

Decolonisation and the Cold War: African student elites in the USSR, 1955–64

Harold D. Weaver

This chapter undertakes a historical study of sub-Saharan Africa's education needs and the ways the Soviet Union responded to these needs, in particular the new, experimental, controversial Patrice Lumumba University. The years between 1955 and 1964 represent a critical period in the emergence of nationalism and unprecedented uprisings against European colonial powers. It marked the beginnings of a new age in Africa – a time to cast aside the vestiges of colonial dominance, together with its political, economic and cultural strangleholds. Importantly, as the period that represented a shift from dependence to self-determination, it was crucial for Africans to develop requisite expertise and skills to play new and expedient roles. The USSR, as leader of the socialist power bloc, represented an alternative model to Western ideas and practices on racial advancement, especially in the field of education. The radical political and economic ideas and the disparate educational models they presented to African scholars and leaders were cautiously embraced by some, and eagerly adopted by others.

This chapter will examine the developmental needs of African countries in this crucial decade. It will interrogate the recruitment, selection and sponsorship methods of the Soviets, and how they constructed a more appealing alternative to African advancement. By giving significant attention to the Patrice Lumumba Friendship University for the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, this chapter will discuss the ways an education in Moscow impacted Africans cognitively and affectively.

African priorities: mental emancipation and the fight against white supremacy

In order to properly assess the effectiveness of Soviet training programmes for Africa and Africans, it is important to understand the rapid evolution of events on the continent in the post-Second World War period. To facilitate the evolution from colonialism to independence, some African leaders

sought to confront its legacies. For them, education and indigenous human resource development were the instruments with which Africans could emancipate themselves and build strong and working nations.

During the years 1955–64, two outstanding phenomena emerged out of the experience of African nationalists. First, was the changing status of their own countries from colonial dependencies to constitutionally sovereign states.¹ In 1955, there were only three nominally independent states in sub-Saharan Africa; by 1964, twenty-nine territories had achieved constitutional independence. Second, was the reaction ‘against the inferiority of status as members of a particular race’.² During this period there was a realisation that certain foreign procedures, concepts and techniques – oriented toward the metropole – were out of place in the African context. Other foreign adaptations were suitable, but rejected by African political leaders because of the perceived conflict between African objectives and values and foreign adoption. It was a period that Harvard political scientist Rupert Emerson called ‘the rise of self-assertion’,³ including the keeping, adding or discarding of those practices that the populace, through its political leaders, saw fit. This was the politics and psychology of formal independence: the right to create the type of political, economic, cultural and educational systems that the African leadership wanted.⁴ Nevertheless, Africa’s leaders had to contend with the legacies of colonialism and the attendant impediments that came from being formerly governed subjects.

Colonial legacies

Legacies left by the departing European powers played prominent roles in the African ideological and behavioural responses to colonialism.⁵ In the British colonial environment, little social contact existed between Africans and Europeans. In contrast, the French colonial administration intended to mould the Africans into ‘good Frenchmen’. They encouraged the kinds of relationships that would cause an educated African to imitate all aspects of French culture, including education, dress and language.⁶ Africans in British colonies, as Wallerstein’s paraphrase of Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, indicates, ‘did not need to invent the concept of *négritude*, for they had been practicing it all their lives’.⁷ The adoption of a cultural-racial concept of pan-negrism (*négritude*) by African intellectuals in French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean revealed their disillusionment and discontent with the French colonial facade of ‘assimilation’.⁸ They were never truly considered and treated as Frenchmen. They were Black Frenchmen or French Africans or African Frenchmen. Similarly, the psychology of African

nationalism in response to Belgian colonialism can be seen in portions of the speech by Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba at the Congolese independence ceremonies:

We have known the mockery, the insults, the blows submitted to us morning, noon and night because we were ‘négres’ ... We have known the law was never the same, whether dealing with a White or a Negro; that it was accommodating for the one, cruel and inhuman to the other ... We have known that in the cities, there were magnificent houses for the Whites and crumbling hovels for the Negroes, that a Negro was not admitted to movie theaters or restaurants, that he was not allowed to enter so-called ‘European’ stores, that when the Negro travelled, it was on the lowest level of a boat, at the feet of the White man in his deluxe cabin.⁹

What became clear was that white supremacy needed to be overhauled. It needed to be overcome as the key component of true and total liberation. Nationalism and anti-racism were synonymous, and their link was explicitly recognised by various African nationalists. Ndabaningi Sithole, founder of the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU), for example, specifically listed African nationalism in his colonised country as a response to white supremacy:

