

Nationalism and African Intellectuals

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This book is about nationalism and African intellectuals and about their intersections, in order to address issues of tradition, change, politics, and ultimately power. The most significant intellectual project, throughout the period covered by this book, has been to reshape Africa according to the image constructed by its educated elite. The results have been mixed, from the glorious euphoria of the success of anticolonial movements to the depressing circumstances of the African condition as we enter a new millennium.

I set out to explore the understanding of Africa by Africans of different generations and intellectual orientations. As far as possible, I blend the analysis of actions with the reflections that preceded and accompanied them. All of my cases are related to progress and modernization since the nineteenth century, and I have privileged the new educated elite, which has dominated the discourse. If Europeans obtained power from a traditional elite during the nineteenth century, they handed it over to a new educated elite in the twentieth. The issue of power loomed large, as the elite was also interested in challenging traditional authority at virtually all levels of government. It successfully positioned itself as the only group that could reflect effectively on the profound changes that characterized the various periods and that had the means to bring them about. However I am not concerned with power politics, but with how nationalism has shaped the production of knowledge and influenced politics in Africa since the nineteenth century. Where knowledge and action have interacted, as in nationalist struggles in the colonial era or as in Pan-Africanism, I have defined my agenda more broadly to reflect this interaction. This book examines the intelligentsia's ambivalent relationship with the missionaries, Europeans in general, the colonial apparatus, and subsequent state formations; the contradictions manifested within Pan-Africanism and nationalism; and the relation of academic institutions and intellectual production to the state during the nationalist period and beyond. Throughout these formations, ethnic identities and traditions have remained a powerful force. Claims to ethnic identity and traditions have served both radical and conservative agendas. My examples are drawn mainly from tropical Africa, although I allude to major developments in other parts of the continent.