



Some perspectives on the conquest of Africa

THE CONQUEST OF AFRICA

African attitudes to the arrival of Europeans In the late 1870s and early 1880s African rulers had no sense of doom; for the most part they did not feel threatened by the Europeans among them and felt quite capable of meeting any military threat. Many rulers welcomed European help against enemies, to secure some freedom of movement from an over-bearing overlord, or to gain an advantage over rivals. Oppressed groups within a society did the same. Europeans, having access to guns and having the ability to withhold the supply thereof, were welcome allies in one form or another. Because the conquest was more of a process than a single event, rulers realised only much later that their independence was at stake. The development of trading relations between Africa and Europe brought new manufactures to Africa, including strategic articles such as guns. Very soon these societies – or at least their rulers – could not do without these goods. They became locked into the international trading system, and this made it difficult to resist further steps that brought with them European penetration and control.¹

In dealing with the subject of conquest, we should not think in terms of a few major battles. There were thousands of small conquests, and in many of them no blood was

shed. Although the process of conquest spanned a period of some twenty years, the actual conquest of any particular area could usually be measured in terms of weeks or months. Many 'conquests' were entirely bloodless. In colonial historiography the conquests are often known as 'pacification', which is, as Oliver points out, 'certainly a euphemism'. Of course, one should remember that, apart from formal military operations, there was other violence as well, with huts being burnt, gardens destroyed, and livestock confiscated as villages were compelled to pay taxes or pushed into forced labour. This was really police action and much of it took place after the formal establishment of an administration. Although one cannot justify this, one can say that this sort of thing was not new to the Africans – there had been earlier raiders and conquerors seeking tribute, and the methods of these precursors were every bit as violent as those of the new conquerors.² In the battle of Omdurman British forces killed some 11 000 Sudanese. But this was not really typical of the scramble.

African resistance Resistance took many forms – there were clashes between armies, guerrilla warfare, peasant rebellions and 'social banditry'. T. O. Ranger says that it is clear 'that the old attempts to distinguish naturally warlike from naturally peaceful African societies are beside the point. Research has shown that there were no so-called warlike, raiding states and so-called peaceful, trading and cultivating ones, since virtually all states had some crucial interests or values which they were prepared to defend, if necessary by armed resistance. The view that only large-scale African polities resisted while small-scale societies could neither resist nor exploit colonial rule has also been conclusively disproved ... In short, virtually every sort of African society resisted, and there was resistance in virtually every region of European advance.'³

Differences in tactics Resistance was not always obvious. This has led to the use of the word 'collaboration' to describe the attitude of many Africans to the arrival of Europeans in their midst. African historians quite rightly abhor this word with its connotations of sell-out. Africans did not willingly give away their land or sovereignty. What has led some people to think that they were not jealous of their land and sovereignty is that not all societies resisted the conquerors with arms. Professor A. A. Boahen says that virtually all African societies were intent on defending their sovereignty: 'It is in the strategies and the tactics that they adopted to achieve this universal objective that they differed. Most African rulers chose the strategy of confrontation, using either diplomatic or military weapons or both ... Others ... chose the strategy of alliance or co-operation, *not* of collaboration.' He is adamant that 'the fundamental issue at stake between the 1880s and the 1900s as far as African rulers were concerned, was that of sovereignty, and on this, it was quite clear that nobody was prepared to compromise. Those African rulers who have been mistakenly termed collaborators were those who thought that the best way of safeguarding their sovereignty or even regaining the sovereignty that they might have lost to some African power previous to the arrival of the Europeans was *not* to collaborate but rather to *ally* with the European invaders.'⁴