There is a sense in which ‘white supremacy’ may be regarded as having been largely responsible for the effective cross-fertilization of African nationalism. Without the existence of this racially based doctrine of ‘white supremacy’, which adversely affected the African peoples, it is probable that the African peoples would not have sensed so quickly the ‘consciousness of kind’ which boomeranged on the colonial powers and the white settlers.¹⁰

One-time Ghanaian Prime Minister, Professor K.A. Busia, while in exile, was quoted: ‘the fact that African nationalism is, in the first place, a demand for racial equality is its most conspicuous attribute’.¹¹ His political opponent, president and founder of modern Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, observed that ‘the Europeans relegated us to the position of inferiors’.¹² Because of this, African nationalists stressed the need for ‘mental emancipation’.¹³ Albert Memmi,¹⁴ Frantz Fanon,¹⁵ O. Mannoni,¹⁶ Paulo Freire and Richard Wright¹⁷ are among those who have written perceptively about the psychology of colonialism, including its racial aspects from the victim’s vantage point. Hence, African decolonisers recognised that this new chapter in African history required not only political and economic emancipation but cultural and educational liberation as well. It was imperative to decolonise culture and history as presented in colonial texts in order to prompt that mental emancipation that was such a necessary prerequisite to true freedom. Decolonising both research and training was seen as a means of moving towards mental emancipation.

Afro-centric research

This stage in Africa's evolving history required a release from colonial restraints that went beyond political and economic dominance. Political leaders and scholars began discussing the necessary link between scholarship and political independence. Memmi, Fanon, Nkrumah and Freire were among those observers, who reminded us that colonial education in Africa was politically motivated and was used as a means to de-Africanise the continent's population.¹⁸ Present in education, including colonial research, was the 'actual negation of every authentic representation of national peoples – their history, their culture, and their language ... (and) culture belonged (only) to the colonizers'.¹⁹ African leaders recognised the importance of revitalising African research and studies to counter the demeaning influence of colonial education.

Harvard University's two prominent Africanists, Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson, discussed the relationship between modern African nationalism and the need for an objective study of Africa's past. They argued that this search was necessary in order to counter the long-perpetuated view that Africa was a dark continent, and its people were little more than primitive 'tribesmen' before the arrival of the white man who endowed them with light, learning and civilisation. They pointed out that this racialised thinking was further influenced in the nineteenth century by the espousals of Darwin:

If Africa had no culture worthy of taking its place among the other cultures of mankind, and had no history other than that of barbarism and slavery, then it was inevitable that the awakening of this inferior black race be seen only as a growing awareness of what Europe had to offer, and its advance measured only in terms of development along the lines laid down by the white man.²⁰

African scholars and heads of state and government, including Jomo Kenyatta, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Leopold Senghor, all agreed that a rebirth of the history of Africa's peoples had to be acknowledged and, indeed, was mandatory. President Kwame Nkrumah put it most succinctly when addressing the opening session of the First International Conference of Africanists, in Accra, 1962; he stated that, for centuries, Africa was the receptacle into which flowed European culture, language, ideas and ideologies. To the rest of the world, Africa's past was unimportant. He also suggested that the surge of nationalism among Africans, and their growing interest in their roots, was viewed with considerable alarm by the colonisers:

If Africa's history is interpreted in terms of the interests of European merchandise and capital, missionaries and administrators, it is no wonder that African

nationalism is regarded as a perversion and colonialism as a virtue ... In rediscovering, and revitalizing our culture and spiritual heritage and values, African Studies must help to redirect this new endeavour.²¹

The eminent Nigerian historian Kenneth Onwuka Dike was among those African scholars who linked African nationalism with scientific knowledge of the past. He stated that ‘every nation builds its future on its past; (and) the African must not only instinctively have faith in his own existence, but must also satisfy himself by scientific inquiry that it exists’.²²

Nigerian historian J.F. Ade Ajayi also shared Dike’s view. He argued that every African political leader had to cast off the shackles of inferiority imposed by colonial regimes, and painstakingly search back into the history and culture in order to successfully engage in the nationalist struggle. He states that the African:

needs an ideological answer to imperialism. He must believe in the future of Africa, and to do so convincingly, he must base his belief on a confident assessment of the achievements of the African in the past ... If he has any growing feelings of doubt about the future, he would demand less than self-government. Apart from his own personal emancipation, in order to succeed in the nationalist struggle, he would also need to restore the self-confidence of his followers ... Like the missionary seeking mass conversion, the nationalist leader realizes that he cannot reach the people effectively except in the language, the symbols, the culture, they understand. That is why the nationalist struggle and the organization of the nationalist party becomes an important exercise in national education and a major step in the building up of national unity and a common political loyalty.²³

Afro-centric schooling

On their ascension to constitutional independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, African nationalists began a review of the colonial legacy and exploration of the status of education in the post-colonial period. An examination of the nature of schooling will give us some idea of why it was imperative for African students to take advantage of study-abroad programmes offered by other nations in order to acquire the skills and knowledge needed for independence. Among the existing characteristics that required changes in order to aid decolonisation and development were the following: 1) an orientation towards Europe, both in content and in language of instruction; 2) a focus on humanistic studies; 3) a neglect of schooling opportunities for girls; and, 4) a shortage and underutilisation of facilities in higher education.

