Intellectual Agent, Mediator and Interlocutor
Intellectual Agent, Mediator and Interlocutor: A. B. Assensoh and African Politics in Transition

Edited by

Toyin Falola and Emmanuel M. Mbah
To Professor Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh for her scholarship and contributions to African and African American studies.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures............................................................................................................. x

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. xi

Chapter One ........................................................................................................ 1
Intellectual Agent, Mediator, and Interlocutor: A. B. Assensoh and African Politics in Transition
Toyin Falola and Emmanuel M. Mbah

Part I: Ethnicity and Conflict

Chapter Two ........................................................................................................... 32
Political Winds of Change in Africa: Decolonization and Its Aftermath
Julius O. Adekunle

Chapter Three ......................................................................................................... 51
Ethnicity and State Crisis in Southern Nigeria
Olufemi O. Vaughan

Chapter Four ......................................................................................................... 67
Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry and Catherine Clay

Chapter Five ......................................................................................................... 88
Historicizing and Contextualizing the Discourse on African International Law and a Concise Overview of the Pacific Settlement of the Cameroon-Nigeria Bakassi Peninsula Dispute
E. Ike Udogu
### Part II: Governance and Development Economics

Ali Mazrui

Chapter Seven: The Global Discourse on Democracy and Development: Speaking Truth to Power
Ama Biney

Chapter Eight: From the OAU to the AU: The Travails of Regional Integration in Africa
George Klay Kieh, Jr.

Chapter Nine: Africa in the First Decade of the Twenty-first Century: New Economic Governance
Ivor Agyeman-Duah

Damien D. Ejigiri and Waswa Balunywa

### Part III: Social Adjustments and Mobility

Chapter Eleven: Universal Health-care Coverage: Assessing the Implementation of Ghana’s NHIS Law
Hassan Wahab

Chapter Twelve: Limited Engagement: Historical Flashpoints in the Politics of University-Community Engagement in Africa
Ishmael I. Munene
Chapter Thirteen ...................................................................................... 218
The State and Islam in Ghana
David Owusu-Ansah

Chapter Fourteen .................................................................................... 228
“Diasporas,” Mobility, and the Social Imaginary: Getting Ahead in West Africa
Emmanuel Akyeampong

Chapter Fifteen ........................................................................................ 244
Abraham Lincoln’s Legacy in Africa
William D. Pederson and S. David Goode

Chapter Sixteen ....................................................................................... 257
How I First Encountered A. B. Assensoh in Louisiana
Dorothy V. Smith

Appendix A ............................................................................................. 264
Grantmanship

Appendix B .............................................................................................. 266
International Linkages

Appendix C .............................................................................................. 267
Journalistic (Editorial) Appointments and Work Experience

Notes ........................................................................................................ 269

Bibliography ............................................................................................ 310

Contributors ............................................................................................. 345
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 5.1: Map of Area of Conflict
Figure 6.1: Shariacracy between
Figure 6.2: Between Lingo-constitutionalism and Religio-
constitutionalism
Figure 10.1: 2011 Overall Scores of Governance Performance
Figure 10.2: Safety and Rule of Law Scores
Figure 10.3: Overall Bottom Country Scores vs. Safety and Rule of Law
Bottom Scores
Figure 11.1: New Institutional Framework
Figure 12.1: Context of Limited Engagement for Colonial Universities
Figure 12.2: Context of Limited Engagement for Universities, 1980-95
Figure 12.3: A Diagrammatic Representation of the Conceptual
Framework
Figure 12.4: Comparison between Kenyatta University and NMMU
Engagement
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the brainchild of Toyin Falola who saw the wisdom and necessity of dedicating a volume on scholarship to someone who has contributed so much to African studies. Before long, it became a two-person project (of Toyin Falola and Emmanuel M. Mbah); we, the editors, had to come up with a theme and a list of reputable contributors for the volume; we also had to ensure its timely completion without sacrificing quality, and as a result, we sometimes pestered them. We owe the contributors a debt of gratitude; it is thanks to them that we have the volume today.

We also want to extend our gratitude to Professors Okpeh Okpeh, Mike Odey, and Sati Fwatshak for their useful comments on chapter one of the volume and to all those who assisted us in one way or another in bringing this volume to fruition.
CHAPTER ONE

INTELLECTUAL AGENT, MEDIATOR, AND INTERLOCUTOR:
A. B. ASSENSOH AND AFRICAN POLITICS IN TRANSITION

TOYIN FALOLA AND EMMANUEL M. MBAH

Introduction

After decades in the groves of an exciting and competitive academy, during which period he also served as a journalist and a pastor, Professor Akwasi B. Assensoh has now retired, in a formal sense of attachment to, and disengagement from, a specific university space, in this case that of Indiana University Bloomington. He will, however, continue to work within formal and informal spaces. In the real sense, the informal space is elastic—a world without any fixed end or boundaries, embodied in the endless productive work in multiple spaces of engagements and interactions. And as the informal merges with the formal, there emerges a cumulative body of works and ideas that in turn lead to an afterlife. The informal and the formal then merge into a legacy, which becomes the stamp of life; the memory of existence; the assessment and celebration of the past, even of a dead past; a living presence and the constant recall of the past.

