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Abstract

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Keywords

colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, postcolonialism, development, labour control, colonial states, colonial conquests, migration

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IN February 2005, the National Assembly of France passed a law that asserted 'the positive role of the French presence abroad, especially in North Africa', while directing educators to undertake the 'positive presentation of [French] colonialism' to schoolchildren. A year later, France's president, Jacques Chirac, repealed this law in an effort to defuse what historian Benjamin Stora called the 'dangerous war of memories', which threatened to rupture diplomatic relations between France and its former settler colony, Algeria.[1] If anyone had thought that the history of European imperialism and colonial rule in Africa was decided, then this episode and the public debate it generated quickly dispelled that idea.

Among professional historians too, debates about the nature of colonial rule in Africa have continued to simmer. Writing in 1990 for the UNESCO-sponsored *General History of Africa*, the distinguished Ghanaian historian Adu Boahen argued that 'the colonial rulers had one principal end in view, the ruthless exploitation of the resources of Africa for the sole benefit of colonial powers and their mercantile, mining, and financial companies in the metropolitan countries'. By contrast, Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage, who helped to establish the academic field of African history in Britain, portrayed colonial rule more benignly. Also writing in 1990, they suggested that colonial governments had aimed to 'maintain peace and the rule of law' and, from the 1920s, to fulfil their growing sense of 'moral obligation' to develop African societies.[2] Despite these differences of interpretation, Boahen and Oliver and Fage shared basic assumptions about how colonial states worked. They assumed, first, that Europeans were *colonizers*, that Africans were *colonized*, and that the distinctions between them were clear. They assumed, second, that colonial states formulated and applied policies with a high degree of coherence, so that the theory and practice of rule converged.

Recent scholarship in African history suggests a more complex picture. Many more people—and more *kinds* of people—than previously assumed were involved in shaping colonial states: not only African chiefs and European military men and civilian elites (such as British District Officers and French *commandants de cercle*), but also, for example, African translators, schoolteachers, and tax collectors, as well as European forestry (p. 152) experts, missionaries, and anthropologists. Viewed in this way, the lines between colonized and colonizer look blurrier. Likewise, colonial

administration was far more diffuse and less closely coordinated than official discourses of governance suggested, so that colonial states exerted their considerable power in ways that were often arbitrary, variable, and contingent on decisions made by individuals in local settings. In cities such as Paris, Brussels, and London, or Conakry, Léopoldville (Kinshasa), and Khartoum, the ostensible architects of colonial policies had less influence over colonial statecraft, as practised on the ground, than they either wanted or knew. In short, as historians reach deep into the colonial archives of former imperial powers and of African states, they now realize that the day-to-day articulation of colonialism was more complicated than once thought: 'more a multitude of discordant voices than the monotonous drone of imperial hegemony'.[3]

This chapter sketches a history of colonial states in Africa, explaining when and why they emerged, what they did, how they worked, and who made them what they were. At the same time, it aims to explain the historiography of colonial states; that is, the different ways that historians have interpreted their nature, their impact, and their legacies.

The Creation of Colonial States

During the closing years of the nineteenth century and opening years of the twentieth, seven European countries claimed territories in Africa and devised administrations within them. These were Britain, France, Germany, Belgium (initially through King Leopold's private initiative), Portugal, Spain, and Italy. For decades, historians have described this expansion as the result of a 'new imperialism', which stood in contrast with Europe's 'old' imperialism shaped by maritime trade in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds and which arose from new motives. These included a desire to enhance national prestige, to guarantee access to African raw materials and markets for European industrial goods, and to control strategic concerns such as waterways. For citizens of colonizing countries, African colonial states also offered prospects of employment, adventure, Christian endeavour, and personal gain. Thus, European governments, corporations, missions, and individuals found stakes in the colonial enterprise. Yet Africans seized or created opportunities, too, and in the process pushed the history of colonial states down unexpected paths.

The colonial partition, the so-called Scramble for Africa, is hard to date precisely, but precipitating events included France's occupation of Tunisia in 1881 and Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882. Otto von Bismarck, chancellor of the newly unified Germany, was concerned about this land grab, but eager also to get a share of the booty. Thus Bismarck called a meeting in Berlin and invited representatives of European states that were vying for African territories. Ultimately, the Berlin Conference of 1884–5 regulated this free-for-all. Contestants agreed to recognize the spheres of influence that some states were already claiming or eyeing, and agreed, too, that countries could only (p. 153) confirm their hold on territories by demonstrating 'effective occupation'; that is, by developing infrastructures for colonial rule. The latter provision changed the nature of European imperialism in Africa. Henceforth, European powers insisted on their right and need to impose strong centralized rule over colonies, and presumed authority to dictate policies and extract taxes within their borders. At the same time, they invoked a 'civilizing mission' to justify their actions, claiming to spread religious values, rational thought, liberty, justice, and other glorious abstractions.

