

University Education and Political Development in Africa

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Abstract

The article is intended to show how University Education has contributed to political development in Africa. It begins by discussing the role of University Education in political development in the world. It traces such development from the period of Ancient Greece up to the 20th century. The article examines how University Education contributed to the rise of African nationalism by citing how most African nationalist leaders had received University Education. After that, the article makes a discussion of how such education contributed to the process of nation-building in Africa. Lastly, the article provides an analysis of how University Education contributed to the democratization process and the building of multi-party democracy.

Keywords: University Education, Democracy, Political Development

1.0 Introduction

Nearly all universities in the World have four main functions. The first function is teaching. This means that universities play the role of transmitting knowledge to young people through the process like lectures, seminars and examinations in various fields of knowledge and professions. The second function is to carry out research and consultancy. Research and consultancy are important sources of accumulating and developing

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knowledge in the various fields of knowledge and professions. The third function is to carry out publications. Publications include the publishing of books, chapters in books, and articles in journals. Publications provide an important role in the provision of teaching and learning materials. The fourth function of universities is to provide services to the government, various institutions and the society at large.²

In this context, if such functions universities and University Education play, the roles of political and socio-economic development are attained. In terms of socio-economic development, for example, universities have been a key in developments of science and technology, modern systems of agriculture, various aspects of health and medicine, botany and zoology, and so on.

It is even of very important that universities have been a key in the development of political systems in the world. It is, therefore, the intention of this article to examine how University Education has played the role of political development in Africa. The article constitutes five sections: the first is the introduction and the second is a survey of how universities have contributed to political development in the world. The third and the fourth sections examine how University Education has contributed to political development in Africa in terms of the rise of African nationalism and struggles for independence, and the democratization process. The last section constitutes the conclusion.

²Such services can include presentation and discussion of papers in conferences, workshops and seminars and expert advice.

1.1 University Education and Political Development in the World

University Education is traced as far back as the period of Ancient Greece civilization between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC. The Academy established by Plato is taken to be the first University in the world. The Academy taught young people and carried out research in philosophy, political science, biology, and astronomy. Through research, Plato himself published three important books that have made important contribution to political development in the world. These books include *the Republic*³, *the Statesman*, and *the Laws*. During that time, the concept of democracy was developed. According to the Greek language, “*demo*” means people and “*crat*” means power. As we shall see, democracy has been an important concept in processes of political development in the World (Mpangala, 2009).

Most universities in Europe were established from the 15th century AD onwards. Ideas which resulted into movements that contributed to the developments of liberal political systems in Europe between the 14th and 19th centuries AD were produced in various universities. Such movements included the Renaissance from the 14th to the 16th centuries and capitalist revolutions in England in 1688 to 1689 and France in 1789 AD. These movements resulted into transitions from feudal to capitalist political systems (ibid).

It is interesting to note that prominent political philosophers of liberal democracy were products of European University

³Mwalimu Julius Nyerere made efforts to translate the Republic into the Swahili Language and he completed the task while in bed in London before he passed away. The transcript was supposed to be published by the Dar es Salaam University Press, but it got lost.

Education. These philosophers included Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill. Good examples are Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who had received their University Education at the University of Oxford in England. By the 19th century, liberal democracy had become an important political philosophy and ideology of the capitalist system, which had arisen due to the industrial revolution.

It is interesting to note that the theory of scientific socialism, which has made significant contribution to political development in the world, was developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in Great Britain (GB) from the middle of the 19th century. The origin of the theory was dialectics based on principle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. It was developed by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.⁴ However, the theory came to be developed by Karl Marx⁵, who was a PhD student of Hegel. Thus, arising out of the theory of dialectics, Marx and Engels were able to develop the theory of scientific socialism, which resulted into the first Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917 under the leadership of Lenin.

During the 20th century, socialist movements spread in Asia and Latin America. In Asia, the movements resulted into the second Socialist Revolution in the World, that is, the Chinese Revolution of 1949. The Revolution was led by Mao Tse Tung, who had embraced ideas of scientific socialism of Karl Marx, Engels, and Lenin, while working in a University Library in China. In Latin America, socialist movements took place in

⁴A Professor of philosophy at the University of Yena in Germany during the first half of the 19th century.