Several generalisations can be made about the education system inherited

from the colonial government. Perhaps most important is that its major objective was to benefit the European coloniser, not the colonised African. In other words, the aim was to ensure Africa's continued dependency on Europe. American economist Martin Carnoy describes this relationship:

The European powers used education to effect change, but only those changes that solidified their influence and control over the peoples of ... Africa. Although the policy was not altogether successful, it did manage to bring these areas into conditions of economic and cultural dependency which few have overcome with political autonomy.²⁴

Considering the fact that the structures and models of education built by colonial governments were incapable of sustaining the needs of newly independent African nations, the Soviets built alternative programmes that Africa's scholars, nationalists and elites embraced.

Patrice Lumumba University: a new, experimental higher education institution in Moscow for newly independent African states

In order to help newly independent sub-Saharan African countries overcome deficiencies in human resources, Soviet authorities established an experimental, post-secondary training centre. This centre, called the Patrice Lumumba Friendship University for the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, was expected by Soviet officials to become instrumental in the struggle for African and other Third World decolonisation and independence. The initial statement announcing the Friendship University indicated Soviet governmental intentions. During his first visit to the Third World – Indonesia – in February 1960, the Soviet head of government and party, Nikita Khrushchev, indicated why the new university was needed:

[To] give aid to colonial and neo-colonial Third-World countries in the training of their national cadres of engineers, agricultural specialists, doctors, teachers, economists, and specialists in other branches of knowledge, the Soviet Government has decided to set up in Moscow a university of the friendship of peoples.²⁵

A significant factor about the university was the attention given to recruiting 'talented young people coming from poor families'.²⁶ In his speech, Khrushchev recognised some of the problems many Africans themselves considered as limiting Africa's progress and development. Prominent of all was that little attention was paid to technology and the applied sciences in higher education in Africa. This prompted the creation of Lumumba University in Moscow. What resulted was a university

with a 'basic skills' faculty – for those needing language, subject-matter, and skills-and-attitude preparation for academic rigours – and six other faculties: Medicine; Engineering; Agriculture; History and Philosophy; Economics and Law; and Mathematics, Physics and the Natural Sciences. A University Council, its Board of Trustees, comprised the three founding organisations: the Central Committee of Trade Unions, the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship with Foreign Countries. Additional units represented in governance were the Soviet Ministry of Higher and Specialised Secondary Education, the Soviet Committee of Youth Organisations, the Rector and Pro-Rectors and elected representatives of faculty and students.

Friendship University v. other Soviet universities

In what ways did the Friendship University differ from other universities in the Soviet Union? Soviet higher education curricula were aimed at meeting the needs of a Soviet society. Industry was highly specialised; technology, demonstrated by the launching of Sputnik 1 in 1957, was internationally competitive. Agriculture, under Khrushchev's new programmes, became increasingly mechanised. Among the differences between the Friendship University and other institutions of higher education in the USSR was its recruitment, selection and sponsorship process; its governance; its curriculum; and the degrees awarded. Friendship University students differed from foreign students at other Soviet universities in that many did not meet formal admission requirements. Unlike many Soviet students, whose governments revered the relationship between theory and practice, African students were likely to have interrupted their schooling for work. However, in many cases, the schooling halt was compulsory, because of a shortage of placements in African secondary schools or because of economic poverty. This interruption did not measure the intellectual abilities or skills of African students; rather it revealed constraining aspects of the African colonial context. These factors accounted for a lack of academic preparation for higher education on the part of some African students.