In his formal and former job, he was a full professor and director of graduate studies and admissions in the Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana University (IU) Bloomington. Before coming to Indiana, he had been on the faculty of several academic institutions, serving with distinction at each. In those long years of service, he was a prolific scholar and effective teacher, generating a corpus of work that has deepened and broadened the study of African and African American history and politics. His work is often referenced by other
scholars. Because such an impact is the hope and dream of every serious scholar, a substantial part of this introductory chapter is dedicated to the life and scholarship of Professor Akwasi B. Assensoh, fondly known as AB.

The goal of this introductory chapter, therefore, is three-fold. In the first part we examine AB’s accomplishments as a teacher, scholar/academic, administrator, and activist. The second part focuses briefly on AB’s contributions to scholarship in general. The last part examines the trajectory of African politics since 1945 through the prism of ethnicity, governance, conflict, and the absence of dialogue. Here, we argue that these major concerns, far from being addressed judiciously, continue to undermine African politics by negatively impacting the socioeconomic malaises of rampant poverty and inadequate attention to health care, education, and other humanitarian issues. The inability of Africans to come to a dialogue to resolve these issues has led to situations where foreign actors have stepped in to dictate and define the trajectories of African political discourse and practice.

**Akwasi B. Assensoh: Teacher, Administrator, Activist, and Scholar**

Dr. Akwasi B. Assensoh is currently professor emeritus at IU Bloomington, a position he has held since December 2011. Previously, he was a professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies (AAADS) with an emphasis on history and African studies courses in the Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies, and he served as director of graduate studies and admissions, AAADS from July 1, 2004, to July 1, 2007. He is also an adjunct professor in the Hutton Honors College (formerly the IU Honors Program), IU Bloomington Campus (since 1996); African studies program faculty (since 1995); and Center of Latin American and Caribbean Studies faculty (since 1996). He is a specialist in

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Caribbean, African, and African American contemporary political leadership; African Diaspora in the Caribbean; and African and Latin American military involvement in politics.

**Education**

AB studied history and political science, with a minor in English language, at Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, where he received a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in 1981. He earned a Master of Arts (MA) degree in comparative history, specializing in modern European and world history, African and Afro-American history with emphasis on the Black Diaspora, from New York University (NYU) in 1982. He was awarded a PhD in comparative history—with subfields in modern European / European expansionism history, Afro-American (Black Diaspora) history, and general African history (with an emphasis on European colonization and decolonization)—from NYU in 1984. He continued his impressive educational career by pursuing postdoctoral research in peace studies and leadership, focusing on developing societal / American civil rights and liberation movements in the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, Great Britain, in 1983 and 1984.

AB’s quest for knowledge expanded into other areas not directly linked to his specific areas of concentration, earning him multiple diplomas and certificates from numerous institutions. For example, he was a registered external law (LLB) degree student at the University of London, Senate House, London (1989-92). The two-year course was provided by Wolsey Hall, Oxford, Great Britain, while academic advice and external tests were offered by the University of London. He, however, suspended pursuit of the jurisprudence doctorate (JD) to concentrate on his first love: teaching at university level. Although his candidacy for the JD expired, it can be renewed upon the payment of the prescribed fees to the University of London, and, knowing AB, it should not surprise anyone that he may have retired from teaching African and African Diaspora history and politics only to come back as a law professor.

The following are some of AB’s other diplomas and certificates received in the course of his career up to this point: Certificate of Completion in “Poetics of the Americas: Epic, Novel, and Civilization” in the summer of 1992 from the Louisiana State University (LSU) Program in Comparative Literature, Baton Rouge, for teachers and university professors; Certificate for Fulbright-Hays International Seminar Participation at Gadjah Madah University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (July-August 1986, as a Fulbright-Hays Faculty Fellow), with additional research visits to
Teaching and Research/Fellowships