To appreciate the difference between the old and new imperialism in Africa, one can cite Portugal, which claimed a longer history of engagement in the continent than any other party to the Scramble. In 1415, Portugal colonized the enclave of Ceuta (now claimed by Spain, but surrounded by Morocco). It did the same in Guinea (now Guinea-Bissau) in 1446, the Cape Verde Islands in 1462, and the islands of Fernando Pó and Annobón (now part of Equatorial Guinea) in 1472. Portuguese merchants and later chartered companies established trading enclaves along Africa's south-western and south-eastern coasts. This history enabled Portugal, after the Berlin Conference, to stake claims to what became Angola and Mozambique, and to establish ruling infrastructures within their interiors. Likewise, Spanish colonialism in Africa took new turns after the Scramble, as Spanish Guinea (Equatorial Guinea) shows. In 1778, through an exchange with Portugal for land in America, Spain claimed the island of Fernando Pó along with commercial rights to the adjacent coastal enclave of Río Muni. For decades Spain loosely administered this territory from Argentina, in an arrangement that attested to the bonds of empire stretching across the Atlantic. Yet, it was only in 1904 (a full 126 years after Portugal ceded control, and twenty years after the Berlin Conference) that Spain began to coordinate an administration in this territory, and only by 1927 that it began to govern effectively Spanish Guinea's mainland interior.

European technological advances enabled this new imperialism: medicinal quinine (for averting malaria, thereby enabling Europeans to survive in the tropics), rapid-firing rifles and machine guns, steamships, the Suez Canal (opened in 1869), submarine telegraph cables, railways, and macadamized roads (the last allowing for transport of goods by lorry). New image- and text-producing technologies, such as cameras and typewriters (with their potential for carbon copies and

mimeographs) became indispensable, too, as they enabled colonial states to record, classify, and publicize, to conduct surveillance and gather intelligence, and to register and enshrine property rights. Innovations continued in the twentieth century, with advances in auditory devices such as radios. Meanwhile, in military technology, Italy introduced aeroplanes as a new tool of empire, dropping hand-held bombs on Arab encampments during its 1911 battle to wrest Libya from the Ottoman Empire. Later other European powers in Africa (such as Britain in the southern Sudan) also engaged in aerial bombardment, in an attempt to 'pacify' people who refused to submit to colonial control.

Italy's invasion of Libya in 1911 presents one conventional end-date for the Scramble for Africa; France's imposition of a military protectorate over Morocco in 1912 another. H. L. Wesseling has recently argued, however, that the French seizure of Morocco was a mere epilogue to the Scramble, and that the Peace of Vereeniging, which (p. 154) ended the South African War of 1899 to 1902, was the real watershed for its closure.[4] The final defeat by British imperial forces of the two independent settler republics established by Afrikaans-speaking agriculturalists or 'Boers' secured British control over all of South Africa and hence mercantile access to the gold mines of the Transvaal. A critical figure in British imperial expansion within southern Africa was the diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes, after whom the two British 'Rhodesias', Northern and Southern (now Zambia and Zimbabwe) were named. The British economist J. A. Hobson (1858–1940), who covered the South African War for the *Manchester Guardian*, was surely thinking of Rhodes when he wrote his brilliant analysis and scathing indictment titled *Imperialism*. 'Finance', wrote Hobson in 1902, 'manipulates the patriotic forces which politicians, soldiers, philanthropists, and traders generate', thereby serving as motors of imperial expansion.[5]

At the opposite, northern extreme of the continent lay the French white settler state of Algeria. As a case study in the history of colonial expansion in Africa, Algeria was also somewhat exceptional, because its initial conquest in 1830 predated the Scramble by some fifty years. Yet in other ways its experiences were emblematic of trends elsewhere in Africa—a point that Frantz Fanon (1925–61), the Martinique-born 'psychopathologist of colonialism' strongly emphasized. Like South Africa, Kenya, and Southern Rhodesia, Algeria became a settler colony, although in this case French authorities welcomed Europeans not only from mainland France but also from Malta, Corsica, Sicily, and mainland Italy. As a settler society, Algeria developed a clear hierarchy of privilege, which recognized European Christians as citizens but subjected the majority Arabic- and Berber-speaking Muslims to a series of harsh penalties, commonly known as the *indigénat*, which France later exported to all its colonies in West and Central Africa. Algeria's harsh colonial system exploded in 1954 into a struggle for liberation that ended with French withdrawal in 1962 and with the 'repatriation' of one million holders of French citizenship (many of whom had never seen, or had no known ancestral connections to France).

Four countries stand out as anomalous cases in this history of African colonial states. The first was Liberia, which had been colonized from the 1820s by African Americans who had been freed from slavery in the United States and who declared independence in 1847 with help from the American Colonization Society. The second was Ethiopia, which retained independence—and its Orthodox Christian monarchy—largely by juggling the demands of competing European players, among whom were influential cadres of merchants and missionaries. However, in 1935–6, Italy—by then under the leadership of Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini—conquered Ethiopia, but held the country for only five years. The third case was South Africa, which emerged in 1910 as a tense union of British- and Afrikaner-dominated regions that applied racial policies empowering 'whites' and restricting the rights of 'natives' or 'blacks', as well as 'coloureds' (mixed heritage people) and people of Indian origin. The fourth was the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, which from 1898 had a peculiar status as a 'condominium', or shared domain, of Britain and Egypt. Egypt itself had claims to Sudanese territory that dated from a 'Turco-Egyptian' conquest in 1820, although Sudanese Muslim fighters had ousted the Egyptian colonizers in the early 1880s.