Whereas bilateral agreements or home-government sponsorship sent many foreign students to the USSR for university training, Friendship University students were often dissidents or, at least, did not adhere to the favour of their own governments. Hence, many were in Moscow independent of the political machinery in their respective countries. Other foreign students in the USSR, especially from the USA and Europe, were selected with at least tacit approval of their governments. Khrushchev predicted this variety during his initial announcement when he stated that though 'the

majority of [foreign] students have been sent by government organs ... [the Friendship University should be a place that would] train both those who are sent by government organs and those who express their personal wish to study at the university'.²⁷ University students who were already in the USSR came from Western industrialised countries. They also came from the socialist European, Asian and Caribbean countries, and from other Third World countries. They were being trained at the traditional Soviet universities. However, as was initially announced, Lumumba Friendship University was founded primarily for the benefit of Third World countries, with Soviet students complementing the enrolment. There was at least one African-American student, MaryLouise Patterson, whose parents had been active in Communist Party USA (CPUSA) activities, who was studying and completing her medical studies at Lumumba University.

Another unique aspect of the university was that, though students did not necessarily have a post-secondary school degree, they received a Master of Science degree at graduation. In addition, foreign students at Lumumba University, except for that minority majoring in social and human sciences, did not have to follow required courses in political economy, scientific socialism, Marxism–Leninism and the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as did students at other Soviet universities. Furthermore, there was no compulsory physical education, and on-the-job training at the Friendship University was about half that of other Soviet universities. Hence, in comparison with the others, the Lumumba curriculum was able to lop one year off the time spent in the post-preparatory faculty.

Recruitment, selection and sponsorship: how did African students get to the USSR?

The Soviets used a variety of personnel and organisations to publicise and recruit for the university. At the World Festival of Youth and Students in Helsinki in 1962, I observed the recruitment campaign as aggressive, relying heavily on Third World students themselves, who often worked together in congenial teams. Minimal bureaucracy, a focus on subjects obviously geared to meet African human resource needs, and an emphasis on opportunities for training in fields which Africans were not receiving at home or in the West were among the characteristics of recruiting efforts. The Pro-Rector for Admissions, Professor Yerzin, travelled throughout Africa and Asia to recruit high-quality students. Soviet consulates and embassies in Asia, Africa and Latin America were also used for the dissemination of information and the reception of applications. They actively involved the home offices of international organisations, including the World Federation

of Democratic Youth in Budapest, and the International Union of Students in Prague,²⁸ in recruiting students.²⁹ Once accepted, the students were guests of the Soviet government, which took care of all expenses. Tuition and medical care were free for all – citizen and non-citizen. In addition to stipends of 90 roubles per month, the African student, on arrival in Moscow, received about three hundred roubles to purchase winter clothes.³⁰ The 90 roubles included board money, but costs at the school cafeterias did not exceed several roubles per month. During the summer months, students were given an additional sum of 150 roubles and often a free stay at one of the rest homes on the Black Sea.

Students from Africa were at the Friendship University under varying sponsorship. Some, like many from South Africa, went under scholarships offered directly by the USSR. Usually those students were studying without permission of their home governments and required clandestine travel, which after students surfaced in the USSR, they would then write home to indicate their location.³¹ Another group was under United Nations programmes, both in trust territories and in non-self-governing areas, in which the Soviet Union participated. Under a third sponsorship were those students with scholarships subsidised by home governments or dominant political parties. A fourth sponsorship was non-governmental international organisations with close ties to the USSR, as, for example, the International Union of Students in Prague. The percentage of students who did not have permission from their home governments was small. In fact, in the early days of the university, some students, especially those from countries still under colonial rule, had to do as the early revolutionaries trained at Moscow's Lenin International School: 'Most of the students who attended ... traveled on false passports, under assumed names, and reached the Soviet Union via indirect routes.'³² In a few cases, students of visiting delegations were actually offered scholarships on the spot and stayed on to study in the USSR.

The early days of the university, especially before the achievement of constitutional independence by individual African countries, were marked by a lack of coordination in the recruitment-selection process. East, South and Central Africans, for example, had to make their way to Cairo, where John Kalle,³³ a Ugandan later killed in an IL-18 flight on the way to Gary Powers's showpiece U-2 trial, made the necessary preliminary arrangements and secured their air passage to the USSR or, as the case might be, to another socialist country in Europe. Students from countries with 'moderate' regimes, without Soviet embassies and consulates, got Soviet visas in 'radical' countries³⁴ or in those countries with diplomatic relations with the USSR. This meant that many students left Africa without the knowledge and permission of their home governments. Take the spectacular example

of a young Kenyan student so highly motivated to becoming a doctor that he actually walked from Nairobi to Cairo over a two-year period, assured that if he reached Cairo he would be able to study free of charge in a socialist country. In his case, he was assigned to a medical school in Poland. His story continued to be a happy one. He married a Polish classmate, raised a family of two successful film-makers and television creators, and later returned to Kenya with her, where they both became immersed in the Kenyan health service.