⁵The theory was based on three principles, namely: the principle of “unity of opposites”, the principle of “negation of the negation”, and the principle of “movement from quantity to quality.”

various countries, such as in Chile, Argentina, and Cuba. In Cuba, it culminated into the third Socialist Revolution in the World, that is, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 under the leadership of Fidel Castro, a University graduate of law (Mpangala, 2009).

2.0 University Education and the Rise of African Nationalism and Struggles for Independence

The first important part in the process of political development in Africa was the rise of African nationalism and processes of struggles for independence in the African colonies. It is an historical fact that with the exception of Ethiopia, the whole continent was colonized by European powers towards the end of the 19th century up to 1950s and 1960s. The rise of African nationalism meant that after the Second World War in 1945 there was an emergence of African national consciousness demanding for independence from the colonial powers. In 1950s, some few African colonies got their independence, but the majority of African colonies got their independence from 1960 to mid-1960s (Kimambo & Nyanto, 2017). The question we need to answer is: how University Education made a contribution to the rise of African nationalism and struggles for national independence?

The answer to this question, first, calls for an examination of factors for the rise of African nationalism and struggles for independence. Historians have identified six factors. These include the Second World War itself, which produced returning soldiers; the establishment of the United Nations Organization (UNO), which put pressure for the necessity of decolonization in the World, the socialist movements, and the Pan-African movement. Also, there was an intensification of colonial

oppression and exploitation in the colonies after the Second World War and the emergence and growth of the educated elites (Kimambo & Temu, 1969). Among the six factors, three have a connection with University Education. These include socialist movements, the Pan-African movement, and the emergence and growth of educated elites in the African colonies.

As far as the socialist movements are concerned, we have already seen how universities in Europe became the origins of theories of scientific socialism as well as revolutionary movements. Furthermore, most of the African elites, who became nationalist leaders, had received University Education either within Africa or outside Africa, mainly in Europe and North America. It was in these universities that the educated elites came across ideas of socialism and socialist revolutions. A typical example was Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who while taking his Master's studies at the University of Edinburgh, was member of the *Fabian Club*. The Club specialized in discussions on Marxist-Leninist ideas and ideas on socialism in general. Socialism and socialist movements were completely opposed to systems of colonialism in the world. This position was strengthened by ideas of Lenin on imperialism and all forms of imperialist dominations through colonialism and neo-colonialism.

As far as the Pan-African movement is concerned, many of the Pan Africanists were among the African educated elites who received University Education. A typical example was Kwame Nkrumah who received his University education in the United States at undergraduate, masters and PhD levels. When he joined the Pan African movement in 1940s, he was doing

research and writing his PhD thesis in Great Britain (Nyirenda, 2000). By then, the centre of the Pan-African movement was still in Europe since its establishment in 1900 by Afro-Americans from America and Africans from African colonies.⁶ During the fifth Pan-African congress of 1945 in Manchester, Nkrumah became its Secretary General, while Padmore, an Afro-American, was its chairman. Nkrumah could not even complete his PhD thesis because of the Pan-African Movement and providing leadership in the struggles for independence in Ghana from 1947 to 1957 when Ghana got independence. Nkrumah also played a key role in shifting the center of the Pan-African movement from Europe to Africa. In 1958, he organized two Pan-African conferences in Africa – one in June and the other in December – to discuss how Africans in African colonies could carry out struggles for independence.

As regards the educated elites in African colonies, we have already pointed out how most of the African nationalist leaders had come across University Education either within the colonies or in the countries of the colonial powers in Europe. Educated elites were a product of colonial education. Such education was intended to get African people at different levels of education to assist the colonialists in the colonial administration and as teachers in the colonial schools. The colonial education systems were such that it was only for few African children, who were given opportunities to attend schools and the schools were very few. In Tanganyika, for example, the majority of children who attended school did not go beyond primary education up to standard IV. Only few

⁶The objective of Afro-Americans was to fight against color segregation in America and the objective of Africans was to fight against the system of colonialism in Africa. The two different interests were joined through the Pan-African Movement.

children attended middle school education up to standard VIII. Similarly, very few children attended secondary education up to standard X, and exceptionally bright students went to few secondary schools up to standard XII (Mbenna, 2009).