(p. 155)   The borders that emerged from the Scramble were often arbitrary. Some reflected prior claims, while others were set through the trading of favours. For example, Britain secured parts of northern Nigeria relative to France's Niger in return for recognizing French fishing rights off the Newfoundland coast.[6] In 1911, France agreed to the extension of German Cameroon by giving it two pieces of territory along its southern and eastern fringes; in return, Germany recognized France's free rein in Morocco. Even when officials sought to revise frontiers in light of physical and cultural topographies, the results were sometimes whimsical. In 1913, for example, Britain sent men to tweak the borders of two British-controlled territories, the Sudan and Uganda, with directions to account for the flow of Nile waters and the integrity of African 'tribes'. Captain Kelly, the British officer who came from the Sudan side and who clearly felt a sense of team loyalty, contemplated securing two particular communities of Acholi people for the Sudan because 'their fondness for clothes and such marks of civilisation as brass bands' made them 'progressive' and thus 'worth having'.[7] The

most significant reorganization of colonial jurisdiction was the confiscation of Germany's overseas empire following its defeat in the First World War. Its four African colonies, Togo, Cameroon, German East Africa (now Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi), and German South-West Africa (Namibia), were apportioned by the League of Nations as 'mandates' under British, French, Belgian, and, in the case of South-West Africa, South African stewardship.

Colonial States in Theory and Practice

A recurring theme in the history of Africa's colonial states is that they did not emerge, develop, or function in isolation. Frederick Lugard (1858–1945) was one of the most important players in the British Empire during the age of new imperialism. So extensive was his career that his biographer later chronicled it in two hefty volumes subtitled *The Years of Adventure* and *The Years of Authority*.[8] Born in India, Lugard attended the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He went on to serve in campaigns in Afghanistan, the Sudan, Nyasaland (Malawi), and Burma, to represent British commercial interests in exploratory expeditions in eastern and southern Africa, and to hold appointments as Military Administrator of Uganda, High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria, Governor of Hong Kong, and Governor of Nigeria. Lugard's Nigerian years were the most important of his career. Huge, populous, and richly diverse in cultures and terrains, Nigeria provided a laboratory for experiments in 'indirect rule', a method and philosophy of administration that Lugard later described in his famous *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922).

Indirect rule meant identifying and cultivating local chiefs and other hereditary rulers, and then using them as intermediaries in colonial governance. As described by Lugard, indirect rule worked from the premise that Britain possessed a 'dual mandate' to, on the one hand, colonize territories and extract wealth from them and, on the other, to help backward peoples to progress. Indeed, Lugard held strong views (p. 156) about Africans as 'primitives' and 'child races of the world', 'for whose welfare we are responsible'.[9] A third assumption about indirect rule rested on the romantic, if delusional, premise that Britain could preserve 'authentic' and 'traditional' local cultures while shielding Africans from modern conditions. Along these lines, Lugard wrote with contempt about 'Europeanised Africans'—whom others called 'detribalized blacks'—and stressed the need to avoid making more of them. Through skilful administration, Lugard suggested, it would be possible for Britain to get rich off Africa, reform and save Africans, but stop the clock on change. His writing inspired a generation of British colonial careerists, while his model of indirect rule became Britain's pan-African policy, even if British colonial states applied the idea differently from region to region.

France had its own lofty ideals for colonial rule, at the heart of which was the so-called *mission civilisatrice*, or civilizing mission. Its goal was to propagate the best of French culture along with the rationalist and libertarian values deriving from the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Before 1914 especially, French colonial authorities emphasized a vision of civilization that would 'improve their subjects' standard of living through the rational development, or what the French called the *mise en valeur*, of the colonies' natural and human resources' by, for example, building railroads, improving public hygiene, and promoting justice through the application of law.[10] In contrast with the British, French authorities tended to eliminate chiefs who got in their way and felt little sentimentality about protecting 'tradition'. Also unlike British authorities, who supported or tolerated the policy of Christian missionary schools in using African vernaculars as media for instruction, French colonial authorities promoted French—the proverbial *lingua franca*—consistently throughout their domains. French colonial policy also promoted 'assimilation' (suggesting large-scale adoption of French ways), or in its modified form, 'association' (implying partial acculturation). It also recognized a tiny number of educated Africans who embraced the French language and French ways as *évolués* ('evolved ones'), and granted them a degree of citizenship. In 1936, only 2,000 out of some 14 million French West Africans enjoyed *évolué* status, not including the 80,000 African inhabitants of the four old coastal communes of Senegal, to which France had awarded special privileges in 1848.[11]

In 1925, the distinguished anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, whose institute of ethnology at the University of Paris depended on colonial subsidies, explained the importance of rational study to colonial rule. 'When a colony includes peoples with a civilization inferior to, or very different from, our own, competent ethnologists may be just as urgently required as competent engineers, foresters or physicians.' Native populations, he continued, were as critical as natural resources like mines and forests in accounting for a colony's wealth, and required inventories in the form of 'precise, in-depth knowledge of...languages, religions, and social forms'.[12] Although Lévy-Bruhl was writing with French territories in mind, his observations apply equally to those of other European powers in Africa, which emphasized their rationalism as a justification for colonial rule. By encouraging the scholarly analysis of everything from folktales and marriage customs to native flowers and endemic diseases, colonial powers sought to demonstrate mastery to themselves and to others through the production of knowledge. (p. 157) In this way, too, academic disciplines such as anthropology and tropical

medicine became indebted to the colonial states that fostered them during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

All colonial powers in Africa desired to extract profits from colonies and to keep the costs of administration in check. For Germany, the historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler has argued, money-making was particularly important, as Bismarck hoped that economic success and opportunities abroad would serve as a release valve for rising social pressures at home. German colonies in Africa became 'an integrative force in a recently founded state which lacked stabilising historical traditions and which was unable to conceal its sharp class divisions'.[13] Italy, too, was a newly unified state that hoped to make money in Africa, while exporting surplus population as settlers. For Italy, after the conquest of Libya in 1911–12, the historical romance of African colonization was also critical, since it allowed for the proliferation of nationalist fantasies about reviving the Roman Empire on both shores of the Mediterranean.

