1 *Africa and the colonial challenge*

Never in the history of Africa did so many changes occur and with such speed as they did between 1880 and 1935. As late as 1880, only very limited areas of Africa had come under the direct rule of Europeans and African rulers and lineage heads were in control of their independence and sovereignty (see 1.1). But by 1914, with the sole exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, the whole of Africa had been partitioned and occupied by the imperial powers of France, Britain, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Spain and Italy and colonialism had been installed. In other words, then, during the period of 1880 to 1935, Africa did face a very serious challenge, the challenge of colonialism.

The state of African preparedness

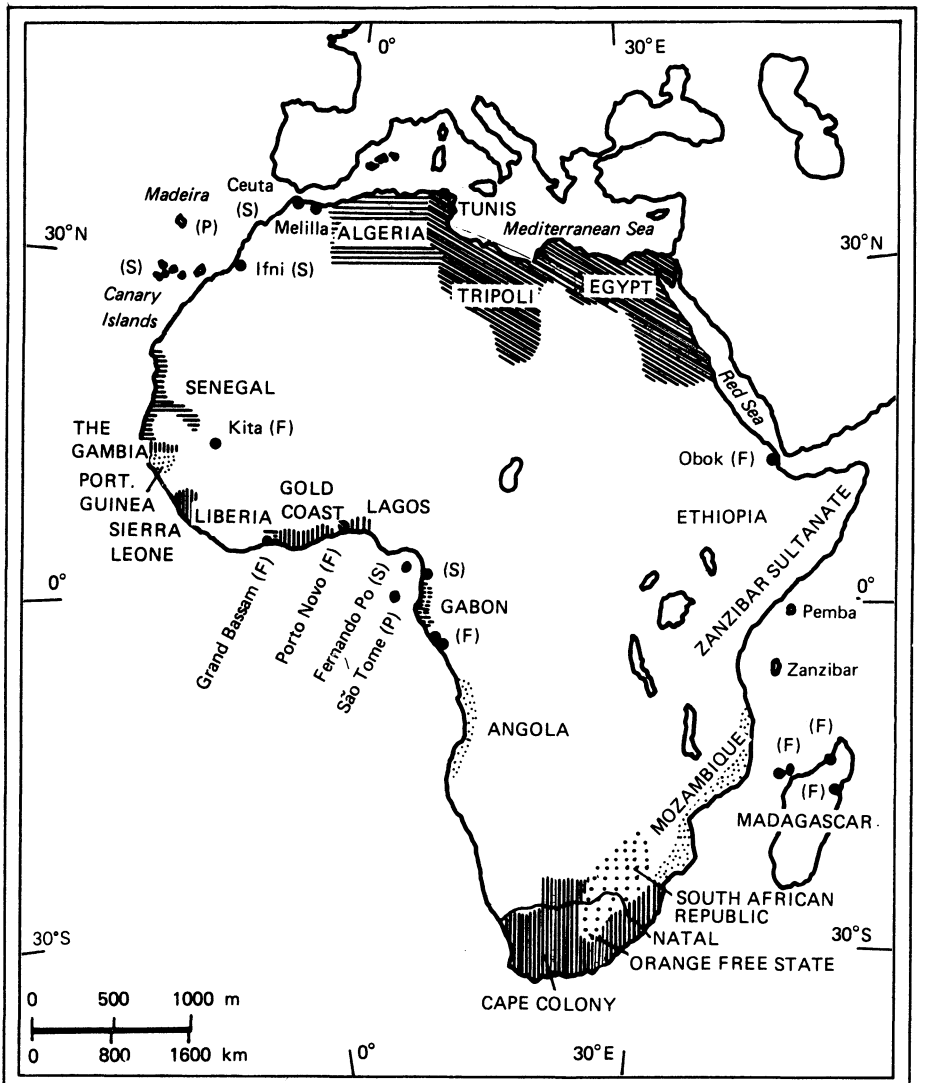
What was the attitude of the Africans themselves to this establishment of colonialism, involving as it did such a fundamental change in the nature of the relationships that had existed between them and the Europeans over the preceding three hundred years? The answer is quite clear and unequivocal: an overwhelming majority of African authorities and leaders were vehemently opposed to this change and expressed their determination to maintain the status quo and, above all, to retain their sovereignty and independence. This answer can be documented from the very words of the contemporary African leaders themselves.

