

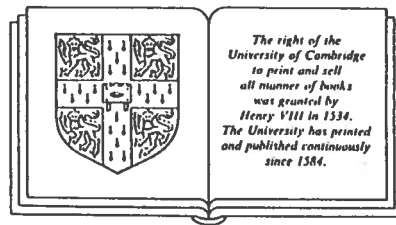
The Invention of Tradition

Edited by

ERIC HOBSBAWM

and

TERENCE RANGER



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6. The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa

TERENCE RANGER

INTRODUCTION

The 1870s, 1880s and 1890s were the time of a great flowering of European invented tradition – ecclesiastical, educational, military, republican, monarchical. They were also the time of the European rush into Africa. There were many and complex connections between the two processes. The concept of Empire was central to the process of inventing tradition within Europe itself, but the African empires came so late in the day that they demonstrate the effects rather than the causes of European invented tradition. Deployed in Africa, however, the new traditions took on a peculiar character, distinguishing them from both their European and Asian Imperial forms.

By contrast to India many parts of Africa became colonies of white settlement. This meant that the settlers had to define themselves as natural and undisputed masters of vast numbers of Africans. They drew upon European invented traditions both to define and to justify their roles, and also to provide models of subservience into which it was sometimes possible to draw Africans. In Africa, therefore, the whole apparatus of invented school and professional and regimental traditions became much more starkly a matter of command and control than it was within Europe itself. Moreover, in Europe these invented traditions of the new ruling classes were to some extent balanced by the invented traditions of industrial workers or by the invented 'folk' cultures of peasants. In Africa, no white agriculturalist saw himself as a peasant. White workers in the mines of southern Africa certainly drew upon the invented rituals of European craft unionism but they did so partly because they were rituals of exclusiveness and could be used to prevent Africans being defined as workers.

By contrast to India, once again, Africa did not offer to its conquerors the framework of an indigenous imperial state nor existing centralized rituals of honour and degree. Ready connections

between African and European systems of governance could only be made at the level of the monarchy; Africa possessed, so the colonisers thought, dozens of rudimentary kings. Hence in Africa the British made an even greater use of the idea of 'Imperial Monarchy' than they did within Britain or India. The 'theology' of an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent monarchy became almost the sole ingredient of imperial ideology as it was presented to Africans. For the Germans, too, the Kaiser stood as the dominant symbol of German rule. The French had the more difficult task of incorporating Africans into a republican tradition.

But serviceable as the monarchical ideology was to the British, it was not enough in itself to provide the theory or justify the structures of colonial governance on the spot. Since so few connections could be made between British and African political, social and legal systems, British administrators set about inventing African traditions for Africans. Their own respect for 'tradition' disposed them to look with favour upon what they took to be traditional in Africa. They set about to codify and promulgate these traditions, thereby transforming flexible custom into hard prescription.

All this is part of the history of European ideas, but it is also very much part of the history of modern Africa. These complex processes have to be understood before a historian can arrive at any understanding of the particularity of Africa before colonialism; many African scholars as well as many European Africanists have found it difficult to free themselves from the false models of colonial codified African 'tradition'. However, the study of these processes is not only a part of historiography but of history. The invented traditions imported from Europe not only provided whites with models of command but also offered many Africans models of 'modern' behaviour. The invented traditions of African societies – whether invented by the Europeans or by Africans themselves in response – distorted the past but became in themselves realities through which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed.

EUROPEAN INVENTED TRADITION AND THE AFRICAN EMPIRE

The traditions which were invented in Europe in the nineteenth century were very unevenly carried into Africa. In the 1880s and 1890s many whites were arriving in southern Africa from Europe,

Canada and Australia to work in the mines; very many Africans were being drawn into the labour migrant network. But European proletarian or artisanal invented traditions were not available to fit African workers into their place in the labour hierarchy, still less to help them define themselves as artisans or workers. Instead, the revived and invented rituals of craft unionism were used by white workers to *exclude* Africans from participation. Elaine Katz in her study of white trade unionism in South Africa shows how the white miners claimed craft status. Dominated by British and Australian miners, their union was 'organized on the basis of an exclusive membership restricted to white underground miners in possession of a blasting certificate'. Union leaders urged an often lethargic membership to follow the Craft Banner and the brass band in Labour Day processions – rituals of worker solidarity which in that context proclaimed elite status. As John X. Merriman, prime minister of Cape Colony, remarked in 1908, white workmen who had been regarded in Europe as the 'lower classes' were 'delighted on arrival here to find themselves in a position of an aristocracy of colour'.¹

An extensive recent literature has shown that in the 1880s and 1890s Africans throughout East, Central and southern Africa were becoming peasants, their agricultural surplus expropriated through unequal terms of trade, tax or rent and their subordinate role in a shared cultural system defined by mission Christianity.² But there was little opportunity for African peasants to borrow from the invented traditions by which European peasantries had sought to defend themselves against the intrusions of capitalism. Almost everywhere in Africa white agriculturalists saw themselves not as peasants but as gentlemen farmers. Only through some of the mission churches did European peasant formulations reach Africans, and only then in transformed shape.

The closest thing to a peasant missionary church was the Basel Mission. The product of Württemberg pietism, the Basel missionaries carried with them to Africa a model of rural society derived from their defence of pre-industrial German peasant life. They proclaimed, against the threat of the industrial town, an ideal 'Christian model village', a reconstituted rural 'tradition' based on 'the pre-industrial

¹ Elaine N. Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, African Studies Institute Communication, no. 3 (Univ. of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1976).

² The two most recent accounts of 'peasantization' are: Robin Palmer and Neil Parsons (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty* (London, 1978); Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London, 1979).

combination of crafts making use of natural products, [and] the extended family'. They stood for 'a social and economic setting "traditional" in the sense that there was direct relationship between local food production and local food supplies'. The original impulse of their entry into Africa was the desire to find free land to which German peasant communities could escape. In their approach to Africans they were 'a mission *from* the village *to* the village'. In Germany itself the pietist model only imperfectly reflected a past that had been much less organic and coherent. In Africa there had not existed 'villages' of this size or stability. The Basel Mission villages, so far from offering African cultivators a means of protecting their values, operated rather as mechanisms of authoritarian European control and of economic innovation.³

Few other mission churches expressed so clearly European peasant aspirations. But many carried with them features which had been produced through European ecclesiastical responses to peasant aspiration. Thus the Church of England had responded to the tensions of an increasingly class-based rural society by developing rituals of 'traditional' community, and now it introduced these harvest festivals and rogation-tide processions through the fields into Africa.⁴ The Roman Catholic Church had responded to the anarchic proliferation of local peasant shrines, cults and pilgrimages by authorizing a popular Marian veneration, and centralizing it at a few shrines to which the flow of pilgrims was directed.⁵ Now into Africa were introduced replicas of Fatima and Lourdes. Such centralization of ritual and cult, introduced before there was any African popular Christianity for them to respond to, acted rather to circumscribe than to stimulate African peasant imagination.

It was not the invented traditions of European workers and peasants, but those of gentlemen and professional men which were most important to whites in Africa, and which had the greatest impact upon blacks. There were two main reasons for the importance of these neo-traditions. By the 1880s and 1890s there was a surplus

³ Paul Jenkins, 'Towards a Definition of the Pietism of Wurtemberg as a Missionary Movement', African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, Conference on Whites in Africa (Oxford, Sept. 1978).

⁴ James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-1875* (Oxford, 1976).

⁵ Alphonse Dumont, 'La Religion - Anthropologie Religieuse', in Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.), *Faire de l'Histoire, Nouvelles Approches* (Paris, 1974), ii, pp. 107-36.

of neo-traditional capital in Europe waiting to be invested overseas. Production of men for service in the extended governing class of industrial democracy had been almost too successful. Younger sons, well-born orphans, the sons of the clergy had experienced the 'traditions' of the public school, the regiment, the university, but were not guaranteed secure advancement in British administrative hierarchies. Such men were deployed in Africa as soldiers, hunters, traders, store-keepers, concession-seekers, policemen, missionaries. Very often they found themselves engaged in tasks which by definition would have been menial in Britain and which only the glamour of empire building made acceptable; the emphasis which they placed on their neo-traditional title to gentility became more intense.

The second reason was that there was a desperate need in the last decades of the nineteenth century to make European activity in Africa more respectable and ordered. While life was being restructured in Britain itself, with the rise of the bureaucracy and of the service traditions in school, army, church and even commerce, most European activity in tropical Africa, whether official or unofficial, had remained tatty, squalid, rough and inefficient. With the coming of formal colonial rule it was urgently necessary to turn the whites into a convincing ruling class, entitled to hold sway over their subjects not only through force of arms or finance but also through the prescriptive status bestowed by neo-tradition.

Steps were therefore taken to ensure that the military and administrative services in Africa were related to the dominant traditions. Much use was made in the early period of colonial administration of officers of the newly efficient and honourable British army. Lugard relied upon them for 'gentlemanly' administrators in Nigeria. In 1902 Lady Lugard, writing from Lokoja on the Niger, was able to describe a veritable festival of neo-tradition. To celebrate Coronation Day - the day of the first elaborate 'traditional' coronation:

we had the table patriotically decorated with roses... and we drank the King's health, with the band playing 'God Save the King', and a black crowd of servants and others clustering round the open windows ejaculating, 'Good King! Good King!'. I was myself struck with the thought as I looked down the table and noted the fine type of English gentleman's face which presented itself in rows on either side, that it really is a phenomenon of our Empire that we should be able in the heart of Africa to bring together for dinner

twenty well-bred English officers of as fine a type as you would hope to meet in the most civilised centres of London.⁶

Meanwhile the educational system of England began to turn out civilian colonial administrators. The headmaster of Harrow declared that

an English headmaster, as he looks to the future of his pupils, will not forget that they are destined to be the citizens of the greatest empire under heaven; he will teach them patriotism... He will inspire them with faith in the divinely ordained mission of their country and their race.⁷

The recruiters for the colonial service testified to the success of these endeavours. 'As to the Public Schools', wrote Sir Ralph Furse, one of the chief architects of the colonial service,

they are vital. We could not have run the show without them. In England universities train the mind; the Public Schools train character and teach leadership.⁸

But the universities too came to play their part, and soon

the District Commissioner had to be a man of many parts. To qualify for appointment to the administrative branch of the Colonial Service he had to hold an honours degree in Arts from a recognised university... It helped the applicant's cause if, in addition to a good degree, he had some kind of athletic record.⁹

All this produced administrators who ran their districts like lordly prefects, inventing their own little traditions to keep the fags on their toes. 'D was in the habit', we are told of the district commissioner of Tunduru in southern Tanganyika,

of going for a long walk every evening, wearing a hat. When, towards sunset, he came to the point of turning for home he would hang his hat on a convenient tree and proceed on his way hatless. The first African who passed that way after him and saw the hat was expected to bring it to D's house and hand it over to his servants, even if he was going in the opposite direction with a long journey ahead of him. If he ignored the hat he would be haunted by the fear that D's intelligence system would catch up with him.¹⁰

⁶ Margery Perham, *Lugard: The Years of Authority* (London, 1960), p. 80.

⁷ Cited by Cynthia Behrman, 'The Mythology of British Imperialism, 1890-1914' (Univ. of Boston doctoral dissertation, 1965), p. 47.

⁸ Sir Ralph Furse, quoted by R. Heussler, *Yesterday's Rulers: The Making of the British Colonial Service* (London, 1963), p. 82; see also, D. C. Coleman, 'Gentlemen and Players', *Economic History Review*, xxvi (Feb. 1973).

⁹ E. K. Lumley, *Forgotten Mandate: A British District Officer in Tanganyika* (London, 1976), p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

But it was not enough in itself to ensure the gentility of soldiers and administrators in Africa. There was also a need to believe that many of the white settlers were also actually or potentially inheritors of the neo-traditions of governance. In the end some settler communities were successful enough to set up in Africa itself replicas of the schools whose traditions validated the British governing class. Thus in 1927

a plan was discussed with Eton College to found the 'Kenya Public School', under the joint auspices of Winchester and Eton, with reciprocal staffing arrangements and scholarships for the children of poorer white parents. After a trip to Britain to test support for the project, the Director of Education decided to ask 'all the leading public schools to present us with pictures of their school buildings so that the boys may be constantly reminded of the great schools at home and old boys visiting the school may likewise remember their Alma Mater'.

As a finishing touch the school was to be named after King George V, 'as a reminder to the backward races of their participation in the Empire'.¹¹ But to begin with the transformation was brought about mainly by a complex system of reformulations which affected the way in which white men in Africa were regarded and the way in which they regarded themselves.