In German colonies, the Congo Free State, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian territories, and some French and British domains, policy-makers hoped to pass costs of administration to private companies in a process that one might describe as the subcontracting of colonial rule. Examples of companies that benefited from such arrangements include the Portuguese Companhia de Moçambique, the German Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft für Südwest-Afrika, and the Belgian Compagnie du Congo Belge. Companies justified territorial claims and maintained order; in return they gained access to labour and profits. Christian missionaries also featured as proxies in this model of colonial statecraft. Authorities hoped that missionaries would provide welfare services (such as clinics for the sick), open schools to train Africans as workers and colonial servants, and bolster the moral legitimacy of colonialism. In return, the theory went, missionaries gained access to souls.

Yet theory diverged from practice in manifold ways. Financially, colonial states seldom made the profits for which European governments and companies had hoped; that is, profits sufficient to cover the costs of administration and then some. Certain regions had more trading potential than others, depending upon a range of environmental and human factors including the presence of exploitable raw materials, cash crops, and workers. Eventually, France found an accounting trick to offset its costs as well as the regional variations in wealth by making its richest colonies, such as Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon, subsidize the poorest, such as Haute-Volta (Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso) and Oubangui-Chari (Central African Republic). Commercially, big firms were expected to behave in ways that would foster social and economic stability, but companies were often rapacious. This was particularly so in the rainforests of Belgian- and French-ruled equatorial Africa, where in the 1890s and 1900s, so-called concessionary companies hell-bent on the extraction of rubber in order to turn a quick profit inflicted widespread and systematic violence upon village communities. When news of atrocities in the Congo Free State leaked out, the result was the rise of modern international human rights activism in the form of the Congo Reform Association and, in 1908, the handing of King Leopold's personal fiefdom over to the Belgian state.

(p. 158) In terms of governance, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* may have reigned at home, but in France's African empire despotism was really the king, with the result that colonial law in practice amounted to a kind of 'rule by decree, enacted in often arbitrary and sometimes spectacular punishments'.[14] Meanwhile, British rulers did not merely preserve African chiefdoms and customs; in some cases they invented them, or at least assembled them from a jumble of parts, while in other cases African chiefs invented or reinvented themselves.[15] Assessing French colonial practice in light of the high ideals of colonial rhetoric, one historian has concluded that French colonization in the early twentieth century functioned largely as 'an act of state-sanctioned violence'.[16] Yet violence has arguably remained a defining feature of all states in history, not only those that have arisen in colonies. The German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) famously defined the state as an 'institutional association of rule' (*Herrschaftsverband*), endowed with a territorial entity, that 'lays claim to the monopoly of *legitimate physical violence*' in the enforcement of its order.[17] Building on Weber, others have defined the state more recently as 'an administrative apparatus where administration means the extraction of resources, control, and coercion, and maintenance of the political, legal, and normative order in society'.[18] The colonial states of Africa certainly claimed monopolies of violence, in the Weberian sense of the term. Colonial states were economic as well as political enterprises, often committed to the extraction of natural resources, to the development of trade, and in the view of critics like Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924), who wrote a famous treatise against imperialism in 1916, to the promotion of private business interests in the form of 'cartels and monopolies'.[19]

Of course, empires are states, too, even if they are often giants in relation to individual colonies. As Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have recently noted, empires are highly stratified states, 'self-consciously maintaining the diversity of people they [have] conquered and incorporated'. At the same time, empires are populated by historical actors who are

constantly 'pushing and tugging on relationships with those above and below them, changing but only sometimes breaking the lines of authority and power'.[20] Historians are now making similar claims about the tug-and-pull of authority and the diffusion of power within Africa's colonial states.

Work, Control, and Coercion

Collecting taxes was a paramount concern of colonial states. So was controlling labour. Colonial rule depended on African labour to build and to maintain infrastructure, from roads, railways, bridges, and telegraph lines to government offices and rest-houses. Colonial sources emphasized the importance of male labour, but in many places women were also involved. Early twentieth-century photographs from the Sudan, for example, show largely female crews engaged in the hard physical labour of digging Nile dams. In response to these needs for 'manpower', colonial states imposed various demands for compulsory labour. These ranged from twelve days a year in French colonies to (p. 159) forty hours a week in the Congo Free State from 1903 to 1908 (subsequently revised to sixty days a year in the Belgian Congo)—although in reality people were often forced to work for longer. Most British colonies ended forced labour in the 1920s, but until then, in what is now Uganda, the demand was so onerous that 'a Ganda peasant might theoretically owe five months' labour a year: one month (in lieu of rent) to his African landlord, one month of local community labour, two months (in lieu of tax) to the state, and one month of compulsory paid (*kasanvu*) labour for the state or (rarely) a private employer'.[21] In the African-American colony of Liberia and in the Portuguese colonies, forced labour remained on the books until the early 1960s. Of course, Europeans were not the first modern imperialists to devise massive and often brutal forced labour schemes in Africa. That distinction goes to Muhammad Ali (1769–1849), the Ottoman governor and dynasty-builder of Egypt, who rounded up vast numbers of Egyptian peasants in the early nineteenth century and forced them to dig irrigation canals, operate textile factories, and fight in his army.