By the end of the Khrushchev era, October 1964, a significant shift occurred away from the fragmented, uncoordinated recruitment-selection process to a more centralised, coordinated process (by government agency or dominant political party) in keeping with the national human resource or political needs of African countries. The signing of the OAU [Organisation of African Unity] Charter, in May 1963, helped to ensure this by encouraging inter-African cooperation and discouraging subversive attempts from other African countries.³⁵ Meanwhile, the university had given the African continent a jump-start in trained personnel in medicine and other subjects needed in the first decade of decolonising, post-independent sub-Saharan Africa.

Adopting newly structured curricula to rethink Africa's industrialisation and development

Before looking at the cognitive curricula, let us briefly respond to the question: what were the affective experiences of African students when they arrived in Moscow? They found that they were given preferential treatment by a system that insisted that they succeed and a population that generally warmly welcomed them. Like the earlier African-American sojourning artists Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson ('for the first time, I walk in full human dignity') in the 1930s, the sub-Saharan African students of the 1950s and 1960s tended to find a warm, hospitable reception from faculty, fellow students and the general population. But it was the warm, passionate sexual relations that I witnessed between African males and Soviet females that was especially empowering for many African males, while at the same time antagonistic to some of their Soviet male counterparts. And then there were drunken Soviet men and women who were heard to curse Chairman Khrushchev for bringing in favoured foreigners, who, they said, were taking valuable resources away from Soviet students and other citizens. These were the exceptions, and not the rule, as mainstream Western media and scholarship reported to us.

At the university, first-year Preparatory Faculty instructors often came to the African students' dorms to give them one-on-one tutorials to help with

the Russian language. African students also received language lessons from Russian students with whom they shared dormitory rooms.

The aims and organisation of the curriculum

The university's Board of Trustees (University Council) spelled out six major aims, the first of which was related to the curriculum:

To train highly-qualified engineers, specialists in agriculture, doctors, teachers, economists, jurists and other specialists familiar with the latest developments in science and technology, and with the practical aspects of the subjects, who are educated in a spirit of humanism and friendship of nations.³⁶

To implement those objectives, the university was organised into one general, preparatory faculty and six subject-area faculties, based on clusters of academic disciplines and specialisms: 1) Engineering; 2) Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry and Biology; 3) Economics and International Law; 4) Philology and History; 5) Medicine; and 6) Agriculture. A graphic breakdown of African students by faculty, for the final year of our study, 1963–64, follows:

Table 10.1 Approximate enrolment by faculty, Lumumba Friendship University, 1963–64^a

Faculty	Approximate number
Engineering	500
Medicine	100
Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology	200
Agriculture	100
Philology and History	125
Economics and International Law	400
Total, less Preparatory Faculty	1,425
Preparatory	900
Grand total	2,325

^a Press conference of the Rector, Lumumba Friendship University, Moscow, 3 December 1964. Also see J. Webbink, *African Students*, 11. The Rector gave the total number as 2,582, but gave the breakdown by faculty as stated above. I cannot account for the discrepancy between the total in the chart – 2,325 – and the total figure he gave – 2,582 – except that the Rector indicated that his figures were *approximate*.

The transitional period: Preparatory Faculty of 'basic skills'

Prior to undertaking study in their regular and specialised fields, African students were exposed to an innovative educational experiment in the

vanguard of special programmes that were also surfacing in the USA: SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge Program at the City University of New York), the Transitional Year, the Urban University, among others. The Preparatory Faculty served a transitional function for those neither linguistically nor academically prepared for the regular Soviet university curriculum. Because of their Russian-language deficiency, the students had to spend at least one year in the faculty. The specific length was determined by achievements during the first year. The authorised range was between one and three years as initially set by the university. The length of study, curriculum and student–teacher relations clearly were based on student needs as perceived by the administrators and teachers. All students spent the first three months in intensive training in the Russian language, especially on vocabulary related to their intended specialism. Then, language training was combined with secondary school mathematics (with emphasis on algebra), physical geography and the political history of the world as related to one’s own continent. African students in world political history, for example, dealt with Africa’s historical resistance to Europe. In addition, the preparatory course was expected to provide:

1. Study skills – discipline. Complicated by the fact that studying was to be done in a new and totally different language, e.g. with word endings in verb conjugations and adjectival and noun declensions in Russian that were not present in many languages.
2. Intensified capsule of secondary – and, in some cases, primary school – education, which was necessary for successful college study and often not accessible in Africa.
3. Acclimatisation to Soviet society – including the social system (with folkways, mores and codes of behaviour peculiar to the Soviet state and system). In the absence of a formal orientation programme, an ongoing, informal orientation occurred.³⁷