This process operated in two ways. The fact that the surplus of neo-traditional capital was being invested in Africa, combined with the fortune-hunting involvement of members of high society, made it possible for commentators to stress the gentlemanly element among white settlers, and to suggest that the colonial experience in itself fitted the rest to acquire gentility. Lord Bryce was struck 'by the large proportion of well-mannered and well-educated men whom one came across' in the 'tropical wilderness' of Rhodesia in the mid-1890s, and added that the colonial experience fostered 'personality developing itself under simple yet severe conditions, fitted to bring out the real force of a man'. In such circumstance Bryce was prepared to condone the rather vulgar neo-traditional enthusiasms which he himself deplored in England. He was much struck by white southern African enthusiasm for cricket, 'the national game'.

Even one who thinks that in England the passion for athletic sports has gone beyond all reasonable limits, and has become a serious injury to education and to the taste for intellectual pleasures, may

¹¹ M. G. Redley, 'The Politics of a Predicament: The White Community in Kenya, 1918-32' (Univ. of Cambridge doctoral dissertation, 1976), pp. 124, 125.

find in the character of the climate a justification for devotion to cricket... Our countrymen are not to be scared by the sun from the pursuit of the national game. They are as much Englishmen in Africa as in England.¹²

Alongside this process of affirming and making gentility there ran another – a redefinition of occupations, so that it became gentlemanly to be a store-keeper or a prospector. Young gentleman who migrated to Rhodesia or to Kenya may have dreamt of one day establishing a landed estate, but in the early days running a farm store and buying African agricultural produce was far more profitable than trying to grow crops oneself. It was in any case assumed that English-speaking 'farmers' would be gentleman farmers, not working the land themselves, but drawing on their neo-traditional powers of command in order to manage labour. So to begin with they relied on African – or Afrikaner – knowledge of the land and creamed off the surplus of African peasant producers through trade. By so doing they performed a vital function since the labour forces of the early colonial economies depended entirely on African produced food. Hence, for a time, it was gentlemanly to run a store or to buy grain and cattle from Africans.¹³ Lord Bryce found 'cultivated and thoughtful minds' in young white store-keepers in Rhodesia in 1896, or in prospectors searching for gold. The atmosphere of these early days – and the buoyancy of the neo-traditions of gentility – emerges strikingly from Colin Harding's autobiography. Harding grew up as the son of the lord of Montacute House, a young man whose main concern was with the heroics of the hunting field. But

the death of my father revealed the unwelcome fact that neither myself nor other members of my family was as opulent as expected... Neither I nor my brothers had any profession, nor yet the means to qualify for one.

Still, 'hunting teaches a man a lot'. Harding arrived in Bulawayo in 1894 to find that 'farming was a washout' and 'men like myself were a drug on the market'. 'Experienced and reliable storekeepers', however, 'could command almost any wage they desired'. But the young gentleman did not go under. Harding set out with an old friend from the hunting field to prospect for gold. Soon he found himself

¹² James Bryce, *Impressions of South Africa* (London, 1897), pp. 232, 384–5.

¹³ For the reliance of Rhodesian whites on African food production, see Palmer, 'The Agricultural History of Southern Rhodesia', in Palmer and Parsons (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty*.

set to dig a mine shaft. 'It was useless for me to remind my friend that I knew little or nothing about sinking a shaft, for he shut me up with the observation that digging out gold was much the same as digging out a fox.' Soon Harding was in the British South Africa Police and on his way to a properly gentlemanly administrative career.¹⁴

Fairly soon conditions in Rhodesia and Kenya developed towards a more securely gentlemanly society. Asians and Greeks and Jews took over the task of store-keepers and 'kaffir-traders'; political action deliberately undercut African peasant production and put labour at the disposal of the gentleman farmer. M. G. Redley thus describes the nature of Kenyan white society just after the first world war.

The main source of British immigrants with capital after the war was what has been called the 'new upper middle class'. Family wealth derived from enterprise in manufacturing, commerce and the professions had blurred the class distinctions of Victorian society. Public school education had provided the basis of a background for those who could lay no direct claim to gentility common with those who could. The background to post-war settlers owed much more to the mill and the factory owner's mansion, the rural rectory and the Indian Army officers' mess than to aristocratic lineage... However, gentility was a way of life with which they felt a close identity and in which they took an obsessive interest... The upper middle class complexion of European settlement was its greatest recommendation for those who felt their status and individuality threatened in British society.¹⁵

Redley describes how neo-traditions functioned to hold together the small and dispersed white rural society. Team games brought neighbours together regularly in an approved and structured way. They also allowed for symbolic expressions of protest in an idiom familiar to both settlers and administrators. Redley describes a 'fancy-dress charity football match' in Nairobi in 1907 patronized by the governor, which

was disrupted by leading settlers dressed as colonial officials with rows of medals made of tin lids and red tape who pegged out quarantine, forest, native and game reserves until the entire pitch was 'out of bounds'.¹⁶

¹⁴ Colin Harding, *Far Bugles* (London, 1933), p. 22.

¹⁵ M. G. Redley, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ M. G. Redley, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

On the other hand, every project to increase the numbers of the white settler population by bringing in thousands of small yeomen or artisans foundered on the determination of those who controlled Kenyan society to keep it in the hands of 'the public school educated with a patrimony, a military pension, investment income or an assurance of family support'.

BRINGING AFRICANS INTO THE TRADITIONS OF GOVERNANCE

The radical Kenyan journalist, J. K. Robertson, was savagely critical of Kenyan whites because he believed them to obstruct productive industry. He created a fictional settler career history to make his point.

John Smith, a London warehouse clerk, finds a clerking job in a certain office in British East Africa. John Smithers-Smith laboriously pores over books and ledgers. 'Tis the same John, only more so... He has realized the value of a double-barrelled name... John goes the pace. It is the custom of the country. He seldom pays his bills... He lives on chits and the wonderful stories of the blue blood of his ancestors. John is quite an institution in the land [and] insinuates himself into the very heart of Nairobi society.¹⁷

More generally, the strength of European invented traditions of governance in colonial Africa helped to produce soldiers and administrators and settlers dedicated to the 'feudal-patriarchal' ethic rather than to the 'capitalist-transformative' one.

But in many ways this is very misleading. The invented traditions of nineteenth-century Britain were a way of running an immensely complex industrial society, a way of managing and accommodating change. In Africa, too, whites drew on invented tradition in order to derive the authority and confidence that allowed them to act as agents of change. Moreover, insofar as they were consciously applied to Africans, the invented traditions of nineteenth-century Europe were seen precisely as agencies of 'modernization'.

There were two very direct ways in which Europeans sought to make use of their invented traditions to transform and modernize African thought and conduct. One was the acceptance of the idea that *some* Africans could become members of the governing class of colonial Africa, and hence the extension to such Africans of training

¹⁷ Roger van Zwannenberg, 'Robertson and the *Kenya Critic*', in K. King and A. I. Salim (eds.), *Kenyan Historical Biographies* (Nairobi, 1971), pp. 145-6.

in a neo-traditional context. The second – and more common – was an attempt to make use of what European invented traditions had to offer in terms of a redefined relationship between leader and led. The regimental tradition, after all, defined the roles of both officers and men; the great-house tradition of rural gentility defined the roles of both masters and servants; the public school tradition defined the roles of both prefects and fags. All this might be made use of to create a clearly defined hierarchical society in which Europeans commanded and Africans accepted commands, but both within a shared framework of pride and loyalty. Thus if the traditions which workers and peasants had made for themselves in Europe did not exercise much influence on Africans under colonialism, invented European traditions of subordination exercised a very considerable influence indeed.

The best illustration of the first idea – that some Africans might be turned into governors by exposure to British neo-tradition – is perhaps the famous school, King's College, Budo, in Uganda. The fullest account is by G. P. McGregor, who perceptively points out that the provision of elementary education was only just being taken seriously in Britain itself in the 1870s as part of the process of bringing the majority of the population to its place in the vocational and educational hierarchy. Hence the spread of elementary schools in Buganda at the end of the nineteenth century was a remarkably little-delayed extension of the same process to the African empire. But in Buganda, while this sort of education seemed appropriate enough to the peasant cultivator majority, the Anglican missionaries did not feel that it was suitable for the Ganda aristocracy.

So far little or nothing had been done for the children of the upper classes [wrote Bishop Tucker], who in many respects were worse off than the children of the peasants. We felt strongly that if the ruling classes of the country were to exercise in the days to come an influence for good upon their people and to have a sense of responsibility towards them, it was essential that something should be done for the education of these neglected children, on the soundest possible lines... by the discipline of work and games in a boarding school so as to build character as to enable the Baganda to take their proper place in the administrative, commercial and industrial life of their own country.¹⁸

In short, in Buganda the missionaries aimed to place on top of

¹⁸ G. P. McGregor, *Kings College, Budo: The First Sixty Years* (London, 1967), pp. 6, 16.

British-style elementary education a structure of British-style secondary education of a neo-traditional kind. They were always clear that their aim was 'the adaptation of our English Public School method to the African scene'. They succeeded to an extraordinary extent King's College was built on the Coronation Hill of the Baganda kings, so that 'both Coronation Services of this century have been held' in the college chapel; 'though some of the traditional ceremonies were observed', the service 'followed many of the features of the English coronation service'.¹⁹ The English Public School house spirit [was] quickly established', and the Gandan members of Turkey House petitioned that its name be changed to Canada House so as to go with England House, South Africa House and Australia House – Turkey seemed 'distinctly unimperial'. The school motto, again said to have been chosen at the request of the pupils, was a Gandan version of Cecil Rhodes's dying words, 'So little done – so much to do.'

McGregor quotes a letter from a Gandan pupil written in the first year of the school's existence, which enables us to see this remarkable process of socialization through Gandan eyes.

First in the mornings when we have got up we arrange properly our beds. If you do not arrange it properly there is judgement or rebuke when the Europeans make a visit... On the front of our cups there is the likeness of a lion. That it is by which the scholars of Budo may be known. And no-one may eat any thing in the cubicle, nor coffee which they chew, but only in the verandah where food is eaten. We sing one hymn and pray and then we learn English... When we come out at four, we go and play football, on one side eleven and on the other side eleven, and we arrange every man in his place, goal-keeper and back men and ba-half-back and ba-forward.²⁰

Everyone agreed that Budo had managed to create that intangible thing, 'the spirit of the school'. It was present at Budo at its best, as we have breathed it in England after generations of experiment – the spirit of the team, of discipline, of local patriotism – and very remarkable has been the translation of it into the heart of Africa.

Sir Phillip Mitchell thought that Budo was 'one of the few places here which has a soul'. Expatriate teachers later came to criticize 'the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35–6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

Budonian habit of defending worthless traditions merely on the grounds that they have always been there'.²¹

Whatever the tensions of doing so within the imperial framework which so firmly subordinated the Gandan ruling class to British administrative officers, and the Gandan monarchy to the imperial crown, there is no doubt that the missionaries created at Budo a successful complex of new traditions, which worked themselves out parallel to an increasing ceremonialism of the role of the Kabaka and the other Ugandan kings so as to achieve a synthesis not unlike that accomplished in nineteenth-century England. The Golden Jubilee ceremonies of the college – 'We had four Kings at the high table' – were also a ritual expression of the commitment of a large section of the Gandan ruling class to these by now hallowed invented traditions.²² But the Budo experiment was not to become a general model; the British themselves came to regret their original alliance with the Ganda chiefs, and to believe that real modernizing change could not be brought about through their agency. Real modernizing change would be the product of European commanders loyally supported by African subordinates.

Various traditions of subordination were available. One was the tradition of the hierarchy of the great house. Part of the self-image of the European in Africa was his prescriptive right to have black servants – at the height of the labour crisis in the South African mines, there were more black men employed in Johannesburg as domestic servants than as mine workers.²³ In 1914 Frank Weston, bishop of Zanzibar, contrasted Islamic community in Africa with Christian differentiation. The African Christian, he wrote, has nothing to adhere to but 'a few Europeans who pass him in the street; he is beneath them; they may be kind to him; he may perhaps be a steward in their dining room, or a butler... but Brotherhood? Well, it is not yet'.²⁴ There was no impulse towards 'Brotherhood' in colonial Africa. For most Europeans the favoured image of their relationship with Africans was that of paternal master and loyal servant. It was an image readily transferred to industrial employment. Throughout southern Africa, African employees were not defined as

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 117, 124.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²³ Charles van Onselen, 'The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand, 1890–1914' (unpublished MS.).

²⁴ Frank Weston, 'Islam in Zanzibar Diocese', *Central Africa*, xxxii, no. 380 (Aug. 1914).

workers but instead controlled and disciplined under the terms of Masters and Servants Acts.

Few whites in Africa, however, maintained domestic establishments of a size which would have allowed the full 'traditional' panoply of the British servant hierarchy. A more elaborate application of European neo-traditions of subordination came with the restructuring of African armies. In Sylvanus Cooke's fascinating account of this process, the French emerge as the first and most imaginative manipulators of the military invented tradition. Faideherbe in the 1850s disbanded his demoralized pressed levies and attracted African volunteers with 'seduisant' uniforms, modern arms, Koranic oaths of allegiance and crash courses in the military glory of the French tradition.