Colonial states also introduced taxes in cash and eliminated earlier currencies. In that part of French Equatorial Africa now containing Chad and the Central African Republic, authorities in 1900 imposed a head tax only on adults—but then defined adults as people over the age of eight.[22] The need for cash to pay taxes compelled many Africans to leave their communities for wage-paying jobs in mostly European-controlled enterprises, such as mines, factories, or, on farms (as in colonies of white settlement such as Kenya). Across the continent, the mobilization of labour by colonial states gave rise to large-scale migrations. As workers found that long distances and meagre incomes kept them from visiting their families, migration in turn led to *de facto* resettlement and urbanization. 'Certainly, by the later 1930s,' wrote one historian with regard to the copper-mining economy of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), 'it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction that Copperbelt workers were essentially rural tribesmen, temporarily working away from their homes.'[23] Equally untenable, given this new urbanization, was the romantic Lugardian idea of preserving 'traditional' African village cultures intact. Some colonial-era labour migrations anticipated postcolonial trends of African migration to Western Europe. Amidst the labour shortages of the First World War, France pressed 300,000 Algerian Muslim males to cross the Mediterranean in order to fill jobs in French factories; by 1939, approximately one in five Algerian men had worked for some time in France.[24]

Mobilizing labour required coercion. After 1905 in the Uele valley of the Belgian Congo, where one company demanded a massive labour supply for extracting and refining gold, 'recruits on their way to the mines were at times linked with ropes around their necks'.[25] In Northern Rhodesia, mining companies and the state used force to round up workers and march them towards the south. Most of these collected workers were men. In some places, such as Swaziland, colonial officials supported efforts of local chiefs as they tried to restrict the labour migration of women—with important consequences for the history of gender relations, family structures, patriarchal authority, and rural–urban connections. The new cash economy also made Africans into buyers of European industrial goods, introducing new cultures of consumerism. In Southern Rhodesia, for (p. 160) example, European manufacturers marketed Lifebuoy-brand soap to African men, in the process revising conceptions of personal hygiene.[26]

What was the difference between using coercion to mobilize labour and using coercion to impose control? The answer was, often, not much. Colonial states relied on an array of coercive bodies, notably armies and police forces, but also on innocuously named 'labour bureaus' (as in Northern Rhodesia) as well as the private militias that some chiefs maintained. Moreover, these coercive bodies sometimes claimed significant autonomy and pursued their own corporate interests relative to other parts of colonial states. Consider the case of German East Africa, where during the 1890s the colonial army was an agent of chaos. The German Foreign Office created a force called the *Schutztruppen*, made up of German army volunteers and African conscripts and charged with promoting security and stability so that German business could

prosper. But on the ground in East Africa, German military officers had other ideas: between 1891 and 1897 they fought more than sixty campaigns against local peoples, but only reported the biggest ones back to Berlin. 'Local military commanders', observed one historian, 'often secretly conducted smaller campaigns, of which even the governor was not subsequently fully informed.' To quell opposition, the *Schutztruppen* resorted to burning villages, plundering livestock and food, and adopting 'a strategy of systematic starvation' among civilians. Amidst the instability that they created, military officers created an impression of their own indispensability to the colonial state and thereby engineered 'the militarization of colonial policy' in German East Africa.[27]

In other colonies the lines dividing soldiers (theoretically waging wars or defending territories) from police (theoretically maintaining law and order) were blurry. Consider the colonial police force of the Gold Coast (Ghana): this evolved from an armed frontier force first established in 1865 and modelled on a combination of the Royal Irish Constabulary and Indian and Egyptian paramilitary forces. Authorities recruited 'Hausas', by which they meant Muslim men from the northern interior, and deployed them in various ways, from consolidating the British conquest of the Asante and Northern Territories region in the 1896–1900 period, to breaking strikes and labour disputes, and supervising convict labourers and guarding banks. These 'Hausa' men, who enjoyed opportunities to rise through the ranks, came to wield considerable power, in some places acting as magistrates by judging local criminal and civil cases. As David Killingray notes:

> All too often a uniform seemed a license to loot and extort, and as a result both the Hausa Constabulary and the Fante police were despised and hated by those they affected to police. Preeminently they were hated as unaccountable representatives of an alien colonial power imposing a range of new laws and measures of social control which lacked any semblance of popular consent.[28]

Who did the coercing in African colonial states? Who did the conquering, policing, rounding up, and clamping down? Europeans stood at the top of the hierarchy, but Africans contributed heavily to colonial armed forces as well. The vast majority of soldiers in all colonial armies were Africans, led by small numbers of European officers. Some Africans may have voluntarily joined colonial armies or police forces, but many (p. 161) more were drafted or otherwise coerced into joining; once in, they found opportunities for adventure, steady employment, and the enhancement of social status. Thus, France achieved its conquest of Dahomey in 1892–4 using its West African recruits, the so-called *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* ('Senegalese Riflemen'). The Anglo-Egyptian forces that defeated the Sudan's Mahdist state in 1898 consisted largely of men of Sudanese origin, while the Italian forces that conquered Libya in 1911 consisted largely of Eritreans. During the First World War, Belgians in the Congo sent African soldiers of the Force Publique to invade German East Africa and occupy Ruanda-Urundi (now Rwanda and Burundi). Hundreds of thousands of African soldiers fought in French and British armies during both world wars, serving and dying in campaigns from those of the Western Front in 1914–18 to Burma in the 1940s. As decolonization loomed in the 1950s, France deployed sub-Saharan African troops in Indochina and in Algeria in vain attempts to suppress anti-colonial uprisings.