Considering the limited technological training in African secondary schools, students coming from the continent were faced with a severe limitation in their competition with Soviet students. In the eight-year schools of Soviet pre-university education, science subjects took up an average of some 35 per cent of the formal class time³⁸ and increased to fifteen hours per week in the last year of secondary school.³⁹ African students, on the other hand, with few exceptions, had an entirely humanistic primary- and secondary-school education, and in most cases only minimal training in mathematics and the natural sciences.⁴⁰

Natural resources: Geology Department

The Lumumba University curriculum reflected the priority of Soviet political, research and training personnel for African control of its natural resources. The Geology Department of the Faculty of Engineering prominently epitomised this priority. Students of Geology were among approximately 1,725 students studying in the regular faculties at the university during the 1963–64 academic year. Significantly, around 1,200 – or 70 per cent of all Friendship University students – were majoring in the natural, physical or medical sciences. The percentage of Africans in Medicine, Engineering, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Agriculture was at least 75 per cent, and possibly higher.⁴¹ All Engineering students were required to make a preliminary decision during their first year about a concentration. Options were 1) Geology, 2) Civil Engineering or 3) Mechanical Engineering. It was the Geology majors who received training in the prospecting, extracting and utilisation of natural resources. At the end of a four-year course, a successful Geology major left with a Master's degree in Mining Engineering.

Certain subjects were required of Geology majors during their course of study in the natural and mathematical sciences: the organisation and economics of mining operations, crystallography and mineralogy, petrography, heat engineering, hydraulics and hydrodynamics, the strength of materials, theoretical mechanics, physics, higher mathematics and chemistry. The luxury of selecting a major within the department was not deferred until the junior year, as it was then in the USA, but had to be decided during the freshman year. Students also had to make a further decision on specialisation within Geology itself in the first year. The options were 1) the mining of solid minerals, 2) oil and gas extraction or 3) geological prospecting and surveying.

The curriculum of mining solid minerals included other specialised courses such as the supply of electricity to mining operations, ore concentration, projecting mining enterprises and the technology of mechanisation of underground and open-pit mining. Those choosing to major in oil and gas extraction took the following courses to fulfil degree requirements: the geology of oil and gas deposits, the planning of oil and gas fields, oil and gas production equipment, the processing and chemistry of oil and gas, the technology and mechanisation of oil and gas transportation, the technology and technique of drilling, and the geology and geophysics of oil and gas extraction. Required courses in the area of geological prospecting and surveying included engineering geology, mineralogy and crystallography, petrography, structural geology and geological mapping, and analytical, physical and colloidal chemistry. Training was not limited to the classroom.

Practical work was gained through work in mines and oil fields, in laboratories and on geological expeditions. The training they received culminated in the production of a research paper that documented the findings from the student's research project on their country.

We turn to examine the relationship between the curriculum in Geology, on the one hand, and African realities, on the other, as pinpointed by the Soviet political leadership and senior Soviet Africanist researchers. Key Soviet political leaders expressed the need to diffuse technological skills in mineral extraction. In his well-publicised speech to the fifteenth session of the United Nations General Assembly on 18 September 1959, Premier Khrushchev noted his government's concern about the exploitation of Third World resources by Western interests:

The peoples of many of these countries have won political independence, but they are still cruelly exploited by foreigners economically. *Their oil and other natural resources are being plundered.* They are being taken out of their countries for almost nothing in return, even while they yield huge profits to the foreign exploiters.⁴² (emphasis mine)

Prior to this 1959 speech, Khrushchev and his government, through its Permanent Delegate, had used the United Nations as a forum to communicate its concern about the manifest influence of the West in African mineral exploitation. The Soviet representative at the UN had earlier accused Western prospectors, under the guise of United Nations-sponsored surveys, of prospecting to aid private Western businesses at the expense of the countries for which the prospecting was carried out. In addition to the General Assembly, Soviet delegates also used the Trusteeship Council as a forum to expose the administering powers' economic policies and practices in the trust territories: Cameroon (British and French), Togo (British and French), Southwest Africa (Namibia) (South Africa),⁴³ Somalia (British and French), Tanganyika (British) and Rwanda-Burundi (Belgium). The European trust administrators – Belgium, France and the United Kingdom – were specifically accused of allowing foreign, private companies, with official licenses, to prospect and exploit the mineral resources of Africa.