It was even suggested from Paris, as a means of instilling at an early age a sense of the military mode in the young Africans and preparing them for a military career, that the children of the *tirailleurs* should be provided uniforms and miniature equipment similar to those of their parents.²⁶

The British were slower to follow such a policy. But in the face of the French threat they also moved to regularize their African regiments. Lugard devoted his meticulous passion for detail to the transformation of his Nigerian levies from a 'rabble' to a disciplined and effective fighting force. Soon he came to esteem them highly; official praise was lavished on them for their conduct in campaigns in the Gold Coast and northern Nigeria; a regimental tradition was being built up as rapidly as the spirit of Budo. Lugard's administration was largely staffed by army officers; in East Africa, too, 'governments were largely military in character during these early years', and Professor George Shepperson has commented on

the narrowness of the line between the civilian and the military... It was through its forces as much as its missions that European culture was brought to the indigenous inhabitants of British Central Africa.²⁸

This kind of admittance of Africans into the European military tradition had both the same ambiguities and the same degree of success as did the operation of the spirit of Budo. Sometimes the two

²⁶ S. J. Cooke, 'Origins and pre-1914 Character of the Colonial Armies in West Africa' (Univ. of California, Los Angeles, colloquium paper, 1972).

²⁸ George Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa: A Review Article', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, no. 26 (Dec. 1959), pp. 23-33.

forms of socialization came together, as in the case of Kabaka Edward Mutesa. Mutesa became Kabaka while still a schoolboy at Budo, and remained there to complete his studies; his coronation was solemnized in the school chapel; he led the Golden Jubilee procession. But he was also admitted into the regimental tradition of the British army.

He joined the Cambridge Officers' Corps soon after arrival at the University and became an officer... He then formally applied to join the army, specifying the Grenadier Guards as his first choice... It was King George VI who, as a personal gesture of good-will, suggested that Mutesa be made a captain. Mutesa went to Buckingham Palace for the ceremony.²⁷

Ali Mazrui remarks that the Kabakaship had become 'an Anglo-African institution', a fact brought out by nothing so clearly as in the ceremonies which attended Mutesa's death. He was given two funerals - one in London and one in Kampala, both marked by full military honours.

There had been a last post in the first burial of Mutesa in London in 1969. On that occasion the military component of the burial was handled by the British Grenadier Guards. Now [in Kampala] the Grenadier Guards were only part of the ceremony. The bulk of the military component was the Ugandan army. And yet the universe of discourse between that trumpet in London in 1969 and the trumpet in the Kasubi tombs in Uganda in 1971, was indeed a shared universe.²⁸

But the acceptance of Mutesa into the officer ranks was a rare exception. Much more general was the production of men like Mutesa's successor as president of Uganda, Idi Amin. Mazrui argues that the rise of Amin and his 'lumpen-militariat' can be seen as a revival of pre-colonial military traditions, in abeyance since the colonial conquest. But in fact, Amin's career provides us with an excellent example of socialization through the colonial army. As Mazrui tells us, when Amin was recruited into the King's African Rifles in 1946, he showed

all the signs of colonial conditioning into dependency... Within seven years he was promoted to lance corporal and was displaying the qualities which so endeared him to his British superiors - instant

²⁷ Ali. A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy* (London, 1975), p. 173.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 190, 191.

obedience, fierce regimental pride, reverence towards Britain and the British, a uniform which crackled with razor sharp starched creases and boots with toe-caps like black mirrors.²⁹

Black mirrors of English privates and non-commissioned officers were precisely what African soldiers were intended to be. As Keegan has shown, European armies had drawn freely on the dress and romantic aura of the 'warrior' races they encountered. They do not seem to have done this in Africa, nor as a result of their military encounters with Africans. It was left to Baden-Powell, a critic of the drill-square mentality, to draw on Matabele scouting abilities so as to provide white youth with a flexible training, richly situated in Kiplingesque myths of the jungle. For a long while southern Africa presented the paradox of young Africans being trained into regimental rigidities and young whites being trained in bush-craft.³⁰

Admittance of Africans into what were intended as replicas of the neo-traditions of Britain did not end with butlering or with schools like Budo or with recruitment into the army. Bishop Weston's hypothetical African Christian, in search of Brotherhood, might if he were very fortunate 'conceivably learn to be a typist',³¹ and many mission-educated Africans were taken into the lower ranks of the bureaucratic hierarchy. African clerks came to value the rubber stamp and the row of pens in the breast pocket; African dance societies made use of purloined rubber stamps to authenticate their correspondence with each other, and danced in full bureaucratic as well as military array.³² Graham Greene's madman on the river boat, with his sheaves of papers and his constant scribbling of minutes as he strove to set an uncaring world to rights, was a tribute paid to the imaginative power – if also a dramatization of the impotence – of the forms of colonial bureaucracy. And, of course, the African Christians, who were taken up as clergy into the imperfect brotherhood of the Christian churches themselves, were trained to perform the invented and re-invented rituals of nineteenth-century European ecclesiology.

There was a rough periodization in all this. European invented traditions were important for Africans in a series of overlapping

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 206–7.

³⁰ For a discussion of the ambiguities of setting up Boy Scout troops in Africa and then seeking to exclude Africans from them, see Terence Ranger, 'Making Northern Rhodesia Imperial: Variations on a Royal Theme, 1924–1938', *African Affairs*, lxxix, no. 316 (July 1980).

³¹ Weston, 'Islam in Zanzibar Diocese', p. 200.

³² Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa* (London, 1975).

phases. The military neo-tradition, with its clearly visible demarcations of hierarchy and its obvious centrality to the workings of early colonialism, was the first powerful influence. Its impact reached a climax – particularly in eastern Africa – with the campaigns of the first world war. Thereafter, especially in British Africa, the military presence declined.³³ The military mode became less influential than the modes of missionary employment or the bureaucratic build-up of Africans in state and business employment. But the debate over the sequence of influence or the debate over which neo-tradition was in the end most influential – a debate that sways to and fro as African kings, surrounded by neo-traditional trappings, dominate some new African states; as bureaucratic élites triumph in others; and Mazrui's 'lumpen-militariat' control yet others – is less important in the end than an assessment of the overall effect of these processes of neo-traditional socialization.

This was surely very large indeed. European invented traditions offered Africans a series of clearly defined points of entry into the colonial world, though in almost all cases it was entry into the subordinate part of a man/master relationship. They began by socializing Africans into acceptance of one or other readily available European neo-traditional modes of conduct – the historical literature is full of Africans proud of having mastered the business of being a member of a regiment or having learnt how to be an effective practitioner of the ritual of nineteenth-century Anglicanism. The process often ended with serious challenges to the colonial power, often couched in terms of the socializing neo-traditions themselves. (The boys at Budo moved from loyal celebration of the 'modernized' coronation ceremony of Edward Mutesa to riot and protest because the Kabaka was not treated by the authorities as though he was a 'proper' king.) This is a pattern worked out by Martin Channock for the school-teacher traditionalists of Nyasaland, and in greater detail by John Iliffe for Tanganyika.³⁴ In its varying forms it underlay a good deal of what we call nationalism. It is distressing, but not in the least surprising, that Kenneth Kaunda in his search for a personal ideology to help him on the road to national leadership found solace and inspiration in Arthur Mee's *Books for Boys*.³⁵

³³ Tony Clayton, 'Concepts of Power and Force in Colonial Africa, 1919–1939', Institute of Commonwealth Studies seminar (Univ. of London, Oct. 1978).

³⁴ Martin Channock, 'Ambiguities in the Malawian Political Tradition', *African Affairs*, lxxiv, no. 296 (July 1975); John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge, 1979).

³⁵ Kenneth Kaunda, *Zambia Shall be Free* (London, 1962), p. 31.

If we return for a moment to the question of 'modernization' through the use of European invented traditions, both their advantages and their limitations to the colonisers become plain. They *did* serve to separate out Africans into relatively specialized categories – the askari, the teacher, the servant and so on – and to provide a rudimentary professionalization of African workers. Embedded in the neo-traditions of governance and subordination, there were very clear-cut requirements for the observance of industrial time and work discipline – the neatly, even fanatically, prescribed segments of the schoolboys' day at Budo; the drill square as source and symbol of discipline and punctuality. On the other hand, the invented traditions which were introduced to Africans were those of governance rather than of production. Industrial workers may have been categorized as 'servants', but for a very long time the true domestic servant commanded a much greater prestige and could manipulate the reciprocities contained in the master/servant relationship from which the industrial worker was cut off. Industrial workers and peasants never had access to the clear-cut and prestigious ceremonials of the soldier, the teacher, the clerk – except insofar as they assumed them for themselves in the costumes of carnival or competitive dance.³⁶ And as we have seen, where craft union traditions did exist Africans were specifically excluded from them. African industrial workers were left to work out for themselves a consciousness and mode of behaviour appropriate to their condition.³⁷

This was one of the many reasons for the relatively high prestige among Africans in colonial Africa of non-productive employment. And at the same time, if the new traditions of subordination had begun 'usefully' to define certain sorts of specializations, they gave rise later to profoundly conservative conceptualizations of these specializations, making African teachers, ministers and soldiers notoriously resistant to subsequent attempts at modernizing change.

³⁶ Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa*.

³⁷ For a discussion of recent literature on African worker consciousness see, Peter Gutkind, Jean Copans and Robin Cohen, *African Labour History* (London, 1978), introduction; John Higginson, 'African Mine Workers at the Union Minière du Haut Katanga', *American Historical Association* (Dec. 1979).

NEW TRADITIONS OF MONARCHY IN COLONIAL AFRICA

Colonial governments in Africa did not wish to rule by a constant exercise of military force and they needed a wider range of collaborators than those Africans who were brought into the neo-traditions of subordination. In particular, they needed to collaborate with chiefs, headmen and elders in the rural areas. This collaboration was in essence a very practical affair of exchanged benefits.³⁸ But the colonial rulers felt the need for a shared ideology of Empire which could embrace whites and blacks alike, dignify the practicalities of collaboration and justify white rule. The British and the Germans found this in the concept of Imperial Monarchy.

In German East Africa the notion of the centrality of monarchy had two aspects. On the one hand, the Germans believed that Africans themselves had a rudimentary idea of kingship and especially in the first stages of interaction with African rulers they were prepared to play up to African assertions of kingliness and to decorate them with some of the stage props of nineteenth-century European ceremonial drama. Thus a German officer reported to the Kaiser in 1890 that he had presented gifts from the emperor to Chief Rindi of the Chagga: 'While the soldiers presented arms, I... encircled his shoulders with the coronation cloak... from the Berlin Opera House and placed on his head the helmet under which Niemann once sang Lohengrin'.³⁹ On the other hand, the Germans believed that African ideas of personal rule by a monarch could be infinitely enlarged so that the figure of an all-powerful Kaiser could come to personify German imperial authority. As John Iliffe tells us:

The ceremony that epitomised German rule was the annual celebration of the Kaiser's birthday. At every district office the askaris paraded before a massive crowd. After inspection and drill, the Senior German official addressed the gathering, extolling his Emperor's virtues and leading a three-fold 'Hurrah' for Kaiser and Reich. And then the people danced, in circles strewn across the parade ground.⁴⁰

But it was the British who carried the monarchical ideology to its

³⁸ For a recent account of collaborative exchanges see, Ronald Robinson, 'European Imperialism and Indigenous Reactions in British West Africa, 1890–1914', in H. L. Wesseling (ed.), *Expansion and Reaction: Essays in European Expansion and Reactions in Asia and Africa* (Leiden, 1978).

³⁹ Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 237–8.

greatest elaborations. The British king had nothing like the very real executive power of the German Kaiser. But the British king/emperor was spoken of more in mystical than in practical terms. J. E. Hine, bishop of Northern Rhodesia, found the coronation of King George V 'a great ceremonial act of religion'. Aspects of the ritual, he found 'too theatrical and suggestive of a scene at the opera', and there was 'far too much music "especially written for the occasion", modern music, to me noisy and unmelodious'. But

as a whole the Coronation was a splendid sight. It was no mere piece of medieval pageantry, out of touch with modern life and the spirit of the twentieth century; no theatrical display of well staged magnificence... It was symbolism of the utmost splendour, but there was reality behind it all – the sacred unction of the Lord's anointed, an act quasi-sacramental in character, followed by the laying on the head of this one man of the Crown which is the outward sign of the awful but grand responsibility of the Government of all the English people and of the many nations beyond the seas which owe allegiance to the English King.⁴¹

In northern Rhodesia itself, the acting administrator summoned all the Ngoni chiefs and their people to a Coronation Day fête; the 'native police' band played; the Anglican 'representative robed and said the special prayer chosen for the occasion, standing near the saluting flag'. The enraptured missionary reported on the celebrations of that evening.