In 1981, the British imperial historian D. K. Fieldhouse argued that the most important feature of modern colonialism between 1870 and 1945 was 'the fact that colonial powers took full control over the government of the dependent societies within their empires'. While conceding that colonial rule may have rankled Africans at times, Fieldhouse suggested that it was 'historically the lesser of two evils facing most indigenous peoples in the later nineteenth century', with the other possible evil, he implied, having been to leave Africans to themselves.[29] With its claims for prudent administration, firm control, and good intentions, Fieldhouse's description of colonial rule is one that most historians of Africa would argue against. Where Fieldhouse saw cool bureaucracy, systematic law codes, and coherent policies, historians have for some years been more likely to notice the randomness, incoherence, and unpredictable harshness of colonial 'systems'. At the same time, they are now likely to question the broad applicability of Crawford Young's portrayal of the colonial state as *bula matari*, the 'breaker of rocks', a term that Congolese peoples used to describe the brute force of the Congo Free State and its successor regimes. While few historians would query the brutality and venality of the Congo Free State, they are inclined to see the exertion of colonial power generally as somewhat more erratic and uneven.[30]

Indeed, writing in 1988 about Francophone Africa, Patrick Manning emphasized the arbitrary exercise of power as a distinguishing feature of African colonial states. Reflecting on the allure of colonial service, particularly in remote areas removed from firm central oversight, he noted that a

> French man in his twenties, newly out of school, might find himself to be a *commandant de cercle* with complete

authority over 200,000 people. He could accept, if he wished, the offers of gifts or women from subjects who sought his good will. Or, for those who refused to pay taxes, he could burn their villages and impose punitive fines in the near-certain knowledge that the governor would back him up.[31]

More recently, Gregory Mann has re-examined the *indigénat*, somewhat misleadingly described in English sources as the French legal 'code'. As Mann shows, the *indigénat* was never codified; it is better seen as a grab bag of sanctions and punishments, operating (p. 162) beyond the realm of courts and providing local *commandants*—and sometimes in rural areas their African *gardes-cercle*—with the option of jailing, fining, or lashing Africans for a host of petty infractions.[32] In Algeria alone, there were thirty-three listed infractions, which included speaking disrespectfully to or about a French official, defaming the French Republic, failing to register a death, refusing to fight forest fires, and avoiding *corvée* (forced) labour.[33]

The arbitrary nature of colonial rule extended into places where, under indirect rule, African authorities heeded ostensible tradition. Illustrating this tendency is an incident that occurred 1936 in the western Sudan involving the court of Ali al-Tom, *nazir* of the Kababish Arabs of Kordofan. One of Ali al-Tom's appointees, a relative, unilaterally divorced a couple so that he himself could wed the beautiful woman. His disregard for Islamic social and legal convention proved too egregious for local Muslims to tolerate, although British officials in Kordofan were inclined to let it stand (much to the displeasure of British legal experts in Khartoum).[34] While this episode illustrates the limits of inventing or revising tradition, it also demonstrates the intricate distribution of authority as well as the efforts of colonial states (involving in this case both Sudanese Muslims and Britons) to maintain power and shield it from challenges.

Examining instances such as these, historians are left to speculate about the consequences of the strong-arm and often arbitrary rule of colonial states for postcolonial African politics. Colonialism bequeathed to postcolonial states an apparatus of government departments (ranging from Post and Telegraphs to Education), military structures, and bureaucratic methods and procedures. But did it also bequeath, through its methods of administration, a governing culture of ruthless tyranny, which included a readiness to allow the unchecked exercise of power?

Locations of Power

In an article published in 1972, Ronald Robinson presented a 'sketch for a theory of collaboration'.[35] British imperial rule was able to function as it did, he argued, because British colonial authorities found local collaborators who were willing to work with and help maintain colonial orders and amass power of their own. Robinson's article became very influential among historians of the British Empire. Yet, appearing at a time when 'the Africanizing of African history was still the central item on the agenda', in Frederick Cooper's words, and when many historians of Africa avoided imperial history as 'white history', identifying some Africans as colonial lackeys conveniently left room for identifying other Africans as heroes.[36] And African heroes, to historians of the 1960s and 1970s, were above all anti-colonial rebels, whether of the peasant-revolter, nationalist-agitator, or guerrilla-insurrectionist variety. To historians of this generation, who were writing soon after decolonization, it was clear who had power in colonial states: white men in pith helmets, white men with guns, and in rural areas that had indirect rule, some black men such as chiefs and emirs.