In 1891, when the British offered protection to Prempeh I of Asante in the Gold Coast (now Republic of Ghana), he replied:

> The suggestion that Asante in its present state should come and enjoy the protection of Her Majesty the Queen and Empress of India I may say is a matter of very serious consideration, and which I am happy to say we have arrived at this conclusion, that my kingdom of Asante will never commit itself to any such policy. Asante must remain as of old at the same time to remain friendly with all white men.

In 1895, Wobogo, the Moro Naba or King of the Mosi (in modern Burkina Faso) told the French Captain Destenave:

> I know the whites wish to kill me in order to take my country, and yet you claim that they will help me to organize my country. But I find my country good just as it is. I have no need of them. I know what is necessary for me and what I want: I have my own merchants: also, consider yourself fortunate that I do not order your head to be cut off. Go away now, and above all, never come back.



1.1 *Africa on the eve of partition, showing extent of conquest by 1880*

When the Italians launched their campaign against Ethiopia with the connivance of Britain and France, Menelik, the Emperor, issued a mobilization proclamation in September 1895 in which he stated:

> Enemies have now come upon us to ruin our country and to change our religion . . . Our enemies have begun the affair by advancing and digging into the country like moles. With the help of God I will not deliver up my country to them . . . Today, you who are strong, give me of your strength, and you who are weak, help me by prayer.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Lat Dior, the Damel of Cayor (in modern Senegal) in 1883, by King Machemba of the Yao in modern mainland Tanzania in 1890, and by Hendrik Witbooi, a king in South-West Africa.

These are the very words of the men who were facing the colonial challenge and they do prove beyond any doubt the strength of their determination to oppose the Europeans and to defend their sovereignty, religion and traditional way of life.

It is equally clear from all these quotations that these rulers were confident of their preparedness to face the European invaders, as well might they have been. First, they were fully confident that their magic, their ancestors and certainly their gods or god would come to their aid, and many of them on the eve of the actual physical confrontation resorted either to prayers or sacrifices or to herbs and incantations. As will be seen in many of the following chapters, religion was indeed one of the weapons used against colonialism. Moreover, many African rulers had been able to build empires of varying sizes only a couple of decades back, and some were still in the process of expanding or reviving their kingdoms. Many of them had been able to defend their sovereignty with the support of their people using traditional weapons and tactics. Some of them, like Samori Ture of the Mande empire in West Africa and Menelik of Ethiopia, had even been able to modernize their armies. From all this, the African rulers saw no reason why they could not maintain their sovereignty at that time. Furthermore, some thought they could stave off the invaders through diplomacy.

However, many African rulers did in fact welcome the new changes that were steadily being introduced from the third decade of the nineteenth century since these changes had hitherto posed no threat to their sovereignty and independence. In West Africa, for instance, thanks to the activities of the missionaries, Fourah Bay College had been founded as early as 1826, while elementary schools and a secondary school each in the Gold Coast and Nigeria had been established by the 1870s. Indeed, a call for the establishment of a university in West Africa by the Carribean-born pan-Africanist, Edward Wilmot Blyden, had already gone out. As early as 1887, some wealthy Africans had even begun to send their children to Europe for further education and professional training and some of them had returned home as fully qualified barristers and doctors.

Above all, following the abolition of the hideous and inhuman traffic in slaves, the Africans had been able to change over to an economy based on the exportation of cash crops – palm oil in Nigeria, groundnuts in Senegal and The Gambia, all before 1880 – and cocoa had just been reintroduced into the Gold Coast by Tetteh Quashie from Fernando Po in 1879. And all this had occurred without the establishment of any direct European rule except in small pockets on the coast. Indeed, the relatively small group of West Africans who had benefited from European-style education were, by

1880, doing extremely well. They were dominating the few civil service posts; on the coast, some of them were running their own import–export businesses and were monopolizing the internal distribution of imported goods. It was in East Africa that European influences were still minimal, although, after the epoch-making journeys of Livingstone and Stanley and the subsequent propaganda by missionary societies, it was only a matter of time before churches and schools, and with them roads and railways, would make their appearance.

As far as Africans were concerned, then, they did not see any need for any radical change in their centuries-old relations with Europe, and they were confident that, if the Europeans wanted to force any changes on them and push their way inland, they would be able to stop them as they had been able to do for the last two or three hundred years. Hence the note of confidence, if not of defiance, that rings through the words quoted above.