In the valley were four huge bonfires, around which some hundreds of dusky natives capered and danced. Some had bells on their feet, and almost all carried knobkerries... The Europeans, sheltered by a grass screen, sat in a semi-circle, and between them and the fire danced the inhabitants of the soil... Then the police band came forward and in the dying flames regaled us with 'The March of the Men of Harlech', 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and other tunes.⁴²

It was not only the established church, however, which spoke of the monarchy in religious terms. Secular administrators, in fact, carried the discourse still further. Their speeches presented to African audiences a king who was almost divine; omnipotent, omniscient and

⁴¹ J. E. Hine, 'The Coronation of King George V', *Central Africa*, xxix, no. 344 (Aug. 1911), pp. 200–1.

⁴² A. G. De La P., 'How the Angoni kept Coronation Day', *Central Africa*, xxx, no. 345 (Sept. 1911), pp. 242–3.

omnipresent. A series of official speeches to the Sotho, for example, stressed the royal knowledge of their situation, the royal concern for their well-being and the royal responsibility for decisions which in reality had been taken by the cabinet. In 1910 Prince Arthur of Connaught told the Sotho Paramount Chief that the new King George V 'remembers the representations you made to His late Majesty, King Edward', and that he knew 'that, if and when, He decides that the time has come for Basutoland to be included in the South African Union you will loyally obey His decision'.⁴³ In 1915 Lord Buxton assured the Paramount Chief that 'His Majesty never ceases to take an interest in the welfare of the Basuto', and that he appreciated their support for 'the great armies which the King has sent out against His enemies'.⁴⁴ In 1925 the Prince of Wales told the Sotho that he was

very pleased that you still cherish the memory of my great-grandmother Queen Victoria... She is no longer with us but the King continues to watch over you with fatherly care. You must show yourselves worthy of his protection by listening to the words of the officers he has appointed to guide and educate you.⁴⁵

And in 1927 Colonel Amery, secretary of state for the colonies, told the Sotho that 'His Majesty the King who has sent me on this journey through His dominions takes the keenest interest in every one of His people – small and great'.⁴⁶

When the king addressed the Sotho directly – as in the Royal Message of 1910 – the officials put into his mouth words of a high patriarchal tone:

When a child is in trouble he will go to his father, and his father after hearing all about the matter will decide what must be done. Then the child must trust and obey his father, for he is but one of a large family and his father has had great experience in settling the troubles of his older children and is able to judge what is best not only for the young child but for the peace and advantage of the whole family... The Basuto nation is as a very young child among the many peoples of the British Empire.⁴⁷

It was little wonder in view of all this that old Chief Jonathan greeted

⁴³ Prince Arthur of Connaught, reply to Address, 9 Oct. 1910, file S3/28/2/2, National Archives, Lesotho, Maseru.

⁴⁴ Lord Buxton, reply to Address, Apr. 1915, S3/28/2/3, Maseru.

⁴⁵ Prince of Wales, reply to Address, 28 May 1925, S3/28/1/9, Maseru.

⁴⁶ Colonel Amery, reply to Address, Aug. 1927, S3/28/1/12, Maseru.

⁴⁷ 'The King's Message', Oct. 1910, S3/28/2/2, Maseru.

the visit of the Prince of Wales to Basutoland in 1925 in terms which struck some of the missionaries present as almost blasphemous:

To me this is a red-letter day. I rejoice on this day like old Simeon of the Holy Scriptures who rejoiced because he had seen the Lord Jesus before he had slept in the graves of his fathers.⁴⁸

Everywhere else in British Africa the same rhetoric was employed. An acute observer of the governor's indabas with chiefs in northern Rhodesia in the 1920s remarked that they were 'designed as a parade (in the Kintergarten sense) of His Majesty's benignity towards his untutored African subjects'.⁴⁹ Certainly the governor was very much concerned to derive his authority and that of the district administrators directly from the King.

All you here are one people – subjects of the King of England. It is the King's wish that all his subjects shall live together in peace... It is to ensure this that Governors are sent out... The Governor who lives in Livingstone and has a large country to administer cannot always be in one place but the District Commissioners... are representatives of the Governor and the King, and their work is that the King's wishes should be carried out.⁵⁰

To give credibility to these claims colonial administrators regarded the ceremonial side of the monarchy as crucially important. When in 1919 the Paramount Chief of Basutoland petitioned for permission to visit the Vatican as well as Buckingham Palace on his journey to Europe, the high commissioner feared that he 'might be unduly impressed by the pomp and state of reception at Vatican and might form conclusion that Pope was more important than the King!' Permission was refused.⁵¹ When the Prince of Wales visited southern and eastern Africa in 1925, his notorious dislike of ceremony was overcome by the entreaties of colonial administrators who told him that if he did not appear in full scarlet before the assembled African masses it would be better for him not to appear at all. The effect was properly gratifying. 'The Prince's arrival was a splendid affair', reported the *Daily Telegraph* from Basutoland; 'His Royal Highness was ablaze with medals, a sight which deeply impressed the great, silent masses'.⁵² From the Solwezi sub-district of Northern Rhodesia

⁴⁸ Chief Jonathan's speech, 28 May 1925, S3/28/1/9, Maseru.

⁴⁹ Winfrid Tapson, *Old Timer* (Capetown, 1957), p. 65.

⁵⁰ Governor Sir James Maxwell, speech at Ndola Indaba, 6 July 1928, file ZA1/9/59/1, National Archives, Zambia, Lusaka.

⁵¹ High commissioner, cable to secretary of state, 19 May 1919, S3/28/2/4, Maseru.

⁵² *Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 1925, 'Picturesque Scenes'.

came the report that the two chiefs who had attended the indaba with the Prince

were highly excited when expressing the pleasure it had given them to meet the Prince... The two chief impressions which seem to have been registered on their minds... were firstly the pomp and ceremony connected with the visit – in Kapijimpanga's words, 'the *Bwana* shone so brightly in his uniform that we could not look upon him' – and secondly that they were able to meet in a friendly way with all the other chiefs of the Territory.⁵³

It was the Northern Rhodesian administration's boast that the indaba had dramatized the oneness of all the peoples of the territory, not because they were all Africans, still less because they were all Northern Rhodesians, but because they were all subjects of one mighty king. Against this background it was more a sign of waning self-confidence than of arrogance when the Northern Rhodesian government was obliged to issue printed instructions to Africans for the royal visit of 1947 telling them that

King George is the biggest King in the world. He is not like an African chief. He does not like people crowding close all round Him, He expects to see His subjects on their best behaviour.⁵⁴

But royal visits were necessarily rare occasions in colonial Africa. In the intervals the royal cult had to be sustained by locally invented rituals. Men could make their careers by inspired contributions to these. A prime example is the career of Edward Twining, later governor of Tanganyika. Twining's biographer relates that his mother was held by her family to have married beneath her; his clergyman father was thought no gentleman. Twining's not very distinguished military career and his transfer to the colonial service was a search for convincing distinction, carried out in the time-honoured way in the imperial peripheries of gentlemanly society. Twining found his distinction in the end – and it is quite clear that he found it through his capacity whole-heartedly to invent tradition.

While still an administrative officer in Uganda, Twining wrote and published a pamphlet on the English coronation ceremony, of which *The Times Literary Supplement* remarked that while it was 'hardly a book that anyone would be tempted to consult for archaeological

⁵³ Annual Report, native commissioner, Solwezi sub-district, 1925, ZA7/1/9/2, Lusaka.

⁵⁴ 'Northern Rhodesia. The Royal Visit. 11 April 1947. Details of the Programme and Broadcasting Arrangements', P3/13/2/1, Lusaka.

detail', nevertheless for 'allowing the modern rite to be followed step by step nothing better could be desired'. Thus having paid tribute to other people's invented tradition, Twining proceeded in the coronation year of 1937 to invent his own. Twining was, in fact, first brought to favourable official attention by his successful organization of the 1937 celebrations in Uganda, a triumph of ceremonial creativity, vividly described by its author:

In the evening we had the combined Tattoo and Firework Display, which was very much my own personal show, having invented it, trained 2 of the items myself, organised the whole, built a stand, sold all the tickets myself... The Governor on arrival pressed a button which did nothing actually, but pretended to set off a maroon which in turn set off an enormous bonfire across the lake which in turn set off 50 rockets. The Buglers then sounded Retreat in the dark and then on went some 40 odd spotlights, floodlights and footlights, and the drums and the band beat tattoo and the audience settled down to enjoy themselves... Then some school-boys did the Parade of the Toy Soldiers. I got the particulars of this from the Duke of York's School at Dover, and adapted it to local conditions. The boys wore white trousers, red tunics, and white pill box hats, the officer a bear-skin... The tattoo then proceeded. Fireworks. A war dance by 120 warriors in Leopard Skins. Ostrich feathers and spears and shields. Then 'From Savage to Soldier' showing the process of turning native warriors into real soldiers.

The central event, and the sensation of the evening, was a relay of the voice of the new king/emperor, broadcast to the gathering through concealed loudspeakers. And next day there was a ceremony at the high court, which involved the Kabaka, the judges, the governor, the chiefs and the bishops – 'also my invention and it turned out to be a most dignified ceremony'.⁵⁵

The rest of Twining's adequately distinguished career displayed the same concern for invented ceremonial. He was a flamboyant governor of Tanganyika. At the end he became one of the first creation of life peers – that supreme example of invented tradition – selling off his Grand Cross Mantle of the Order of St Michael and St John in order to buy 'a second-hand robe trimmed with real ermine'.⁵⁶

Everywhere in British colonial Africa such rituals were taken very

⁵⁵ Darrell Bates, *A Gust of Plumes: A Biography of Lord Twining of Godalming and Tanganyika* (London, 1972), pp. 102–5.

Ibid., p. 286.

seriously, if only rarely with Twining's exuberance. In a recent discussion of 'State and Peasantry in Colonial Africa', John Lonsdale remarks that 'the question of the statishness of the colonial state in Africa' can perhaps best be penetrated 'by looking at its festivals'.

All over the Empire [he writes] there were celebrations on 6 May 1935, the silver jubilee of King George V, even in little Kakamega, a district headquarters in the hills of western Kenya... The *power* of the state was on view with a parade of police... The *majesty* of rule was invoked with a speech from the governor, read by the district commissioner, who observed that King George was present, even to the meanest of his subjects, in his image on their coins, on the medals of their chiefs. He was 'a very great ruler and dearly loves his people and sees that they are ruled justly. He has always shown a very deep personal concern in your welfare' – and the schoolmaster-leaders of peasant opinion were even then acting on the principles of peasant legitimism by by-passing the king's servants and petitioning his House of Commons for redress of grievances... The royal family was still further linked to the material *improvement* in peasant citizenship. In Queen Victoria's day 'very few people had any clothes except skins and blankets and hardly any knew how to read. Now you have railways and roads, schools and hospitals, towns and trading centres, which give you the opportunity for development which civilization and good government bring in their train'. Colonial improvement was linked to peasant *recreation*. The day's proceedings included a display by the local boy scout troop... The rulers sought their subjects' affection in carnival, almost indeed in *saturnalia*. There were games for Africans only, the slippery pole, a tug-of-war, blindfold football biffing; but there was inter-racial sport too, a bicycle race, a donkey derby, even a fancy dress soccer match between Europeans and Indians for the natives to gawp at. Peasant *economy* was co-opted too; there was an egg, cent and flour race... Peasant *culture* was used too; the day started off with church services. Europeans attended the high culture of an Anglican service; to Africans was left the 'low culture' of a Catholic celebration.⁵⁷

It is plain that British administrators took all this sort of thing very seriously – Twining as governor of Tanganyika refused to negotiate

⁵⁷ John Lonsdale, 'State and Peasantry in Colonial Africa', in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, 1981), pp. 113–14.

with Nyerere's Tanganyika African Union because he regarded them as disloyal to the queen. But it is very difficult to assess how seriously Africans took it. Lonsdale describes the Kakamega Silver Jubilee celebrations as part of the 'indigenization of the state', and shows how the leaders of the local African peasantry operated easily within its assumptions; in Northern Rhodesia the chiefs played up to the official 'theology' by addressing their requests for guns or uniforms to the king through his governor and sent the king presents of leopard skins or tusks; African dance associations elected their kings and Kaisers to preside over them with proper ceremony; millenarian preachers told their audiences that King George, who had hitherto been deceived by his corrupt advisers, would assume direct control and usher in the golden age.⁶⁸ Clearly the symbol of monarchy appealed to the imagination. Perhaps for a while it also contributed to some sort of ideological consensus between Europeans and their African collaborators. As we shall see, a good deal of the politics of collaboration took place within the limits set by the colonial theory of monarchy. But as Twining's fatal rigidity in Tanganyika demonstrates, the colonial manipulation of monarchy and indeed the whole process of traditional inventiveness, having served a good deal of practical purpose, eventually came to be counter-productive. Twining's apparent cheerful irreverence and readiness to manufacture tradition only thinly masked his own profound commitment to monarchy, aristocracy, to neo-tradition. It was easier to invent a tradition than to modify it and make it flexible once invented. *Invented* tradition, as distinct from unconsciously evolving custom, could only be taken seriously if it were followed to the letter. That famous 'spirit' which was so celebrated at Budo could not blow where it listed among the dry bones of colonial ceremonialism.