During his long teaching career, AB impacted the lives of many in the numerous courses that he taught. For example, under the broad theme, “Africa and the Black World,” he taught the following courses: Afro-American History (Part I); Afro-American History (Part II); Afro-American and African Leadership in History; African History: The Cross-Atlantic Slave Trade; African Liberation and U.S. Civil Rights Movements: A Comparative Approach; Afro-American/African Protest Strategies (Topics Course); African History through Maps; World History (Political); World History (Social and Economic); Imperialism and Colonialism (European); Expansionism in the Third World (American and European); History of East Africa; History of West Africa; Comparative Slavery (Lower Level); Slavery Worldwide (Upper Level); From Africa to the New World: Blacks in Africa, America, and the Caribbean; Decolonization in Africa; Social Movements in History: African and African American Protest Movements; Black Liberation and Civil Rights Movements (Africa and the U.S.); Black Identity: From Africa to the Diaspora; Africa and Asia in the 20th Century: Cultural, Topographical, and Colonial Experiences; Pan-Africanism and Black Leadership; Pan-Africanism and the Back-to-Africa Movement (Garveyism); Comparative Slavery I; Comparative History II: Map Reading; African Military in History and Politics; Caribbean, African, and African American Political
Leadership, 1957-Present; and Blacks and Jews in History and Politics; 1945-Present (Seminar).

AB also taught specialized courses on European expansionism, imperialism, and the Black world. These include European/African History; History of Europe and Africa, since 1789; European Imperialism; Colonialism and Neocolonialism; Europe in World War I and World War II; Europe and Asia: The Dutch, the French, and the British in Southeast Asia; European and African History through Maps; and Fanon in Europe and Africa: The Algerian Crisis. Under general survey courses, AB taught the following: World Civilization (Parts I and II); World History (with an emphasis on slave acquisitions and the scramble for Africa at the Berlin Conference); Afro-Americans and Africans: Their Liberation Struggles; U.S. Civil Rights: The First Phase, 1800s-1955; U.S. Civil Rights: The Second Phase (Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-70s); and Black Leadership: From Martin Luther King (USA) to Kwame Nkrumah (Africa). Other general courses he developed and taught from 1983 to the present include: Modern Historical Thought; Ideologies (Political and Economic); Women’s History (with an emphasis on African, Asian, and African American Women); Afro-American History: From Indentured Servants to Slavery (Colloquium); Afro-American History: From Slavery to Freedom (upper level and graduate level course). He taught one historiography course, namely, The Making of Africa.

AB had the distinct ability to combine teaching and research, which of course are complementary. His research endeavors were facilitated by numerous awards, some of which include the following: Scholar-in-Residence at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, USA, in 1975 (additional sponsored research on the period when Ghana’s late President Kwame Nkrumah was a student at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, with Research Funds from the Phelps-Stokes Fund, New York, summer-fall 1975); Teaching Fellow, New York University, Department of History (taught American and African History from 1982 to 1983); New York University (Graduate) Academic Scholarship (1982-84); Dillard University’s Successful Nominee for the 21st Century Scholars Graduate Fellowship of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) of New York (Scholarship Award 1982-84); Recipient, Guest Scholarship of the Swedish Institute (Svenska Institutet) of Stockholm, Sweden, for a research visit to Sweden (summer 1983); Researcher (Reader), Institute of Historical Research, University of London, Senate House, London, Great Britain (June-September 1983); Research Attachment, Department of History, University of Stockholm, Sweden, a part of the Swedish Guest Scholarship (summer 1983); National Endowment for the Humanities
Academic Appointments and Work Experience

Upon finishing his PhD, AB was appointed assistant professor of history at Dillard University in the fall of 1984, and he served in that capacity until the fall of 1987, when he was promoted to associate professor. In 1988, he moved on to Stanford University and started afresh as an assistant professor in the Department of History and Afro-American Studies Program from 1988 to 1989. During the spring/fall of 1989 he received a visiting scholar appointment in the Department of History at Emory University. He went back to Ghana in 1994 and was appointed senior lecturer (an equivalent of America’s associate professor teaching rank) in the Department of History at the University of Ghana, Legon, where he gave some seminars but later declined the appointment to accept IU Bloomington’s tenured associate professorship. From Indiana, he moved to Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he accepted a tenured associate professorship appointment in history from 1990 to the fall of 1995. He returned to IU Bloomington as an associate professor in the Afro-American and African history program at the Department of Afro-American Studies, where he served as an associate professor.
professor until July 1, 2001. His appointment as a full professor of Afro-
American Studies at IU Bloomington in July 2001 was evidence of his
scholarship, teaching, and service, and he stayed in that capacity until his
most recent appointment as professor emeritus in 2011 in the same
institution.