(p. 163) Here, too, historians' perspectives have changed. For a start, historians today are disinclined to write history in celebratory modes and are sceptical about finding heroes. The picture now looks more complicated. Writing in 2007, John Parker and Richard Rathbone observed:

> The more we discover about colonial rule, the more fragmented, contradictory, and malleable it appears to be, dependent on the active participation of some Africans and full of autonomous spaces within which others pursued their own agendas. No longer are Africans seen as simply "responding" to the imposition of alien rule by either outright "resistance" or self-interested "collaboration".[37]

To this one might add the diffuse nature of colonial policy-making: decisions emanated from various quarters because power rested in multiple and sometimes unexpected places, and many different voices chimed in when issues of policy arose.

Even the *locus* of power was complicated. A scholar writing in 1976 about Northern Rhodesia observed that colonial administration 'did not merely represent the wishes of Britain. Power was filtered through Cape Town', as well as through officials of the British South Africa Company, who made their opinions and priorities well known.[38] In a similar vein, one

could argue that Algiers, Brazzaville, and Dakar, and not only Paris, were imperial capitals for French Africa, while Cairo, and not only London, was a centre of power relative to the Sudan and Nile basin. In 2007, Thomas Metcalf made a similar argument about India's centrality to the British Empire *vis-à-vis* the Indian Ocean world from South Africa to Singapore. India, he argued, was a political and cultural capital, from which emanated, for example, distinctive styles of colonial architecture.[39] The presence of small but robust South Asian communities in East Africa and South Africa strengthened these Indian connections.

Among Europeans in colonial Africa, there were the obvious holders of power and authority: administrative authorities, military officers, business executives, big land-owning settlers in places like Kenya and Algeria, and, to a more varying extent, missionaries. Yet, as scholars delve into colonial history through the study of science and technology, health, the environment, and urban planning, a more diverse range of agents are beginning to receive greater attention. Consider, for example, forestry experts. In the early twentieth century, many of these scientist-technicians produced environmental crisis narratives about African deforestation and mismanagement, using these to justify interventions that benefited European settlers or firms. In Benin District of southern Nigeria, British forestry regulations radically transformed farming practices along with notions of land ownership. In 1916, a new forestry ordinance 'prohibited the felling of a long list of tree species except on payment of permit fees in Benin City' and specified fines and imprisonment for infractions. A series of cumulative measures of this sort 'virtually criminalized farming and caused much hardship for the populace, which led to widespread protests and agitation against the ordinance and its strict implementation'.[40] In Algeria, meanwhile, scientists in the forestry service implemented land seizure policies in the name of protecting forests from Muslim Algerians, thereby aiding white wine-makers and other settlers as they expanded their hold on (p. 164) choice farmlands. Officials fined and imprisoned so many Algerians for infractions of forestry regulations that 'some in the military sought to protect the Algerians from the Forest Service and its zealous agents'.[41] Whether in Algeria, Nigeria, or elsewhere, colonial authorities seemed particularly bent on eliminating the farming practice of burning undergrowth before planting. In one region of Northern Rhodesia, local people even dated a particular famine to one District Commissioner's ban on the slash-and-burn technique.[42] Across much of eastern and southern Africa, veterinarians mounted similar interventions into established practices of cattle-keeping, which had a profound impact on many pastoral communities.

Amid such exertions of power, Africans struggled to carve out their own niches of influence. A search of French colonial archives by Emily Osborn unearthed cases in Guinea and Soudan (now Mali) from around 1900 that demonstrated 'the capacity of African colonial employees to influence the knowledge, interpretations, and actions of their French superiors'. One example involved a man named Ousmane Fall who was officially a district interpreter—but in fact a mini-state-builder—who 'had designed and supervised an elaborate colonial "justice" system that employed four other Africans who traveled through the district, hearing cases, and passing down judgments'.[43] Ousmane Fall had also forged certificates claiming colonial authority and taken women as captives, his elaborate scheme only unravelling when stumbled upon by French authorities. His case provides a graphic illustration of colonial dependence on African intermediaries and how such dependence could lead to unexpected mutations in government.

In a series of books and articles, A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, a former British colonial official in northern Nigeria who later became an imperial historian, examined the extreme sparseness of the British presence in African colonies. Officials were so few on the ground that they constituted what he dubbed a 'thin white line', albeit a 'line tipped with steel'. In some ways, Kirk-Greene concluded, British rule in Africa amounted to 'a great-confidence trick, a huge game of white man's bluff'.[44] Yet the British, like the French and other European colonizers, did more than bluff. They had superior technologies to back them up or enable surveillance: aeroplanes, guns, radios, and so on. More importantly, they had large cadres of local men whom they drew into their armies and bureaucracies. Colonial states, once again, rested upon complex structures of power.

'Late Colonialsim' and the State in an Era of Rapid Change

Historians sometimes describe the period from the 1930s to 1960s as Africa's era of 'late colonialism'. This term implies something about timing (suggesting the era before independence), but also connotes a shifting mood and purpose in colonial regimes. During these years, regimes faced a spectrum of new challenges. Some were occasioned by the twin global crises of the Great Depression and the Second World War; (p. 165) others by accelerating population growth, urbanization, and social change across the continent. The dramatic growth of cities was often accompanied by rising urban unrest, as workers and trade union activists began to agitate for improved wages and working conditions. All of this

resulted in what has been described as a 'crisis of confidence' or 'loss of faith' in the colonial enterprise. Accompanying the loss of confidence was a sharper interest in the idea of development, as states sought to promote economic growth, expand social welfare, and placate rising African expectations. At the time, the 'fundamental assumption' of colonial states may have been 'that there was still plenty of time'; nevertheless, in retrospect, many of these projects look rushed and haphazard.[45]