In most of the African colonies, there were no universities or university colleges to provide University Education. From 1940s, Makerere in Uganda was the only university to serve all the four British colonies in East Africa, that is, Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda, and Zanzibar. Few students were also sent to Great Britain for University Education. In French colonies, given the policy of assimilation, their African students attended University Education in Paris universities in order to prepare them to become black-Frenchmen. It is important to note that most of the African nationalist leaders were a product of either universities within the colonies or universities in Europe. We have already seen how Mwalimu Julius Nyerere was a product of Makerere University in Uganda and Edinburg University in Scotland, Great Britain. On the other hand, Kwame Nkrumah was a student in up to PhD level in the USA universities. Also, Senghor of Senegal attended his University Education in Paris where he was supposed to become a French *asssimilado*, according to the French. Instead, he became the nationalist leader of Senegal. Moreover, Nelson Mandela graduated in law in a South African University. These are just few examples.

2.1 Contribution of University Education in the Process of Nation-Building in Africa

The rise of African nationalism and struggles for independence were the foundations and earliest stage of political development in Africa. The next stage is the stage of nation-building – the stage when African colonies had already achieved their

independence and they were now new and young independent nations. In terms of political development, they now had to struggle to establish political systems that were necessary for the overall development of the African nations and the welfare of the African people. As far as the roles of universities are concerned, we can trace two different phases. The first phase constitutes continuation of political leaders of struggles for independence, who became the early nation-building fathers. The second phase constitutes the new generation political leaders.

Concerning the early nation-building fathers, we have already seen that most of them had been either students of universities within the colonies or universities in Europe. The experience and the knowledge they had acquired in the universities enabled them to come up with various political theories and nation-building strategies. Among the political theories developed include *African Socialism in form of Ujamaa* in Tanzania developed by Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere. In Senegal, *Negritude* was developed by Senghor, *Conciencism* in Ghana was developed by Kwame Nkrumah, *Humanism* in Zambia was developed by the government of Kenneth Kaunda, and *Common Man's Charter* in Uganda was developed by the government of Uganda.⁷ The mentioned theories made the respective countries to establish different forms of African Socialism as nation-building strategies (Nyirenda, 2000).

⁷Unlike the other theories, the theory of Humanism and Common Man's Charter were not developed directly by Kaunda and Obote, but rather they were established by the committees within their governments.

Another important theory, developed by these nation founding fathers, was the theory of *African Democracy*. Both the theory of African socialism and the theory of African Democracy were based on the traditional African way of life. While the theory of African democracy was also developed by the political leaders but the most prominent was Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. Tanganyika achieved independence on the 9th December, 1961 and Nyerere became the Prime Minister. But in January 1962, Mwalimu Nyerere resigned from the post so that he could have time to strengthen TANU⁸ and develop theories for nation-building. Thus, in the same year (1962), he published the book of *Ujamaa, the basis of African Socialism*. It was in that book that he expounded the theory of building Ujamaa Socialism. His theory on African democracy was expounded in another book titled *Democracy and the Party System*, which was published in 1963 (Mpangala & Mawazo, 2015).

Both the theories on Ujamaa Socialism and African Democracy were the basis of the *Arusha Declaration of 1967*.⁹ The theory of African Democracy was the foundation for the establishment of the one-party political system in Tanzania and in most countries in Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. During the struggles for independence many nationalist political parties were formed. At independence, only one of them became the ruling party, while other parties became opposition parties. The obvious fact is that during the early years of independence the African nations were in form of a multi-party system. But due to the ideas of African democracy, they shifted into a one-party

⁸Tanganyika African National Union (1954-1977), which was a ruling party by then.

⁹The Arusha Declaration on the 5th February 1967 was the major policy for the building of Ujamaa socialism in Tanzania up to 1990.

system. In Tanganyika, the process of establishing one-party system began in 1963 by first collecting the views of the people and then changing the constitution. In July, 1965 the one-party system was officially declared. The adoption of the one-party system spread like fire as most countries shifted from multi-party into one-party system with the exception of Botswana. It was believed that African democracy was based on traditional African political system, which was characterized by political consensus rather than political competition. Thus, unlike the multi-party system, which was characterized by competition, the one-party system was characterized by consensus.