In addition to this fruitful academic career, AB has also received other
very challenging administrative appointments. He was the founding
director of the Honors Program, Dillard University, New Orleans, serving
in that capacity from fall 1984 to fall 1988, during which period he
established the academic, social, and cultural components of a program
that attracted many Title III Education Department grants, and laid the
foundation for the current Honors College. He was an advisor to foreign
students at the same institution from fall 1984 to fall 1988, providing
assistance to international students in the areas of adjustment, academics,
immigration, and residential needs. He served as director of research and
associate editor, Martin Luther King Papers Project of Stanford University
at the King Center, Atlanta, Georgia, from 1988 to 1990. This senior-level
dual position included directing extensive research, guiding research of the
King family’s materials, and writing grant proposals for funding of the
project’s work and publications. During his tenure as director, he assisted
in implementing a software program that facilitated the identification of
instances of plagiarism in research materials, including some aspects of
Dr. King’s Boston University dissertation.

Later, AB became the director of graduate studies for the social
sciences and humanities division (including the history / Black studies,
political science, and sociology departments) at Southern University, Baton
Rouge, from 1991 to 1995, where his duties included, amongst others, the
revision of the graduate academic curriculum, academic (and sometimes
nonacademic) guidance to all graduate students within the program,
supervision of program faculty, the formulation and administration of
budgetary issues, and serving as liaison between the departments of the
program and the university administration. As the director of graduate
studies, he instituted a newsletter for the social sciences and humanities
division as part of his administrative responsibilities. In the course of these
challenging academic appointments, AB was always in touch with his
spirituality. He was ordained a Baptist minister on March 24, 2002, at the
Second Baptist Church, Bedford, Indiana, after a public examination in the
presence of the church’s congregation. The ceremony was conducted by
five ordained ministers and a deacon; since the spring of 2002, he has
served as acting pastor of the same church.
AB’s rich academic career extends to journalistic scholarship. Some of his appointments in this area include the following: assistant editor, and editor in chief from 1969 to 1970, of the *Daily Listener, Saturday Chronicle*, and the *Sunday Digest* (three newspapers published by the Dennis Printing Press of Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa); subeditor, the *Pioneer*, a daily newspaper based in Kumasi, Ghana (1970-72); subeditor, *Africa Magazine* of London (1974-75); managing editor of the syndicated news/features agency, African-Scandinavian Features Services, in Stockholm, Sweden (1976-78); managing editor, *International Observer Magazine* of New Orleans, Louisiana (1980-81); and associate editor, *African Commentary Journal* of Amherst, Massachusetts ( summer-fall 1990). Many of these administrative positions required intense intercontinental coordination, great expertise in personnel management, budgeting, developing social networks, as well as relationships with organizations in the communities.

**Editorial Board Memberships and Affiliations**

Professor Akwasi B. Assensoh was one of the key members in the founding of the *Association of Third World Studies* (ATWS) in 1983 and has been a member of the editorial board from 1988 to the present. Elected to the ATWS executive council in 1999, AB became its vice president / president-elect in 2002, and eventually served as president from 2003 to 2004. AB was a member of the ATWS conference organizing committee for the 27th ATWS annual meeting that took place in Ghana in 2009. To promote scholarship and strengthen the ATWS, Professor Assensoh and Dr. Yvette Alex-Assensoh created the Lawrence Dunbar Reddick Memorial Scholarship Award for the best article on Africa published during the preceding academic year. AB has been a recipient of the ATWS Presidential Award, given to members who have made enduring contributions to the arena of Third World studies. The Presidential Award was created by Dr. Paul Magnarella in 1992.

AB is currently associate editor of the *African World Journal*, Amherst, Massachusetts (since fall 1993); a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Third World Studies* (JTWS), a product of the ATWS (1988-present); member of the editorial board of the *International Abraham Lincoln Journal*, Louisiana State University-Shreveport (spring 2000-present) and as reviews coeditor of the *African and Asian Studies Journal*, published by Brill in the Netherlands. AB’s previous editorial duties include: member of the editorial board for the review journal *Ethnicity and Race in a Changing World*, published by Manchester University Press, Great Britain; board of advisors for Thomas M.

AB’s affiliations with scholastic and other institutions are many, so we are going to limit the list to the most important ones. He is a member of the following: Rosicrucian Order of the United States (AMORC), San José, California (1968-present); International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) of Brussels, Belgium (1974-present); Royal African Society of Great Britain and the Commonwealth, elected by Council of Membership in London in 1975 (active member since 1976); African Studies Association (ASA) (1982-present); American-Scandinavian Foundation of New York (1981-present); National Associate Member of the Smithsonian Institution of Washington, DC (1982-present); New York University Alumni Association (1982-present); American Historical Association, Washington, DC (1983-present); Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Beta Iota Lambda Chapter, Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (1993-present); Lifetime Member, Dillard University National Alumni Association (1983-present); Southern Historical Association, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, Louisiana (1985-present); National Geographic Society of America (1996-present); and Thirty-Second Degree Mason of Prince Hall Masons, New Orleans Masonic Lodge Temple, New Orleans, Louisiana (1986-present).

