamonds and gold.

North Africa also experienced substantial growth of direct European influence after 1790 in the shape of the French conquest of Algeria, which at first sight appears an analogous counterpart to Britain's advance in South Africa. It was, however, an aberration, caused and maintained by internal pressures within France, and thus failed to provoke a scramble for North African territory. Instead, Egypt, Tunis and Tripoli were penetrated by European finance. These states were attempting to 'modernize', but by the 1870s the results had proved disastrous, and widespread bankruptcy set the scene for the imposition of European political control in the 1880s.

The Algerian conquests, the expansion of white settlement in South Africa and the colonial enclaves in West Africa were in themselves substantial additions to the British and French colonial empires, but their impact on the African continent was by no means a dominant theme of its history before 1870. The period covered in this volume must be seen overall as the last phase of African pre-colonial history. The wider impact of Europe was its indirect influence, especially on the development of interior trade and trade routes. The rapid industrialization of