The founding fathers of the African nations were also engaged in two types of political debates. One type was on supporting armed liberation struggles in Southern Africa, and the second type was on establishing continental unity during the 1960s. On supporting armed liberation, it came to be realized that there were two forms of achieving national independence. One form was through peaceful means demanding independence through peaceful approach without the use of violence. By early 1960s, the majority of African colonies had managed to achieve their independence through that form. But many colonies could not achieve independence without armed struggles, and the majority of these were in Southern Africa. Algeria and Kenya had already carried out their armed struggles during the 1950s, and they had already achieved their independence. Thus, when the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) was established in 1963, it was decided that one of its tasks was to assist armed liberation struggles in Southern Africa. The OAU Liberation Committee was established to carry out the process based in Dar es Salaam. Thus, armed liberation struggles were

successfully carried out in South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Guinea Bissau in West Africa (Mpangala & Kazinja, 2006).

Concerning the debate on continental unity, it was also carried out during the 1960s. That was a Pan-African idea that all the newly independent nations should unite to form one African nation. It was believed that it would help Africa to become strong and defend itself against neo-colonial powers in order to ensure fast development. In the process of the debate, two camps emerged. One camp of African leaders under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah advocated immediate continental unity to establish the “United States of Africa.” Another camp under the leadership of Julius Nyerere advocated a gradual approach beginning with regional federations, and later when the federations became mature they could unite to establish “continental unity.” Nyerere himself envisaged to establish the East African Federation as a good example. However, none of the two approaches had succeeded. Neither immediate continental unity nor regional federations was established, let alone the East African Federation. In 1967, the East African Community (EAC) was established by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.¹⁰

As regards, the second phase of the new generation of political leaders, again most of the political leaders, were a product of universities within the independent African countries and universities abroad, mainly in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe. Soon after independence the young African nations, among other things, embarked on

¹⁰The East African Community was not a political federation as envisaged before. It was basically an economic cooperation.

establishing their own universities. In East Africa, for example, the University of East Africa was established with University Colleges notably the Nairobi University College in Kenya, the Dar es Salaam University College in Tanzania, and the Makerere University College in Uganda. In July, 1970 the three colleges became full-fledged Universities in the three countries. Thus, in Tanzania, the Dar es Salaam University College, which began in October 1961 as a college of the University of London and later as the college of the University of East Africa, became the University of Dar es Salaam. Nearly all independent African nations established universities, for instance, University of Lusaka in Zambia, the University of Zimbabwe, and the University of Ghana, and so on.

These universities played considerable roles in terms of producing political leaders and ideas for political development. The University of Dar es Salaam, for example, played the role of producing prominent political leaders for Tanzania and other African countries. While the late Benjamin Mkapa was a product of Makerere University, Jakaya Kikwete, the late Maalim Seif Sharif Hammad, and Joseph Warioba were products of the University of Dar es Salaam. Outside Tanzania, the University of Dar es Salaam produced prominent leaders, such as Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, the late John Garang of South Sudan and a number of leaders of armed liberation struggle in Southern Africa.

The University of Dar es Salaam also became the centre of producing ideas that facilitated political development in Africa. In the 1970s and 1980s, the University became the centre of revolutionary ideas not only for Africa but the third World in general. It earned the name of the “Dar es Salaam School.” Hot

debates were carried out within the University. The ideas supported armed liberation struggles within and outside Africa, the fight against all forms of imperialism and neo colonialism and establishment of truly independent socialist nations (UDSM). The University of Dar es Salaam has just been taken as an example, but universities in other African countries also made contributions in terms of political development in Africa.

2.2 University Education and the Democratization Process in Africa

Nearly thirty years since they got their independences, African countries were busy building their new nations with the objective of ensuring fast socio-economic development and national unity. These objectives were expected to be achieved under the one party system and African democracy. Despite all these efforts, the newly independent African nations found themselves confronted with a number of contradictions and challenges. The first contradiction was that in many African countries instead of building one-party democracy, those in positions of power developed tendencies of authoritarianism and even dictatorships.