A classic example of a late colonial development project that brought rapid change, but which decolonization left hanging, was the 'Zande Scheme'. British officials introduced this scheme in 1946 in the remote south-western corner of the Sudan where sleeping sickness was endemic. Project leaders uprooted 60,000 scattered Zande-speaking people and resettled them in 'elongated village units of 50 families' in an 'agglomeration [that] also facilitate[d] educational arrangements, public health, and medical programs'. The scheme hired Arabic-speaking, northern Sudanese Muslims to supervise the Zande in planting Nigerian palm oil trees and cotton, and in extracting oil and fibre from them. But already, on the eve of decolonization in 1955 (when civil war was poised to erupt), project leaders were acknowledging problems with soil erosion, while they speculated that the scheme needed many more years 'to bring the peasantry to a civilized and prosperous, if not wealthy, state'.[46]

Colonial bureaucracies were also changing. Eager to keep colonial rule cheap, policy-makers from the start had been training and hiring African men as petty government employees, who typed and filed papers, surveyed plots of land, taught in government schools, disbursed medicines, counted revenues, and more. In the 1930s, as financial pressure mounted as a result of economic downturn and shrinking revenues, local African professionals became increasingly important to colonial states, while their accretion of responsibility made them more ambitious.[47] By the 1950s, as the political ambitions of urban elites were joined by mounting popular agitation, Britain and France sought to placate rising demands by granting constitutional concessions; the former by expanding or creating local legislatures and the latter by extending African representation in the metropolitan parliament. Between 1945 and 1958, France gradually extended the electoral franchise, resulting in a 'dizzying series' of votes in 'four referenda, two constitutions, three National Assemblies, and three territorial assemblies'.[48]

As the frontier of research moves ever forwards into the second half of the twentieth century, historians of Africa are now devoting increasing attention to the postwar era of late colonialism and decolonization. At the heart of their concerns lies the issue of the nature of the late colonial state and its relationship to independent polities that followed. The question is ultimately about 'what difference the end of empire meant, as well as what kinds of processes continued even as governments changed hands'.[49] That is, to what extent did independence and national liberation simply disguise a process of continuity from autocratic colony to autocratic 'postcolony'?[50] Debates about the legacy of late colonialism also turn on the consequences of the move towards the 'developmental (p. 166) state'. How substantive, lasting, and socially ameliorative were such projects in practice? This much, at least, is clear: colonial states (along with many Christian missions) passed the baton of development and social welfare to multinational and international philanthropic agencies, in a process that anticipated the roles that non-governmental organizations would play in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Africa.

Conclusion: On the Agenda

As historians of Africa continue to scrutinize the era of colonial rule, they are paying closer attention than in the past to the complex and uneven distribution of power within states, seeking to understand the ways in which diverse peoples—administrative authorities and other European agents, but in particular African historical actors themselves—shaped these states and made them function. They are also seeking to broaden their range of historical sources and approaches to them. This point bears elaboration. A generation ago, historians of colonial states were likely to rely on official reports sent to imperial or colonial headquarters (and now stored in national archives), as well as on correspondence and memoirs from European administrators. These sources tended to reflect the biases of ruling elites and to convey an impression of mastery derived from the gathering of knowledge and 'intelligence'. Historians still read these texts, of course, but are more likely now to read them critically, 'against the grain', while listening for the voices of less powerful people. Now, too, historians are likely to draw upon more diverse types of sources: oral accounts; visual materials such as photographs; and the rich literary and artistic production of Africans, such as poems and songs. Interdisciplinary approaches to history through the lenses of anthropology, art history, environmental studies, and other fields are also opening up new windows.

As a result of the widening frame of sources and methods, the field of 'imperial history' (with its established focus on the interests, policies, and behaviour of European empire-states and their ruling elites) and that of 'African history' (with its focus on the social history of African peoples, including the humblest), have been moving closer to each other. Growing scholarly attention to transnational history and the history of diasporas (including the contemporary history of African migrants living in the former colonizing countries of Europe) has confirmed this trend. Nevertheless, to a large extent, narratives of colonial states have continued to focus almost exclusively on the actions of *men*. One challenge still facing historians is to seek out and explore the history of colonial states as they involved women, as well as the children who were Africa's future.

This study of African colonial states has focused on the discrepancies between the theory and practice of administration, along with the work of collecting taxes, recruiting labour, and maintaining control. It has commented only briefly on the role of colonial states in fostering development and welfare, for example, through vaccination campaigns or public health measures that saved lives, or through establishing schools that opened doors to literacy, learning, and opportunity for African youths. Such (p. 167) welfare-related measures were important, but how many people actually benefited? Only a tiny proportion of school-age Africans in the colonial era, for example, ever got the chance to go to school. Bigger questions loom, too. How can historians assess the evidence for the humanitarian and altruistic deeds of colonial states in light of the evidence for their brutality and rampant, if erratic, aggression? Returning to the debate with which this chapter opened, how can historians reconcile the 'ruthless exploitation' that one eminent historian detected in colonial states with the claims for 'moral obligation' and service that were cited by two of his colleagues? This debate about the intentions and deeds of colonial states shows no signs of abating, so new generations of scholars will need to continue to address it.

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