⁶⁸ An interesting variant, directly calling the bluff of the imperial ideology, came in a sermon preached in Bulawayo in June 1923 by a Watch Tower teacher, Kunga: 'King George V tells the truth to the English but the people of this country do not abide by what he says but make their own laws. In 1912 the King wanted to come to Rhodesia to see the natives and change the law for them, but the white people of Southern Rhodesia sent him a message and told him not to come as there was too much sickness in the country.' File N3/5/8, National Archives, Rhodesia, Salisbury.

AFRICAN ATTEMPTS TO MAKE USE OF EUROPEAN NEO-TRADITION

One of the functions of the invention of tradition in nineteenth-century Europe was to give rapid and recognizable symbolic form to developing types of authority and submission. In Africa, and under the oversimplifying influence of colonial rule, the symbolic statements themselves became simpler and more emphatic. African observers of the new colonial society could hardly miss the significance that Europeans attached to the public rituals of monarchy, the gradations of military rank, the rituals of bureaucracy. Africans who sought to manipulate these symbols for themselves, without accepting the implications of subordination within a neo-tradition of governance, were usually accused by Europeans of triviality, of confusing form with reality and of imagining that it was possible to achieve power or prosperity just by emulating ritual practice. But if this were true, the over-emphasis on the forms had already been created by colonial whites themselves, most of whom were the beneficiaries rather than the creators of wealth and power. If their monopoly of the rites and symbols of neo-tradition was so important to the whites, it was by no means foolish of Africans to seek to appropriate them.

It seems to me that there were broadly four ways in which Africans sought to draw on European invented traditions, in a relatively autonomous way and without accepting the roles which Europeans assigned to Africans within them. At one level, the aspirant African bourgeoisie sought to make its own that range of attitudes and activities which defined the European middle classes. At another level, many African rulers – and their supporters – struggled to achieve the right to express their authority through the use of the titles and symbols of European neo-traditional monarchy. Again, there were Africans who adapted European neo-traditional symbolism in a spirit of fashion, proclaiming their own sophistication not so much by 'aping' Europeans as by an impressive display of their ability to keep up to date, to discern the realities of colonial power and to comment shrewdly upon them. But in many ways the most interesting use of European neo-traditions was by Africans who found themselves uprooted and who needed to discover new ways of making a new society.

The most vivid account of African petty bourgeois aspirations and their appropriation of British middle class neo-traditions is given by

Brian Willan in his work on the mission-educated Africans of Kimberley in the 1890s. 'Kimberley in the 1890s', he writes, 'was a supremely British place: daily life in the Diamond City, indeed, perhaps expressed as clearly as anywhere in the Empire the meaning and reality of British imperial hegemony.' There existed in the city: a growing and increasingly coherent class of educated Africans who had been drawn to Kimberley because of the opportunities that it provided for employment and for the utilization of the skills associated with the literacy which they possessed.

These men aspired to become secure denizens of the nineteenth-century British liberal universe – a universe of freedom and equality under the common law, of secure property rights and of entrepreneurial vigour. At the same time they sought to symbolize their citizenship of this universe through their mastery of the more 'irrational' invented traditions of the late nineteenth-century British middle class.

They outdid colonial whites in their loyalty to the crown. 'One peculiarly important and pervasive symbol... which gave expression to the values and beliefs that they held, was the figure of Queen Victoria'; they celebrated the queen's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 with banquets and loyal addresses in which they dramatized their own 'progressive' achievements and their trust in the monarchy as a guarantor of them. They set up 'a network of regular activities and involvement in churches, clubs and societies'. Above all, they took to sport:

Sport [writes Willan] was important in the life of Kimberley's African petty bourgeoisie, providing a further bond of association and the means of disseminating the hegemonic value of the society in which they lived. Tennis was played at one of three clubs: Blue Flag Tennis Club, Champion Lawn Tennis Club, and Come Again Lawn Tennis Club... Altogether more popular, however, were cricket and rugby football, the leading sports in the Cape Colony generally... Cricket was the game that Kimberley's African petty bourgeoisie really made its own. That this should have been the case is perhaps not at all surprising. Cricket, after all, was not just a game. Rather, it was a uniquely British institution that embodied so many of the values and ideals which... they aspired to. Cricket was a social training ground: the analogy between cricket and life generally was widely accepted, its value in character development unquestioned. 'Caution, care, patience and decision', so one writer

in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* claimed in 1893, 'are inculcated by cricket's manly toil'. Cricket both embodied and disseminated the imperial idea.

In Kimberley, the two African clubs (they ran several teams each) were the Duke of Wellington Cricket Club... and Eccentrics Cricket Club: even their names are suggestive, both symbolising qualities upon which the British Empire was built.⁵⁹

In the long run of South African history, of course, all this came to be regarded by whites as taking the imperial ideal altogether too seriously. In South Africa there was no room for a cricket-playing black ruling class. African cricket withered away, to be replaced later on by the proletarian association football, which is the mass sport of modern Africa. Only in such exceptional colonial societies as Sierra Leone could Creole society regularly demonstrate its real power by lavish European neo-traditional rituals.

Meanwhile, 'tribal' African rulers found themselves contesting for the visible attributes of neo-traditional monarchy because their status was everywhere threatened under middle period colonialism. In the early days colonial administrators were happy enough to recognize African rulers as kings, and to present them, like Rindi, with the properties of stage monarchy. But as the colonial régimes established themselves and became less dependent on concessions extracted from African rulers, so there began a process of deflation. Thus, much of the British South Africa Company administration's claim to north-western Rhodesia depended upon the concessions it had gained from Lewanika of Barotseland. Lewanika was described as a great king and rewarded with access to the glamour of the British crown. The symbolic climax of Lewanika's career came with his invitation to attend the coronation of Edward VII in 1902. Lewanika was received with honour by English 'society':

he had royal carriages put at his disposal, his horses were taken out of his carriage in a Dorset village so that village people could drag the carriage, he was taught to play simple games at tea parties by people like the Duchess of Abercorn.

He was encouraged to acquire for his use both in England and back home some of the symbols of British royal ceremonialism – a royal coach, the uniform of a full-dress admiral, scarlet coats for his

⁵⁹ Brian Willan, 'An African in Kimberley: Sol. T. Plaatje, 1894–8', Conference on Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness: the Making of Modern South Africa (Jan. 1980), pp. 3, 5, 14–15.

servants at Lealui. 'When Kings are seated together', proclaimed the old Lozi ruler, 'there is never a lack of things to discuss'.⁶⁰

But soon the old man was being denied his kingliness altogether. As the Northern Rhodesian administration came to feel more secure, so it cut back Lewanika's powers, rebuffed his protestations and dramatized this withdrawal of favour through a double manipulation of royal symbolism. It was laid down that the high commissioner and the administrator must be greeted with the Lozi royal salute; it was also laid down that Lewanika himself should no longer be referred to as 'King', since this elevated him above the other chiefs and drew what was considered to be an altogether inappropriate analogy with the imperial monarch.⁶¹ A similar pattern is apparent in the Ankole kingdom in Uganda. There, too, there was an initial period of colonial support for the Ankole monarchy, followed by a reaction in which 'officers at work in the country disliked the title of King being used for the rulers of small African states'.⁶²

In this colonial middle period, African 'paramounts' strove to gain the title of king, to obtain invitations to British coronations, to dramatize their internal authority with crowns and thrones, British-style coronations and jubilees. The Omugabe of Ankole managed to acquire a throne and a coat of arms and a crown.⁶³ Lewanika's successor, Yeta, worked indefatigably to proclaim special royal status. He had certain advantages. Whenever a royal personage visited Northern Rhodesia, the administration looked fairly desparately around for something other than the Victoria Falls to show them. They had always to fall back on the Lozi. Reviewing the ceremonial possibilities for the Prince of Wales's visit in 1925, the governor deplored that 'generally speaking none of these Chiefs are likely to look very impressive', but consoled himself with the thought that the Lozi 'aquatic display' was likely to be 'a fairly picturesque affair as native ceremonies go'.⁶⁴ Yeta brought his fleet down the Zambesi to meet the prince, but was careful to stress in his speech that 'it would have been a great pleasure to us to receive and welcome Your Royal Highness at our home with *proper* ceremonious

⁶⁰ Henry Rangeley to 'Dear Mr Cohen', March 1938, Historical Manuscripts 20, RA1/1/1, Lusaka; G. Caplan, *The Elites of Barotseland, 1878-1969* (California, 1970).

⁶¹ M. R. Doornbos, *Regalia Galore: The Decline and Collapse of Ankole Kingship* (Nairobi, 1975).

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Sir Herbert Stanley to Sir Geoffrey Thomas, 7 July 1925, P3/13/3/8, Lusaka.

welcome'.⁶⁵ Moreover, there were many thousands of Lozi working in the mines and towns of the south, many as clerks and supervisors. These 'new men' were fully prepared to donate money and to draft petitions in order to recover the title of 'King' for their paramount. Finally, the special status of Barotseland meant that the administration could not just impose local 'reforms' there but had to bargain with Yeta.

Drawing on all these advantages, Yeta scored a signal symbolic triumph at the end of his reign. He was determined to attend the coronation of 1937. There were formidable obstacles. The secretary of state in London had at first decided not to invite any African ruler to the ceremony, but to draw the line at the Indian princes. The administrators in Northern Rhodesia took the position that the coronation was a sacramental rite appropriate only to whites; Africans could not penetrate to this holy of holies; the coronation liturgy 'would convey nothing to the great majority of natives'.⁶⁶ But Yeta exploited all his advantages; made concessions on local government 'reform' and was invited. His progress south was triumphal as the Lozi labour migrants flocked to the line of rail to donate funds for the voyage. Yeta was received by the king; gave him the Lozi royal salute; and returned in triumph to Barotseland, where Lozi progressives expressed themselves

very glad for the honour that the British Empire has bestowed upon Barotseland by inviting Your Highness to attend the Coronation and more than all in giving Your Highness one of the best seats in the Abbey, which is a privilege that only a few people among thousands and millions of people have enjoyed.⁶⁷

The triumph was recorded for posterity by Yeta's secretary, Godwin Mbikusita, whose *Yeta III's Visit to England* was published in 1940.

The Coronation [wrote Mbikusita] was the greatest event we ever saw or that we will ever see in our lives again. Nobody could think that he is really on earth when seeing the Coronation Procession, but that he is either dreaming or is in Paradise.

But he also made it very plain that Yeta made his homage to King George as one king to another, recording that Sobhuza II of Swaziland had cabled Yeta 'wishing you... to hail the King with African royal spirit and etiquette'.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Address of Yeta III, 18 June 1925, RC/453, Lusaka.

⁶⁶ Minute on secretary of state to governor, 6 Feb. 1937, sec. 1/1792, Lusaka.

⁶⁷ For Yeta's visit to England see file sec. 2/364, ii, Lusaka.

⁶⁸ Godwin Mbikusita, *Yeta III's Visit to England* (Lusaka, 1940).

Nor was it only great chiefs who had once enjoyed the title of 'King' who played this kind of symbolic politics. Recourse to royal neo-tradition was one of the techniques of the great invention of 'tribal' traditions which was going on everywhere in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁹ Leroy Vail has described what happened in the case of the Tumbuka-speakers possessed different religious and social institutions. But under colonialism a group of mission-educated Africans Tumbuka-speakers possessed different religious and social institutions. But under colonialism a group of mission-educated Africans created a Tumbuka paramountcy. Chilongozi Gondwe was appointed as chief in 1907 and commenced a campaign to impress his royal status on the minds of the Tumbuka. He celebrated each year the anniversary of his accession and began to use the title of 'King'. In this he was warmly supported by the mission élite, who were beginning to produce a myth history of the ancient Tumbuka empire. As Leroy Vail remarks:

For the well-educated elite to accept traditional values and a hierarchical arrangement of society under chiefs is *not* to be wondered at, given the nature of the Victorian education they had received in the [mission] schools.

The district commissioner attempted to check Gondwe's acquisition of influence. 'I warned [him] that he was not to assume the title of King'. But by the time of Chilongozi Gondwe's death in 1931 things had changed. The colonial administration now favoured a policy of indirect rule and this gave an opening for the élite inventors of tradition.