The reasons given for the Soviet criticism concerned the division of Africa at the Congress of Berlin (1884–85) that began the territorial scramble for Africa and resulted in European colonialism and territorial occupation. The colonial practice was not to consult with the local population nor to secure their consent on such vital matters.⁴⁴ This meant that even after African political or constitutional independence, the European governments would still maintain and retain significant economic influence, through natural resources, and thus inhibit self-determination and eventual autonomy. This is a classic example of neo-colonialism, that phenomenon of outside



Figure 10.1 Soviet anti-apartheid poster, c. 1960. Translated, it identifies what is going on with the word ‘Africa’ (in white). On the clothing of the colonisers being dumped are the words ‘apartheid’ and ‘racism’.

economic control, of remote control, after independence, which insured continued cultural and political dominance from the outside.

Soviet scholars also reiterated in their published works the same charges made by their diplomats in international political forums. The widely respected academician Professor I.I. Potekhin, the founding Director of Moscow’s Africa Institute, accused Western prospectors of intentionally underestimating the mineral potential of African countries.⁴⁵ The results of such distortions were twofold. One was that it misled African political and economic decision-makers into underestimating their own resources available for economic development. The other was that the nations received smaller remunerations for their raw materials than those to which they were

entitled. One specific example reported by Potekhin was Guinea-Conakry: whereas French specialists had estimated iron ore reserves to be between 2.5 and 3.5 billion tons, ‘Soviet geologists, who visited Guinea, following only a preliminary study, estimated iron ore reserves at 20 to 30 billion tons’⁴⁶ or up to ten times what the French experts had estimated. What effect did Potekhin feel that the development of mining and other industries had on African leadership coping with post-independence problems? To what extent was his writing prescriptive? He opined:

The main condition for the conquest of economic independence, and for the creation of a harmoniously developed economy, is the development of industry. The slogan of industrialization is one of the most popular slogans in contemporary Africa. But the economically weak states of Africa do not at present have the strength for a creation of large-scale enterprises of the various *metallurgical* or machine-building industries. Therefore, industrialization is beginning with the enlargement of a *mining industry*, the building of hydro-electric stations, and enterprises of light industry plants for the processing of agricultural products.⁴⁷ (emphasis mine)

Did the Lumumba University curriculum respond to the industrialisation and development needs of African states? Yes. The university gave high priority to diffusing technological data to African students through the natural, physical and medical sciences. Students were free to select, or were coerced into selecting, the sciences in at least 70 per cent of cases,⁴⁸ a sharp contrast to the small number of African students who were majoring in the natural and physical sciences in Western countries and in sharp contrast to reports in USA scholarly literature and public media.

Conclusion

Limited national higher education facilities for males and females made it necessary for sub-Saharan Africans to utilise transnational opportunities in order to obtain rapid indigenisation (Africanisation) of human resources. Among those countries intervening was the USSR, with a variety of formal and non-formal education and training programmes inside and outside the country. The Soviet programmes in this critical decade of African decolonisation, 1955–64, demonstrated creative and pragmatic innovation 1) in programme development dedicated to African needs and priorities, with curricula focusing on technology, health and natural and physical sciences, including Geology; 2) in non-traditional admissions procedures, often for non-traditional students, in recruitment, selection and sponsorship; and 3) in providing an environment for mental emancipation and empowerment

of future African elites. In relationship to sub-Saharan African needs and priorities, African students found Soviet education programmes, including those at Patrice Lumumba Friendship University for the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, to be useful in facilitating African industrialisation, development, conscientisation and democratisation through the indigenisation (Africanisation) of human resources.

Notes

- 1 For the ingredients involved in a transfer of bureaucratic power, see David Apter, *Ghana in Transition* (New York: Anthenum, 1963). I am grateful for the assistance of Gbemisola Abiola, Michelle Gibbs, Anne S. Nash, Rachel Rubin and Mark Solomon in the preparation of this chapter.
- 2 Margery Perham, in Kenneth Kirkwood (ed.), *African Affairs 1*, St Anthony's Papers 10 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961).
- 3 Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).
- 4 L. Gray Cowan, 'The Current Political Status and Significance of Africa South of the Sahara', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 30:3 (1961), 92.
- 5 Rupert Emerson, 'Crucial Problems Involved in Nation-Building in Africa', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 30:3 (1961), 193.
- 6 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
- 7 Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: The Politics of Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).
- 8 Victor C. Ferkiss, *Africa's Search for Identity* (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 157.
- 9 Patrice Lumumba quoted in Hans Kohn and Wallace Sokolsky (eds), *African Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1965).
- 10 Ndabaningi Sithole, *African Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- 11 K.A. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa*, as quoted in Kohn and Sokolsky, *African Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 13.
- 12 Kwame Nkrumah, *Axioms of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Nelson, 1967), 24.
- 13 See Nnandi Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa* (London: Cass, 1968 reprint).
- 14 Albert Memmi, *The Colonized and the Colonizer* (Boston, MA: Beacon Hill Press, 1960).
- 15 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* and Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- 16 O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban* (New York: Praeger, 1964).
- 17 Richard Wright, 'The Psychological Reactions of Oppressed Peoples', in Richard Wright, *White Man, Listen!* (New York: Doubleday, 1957).
- 18 Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 13.