But what the Africans did not realize was that by 1880, thanks to the spread of the industrial revolution in Europe, and the subsequent technological progress signified by the steamship, the railway, the telegraph and, above all, the first machine gun – the Maxim gun – the Europeans whom they were about to face now had new political objectives and economic needs and a relatively advanced technology. That is, they did not know that the old era of free trade and informal political control had given way to, to borrow Basil Davidson's words, 'the era of the new imperialism and rival capitalist monopolies' and therefore that it was not only trade that the Europeans now wanted but also direct political control. Secondly, the African leaders were not aware of the fact that the guns that they had used hitherto and stockpiled, the muzzle-loading muskets – the French captured 21 365 muskets from the Baule of Côte d'Ivoire after the suppression of their revolt in 1911 – were totally outmoded and no match for those of the Europeans, the breech-loading rifles, which had about ten times the rate of fire at six times the charge, and the new ultra-rapid-fire Maxims. The English poet Hilaire Belloc summed up the situation aptly:

> Whatever happens we have got
> The Maxim gun and they have not.

It is here that African rulers miscalculated, and in many cases with tragic consequences. As will be seen later, all the chiefs quoted above, except one, were defeated and lost their sovereignty. Moreover, Lat Dior was killed, Prempeh, Behanzin and Cetshwayo of the Zulu were exiled and Lobengula of the Ndebele died in flight. Only Menelik, as will be seen in a later chapter, defeated the Italian invaders and thereby maintained his sovereignty and independence.

The structure of Volume VII

It is evident, then, that relations between Africans and Europeans did undergo a revolutionary change and Africa was faced with a serious colonial challenge between 1880 and 1935. What, then, were the origins of this phenomenal challenge, the challenge of colonialism? Or, put differently, how and why did the three-centuries-old relations between Africa and Europe undergo such drastic and fundamental change

during this period? How was the colonial system established in Africa and what measures, political, economic, psychological and ideological, were adopted to buttress the system? How prepared was Africa to face and how did she face this challenge and with what success? Which of the new changes were accepted and which were rejected? What of the old was retained and what was destroyed? What adaptations and accommodations were made? What were the effects of all this on Africa, its peoples and their political, social and economic structures and institutions? Finally, what is the significance of colonialism for Africa and her history? These are the questions that this volume will attempt to answer.

For the purpose of answering these questions, and explaining African initiatives and responses in the face of the colonial challenge, this volume has been divided, apart from the first two chapters, into three main sections. Each section is preceded by a chapter (3, 13, 22) in which the theme of the section is surveyed in a general way and from a continental perspective, and the subsequent chapters are dealt with on a regional basis. The introductory section, comprising this and the next chapter, discusses African attitudes and preparedness on the eve of this fundamental change in the relations between Africa and the Europeans, and the reasons for the partition, conquest and occupation of Africa by the European imperial powers.

The second section deals with a theme that had, until the 1960s, either been grossly misrepresented or entirely ignored by the colonial school of African historiography, namely, African initiatives and reactions in the face of the conquest and occupation of Africa. To the members of this school, such as H. H. Johnston, Sir Alan Burns and, more recently, Margery Perham, Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan, Africans in fact welcomed the establishment of colonial rule since not only did it save them from anarchy and internecine warfare but it also brought them some concrete benefits. Thus Margery Perham:

> most of the tribes quickly accepted European rule as part of an irresistible order, one which brought many benefits, above all peace, and exciting novelties, railways and roads, lamps, bicycles, ploughs, new foods and crops, and all that could be acquired and experienced in town and city. For the ruling classes, traditional or created, it brought a new strength and security of status and new forms of wealth and power. For many years after annexation, though there was much bewilderment, revolts were very few, and there does not *appear* to have been much sense of indignity at being ruled.

Such ideas are also reflected in the use of such Eurocentric terms as 'pacification', *Pax Britannica* and *Pax Gallica*, used rather ironically to describe what amounted to the conquest and occupation of Africa between 1890 and 1914.

It is to correct this wrong interpretation of the colonial school and to redress the balance and highlight the African perspective that we have devoted as many as seven chapters to this theme of African initiatives and reactions.