AB has previously held membership in the following organizations, etc.: member, Ghana Journalists Association, Accra, Ghana, (1972-73); Association of Foreign Correspondents in Sweden, Stockholm, Sweden (1976-78); Press Club of New Orleans (1980-88); Social Science History Association of America, Carbondale, Illinois (1982-86); International Platform Association (an agency for speaking engagements), Cleveland Heights, Ohio (1982-86); Southern Regional Honors Council, University of Alabama (1984-88); National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA), Washington, DC (1985-88); English Center of the International PEN Writers’ Association of London, Great Britain (1984-96), with the membership being transferred to the PEN Center USA West in 1996; National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia (1984-88; 1990-91).
Selected Honors

AB’s excellence and breadth of scholarship and service have earned him many distinguished honors. Some of these include the 1983 Speaker of the Year Award of the Graduate School of Public Administration Students’ Association, New York University; the Indiana University’s College of Arts and Sciences (COAS) Excellence in Teaching Award (TERA) during the 1996-97 academic year; the 1997 Presidential Award for Academic and Scholarly Excellence, by the ATS; the 1998 Distinguished Book Award by the ATWS for African Political Leadership; the 2000 Distinguished Scholarship Award of the African Research Bureau (ARB) from the ATWS; the 2001 James P. Holland Award for Exemplary Teaching and Service to Students from Indiana University College of Arts and Sciences (COAS); the 1993 University Chancellor’s Renaissance Scholar of the Year Award at Southern University; and the Richard A. Bernstein Research Professor (Endowed Chair, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore Campus for the 2003-4 academic year (responsibilities included administering the entire Bernstein Endowed Chair Office, conducting publishable research, giving invited seminars/lectures in classrooms, assisting with several research-oriented duties at the request of the President’s Office, editing university-related materials, and mentoring of faculty as well as students). AB has also been nominated and/or listed in the following: British Books in Print (among authors) since 1980; Contemporary Authors (among authors), 1987 edition; Who’s Who in U.S. Writers, Editors and Poets, 1988 edition; Who’s Who in America, 2005 edition and the 2013 deluxe edition; Who’s Who in the World (2006); and Men of Achievement, 1989 edition, of the International Biographical Center, Cambridge, Great Britain.

AB’s Contribution to Scholarship

Due to the very large volume of AB’s publications, we are going to focus on the few that have greatly reinvigorated scholarship both within Africa and across the Atlantic. One of his outstanding publications, African Military History and Politics (coauthored with Yvette N. Alex-Assensoh) examines the somewhat negative role the military has played in African politics since the emergence of independent African states. The authors note that whereas the African military is a creation of European colonial rule, European colonizers trained the military to be apolitical or nonpartisan. However, since independence, African armed forces, including the police, have yet to figure out how not to get involved in
politics, as a majority of them have been, or continue to be, ruled by military dictatorships. Through coups d’état and other forms of intervention, the military continues to get embroiled in African politics, sometimes overthrowing good governments and at other times replacing civilian dictatorships with military ones. The authors conclude by noting that,

While some coups d’état in postindependence Africa were inevitable and possibly necessary evils, most of them have become unnecessary intrusions into the political domain, which, as Nkrumah and other postindependence African leaders spelled out in their writings or speeches, should belong exclusively to the elected officials of the various nations that have suffered these takeovers.6

In an earlier monograph, Kwame Nkrumah of Africa (1989), AB examines the influences that shaped Nkrumah’s early years, from his teacher training experience, which began in 1926 in Ghana, to his studies in the United States and his brief stay in Europe. He argues,

Nkrumah’s varied experiences and extensive travels in the United States, as a student-cum-worker, appeared to have brought him in direct contact with a wide spectrum of individuals and organizations, a situation which obviously placed him in a better political stead than many other African politicians.7

Nkrumah’s stay in the United States, from 1935 to1945, molded and prepared him intellectually and politically for the important roles that he would later play in Ghanaian and African politics.8 But above all, Assensoh argues, his pan-African connections in Europe, amidst severe hardship, were very useful for his future political career and were instrumental in his appointment as Secretary General of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) by its Executive Committee, from which his political life blossomed.9

AB has also written on American civil rights politics, as well as on the cross-cultural marriage connections between Africans and African Americans. In a 1987 monograph, entitled Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and America’s Quest for Racial Integration, Assensoh argues that the humble parental upbringing and influence were important factors in molding Dr. King’s moral character, and that his destiny and the leadership role he was to play in the struggle for socioeconomic, political, and racial equality was rooted in the formative years of his life. His introduction (by his parents) to the teachings of Christianity, which he
exercised throughout his entire life, perfected his moral discipline and made him oblivious to the negative peer-pressure that might have lured him into crime. While accepting that without King’s excellent upbringing he might still have succeeded academically, AB points out that King could well “have turned out to be like many other Black children who, despite similar educational opportunity being made available to them, ultimately ended up in jail houses for criminal and other deviant [behaviors].”