It is interesting to note that Frantz Fanon, an Algerian revolutionary and political philosopher, predicted that that would happen as early as the 1960s when theories of African democracy and one-party system were being discussed. Fanon criticized these theories arguing that the concept of African Democracy was a wrong concept because democracy was universal concept you could not have African democracy. Fanon further argued that it was not easy to build democracy under one-party system. Such a system had always the tendency

of developing authoritarianism and dictatorships that can be an instrument of the ruling class to oppress and exploit the masses (Nyirenda, 2000).

The second contradiction, which arose out of the first above, was the prevalence of the state of violent conflicts. Party due to one-party authoritarianism and neo-colonial interests in Africa soldiers decided to overthrow the one-party civilian regimes and thus military regimes were established. In some countries, rebel groups got organized and decided to fight against their governments through civil wars. Thus, the expected peace, unity and fast development could not be realized.¹¹

The third contradiction was the emergence of the economic crisis from the second half of the 1970s to mid-1980s. Although the economic crisis was a world-wide phenomenon due to the oil crisis of 1973 and 1979 in the Middle East, the crisis was more serious in African countries due to fragile economies. Thus, the people in the African countries viewed the crisis as being due to failures of authoritarian one civilian and dictatorial military government to manage the economies.

Arising out of the said contradictions, the people in African countries began to carry out demands for changes in political and socio-economic changes. At the political level, the demands were aimed at shifting from the one-party civilian and military regime into multi-party democratic governments. The movements in the African countries got strong support from the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Western donor countries. Movements began from the second

¹¹State of conflicts was widespread in many African countries but countries of the Great Lakes experienced greater conflicts, such as Burundi, Rwanda, DRC, and Uganda. By 1990s, more than half of the refugees in Africa came from the Great Lakes Region.

half of the 1980s, but the process of adopting the multi-party democratic systems gained momentum from 1990 onwards. The process of demanding and adopting the multi-party democratic system came to be regarded as the democratization process in Africa (Mpangala, 2000).

Our major interest, in this section, is to examine the contribution of University Education and universities in the democratization process in Africa. It is an obvious fact that universities and university intellectuals played a significant role in the democratization process. They generated discussions and debates on how best multi-party democracy can be established. Some universities established institutions to facilitate the democratization process. For example, the University of Dar es Salaam established two important institutions after the adoption of the multi-party political system in Tanzania in 1997. Based in the Department of Political Science, the institution is first the Research on Democracy in Tanzania (REDET) and second is the Tanzania Elections Monitoring Committee (TEMCO). While REDET preoccupied itself with research, publications and organizing seminars and workshop on multi-party democracy, on the other hand, TEMCO preoccupied itself with processes of observing and monitoring multi-party elections both major elections and by-elections.¹² Like other observers, TEMCO produced reports, which were critical enough to facilitate development of democratic free and fair elections.

A very good example of how universities and university academicians contributed to the democratization process in

¹²TEMCO functioned as one of internal or local observers of elections as there were also international observers, observing either in Tanzania mainland or Zanzibar.

Africa was the unique role played by an institution known as CODESRIA.¹³ From 1991, CODESRIA coordinated a research project on ethnic conflicts in Africa under the leadership of Prof. Akwudiba Nnoli from one of the Nigerian Universities. Previously, Prof. Nnoli also worked at the University of Dar es Salaam in the Department of Political Science of Public Administration. The project brought together prominent academicians from universities of different countries in Africa.

By that time CODESRIA was under the leadership of Prof. Mkandawire from Malawi as Executive Secretary. Other examples include Professors Nmeli and Mustafa from Nigeria, Prof. Mathirudq Sithale from University of Zimbuby, Prof. Archie Mafeye from South Africa, Prof. Walter Oyugi from the University of Nairobi, Kenya and Prof. Gaudens Mpangala from the University of Dar es Salaam, to mention just a few. While discussing research reports on conflicts, it came to be realized that the solution to conflicts in Africa was building multi-party democracy in the African countries (Nnoli, 1998). Discussions and debates were carried out through workshops, seminars and conferences from 1990 to mid-1991s held in different countries. In addition to those, CODESRIA organized Annual CODESRIA Assemblies in Dakar Senegal whereby themes and papers were mainly based on aspects of building democracy in African countries.