An African minister, Edward Bote Manda, backed Chilongozi's son, John Gondwe, as the new chief. Manda drew up an elaborate coronation rite, including a series of 'Vows of Chieftainship' modelled on those of the British coronation – 'Do you solemnly promise to protect our Christian religion and submit to the Bible teachings which are a guide to righteous ruling of your people?' The Tumbuka paramountcy began to assume the characteristics of a progressive Christian monarchy.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Terence Ranger, 'Traditional Societies and Western Colonialism', Conference on Traditional Societies and Colonialism (Berlin, June 1979). Published as 'Kolonialismus in Ost-Und Zentral Afrika', J. H. Grevemeyer (ed.), *Traditionale Gesellschaften und europäischer Kolonialismus* (Frankfurt, 1981).

⁷⁰ Leroy Vail, 'Ethnicity, Language and National Unity' (Univ. of Zambia seminar paper, 1978). Dr Vail is editing a volume of ethnicity and political economy in southern Africa.

It will be seen that these attempts to manipulate British royal symbolism were complex. If from the point of view of the chiefs they were largely re-assertions of status, from the point of view of the mission-educated they were also an attempt to *redefine* chiefly authority. The British Coronation rite, wrote Mbikusita,

shows great cooperation between the Crown and People, and this shows that although the people are the subjects of their King, he is also their subject... It is a great surprise to us to see that the Queen in England shares the Coronation with the King. It is a sign of irrevocable marriage and true partnership in life. European civilisation has taken centuries to appreciate this and we hope that, by the teaching and examples given to us by this civilization, this generation may come to acquire such realization.

Lozi teachers expressed the hope that Yeta's visit to the coronation would 'open a door for the Barotseland educated class' and 'uplift the country by adopting some of the civilized lines existing in England'.⁷¹ Once again, in Africa the neo-traditions of Britain were seen as a source of modernizing change.

But just as the commitment to royal symbol proved, in the end, limiting to the colonialists, so its fruits for Africans were at best ambiguous. Educated Africans came to realize that the way towards real power to bring about modernizing change did not lie in relatively small-scale African 'kingdoms'. They began to invent nationalist rather than tribal traditions. By the time of the visit of King George VI to Northern Rhodesia in 1947, African intellectuals sought to make use of the occasion by delivering loyal addresses which made a series of nationalist points; the old pieties of such occasions were only maintained by dint of arbitrary censorship of their texts. A clear distinction had by then opened up between their concerns and those of the Lozi paramount, who put on in 1947 another reliably picturesque ceremony.⁷²

Meanwhile, those African rulers who *did* succeed in acquiring some of the trappings of neo-traditional monarchy were caught up in an ironic process. What was involved, as Doornbos brings out very well for Ankole, was a transformation from flexible and adaptable customary monarchical institutions to a colonial monarchy 'fitted into the bureaucratic structure and in time adorned with a thick

⁷¹ Mbikusita, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 63–4, 145.

⁷² File sec. 3/234, Lusaka contains both the original and the censored forms of Addresses.

overlay of new ceremonialism'. The essence of the change in Ankole was to turn the Omugabe 'into an instrument of bureaucratic hierarchy and to relegate the traditional values to the level of folk lore'. Aspirations to become more like the king/emperor ended in African rulers really becoming more like him, as they came more and more to occupy the ceremonial centre rather than the political or cultural centre of their societies. It was a process neatly summed up by the title of Doornbos's book, *Regalia Galore*. But unlike the ceremonial of the king/emperor, which still serves a function in shrunken, post-imperial Britain, the ceremonial of African kings turned out in the end not to mirror anything very important. The Ankole kingship was abolished without a ripple of dissent, and the local press headlined the transition to a more openly bureaucratic symbol of authority – 'The Throne Replaced by Chairman's Seat'.⁷³

But it was not only African rulers and clergymen who tried to manipulate the symbols of European invented tradition. They were also seized upon by thousands of others who were experiencing the colonial economy, whether as migrant labourers or as petty clerks and functionaries. Each of these two groups sought to come to terms with the new colonial society and they did so partly by means of participation in dance associations in which one or other of the European invented traditions was drawn on to express the essence of colonialism, as a source of prestige, or as a mark of high fashion. John Iliffe has described the coastal dance associations in German East Africa just before the first world war. Dances were performed in the Kaiser's honour in 1911 by *ngoma ya kihuni* – the hooligans' dance association, a name defiantly chosen by 'low-class, up-country immigrants'. They danced the *Bom*, an imitation of German military drill, named after the sound of the machine gun. Clerks and domestic servants 'invariably celebrated the Kaiser's birthday with *chapaul-inge*'. Their dance associations gathered in a house furnished in European style; they drank tea; 'and at the end of the feast they said "Hurrah!" three times'.⁷⁴ In the towns of the Kenyan coast a similar class division produced competition between the Arinoti up-country migrants and the Marini Swahili youth. The Marini rejoiced in rich aristocratic patrons and they triumphed over their plebeian opponents with processions headed by replicas of governors and their equerries; with floats of battleships, with admirals in full dress taking

⁷³ *Uganda Argus*, 28 Sept. 1967.

⁷⁴ Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, pp. 238–9.

the salute on the bridge; and on one glorious occasion still much celebrated in the photograph albums of Lamu, with a stately line of peers of the house of lords, all in full ceremonial dress.⁷⁵

As I have argued elsewhere, these carnival occasions were very much more than a mere aping of the whites. The dance societies were descendants of older associations which had for decades, and probably centuries, reflected the changing experience of the coast and its hinterland, now marking a shift in the balance of power by taking up Omani fashions, now by adopting Indian modes. Among other things, the dance associations were very shrewd in seizing upon basic divisions within European colonial society and using these as the basis for dance competition. Before formal colonialism, French teams danced against German and British teams. Under colonialism, teams representing sea-power danced against teams representing the colonial infantry. In Kenya teams professing loyalty to the British crown – Kingi – danced against teams representing those most evident rivals of the English, the Scots. Scotch teams paraded through the streets of Mombasa, wearing kilts and playing bag-pipes, thus celebrating the successful nineteenth-century invention of Scottish tradition. The Welsh, alas, were less present in the African empire and there were no Druids in African dance competitions!⁷⁶

These dances were performed by men who were either confident in their own coastal urban environment or who had a rural home to return to. But there were others who felt uprooted, needing not only to reflect on the colonial experience but to discover a way of organizing their whole lives. For such people, one European tradition in particular was useful – the military mode. This was the most clear-cut model available, especially in early colonialism. Its demarcations of authority were obvious, as were its methods of instilling work discipline; it formed a centrally important part of early colonial European societies, and seemed to offer a complete model of an operative community. So ready to hand was it, that the military mode and the military metaphor were extensively employed by European missionaries, who armed and drilled their early converts before formal colonial rule was established, and who continued to drill their schoolboys and organize them into drum and fife bands deep into the colonial period.⁷⁷ But an appropriate discipline was not merely

⁷⁵ Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Terence Ranger, 'The European Military Mode and the Societies of Eastern Africa' (Univ. of California, Los Angeles, colloquium paper, 1972).

something enforced by whites; often it was something sought by Africans. After all, the adjustment to the exigencies of the new colonial system had to be made by Africans themselves. A new model of social interaction, of hierarchy and control was needed by many African groupings that wanted to become communities. The military mode could be made use of by Africans for all these purposes.

Professor Ogot cites a striking case. Bishop Willis visited scattered African converts in western Kenya in 1916.

Trained or half trained in a Mission School [wrote the Bishop], the Convert returns to his native village, and is lost to sight. Next time the missionary meets him he is in self-imposed charge of a little congregation of Readers, from which in due course a little group of candidates for the catechumenate emerges. So the work grows, but much of it in its initial stages is carried on in entire independence of the European. Again, the visitor on any Sunday to the native congregation in Kisumu will see what he will see nowhere else but in Kavirondo, a drilled and uniformed congregation. Not all, but some hundreds of them, will be found clothed in a short shirt of white with dark blue facings and a dark blue spine pad; the letters, roughly worked, C.M.K. across the breast; and on the red fez cap a blue cross on white shield. A closer inspection will reveal mysterious buttons and stripes showing that from a corporal to a colonel every rank is represented. Two little red buttons on the shoulder indicate a lieutenant, three are a captain and so on. Even the Red Cross contingent finds a place, with its own officers, outside the building before church. And throughout, in varying degrees of efficiency, the same thing. The colours vary, the shape of the cross on the cap differs with the different districts, but the same general idea is to be seen everywhere. The interesting part of the organization is that it is entirely the native Christians' own idea. They have designed and paid for their own uniforms. They drill and organize themselves without instruction or intervention from any white man; a clearer proof of natural independence it would be difficult to find.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ F. B. Welbourn and B. A. Ogot, *A Place to Feel at Home* (London, 1966), pp. 24–5.

EUROPEANS AND 'TRADITION' IN AFRICA

The invented traditions of nineteenth-century Europe had been introduced into Africa to allow Europeans and certain Africans to combine for 'modernizing' ends. But there was an inherent ambiguity in neo-traditional thought. Europeans belonging to one or other of the neo-traditions believed themselves to have a respect for the customary. They liked the idea of age-old prescriptive rights and they liked to compare the sort of title which an African chief possessed with the title to gentlemanliness which they laid claim to themselves. A profound misunderstanding was at work here. In comparing European neo-traditions with the customary in Africa the whites were certainly comparing unlike with unlike. European invented traditions were marked by their inflexibility. They involved sets of recorded rules and procedures – like the modern coronation rites. They gave reassurance because they represented what was unchanging in a period of flux. Now, when Europeans thought of the customary in Africa, they naturally ascribed to it these same characteristics. The assertion by whites that African society was profoundly conservative – living within age-old rules which did not change; living within an ideology based on the absence of change; living within a framework of clearly defined hierarchical status – was by no means always intended as an indictment of African backwardness or reluctance to modernize. Often it was intended as a compliment to the admirable qualities of tradition, even though it was a quite misconceived compliment. This attitude towards 'traditional' Africa became more marked as whites came to realize in the 1920s and 1930s that rapid economic transformation was just not going to take place in Africa and that most Africans had to remain members of rural communities, or as some whites came to dislike the consequences of the changes which *had* taken place. The African collaborators, playing their role within one or other of the introduced European traditions, then came to seem less admirable than 'real' Africans, still presumed to be inhabiting their own, appropriate universe of tradition.

The trouble with this approach was that it totally misunderstood the realities of pre-colonial Africa. These societies had certainly valued custom and continuity but custom was loosely defined and infinitely flexible. Custom helped to maintain a sense of identity but it also allowed for an adaptation so spontaneous and natural that it was often unperceived. Moreover, there rarely existed in fact the

closed corporate consensual system which came to be accepted as characteristic of 'traditional' Africa. Almost all recent studies of nineteenth-century pre-colonial Africa have emphasized that far from there being a single 'tribal' identity, most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as subject to this chief, at another moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan, and at yet another moment as an initiate in that professional guild. These overlapping networks of association and exchange extended over wide areas. Thus the boundaries of the 'tribal' polity and the hierarchies of authority within them did *not* define conceptual horizons of Africans. As Wim van Binsbergen remarks, in criticizing Africanist historians for their acceptance of something called 'Chewa identity' as a useful organizing concept for the past:

Modern Central Africa tribes are not so much survivals from a pre-colonial past but rather largely colonial creations by colonial officers and African intellectuals... Historians fail to qualify the alleged Chewa homogeneity against the historical evidence of incessant assimilation and dissociation of peripheral groups... They do not differentiate between a seniority system of rulers imposed by the colonial freezing of political dynamics and the pre-colonial competitive, shifting, fluid imbalance of power and influence.⁷⁹

Similarly, nineteenth-century Africa was *not* characterized by lack of internal social and economic competition, by the unchallenged authority of the elders, by an acceptance of custom which gave every person – young and old, male and female – a place in society which was defined and protected. Competition, movement, fluidity were as much features of small-scale communities as they were of larger groupings. Thus Marcia Wright has shown, in a stimulating account of the realities of late nineteenth-century society in the Lake Tanganyika corridor, that economic and political competition overrode the 'customary securities' offered to women by marriage or extended kinship relations. Women constantly found themselves being shaken out of the niches in which they had sought security, and constantly tried to find new niches for themselves. Later on, of course, and in the twentieth century, the dogmas of customary security and immutably fixed relationships grew up in these same societies, which came to

⁷⁹ Review of S. J. Ntara, *History of the Chewa*, ed. Harry Langworthy, by W. M. J. Van Binsbergen, *African Social Research* (June 1976), pp. 73–5.

have an appearance of *ujamaa* style solidarity; the nineteenth-century time of 'rapid change', in which 'formal structural factors' became relatively less important than 'personal resilience and powers of decision', gave way to stabilization. As Marcia Wright remarks:

the terms of the reconstruction were dictated by the colonial authorities in the years after 1895, when pacification came to mean immobilization of populations, re-inforcement of ethnicity and greater rigidity of social definition.⁸⁰

Hence 'custom' in the Tanganyika corridor was much more of an invention than it was a restoration. In other places, where the competitive dynamic of the nineteenth century had given many opportunities for young men to establish independent bases of economic, social and political influence, colonialism saw an establishment of control by elders of land allocation, marriage transactions and political office. Small-scale gerontocracies were a defining feature of the twentieth rather than of the nineteenth century.

