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.\(^{58}\) 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.

\(^{58}\) 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 northwestern 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

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 desperately 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


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Sir Herbert Stanley to Sir Geoffrey Thomas, 7 July 1925, P3/13/3/8, Lusaka.
The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa

welcome’. 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’. 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. 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’.

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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{70}


\textsuperscript{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'.21 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.22

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

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22 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 folklore'. Aspirations to become more like the king/emporer 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/emporer, 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’.

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 *chapaulinge*’. 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’.

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

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. Scotchi 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.


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.\textsuperscript{78}

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

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 estab-
ishment 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 compre-
hensible 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,

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\(^{81}\) 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

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.

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.

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

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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'.

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.

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.

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

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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. 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.

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-bound, 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

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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'.

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.

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

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94 Ibid., pp. 223-4.
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 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 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 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

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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. 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’.

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

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

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


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.