Furthermore, AB maintains that King’s use of Mohandas Gandhi’s nonviolent strategies in the 1960s in formulating an approach to the problem, contributed immensely to generating a dialogue that ultimately resulted in minorities having a heightened feeling of belonging to the United States of America. In addition to Dr. King’s nonviolent approach to politics, AB contends, was his belief that only through participation in voting could African Americans truly contribute to the political process; it was only through such participation that a national leader with minority sympathies could ever be elected in the United States. That is why Dr. King waged a campaign for voter registration among African Americans and was rewarded with the realization that the Black vote played a significant role in electing President John F. Kennedy—who turned out to be the liberal whose presidency laid the groundwork for meaningful discussion and progress on issues of racial integration and inclusion.

Finally, AB points out that, apart from King’s leadership of the civil rights movement, his packed schedule of activities within the African American community and other minority groups and with the U.S. government, the intimidations and arrests, Dr. King was still able to pursue scholarship, which resulted, in under thirteen years, in six books and numerous newspaper articles and pamphlets, many of which reflected on his childhood years, the philosophy of nonviolence, and the civil rights movement. Thus, despite his humble Southern upbringing, Dr. King showed that with hard work, discipline, and moral astuteness, even minorities could succeed in the United States.

In “The Politics of Cross-cultural Marriage,” we continue to see the broad spectrum of A. B. Assensoh’s scholarship in the analyses of the challenges posed by marriage between Africans and African Americans from the point of view of the differences in sociocultural backgrounds. Specifically, Yvette and AB evaluate the role played by race, international relations, and cultural differences in marriages between Africans and African Americans. On race, the authors opine that because both groups have black skin, “[color] helps override awareness of their cultural ‘Otherness’ in American society.” Second, the authors note that international relations impact marriages between Africans and African
Americans, arguing that relations between the United States and individual African nations, among other factors, determine the number of African immigrants permitted to enter the United States in search of a better life, including marriage. Last, the authors argue that cultural differences in dealing with issues such as the definition of marriage, family structures, financial arrangements, ethnocentric behaviors, and unwarranted stereotypes from outsiders are some of the challenges that such marriages face. This is very much a quality of A. B. Assensoh—to selflessly use his particular situation as an example, provided the usage enhances the quality of scholarship.

The Larger Context: African Politics in Transition

In evaluating the combined impact of AB’s work, the intellectual setting is that of politics in Africa at transitional moments. Fluidity, instability, and crises define these various moments. The period from 1945 to 1960 was a watershed in African politics. For many Africans—with the exception of those living under Portuguese rule in Angola and Mozambique, and those living under white minority rule in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and South-West Africa (now Namibia)—these were years of promise. The Second World War had ended and Africans were optimistic about an independent future; it is this optimism that undergirded African politics during these promising times.

However, for a continent striding toward independence, there were many unsettling issues that needed the full attention of African nationalists. One of those issues, and a very important one in view of its ability to divide Africans and/or foment conflict, was how to bridge the ethnic divide that had been instituted by European colonizers, both in their respective colonies and sometimes across colonies. Other preoccupations at the time included discussions on the preferred form of government once independence was gained, how to configure self-reliant economies capable of redressing the poverty gap and adapt to the developmental needs of Africans, and how to establish concrete social structures centered on the advancement of education and health care.

Because these issues had been grossly mismanaged by the colonial powers, those fifteen years from 1945 to 1960 could arguably be characterized as the incubation period for the dysfunction that has stymied African politics since independence. For it was during these transitional years that African statesmen learned how not to speak to each other. How to introduce meaningful dialogue to address issues between and among Africans is where the transition in African politics stands today. In this
third part, we examine the four major roadblocks to the smooth transition in African politics: the ethnic problem, ineffective governance, recurrent conflict, and the absence of meaningful dialogue.

The Ethnic Problem

If there is one issue that defines African politics post-1945, it has to be ethnic discord. Peter Schraeder defines ethnicity as

>a sense of collective identity in which a people (the ethnic group) perceives itself as sharing a common historical past and a variety of social norms and customs, including the roles of elders and other age groups within society, relationships between males and females, rites and practices of marriage and divorce, legitimate forms of governance, and the proper means of resolving conflict.

With more than one thousand ethnic groups on the continent, ethnicity plays a major role in African politics because it constitutes the fabric through which African societies are either sewn together or torn apart; it is, according to Toyin Falola, “a source of identity affirmation (a cultural unit) and an agency of power (politics).” And because ethnic classifications, values, and politics are constantly changing, ethnicity constitutes the cornerstone of African politics in transition.