Some part of these twentieth-century processes of 'immobilization of populations, re-inforcement of ethnicity and greater rigidity of social definition' were the necessary and unplanned consequences of colonial economic and political change – of the break up of internal patterns of trade and communication, the defining of territorial boundaries, the alienation of land, the establishment of Reserves. But some part of them were the result of a conscious determination on the part of the colonial authorities to 're-establish' order and security and a sense of community by means of defining and enforcing 'tradition'. Administrators who had begun by proclaiming their support for exploited commoners against rapacious chiefs ended by backing 'traditional' chiefly authority in the interests of social control.⁸¹ Missionaries who had begun by taking converts right out of their societies so as to transform their consciousness in 'Christian villages' ended by proclaiming the virtues of 'traditional' small-scale community. Everyone sought to tidy up and make more comprehensible the infinitely complex situation which they held to be a result of the 'untraditional' chaos of the nineteenth century. People were to be 'returned' to their tribal identities; ethnicity was to be 'restored' as the basis of association and organization.⁸² The new rigidities,

⁸⁰ Marcia Wright, 'Women in Peril', *African Social Research* (Dec. 1975), p. 803.

⁸¹ Henry Meebelo, *Reaction to Colonialism* (Manchester, 1971).

⁸² Terence Ranger, 'European Attitudes and African Realities: The Rise and Fall of the Matola Chiefs of South-East Tanzania', *Journal of African History*, xx, no. 1 (1979), pp. 69–82.

immobilizations and ethnic identifications, while serving very immediate European interests, could nevertheless be seen by the whites as fully 'traditional' and hence as legitimated. The most far-reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa took place when the Europeans believed themselves to be respecting age-old African custom. What were called customary law, customary land-rights, customary political structure and so on, were in fact *all* invented by colonial codification.

There is a growing anthropological and historical literature on these processes which it is not possible to summarize here. But a few striking statements will give an indication of the argument. Thus John Iliffe describes the 'creation of tribes' in colonial Tanganyika:

The notion of the tribe lay at the heart of indirect rule in Tanganyika. Refining the racial thinking common in German times, administrators believed that every African belonged to a tribe, just as every European belonged to a nation. The idea doubtless owed much to the Old Testament, to Tacitus and Caesar, to academic distinctions between tribal societies based on status and modern societies based on contract, and to the post-war anthropologists who preferred 'tribal' to the more pejorative word 'savage'. Tribes were seen as cultural units 'possessing a common language, a single social system, and an established common law'. Their political and social systems rested on kinship. Tribal membership was hereditary. Different tribes were related genealogically... As unusually well-informed officials knew, this stereotype bore little relation to Tanganyika's kaleidoscopic history, but it was the shifting sand on which Cameron and his disciples erected indirect rule by 'taking the *tribal* unit'. They had the power and they created the political geography.⁸³

Elizabeth Colson describes the evolution of 'customary land law' in much the same way:

The newly created system was described as resting on tradition and presumably derived its legitimacy from immemorial custom. The degree to which it was a reflection of the contemporary situation and the joint creation of colonial officials and African leaders... was unlikely to be recognized.

The point is not merely that so-called custom in fact concealed new balances of power and wealth, since this was precisely what custom in the past had always been able to do, but that these particular

⁸³ John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, pp. 323-4.

constructs of customary law became codified and rigid and unable so readily to reflect change in the future. Colson remarks that

colonial officers expected the courts to enforce long-established custom rather than current opinion. Common stereotypes about African customary law thus came to be used by colonial officials in assessing the legality of current decisions, and so came to be incorporated in 'customary' systems of tenure.⁸⁴

Similarly, Wyatt MacGaffey has shown how the Bakongo peoples moved from a pre-colonial situation of 'processes of dispersal and assimilation'; of 'the shunting of subordinate populations of slaves and pawns'; of 'a confusion of debts, assets, scandals and grievances', into a colonial situation of much more precise and static definition of community and of land rights.

In the evolution of tradition, the touchstone of merit was very often the presiding judge's concept of customary society, derived ultimately from... a lingering European image of the African kingdom of Prester John... Court records contain evidence of the evolution for forensic purposes away from the magical in the direction of the evidential and refutable... Those whose traditions lost a case came back a year or two later with better traditions.

Once again, my point is not so much that 'traditions' changed to accommodate new circumstances but that at a certain point they had to stop changing; once the 'traditions' relating to community identity and land right were written down in court records and exposed to the criteria of the invented customary model, a new and unchanging body of tradition had been created.

Eventually there resulted a synthesis of the new and the old, which is now called 'custom'. The main features of customary society, responding to the conditions that developed between 1908 and 1921, assumed their present form in the 1920s.⁸⁵

Around the same time Europeans began to be more interested in and sympathetic towards the 'irrational' and ritualistic aspects of 'tradition'. In 1917 an Anglican mission theologian suggested that for the first time missionaries in the field should 'collect information with regard to the religious ideas of the black man', so that their relationship to traditional society could be understood. 'In the

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Colson, 'The Impact of the Colonial Period on the Definition of Land Rights', in Victor Turner (ed.), *Colonialism in Africa* (Cambridge, 1971), iii, pp. 221-51.

⁸⁵ Wyatt MacGaffey, *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo* (California, 1970), pp. 207-8.

twentieth century we are no longer contented to cut the knot, as the nineteenth century did, and say: Science has put an end to these superstitions'.⁸⁶ After the first world war, Anglicans in East Africa, faced with the need to reconstruct rural society after the ravages of the fighting and the subsequent impact of the depression, began to make anthropological analyses of those aspects of 'traditional' ritual which had contributed towards social stability. Out of such inquiry came the well-known policy of missionary 'adaptation', which produced its most developed example in the Christianized initiation ceremonies of the Masasi diocese in south-eastern Tanganyika.⁸⁷ More generally, there emerged from this kind of thought and practice – with its emphasis upon rituals of continuity and stability – a concept of immemorial 'African Traditional Religion' which did less than justice to the variety and vitality of pre-colonial African religious forms.

AFRICAN MANIPULATION OF INVENTED CUSTOM

All this could not have been achieved, of course, without a good deal of African participation. As John Iliffe writes:

The British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes; Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the colonial framework...[The] new political geography...would have been transient had it not co-incided with similar trends among Africans. They too had to live amidst bewildering social complexity, which they ordered in kinship terms and buttressed with invented history. Moreover, Africans wanted effective units of action just as officials wanted effective units of government...Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to.⁸⁸

We have already seen in the case of the Tumbuka paramountcy how African rulers and mission-educated 'modernizers' could combine in an attempt to manipulate the symbols of monarchy. Iliffe shows how similar alliances helped to build up the ideas and structures of 'tribal' tradition.

During the twenty years after 1925 Tanganyika experienced a vast social reorganization in which Europeans and Africans combined

⁸⁶ 'The Study of African Religion', *Central Africa*, xxxv, no. 419 (Nov. 1917), p. 261.

⁸⁷ Terence Ranger, 'Missionary Adaptation and African Religious Institutions', in Terence Ranger and Isaria Kimambo (eds.), *The Historical Study of African Religion* (London, 1972), pp. 221–51.

⁸⁸ Iliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

to create a new political order based on mythical history...Analysing the system [of indirect rule] one officer concluded that its main supporters were the progressive chiefs...It is clear that they were the key figures in indirect rule. Its chief virtue was indeed to release their energies...The native administrations employed many members of the local elite...Even educated men without native administration posts generally acknowledged hereditary authority...In return many chiefs welcomed educated guidance. Iliffe describes progressive chiefs and mission-educated Africans combining in a programme of 'progressive traditionalism'.

Just as later nationalists sought to create a national culture, so those who built modern tribes emphasized tribal culture. In each case educated men took the lead...The problem was to synthesize, to 'pick out what is best from (European culture) and dilute it with what we hold'. In doing so, educated men naturally reformulated the past, so that their syntheses were actually new creations.⁸⁹

One area in which African intellectuals interacted with 'adaptation' missionary theory was in the invention of 'Traditional Religion'.

It was not until missionaries studied African religions carefully during the 1920s that most Africans dared to consider their attitudes publicly. Michel Kikurwe, a Zigua teacher and cultural tribalist, envisaged a golden age of traditional African society...Samuel Sehoza pioneered the idea that indigenous religious beliefs had prefigured Christianity.

Like the missionaries these men emphasized the function of religion in stabilizing society.

In each district [wrote Kikurwe] men and women were busy to help one another, they taught their children the same laws and traditions. Every Chief tried as much as he could to help and please his people, and likewise his people did the same in turn, they all knew what was lawful and unlawful, and they knew that there was a powerful God in heaven.⁹⁰

It is easy enough to see the personal advantages which these inventors of tradition stood to gain. The successful teacher or minister who stood at the right hand of a paramount was a man of very real power. The African clergy who constructed the model of 'Traditional Religion' as the inspiring ideology of stable pre-colonial communities were making a claim to do the same for modern African

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 327–9, 334.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 335–6.

societies by means of 'adapted' Christianity.⁹¹ Yet Iliffe concludes that

it would be wrong to be cynical. The effort to create a Nyakyusa tribe was as honest and constructive as the essentially similar effort forty years later to create a Tanganyikan nation. Both were attempts to build societies in which men could live well in the modern world.⁹²

But there was still an ambiguity in invented African tradition. However much it may have been used by the 'progressive traditionalists' to inaugurate new ideas and institutions – like compulsory education under the Tumbuka paramountcy – codified tradition inevitably hardened in a way that advantaged the vested interests in possession at the time of its codification. Codified and reified custom was manipulated by such vested interests as a means of asserting or increasing control. This happened in four particular situations; though it was not restricted to them.

Elders tended to appeal to 'tradition' in order to defend their dominance of the rural means of production against challenge by the young. Men tended to appeal to 'tradition' in order to ensure that the increasing role which women played in production in the rural areas did not result in any diminution of male control over women as economic assets. Paramount chiefs and ruling aristocracies in polities which included numbers of ethnic and social groupings appealed to 'tradition' in order to maintain or extend their control over their subjects. Indigenous populations appealed to 'tradition' in order to ensure that the migrants who settled amongst them did not achieve political or economic rights.

THE USE OF 'TRADITION' BY ELDERS AGAINST YOUTH

The colonial reification of rural custom produced a situation very much at variance with the pre-colonial situation. The pre-colonial movement of men and ideas was replaced by the colonial custom-bounded, microcosmic local society. It was important for the colonial authorities to limit regional interaction and thus to prevent a widening of focus on the part of Africans. For this reason they were prepared to back collaborators at the local level and to endorse their dominance. But at the same time the colonial powers wanted to

⁹¹ Ranger, 'Missionary Adaptation and African Religious Institutions'.

⁹² Iliffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 324–5.

extract labour from these rural societies, so that young men were being drawn to places of employment very much more distant than the range of journeying in the pre-colonial past. These young men were expected to be at one and the same time workers in a distant urban economy and acceptant citizens in the tightly defined micro-cosmic society.

This situation created many tensions. Returning migrants came back into a society tightly controlled by the elders; the elders, in turn, were alarmed at the new skills and funds possessed by the migrants. The elders stressed their customary, prescriptive rights which gave them control of land and women, and hence of patronage. MacGaffey describes the colonial Bakongo village in these terms:

A man remains a cadet until he is about forty, perhaps longer... He is at the beck and call of his elders, whose tone towards him is often peremptory. Young men speak of their elders as jealous and fault-finding. The status of young men is that of the client... The control exercised over their dependants by the elders is a function of their managerial monopoly in routine public affairs.

This managerial monopoly is largely a function of the elders' control of 'traditional' knowledge, on which claims to land and resources are based. MacGaffey records 'the objection of elders' when 'bright young men busily took notes' at a land hearing case, and thus threatened to break the elders' monopoly.⁹³

The response of young men to this manipulation of 'tradition' could take one of two forms. The key object was to outflank the elders and their sphere of local, but colonially invented, tradition. This could be done by adopting one or other of the European neo-traditions. Thus returning migrants often established themselves as catechists – whether recognized by the missions or not – and set up their own villages on new principles of organization, as it will be remembered was the case with the uniformed congregations of western Kenya. This was easier to do, however, in the earlier colonial period before both European church and European state began to insist on a proper subordination to custom. In MacGaffey's village, the young men, deprived of a real escape, took refuge in a fantasy one.