- 19 Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 14.
- 20 Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson (eds), *The Political Awakening of Africa* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965).
- 21 President Kwame Nkrumah, Address to the First International Congress of Africanists, University of Ghana, Legon, 12 December 1962. Quoted in Emerson and Kilson, *The Political Awakening of Africa*, 25–26.
- 22 K.O. Dike, 'History and African Nationalism', *Proceedings of the First Annual Conference of the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research* (Ibadan: Ibadan University College, 1952, reprinted 1957), 31.
- 23 J.F.A. Ajayi, 'The Place of African History and Culture in the Process of Nation-Building in Africa South of the Sahara (1960)' in Immanuel Wallerstein (ed.), *Social Change: The Colonial Situation* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), 612.
- 24 Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David McKay Co., 1974), 82.
- 25 Seymour Michael Rosen, *The Peoples' Friendship University in the USSR* (Washington, DC: US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1962), 4, quoting from a text carried by Radio Moscow, 22 February 1960.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.* Headed for some years by an Iraqi youth leader, Razik, whom I last saw at a May 1969 meeting of experts in higher education, sponsored in Paris by UNESCO; surprisingly, no Africans were among the educational administrators participating.
- 29 Seymour Rosen, *The Peoples' Friendship University in the USSR*, 6–7.
- 30 Sources for this material include personal interviews and a University-issued booklet entitled 'Rules of Enrollment to the Peoples' Friendship University named after Patrice Lumumba for the 1963–1964 Academic Year' (Moscow: Peoples' Friendship University, n.d. [probable date 1963]), 1.
- 31 Edward A. Raymond, 'Education of Foreigners in the Soviet Union' (advance paper for the 66th Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Los Angeles, California, 8–12 September, 1970), 7.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Interview with John Kalle, United Nations, New York, October 1959.
- 34 'Radical' in this sense refers to the self-proclaimed socialist governments in Ghana, Guinea, Mali and the United Arab Republic.
- 35 It is clear that this was not totally implemented, but it did tend to lessen tensions, at least temporarily, between certain neighbouring countries. Ghana, for example, stopped processing travel documents for Nigerian youth desiring to study in the Soviet Union.
- 36 1964 *Spravochnik (Catalogue: Peoples' Friendship University Named After Patrice Lumumba)* (Moscow: Peoples' Friendship University, 1964), 4. The other five objectives were (1) to carry out urgent scientific research work, including designs, technologies and cultures of Asian, African and Latin American countries, which would enable them to develop their national economies;

- (2) to produce high-quality textbooks and educational and graphic aids in Russian and foreign languages for students of the University or other educational establishments; (3) to train scientific teaching staff for work in the University and in higher educational establishments abroad; (4) to popularise scientific disciplines; and (5) to cooperate on the basis of mutual help on questions of educational and scientific research, with higher educational scientific establishments, scientific societies, governmental establishments, social organisations and enterprises of the Soviet Union and abroad by means of exchange of information and participation in national, regional and international meetings and conferences.
- 37 Called 'Personal Adjustment' at some American universities.
- 38 Nigel Grant, *Soviet Education* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1964), 39.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 40 K.M. Panikkar, *The Afro-Asian States and their Problems* (London: G. Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1959) and Ken Post, *The New States of West Africa* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964) are among those writers dealing with the subject.
- 41 Press conference for foreign correspondents accredited by USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by the Rector of Lumumba University, at the University, Moscow, December 1963.
- 42 Hassan Mirreh, *Soviet Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1962), 50–51. I am grateful for my numerous interactions with Hassan in the Colombia University Library, New York City, in the early 1960s. Over time, we shared many similar views about the USSR, the Cold War and Soviet relations with Africans and African countries. I drew heavily on his knowledge of the United Nations and the importance of the UN for Soviet education assistance to Africa and Africans.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 I.I. Potekhin, *A Soviet Primer on Africa* (Washington, DC: US Joint Publication Research Service, 1962), 308.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*, 184–185.
- 48 A student's major field of concentration was often a joint decision, involving the student's success in the preparatory studies, his or her personal preference, African national human resource needs and the availability of Soviet training resources.