Given these case studies, there is no doubt that universities and universities' intellectuals have played a significant role in the democratization process and political development in terms of

¹³ An international institution for coordinating research activities by universities in African countries, which is based in Dakar, Senegal.

multi-party politics in Africa. But it has to be pointed out that as was the case with the one-party political system, the multi-party political system in Africa has experienced a number of contradictions from the 1990s to the present. The main problems have emerged. The first has been lack of willingness of ruling party under one-party system to accept the system of multi-party politics; the tendency has been to perpetuate the one-party system within the context of multi-party system. Thus, such parties develop tendencies of state parties, depending on state organs in order to win elections and perpetuate themselves in power. Under such situations opposition parties are taken as enemies and not partners in development.

The second problem, arising out of the first, multi-party elections in most cases, has not been free and fair. As a result, elections have resulted in another wave of conflicts in Africa. Even countries which enjoyed a state of peace under one-party system found themselves in conflicts under the multi-party system.¹⁴ The third problem has been tendencies of some presidents in Africa to perpetuate themselves in power. They are ready to manipulate the change of their constitutions so that they become “life presidents.” Under such situations, multi-party democracy cannot function, therefore, the situation leads into authoritarianism and dictatorships. This means that given these problems, multi-party democracy has not developed as expected.

During the early stage of the democratization process, there were high hopes of building democratic societies in Africa, and

¹⁴A good example of countries which enjoyed peace under one party system and began to experience violent conflicts due to multiparty elections are Kenya and Tanzania, particularly in Zanzibar.

thus facilitating fast socio-economic development. For example, Prof. Masipula Sithole of Zimbabwe regarded the democratization process as the second wind of change in Africa (Sithole, 1993). The first wind of change was the struggles for independence as stimulated by the British Prime Minister, Harold Maxmillian, during the 1950s. He said that in Africa there was a wind of change, which was blowing all over the continent, and thus the colonial powers could not stop it. A Tanzanian intellectual, Karim Essack, regarded the democratization process as a new liberation and a new revolution in Africa (Essack, 1994). Therefore, all these high hopes have not been realized as expected with the exception of few countries like Ghana and Botswana where multi-party democracy is developing well.

3.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The article has also observed that for nearly 30 years due to a number of factors, African countries have not been able to establish a viable multi-party democratic system. However, there are good indication that the African continent has a bright future of building a workable multi-party democratic system and thus ensuring fast socio-economic system. Good success in some African countries such as Botswana and Ghana provide such an indication. There is no doubt that University Education and universities as a whole will have to play a vital role in order to ensure such success.

From now onwards, universities in Africa have to carry out few important processes: the first, is to increase and raise research and publications on political development in Africa in general and on multi-party democracy in particular. Second, the products of research and publications should be accessible to

the people through workshops, seminars, conferences, and civic education. Although many governments and ruling parties in Africa are reluctant to provide civic education to the people, ways have to be found in order to raise political awareness and consciousness of the people. The third aspect is that universities should be in the frontline to push for new constitutions, which are in line with the system of multi-party democracy and multi-party competition.

The fourth and most important aspect is that through research, publications and various types of discussions and debates, universities have to come out with relevant and suitable philosophical and theoretical perspectives on the best political system in Africa. It is suggested that such perspectives should be based on people-centered democracy and people-centered development. This means that democracy and development should go together. During the debates on democratization during the 1995s, it was perceived that Africa should, at best, establish democratic developmental states (*ukandawire*). Such democratic developmental states should be people-centered. Under such conditions, democracy should mean people's power, people's participating and people's emancipation.

It has to be pointed out, however, that the highest level of political and socio-economic development in Africa can be achieved under conditions of continental unity. The Pan-African ideal and the ideal of early African leaders on continental unity should be one of the goals or roles of universities in Africa. This means that the current independent African nations should be ready to become states within the United States of the African Continent (USAC).

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