The postcolonial ethnic problem in Africa is a colonial creation. Colonial politics of socioeconomic and political preference, engineering, and/or alienation introduced serious cleavages between, and very often within, ethnic groups in Africa. In former German Kamerun (Cameroon), for example, German preference for the Bali-Nyonga ethnic group resulted in a reengineering process that quickly gave the Bali-Nyonga suzerainty over the more populated surrounding Widikum communities, during which period Widikum indigenes claimed to have suffered innumerable abuses as a result of the Bali-Nyonga/German alliance. This conflict, which started during the early years of German colonial rule, specifically in the 1890s, has been memorialized and eternalized into a veritable ethnic problem between the two groups. The French, during their tenure in Côte d’Ivoire, complicated the ethnic map by assigning preferential territorial spaces to favored groups, a factor that has heightened conflict between Ivorian ethnicities. Belgian colonial practices, including preference and support for the Tutsi over the Hutu in Rwanda and Burundi, were major factors in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

During the first two decades after independence, many in the West, and even some in Africa, believed that the ethnic problem in Africa would
dissipate as African societies embraced modernity or Western capitalist culture, as posited by theorists of modernization. For emerging African leaders of that period, independence and good governance could only be achieved if a form of unity that cut across ethnic barriers could be forged. Such thinking had been prefaced by the surge of nationalism that accompanied the struggle for independence, during which period, “those who suggested [rightly] that ethnic differences would endure . . . ran the risk of being denounced by African leaders and Western observers alike as subverting the African continent’s struggle for independence and dignity.”

Policies of ethnic balancing in structuring governance regarding the proportional allocation of state resources and political participation became important to some African statesmen at independence. Ethnic balancing as a policy of governance in Africa was untenable as it was difficult to satisfy all ethnic groups to the same degree. Before long, single-party systems and numerous military coups d’état, both the result of attempts by particular ethnic groups to either conserve or seize power, became the new norm throughout the continent. In some cases, after winning elections, ethnic majorities held on to power, refusing to give it up even after being defeated in subsequent elections. Then came the 1990s or the post-Cold War period, when competition and conflict between ethnic groups became a given in African politics. Ethnic competition and conflict heightened between groups in the continent during this period for numerous reasons, principal among these the precipitous reintroduction of multiparty politics. Multiparty politics began to further realign African ethnicities in unhealthy ways, thereby exposing the fluidity of the concept of ethnicity in African politics.

Autochthonism has emerged as a new version of ethnic politics based on territoriality, where particular ethnic groups claim to be more indigenous in the community or country than others. Recent outbursts of autochthonism, as witnessed in Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon, South Africa, and Libya, speak to the destabilizing nature of ethnicity in Africa, while adding credence to the fact that African politics is still in transition. In the 1990s in Côte d’Ivoire, for example, the concept of Ivoirité was used to depict Henry Konan Bédié from the South as a true Ivorian citizen contesting to lead the nation, while Alassane Ouattara, a northerner and the current president, was depicted as an outsider from Burkina Faso contesting elections in Côte d’Ivoire. Arguably, this concept played a significantly negative role in the 2011 postelection violence / civil war.

Thus, it is undeniable that the ethnic problem in Africa is huge, but the solutions are scarce. We agree with scholars such as Schraeder and others who have argued that ethnic balancing through some measure of
proportionality could result in a greater degree of inclusiveness and state
stability, despite the fact that some ethnic groups benefit more. But Donald
Rothchild’s assumption, “if all partners gain some share, they may come
to view continued participation in the process as serving their interests,”
is untenable in this age of multiparty democracy, as witnessed in some
parts of the continent. But how to deal with the ethnic problem, especially
because of the role it plays in other aspects of African politics, continues
to preoccupy African scholars and statesmen, as contributors in this
volume testify.

The Issue of Governance in African Politics

In the two decades before African states gained independence (1940-60),
multiparty politics had been introduced in some colonies. In the Gold
Coast, for example, the Convention People’s Party (CPP) of Kwame
Nkrumah led the colony to self-government in 1951 and to independence
as Ghana in 1957, after defying British colonial efforts to meddle in an
attempt to control the trajectory of politics and after defeating other parties
in organized elections. In Nigeria, despite serious political and ethnic
divisions between Nnamdi Azikiwe’s National Council of Nigeria and the
Cameroons (NCNC), composed mostly of the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria;
Obafemi Awolowo’s Action Group (AG), representing mainly the Yoruba
of Southwest Nigeria; and Sir Ahmadu Bello’s Northern People’s
Congress (NPC), self-government was attained in 1959, and independence
eventually came in 1960, with Azikiwe as the first president of Nigeria.23
Meanwhile, in former French Cameroon, the introduction of multiparty
politics ushered in chaos—influenced in part by the desire by French
officials, Ahmadou Ahidjo’s Movement for the Union of Cameroon
(MUC), and other, smaller parties to demonize and target Reuben Um
Nyobé’s Union of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC), a party the French
were unable to control because of its broad appeal. After failing to
minimize the UPC by creating close to ninety ethnic-based political
parties, UPC leaders were targeted and assassinated, paving the way for
the French to back their candidate, Ahmadou Ahidjo, and for his party to
take the helm of Cameroonian politics at independence.24