It will be seen from these chapters that the view that Africans received the invading soldiers with elation and quickly accepted colonial rule is not borne out by the available evidence. In fact, African reactions were the very reverse. It is quite evident that Africans were faced with only two options, either to readily surrender their sovereignty and independence, or to defend them at all costs. It is most significant that the great

majority of them, as will be amply demonstrated in this volume, irrespective of the political and the socio-economic structures of their states and in the face of all the odds against them, did decide to defend their sovereignty and independence. John D. Hargreaves poses this interesting question:

> [Given this] range of possible attitudes on the part of the European invaders, a number of options might be open to African rulers. Among the short-term advantages obtainable from treaties or from collaboration with Europeans were not merely access to fire-arms and consumer goods, but opportunities to enlist powerful allies in external or internal disputes. Why then did so many African states reject such opportunities, choosing to resist the Europeans in battle?

This may sound enigmatic, but only so to somebody looking at the whole issue from the Eurocentric point of view. To the African, the issue at stake was not short-term or long-term advantages but rather the fundamental question of his land and his sovereignty, and it is precisely because of this that virtually all African polities, centralized and non-centralized alike, sooner or later chose to maintain or defend or try to regain their sovereignty. To them, there could be no compromise on that, and indeed many of the leaders of these states chose to die on the battlefield, go into voluntary flight or face exile rather than surrender their sovereignty without a struggle.

A great majority of African rulers, then, did opt for the defence of their sovereignty and independence. It is in the strategies and the tactics that they adopted to achieve this universal objective that they differed. Most African rulers chose the strategy of confrontation, using either diplomatic or military weapons or both. As will be seen below, Samori Ture and Kabarega of Bunyoro resorted to both weapons while Prempeh I and Mwanga of Buganda relied on diplomacy. Others, such as Tofa of Porto Novo (in what is now Benin), chose the strategy of alliance or co-operation, *not* of collaboration.

This question of strategy should be highlighted here because it has been grossly misunderstood hitherto and this has led to the classification of some of the African rulers as collaborators and their action as that of collaboration. We are opposed to the use of this term collaboration not only because it is inaccurate but also because it is derogatory and Eurocentric. As we have seen above, the fundamental issue at stake between the 1880s and the 1900s, as far as the African rulers were concerned, was that of sovereignty, and, on this, it was quite clear that nobody was prepared to compromise. Those African rulers who have been mistakenly termed collaborators were those who thought that the best way of safeguarding their sovereignty or even regaining the sovereignty that they might have lost to some African power previous to the arrival of the Europeans was *not* to collaborate but rather to *ally* with the European invaders.

However, whatever strategy the Africans adopted, all of them – with the sole exception of the Liberians and Ethiopians – failed, for reasons that will be discussed below, to maintain their sovereignty, and by the beginning of the First World War, the cut-off date for the first section of this volume, Africa had been subjected to colonial rule. How and why the Liberians and Ethiopians managed to survive in the face of this colonial onslaught is treated in Chapter 11.

What, then, did these colonial powers do with their new colonies in the political, social and economic fields after the interlude of the First World War? It is this question which is answered in the second section of this volume. Here, since the various political mechanisms devised for the administration of their colonies, and the ideologies behind them, are well covered in many of the existing works surveying colonialism in Africa, only a single chapter has been devoted to this theme. Instead, much more attention is given to the economic and social aspects of the colonial system and its impact on Africa so as to redress the balance. It will be seen from these chapters that the period after the First World War and up to 1935, the period which has been described by some recent historians as the high noon of colonialism, did see the building of an infrastructure of roads and railways and the introduction of some social changes, such as primary and secondary schools. However, the colonial rulers had one principal end in view, namely, the ruthless exploitation of the resources of Africa for the sole benefit of the colonial powers and their mercantile, mining and financial companies in the metropolitan countries. One of the chapters in this section to which particular attention should be drawn is the one dealing with the demographic aspects of colonial rule, a theme which is not normally found in existing surveys of colonialism in Africa.

What were African initiatives and reactions in the face of this consolidation of colonialism and the exploitation of their continent? This is the question which is answered in the third section of this volume and a great deal of attention is paid to this question in conformity with the philosophy underlying this work, that is, to view the story from an African standpoint and to highlight African initiatives and reactions. African attitudes in this period were certainly not characterized by indifference or passivity or ready acceptance. If the period has been described as the classic era of colonialism, it is also the classic era of the strategy of resistance or protest in Africa. As will be shown, both in the general survey and in the subsequent regional surveys, Africans did resort to a number of devices and measures – and indeed a whole variety of these were devised – to resist colonialism.