For those who are young in years a degree of compensation is provided by the Dikembe, a social club catering to the unmarried men... Dikembe culture, an interesting caricature of the serious

⁹³ MacGaffey, *op. cit.*, pp. 208, 222–3.

magico-religious beliefs and principles of the older generation which it defies, contains the seeds of an anti-society... The doors of the bachelor huts bear such inscriptions as 'Palais d'Amour' in Gothic lettering... The culture of the Dikembe is that of *billisme*, whose heroes are the stars of romantic French and American movies [and] takes its name from Buffalo Bill, 'sheriff du quartier Santa Fe, metro d'amour'.⁹⁴

These light-hearted absurdities conceal a serious attempt to discredit 'custom', endorsed as it is by the whites, through the subversive effects of European fantasy.

However, another path had also been open to the young in the colonial period and before the rise of the nationalist parties. This had been to outflank the reified 'custom' of the elders by appeals to more dynamic and transformative aspects of the traditional. Recent commentators have increasingly seen the very widespread witchcraft eradication movements of the colonial period, with their promise of a society freed from evil, in this sort of way. MacGaffey describes how in his Bakongo village the management of witchcraft accusation by the elders caused great discontent, and led to the arrival of a 'prophet' who undertook to eliminate witchcraft, an achievement which would deprive the elders of a potent form of social control. The result was 'the temporary paralysis of the elders'. Roy Willis has shown how in rural south-western Tanganyika in the 1950s young men tried to break the control exercised by elders over land and local 'routine public affairs', by making use of a series of witchcraft eradication movements, which outflanked invented custom by an appeal to the pre-social Golden Age.⁹⁵

Of the many other analyses which support the argument, I will content myself with citing a particularly cogent, and as yet unpublished, account of the well-known Watch Tower sectarian movement in southern and central Africa. Sholto Cross concludes:

The three mining belts of settler Africa... provide the central focus of the movement and the migrant labourer was the main bearer... The migrant system which existed in these territories... prolonged the period in which the Africans could be regarded as bound by their tribal culture... yet at the same time policies designed to promote labour mobility were instituted which

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-4.

⁹⁵ Roy Willis, 'Kamcape: An Anti-Sorcery Movement in South-West Tanzania', *Africa*, xxxi, no. 1 (1968).

undermined the economic basis of this tribal culture... The rate of change in the industrial areas far outstripped that in the rural hinterlands, yet the migrant labourers continued to move between the two worlds of town and country... The proliferation of Watch Tower villages [was caused by] the series of restraints placed upon the returning migrant. Customary authorities were jealous of the new men, whose way of life emphasized urban values... The prevalence of women and youth in the rural Watch Tower suggests that economic cleavages were reinforced by other forms of differentiation... The forward looking ideas of the hoped-for liberation [promised] by millennial Watch Tower were such that customary authority itself became a major object of attack.⁹⁶

THE USE OF 'TRADITION' BY MEN AGAINST WOMEN

Denise Paulme's *Women of Tropical Africa*, though concerned to refute a stereotyped European image of oppressed African womanhood, nevertheless brought out very clearly two things. The first was the practical breakdown under colonialism of many customary institutions regulating the relations between the sexes, a breakdown almost always disadvantageous economically to women. The second was the constant appeal by men to 'tradition'. Anne Laurentin asserted in her chapter in the collection that

remembrance of the good old days is accompanied by nostalgic regret on the part of older men... Among young and old alike there is a profoundly anti-feminist spirit which springs from a feeling of impotence upon realizing that women will refuse to return to the state of dependence they knew a century ago. The old people lay the blame for the fall in the birthrate on women.⁹⁷

To my mind Laurentin is confusing complaints about increasing female independence with its reality. Elders reasserted their control over local affairs by their complaints of the breach of tradition by the young; men reasserted their dominance over a changing economic and social system by their complaints of the breach of tradition by women.

A more recent collection of essays on African women makes the

⁹⁶ Sholto Cross, 'The Watch Tower Movement in South Central Africa, 1908-1945' (Univ. of Oxford doctoral thesis, 1973), pp. 431-8.

⁹⁷ Anne Laurentin, 'Nzakara Women', in Denise Paulme (ed.), *Women of Tropical Africa* (California, 1963), pp. 431-8.

point clearly. As Caroline Ifeka-Moller reminds us, colonial records on African 'tradition', on which the new invented custom was based, were exclusively derived from male informants, so that 'indigenous female belief' remained unrecorded. Thus 'men's dominance in society, that is their control over religious beliefs and political organization' was expressed even more clearly in colonial invented custom than it had ever been before. Neither in the works of indirect rule ethnographers nor of adaptation missiologists – nor of mission-educated African intellectuals – was much attention paid to the traditions of women.⁹⁸ Moreover, African men were quite prepared to appeal to the colonial authority to enforce 'custom' upon women once it had been defined. In southern Rhodesia, and elsewhere in the zone of industrial labour migration, officials imposed punishments for adultery and enforced paternal control over marriage in response to constant complaints by male 'traditionalists'.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, in the absence of male migrants, women were playing a larger and larger part in rural production.

Once again, women had two possible means of asserting themselves against male-dominated custom. They might turn to missionary Christianity and its notions of female rights and duties, or they might seek to use the counter-propositions available within African culture. Sometimes women sought to develop rites of female initiation, which had in the past constituted a balance to male ritual influence in the microcosm. Sometimes they sought to draw on twentieth-century forms of regional cultic association and on macrocosmic prophet movements in order to challenge the constraints of the bounded society of invented custom.

One or two recent studies have sought to explore these female initiatives. Richard Stuart, in an unpublished paper, shows how Chewa women made use of a missionary import, the Mothers' Union:

An equilibrium between the equally important sphere of women and public sphere of men had developed among the Chewa of east central Africa by the end of the nineteenth century. [This] was disrupted by the impact of African and European invasions, and the effects of Christianity, Commerce and Civilization. These

⁹⁸ Caroline Ifeka-Moller, 'Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt', in S. Ardener (ed.), *Perceiving Women* (London, 1975).

⁹⁹ Eileen Byrne, 'African Marriage in Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1940' (Univ. of Manchester B.A. research thesis, 1979).

undermined the historic bases of Chewa society, and provided men with access to new forms of wealth and power denied to women. During the colonial period, neo-traditionalists attempted to maintain this disequilibrium between men and women, and to restructure society on a paternalistic and individualistic basis. One attempt to counter this process, to enable women to make the transformation from small to large scale societies on their own terms, was made by the Anglican women's organization, the Mothers' Union or *Mpingo wa Amai*. This met with an immediate response when it was introduced in the early 1930s, enabling Chewa women to redefine historic roles and institutions within the changed circumstances and to respond to novel problems raised. It achieved some success in maintaining the status of women.¹⁰⁰

Sherilyn Young's 'Fertility and Famine' is a study of the alternative strategy. In summary version her account of her southern Mozambique case runs:

Colonial forced labour in the twentieth century supplemented migration in draining the labour power of the Tsonga and Chopi. Large settler plantations were carved out of their existing agricultural lands. A run of famines and ecological disasters between 1908 and 1922 ensured heavy dependence on the export of labour. The agricultural revival of the 1920s was predominantly that of a female peasantry, producing the bulk of Southern Mozambique's cashews and groundnuts... When [in] the Second World War a system of forced labour was resorted to, women had to produce cash crops, especially cotton, for four days a week, under male supervisors. Adaptation to such changes can be seen in the growth of spirit-possession cults among the people, dominated by women. Southern Mozambique society survives with a striking distinction between a local female peasantry and an emigrant male semi-proletariat.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Richard Stuart, 'Mpingo wa Amai – the Mothers' Union in Nyasaland' (unpublished MS.).

¹⁰¹ Sherilyn Young, 'Fertility and Famine: Women's Agricultural History in Southern Mozambique', in Palmer and Parsons (eds.), *Roots of Rural Poverty*.

THE MANIPULATION OF 'TRADITION' AGAINST SUBJECTS AND IMMIGRANTS

The other two appeals to 'tradition' and reliance upon the relationships spelt out in the new colonial custom are more straight-forward. Ian Linden has described how the Ngoni chiefs in Nyasaland attempted to use the colonial alliance with administrators and missionaries to exert control over their Chewa subjects. To do so they adumbrated the concept of disciplined and healthy 'Ngoni culture' and of a decadent and immoral 'Chewa culture' – the very concepts which Binsbergen criticizes as so misleading for the nineteenth century; they argued that Ngoni culture had been dominant prior to the European arrival and should be supported now against the 'beastly' practices of the Chewa; they played upon the European liking for clear-cut hierarchies of status in order to firm up networks of power which had been much less clear-cut in the past. The Ngoni were also able to stiffen up their own 'tradition' of discipline and military prowess by a selective use of the European military mode.

Another Nyasaland example can be used to illustrate the use of 'tradition' by indigenes to maintain control over immigrants. Matthew Schoffeleers has shown how the Mang'anja of the Lower Shire Valley have managed to retain control of chiefship, control of land allocation, and so on, though far out-numbered by immigrants from Mozambique. They have been able to do this by a combined appeal to the 'traditions' of pre-colonial chiefship and to the 'traditions' of the local territorial cult. In fact, the nineteenth-century history of the Valley was one of enormous fluidity; well-armed adventurers came in and imposed themselves upon the Mang'anja; the shrines of the territorial cult were destroyed; there were rapid changes in the self-identification of the people, who used this or that ethnic tag according to shifting balances of prestige. It was the colonial pacification which broke up the power of the armed adventurers, restored the Mang'anja chiefs and which really stimulated the invention of Mang'anja identity. With codified colonial custom, the right of the Mang'anja chiefs to allocate land was taken as an article of faith. In the twentieth century the Mang'anja achieved a dominance in the name of tradition which they had not exercised in the past.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ian Linden, 'Chewa Initiation Rites and Nyau Societies', in Terence Ranger and John Weller (eds.), *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* (London,

CONCLUSION

African politicians, cultural nationalists and, indeed, historians are left with two ambiguous legacies from the colonial invention of traditions. One is the body of invented traditions imported from Europe which in some parts of Africa still exercises an influence on ruling class culture which it has largely lost in Europe itself. In his *Prison Diary* Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes savagely of the contemporary Kenyan élite:

The members of a comprador bourgeoisie of a former settler colony count themselves lucky. They don't have to travel and reside abroad to know and copy the culture of the imperialist bourgeoisie: have they not learnt it all from the colonial settler representatives of metropolitan culture? Nurtured in the womb of the old colonial system, they have matured to their full compradorial heights, looking to the local Europeans as the alpha and omega of gentlemanly refinement and lady-like elegance. With racial barriers to class mobility thrown open, the deportment of a European gentleman – rosebuds and pins in coat lapels, spotless white kerchiefs in breast pockets, tail-coats, top-hats and gold-chained pocket watches – is no longer in the realm of dreams and wishes... The most popular columns in the old settler papers... were the social pages... Well, the columns are now back in the glossy bourgeois monthlies... The settler played golf and polo, went to horse-races or on the royal hunt in red-coats and riding-breeches... The black pupils now do the same, only with greater zeal: golf and horses have become 'national' institutions.¹⁰³

Other new states, less open to Ngugi's charges, express their national sovereignty with the national anthems, flags and rallies which Eric Hobsbawm describes for nineteenth-century Europe in this book. Representing as they do new multi-ethnic territorial states the African nations are much less engaged in the invention of past 'national cultures' than were the Scottish or Welsh Romantics.

The second ambiguous legacy is that of 'traditional' African culture; the whole body of reified 'tradition' invented by colonial

1975); Matthew Schoffeleers, 'The History and Political Role of the Mbona Cult among the Mang'anja', in Ranger and Kimambo (eds.), *The Historical Study of African Religion*.

¹⁰³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (London, 1981), pp. 58–9.

administrators, missionaries, 'progressive traditionalists', elders and anthropologists. Those like Ngugi who repudiate bourgeois élite culture face the ironic danger of embracing another set of colonial inventions instead. Ngugi himself solves the difficulty by embracing the tradition of Kenyan popular resistance to colonialism. As this chapter suggests, young men, women, immigrants – the exploited groups with whom Ngugi has sympathy – *have* sometimes been able to tap the continued vitality of the mingled continuity and innovation which resides within indigenous cultures as they have continued to develop underneath the rigidities of codified colonial custom.

As for historians, they have at least a double task. They have to free themselves from the illusion that the African custom recorded by officials or by many anthropologists is any sort of guide to the African past. But they also need to appreciate how much invented traditions of all kinds have to do with the history of Africa in the twentieth century and strive to produce better founded accounts of them than this preliminary sketch.