In all three cases, we notice observable patterns that reflect the way
multiparty politics played out all over the continent during the decade
before independence and the first three decades after. First, meddling in
the political process became compulsive for former European colonial
powers, especially the French, who wanted to retain a greater say in the
postindependence restructuring of their former colonies. Thus,
once the decision was made to withdraw . . . they devoted more attention to the retention of desired economic, diplomatic, and security arrangements than to the operation of new governmental institutions in accordance with constitutional and democratic principles.\textsuperscript{25}

In other cases, meddling was occasioned by the East-West ideological conflict, i.e. the Cold War. In sum, such meddling meant gloom and doom for any prospect of a genuine takeoff and practice of multiparty politics in Africa.

Second, ethnicity and the propensity for ethnic discord were permanently injected into multiparty politics during the period in question—the Civil War in Nigeria in the 1960s, the chaos in the Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC)—and the prevalence of ethnic discord throughout the continent was an important argument advanced for the move toward single-party governments in the 1970s, which hinged on ethnic balancing. Unfortunately, these single-party governments were precipitously transformed into civilian and military dictatorships, and the whole idea of ethnic balancing dissipated. And, finally, the desire for the new single-party regimes / dictatorships was to conserve power for as long as possible; the fact that these autocratic leaders could not be changed through the democratic process explains the prevalence of military coups d’état as the only means of regime change in Africa. Richard Joseph accepts this premise by noting that between 1957 and 1990, military coups constituted the only route for regime change in much of Africa, the only exceptions being the 1970 elections in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria.\textsuperscript{26}

The 1990s ushered in a new surge in demands for democratization that would result in the abandonment of the idea of single-party, military, and autocratic political regimes in many African states. The surge included calls for constitutional reforms and amendments to allow political pluralism, accompanied by meaningful elections and freedoms. Pressure on African states to democratize in the early 1990s was both domestic and external. Domestic pressure came from politicians marginalized during the earlier phase of single-party autocratic governments as well as disenfranchised masses, angry with the level of corruption, impoverishment resulting from economic mismanagement, the unemployment that accompanied the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the Bretton Woods Institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and the very slow rate of development.\textsuperscript{27} For many in this group, who, arguably, were greatly encouraged by the clamor for democracy from Eastern Europe, the adoption of the Western variant of multiparty
democracy was not a means to an end, but an end in itself in addressing socioeconomic and political shortfalls in their respective nation-states.

External pressure for multiparty democracy and for changes in the way African governments conducted politics may be attributed in part to the member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as well as to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which insisted on the introduction of a “democratization and good governance agenda into the African political scene” as a precondition for further loan disbursements to African states. This was prefaced by the inability of many African states to honor their massive debt repayments in the early 1980s. The IMF and the World Bank then introduced the SAPs, requiring African states in need of further assistance to enter into an agreement with these institutions, the purpose of which was to stabilize and restructure their economies, particularly in the areas of state expenditure and growth stimulation. However, with the exception of Ghana, the SAPs did little or nothing to halt socioeconomic decline in Africa.

A review of the SAPs in the wake of its failure “revealed that the restriction of the policy to purely economic matters was responsible for its inability to engender economic growth in Africa.” African leaders, many of them steeped in patronage politics, were unwilling or lukewarm in implementing the SAP policies of deregulation and privatization because this constituted an affront to the politics of patronage that characterized their leadership. A reappraisal of the SAPs led to a new IMF / World Bank premise that “economic development in the continent could only be achieved through the [institutionalization] of improved governance and the establishment of a more open and accountable political system.” This marked the beginning of the premise that economic development in Africa could be fostered by connecting it to democracy, accountability, and good governance. Thus, the new IMF / World Bank policy in Africa from the 1990s was to tie economic aid to democracy and accountability in governance.

To be fair, despite numerous reasons advanced by scholars from different disciplines as to the role of the IMF and the World Bank in catapulting democratic change into Africa, it was definitely internal socioeconomic hardship and discontent with corruption that led to the ultimate clamor by ordinary Africans, trade unions, and civil society organizations, as well as some of the newly minted opposition political parties, to demand immediate changes in the pursuit and conduct of governance in the respective African states. The role of external forces was more indirect—as Richard Joseph puts it, they “were often able to