It should be emphasized that the objectives at this time were, with the exception of those of the North African leaders, not to overthrow the colonial system but rather to seek its amelioration and an accommodation within it. The main objectives were to render the colonial system less oppressive and less dehumanizing and to make it beneficial to the Africans as well as the Europeans. African leaders sought the correction of such specific measures and abuses as forced labour, high taxation, compulsory cultivation of crops, land alienation, pass laws, low prices of agricultural products and high prices of imported goods and racial discrimination and segregation, and to improve inadequate social facilities such as hospitals, pipe-borne water and schools.

These grievances against the colonial system were felt, it should be emphasized, among all classes of society, the educated as well as the illiterate and the urban as well as the rural dwellers, and generated a common consciousness among them as Africans and black men as opposed to their oppressors, the colonial rulers and the white men. It is during this period that we see the strengthening of African political nationalism, which had its beginnings immediately after the completion of the establishment of the colonial system in the 1910s.

The articulation of this feeling and the leadership of the movement, which during the period up to the 1910s was the responsibility of the traditional authorities and developed within the framework of the pre-colonial political structures, was now assumed by the new educated elite groups or members of the new middle class. Those new leaders were, rather paradoxically, the products of the very colonial system itself, created and sustained through the schools and the administrative, mining, financial and commercial institutions that it introduced. It is the concentration of the leadership of the nationalist and anti-colonialist activities in the hands of the educated Africans who lived mainly in the new urban centres which has led to the incorrect identification of African nationalism in the inter-war period exclusively with that class and its characterization as primarily an urban phenomenon.

Numerous groups and associations were formed for the articulation of these nationalist aspirations. As is evident in the chapters in this section, the strategies and tactics that were devised during this period in order to give expression to these aspirations were equally diverse. As B. O. Oloruntimehin and E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo (Chapters 22 and 26 below) have shown, these groups included youth associations, ethnic associations, old boys' associations, political parties, political movements of both a territorial and inter-territorial nature and inside as well as outside the continent, trade unions, literary clubs, civil servants' clubs, improvement associations and various religious sects or movements. Some of these had been formed in the period before the First World War but there is no doubt that they proliferated during the period under review, as the chapters show.

The weapons or tactics adopted during the period, unlike those of the pre-First World War period when rebellions and so-called riots were more prevalent, were petitions and delegations to the metropolitan and local governments, strikes, boycotts and, above all, the press and international congresses. The inter-war period was certainly the heyday of journalism in Africa in general and in West Africa in particular while pan-African congresses also became a typical feature of the anti-colonial movement. These congresses were calculated to give nationalist and anti-colonial movements in Africa an international flavour; they hoped to draw the attention of the metropolitan powers to events in the colonies, and it was for this reason that the pan-African congresses organized by the American black, Dr W. E. B. Du Bois, were held in Paris, London, Brussels and even Lisbon. This theme is taken up in greater detail in Chapter 29, which deals with the interactions between the blacks of Africa and the blacks of the diaspora in the Americas during the entire period under review.

However, despite the diversity of associations and the complexity of the tactics they developed, with the sole exception of Egypt, very little real impact had been made on the colonial system by the early 1930s. And when, in 1935, the imperial forces of Fascist Italy under Mussolini seized and occupied Ethiopia, one of the two remaining bastions of hope and the main symbol of Africa's future revival and regaining of sovereignty, it looked as if the continent of Africa was doomed to be for ever under the yoke of colonialism. But this was not to be. The resilience of African peoples, the occupation of Ethiopia itself, the intensification of African nationalism and anti-colonialist sentiment after the Second World War, coupled with the emergence of new mass political parties and a new radical leadership dedicated not to the amelioration but rather to the complete

uprooting of colonialism – all these factors combined, as Volume VIII of this work will show, to bring about the liquidation of colonial domination from the continent at a rate as quick, and within about the same twenty-year period, as it took to establish it. However, between 1880 and 1935, colonialism appeared to be firmly imprinted on Africa. What marks, then, did it leave on Africa? This is the question that is answered in the last chapter of the volume.