Cooperation: Uganda Such alliances often made very good sense. In northern Nigeria many of the Fulbe emirs were able to retain most of their power by cooperating with the first British officials. Another example of cooperation may be taken from Uganda. By the end of the nine-

teenth century the Christian chiefs of Buganda as a group had won a degree of power *vis-à-vis* the kabaka and other chiefs, which they saw would be lost if they tried to oppose the British annexation of the country – they realised that military resistance would be futile. Although Bunyoro, which had refused to yield to Lugard during the days of the Imperial British East Africa Company, continued to resist the British government for a further four years after 1894, the Ganda chiefs did not oppose British rule. As they saw it, the future lay with allying themselves with the Europeans, and they entered the service of the British as officials in the administration of the Uganda Protectorate. This strategy enabled them to retain much of their authority, and because of this they could make things easy or difficult for the British. This gave them a bargaining position which was recognised by the British in the Uganda Agreement of 1900. In terms of this, in return for their acceptance of British rule, political power was in effect divided between the British and the Christian oligarchy. Thus while the office of kabaka was retained, real power rested not with the kabaka, but was in the hands of the lukiko, which they dominated. The members of this oligarchy also obtained the best land under the most favourable circumstances.

Africans not powerless The above also illustrates a point made by Curtin *et al.* as far as military conquest is concerned: 'The Europeans almost always had the physical ability to win each campaign, but military victory alone was no guarantee that they could then govern indefinitely without imposing a continuing drain on the taxpayers at home. African leaders therefore had a far better bargaining position than their military weakness implied. They could not prevent military defeat, but they could help determine the forms and conditions of colonial rule that followed.'⁵

Expedient treaties with France: Ahmadu The experiences of Ahmadu and Samory with the French show how African rulers had to carefully choose their options. In the Tukolor empire under Ahmadu Seku, son of al-Hajj Umar, and the Mandinka empire of Samory, which were the main opponents of French expansion in the western Sudan, both first chose diplomacy, signing treaties with the French. But the French regarded such treaties as only temporary while they strengthened their forces. Ahmadu was under no illusions. He knew that the treaty was regarded by the French as a temporary expedient until such time as they could afford to put a military force in the field against him. But he nevertheless cooperated with the French. His options were limited: his authority over the outlying parts of his empire was shaky, and he wanted to expand his economic ties with the French and thus obtain the arms he needed to bolster his authority. He went so far as to aid the French against Mahmadu Lamine, who was no less a threat to Ahmadu than he was to the French. By helping the French defeat him he was also helping himself. He joined forces with the French in the military campaign that saw Mahmadu Lamine defeated in 1887; Lamine himself was killed. But of course the defeat of Lamine meant that Ahmadu's days were also numbered. This illustrates the difficulties facing African leaders trying to preserve their identity. Although the French used Ahmadu to defeat Mahmadu Lamine and had a peace treaty with the Tukolor, they were at the same time quietly working to undermine Ahmadu, secretly giving guns to his enemies. Despite the peace treaty with Samory they also gave guns to his enemies.

Samory Samory's empire was still expanding, but he was experiencing difficulties and unrest as a result of his rigorous enforcement of Islamisation on the conquered peoples whom he was incorporating into his empire. As the opposition to his Islamisation policy grew, Samory increasingly favoured an alliance with France. He wanted to increase his trade with France and at the same time ensure that the French would not attack him while he was bringing his rebellious subjects to order. So in March 1887 he signed a treaty with France in which he renounced all rights to the land north of the Tinkisso branch of the Niger; at the same time he placed his lands under French protection. But Samory believed that he had become an ally of the French, not a dependant.

Tippu Tip The alternative strategies that African societies frequently developed may be demonstrated too by Tippu Tip's Swahili-Arab empire, which was a threat to Leopold's expansion in the east. Tippu Tip tried to ward off the threat from Leopold by claiming that he owed allegiance to Zanzibar. However, by the late 1880s British and German action had virtually nullified the sultan's influence in the interior and the sultan could provide Tippu with no protection. So Tippu promptly changed his allegiance and accepted an offer from Leopold to become governor of the Free State's eastern provinces. The Free State thus averted a war to bring Tippu under its control, and the ivory of the region no longer went to Zanzibar. Although this arrangement may have suited Tippu, his Swahili-Arab merchant subjects did not like it, as their raiding activities were now very much circumscribed, while rival European traders and members of the Free State's mercenary army made their presence felt in the area. The army, the Force Publique, in particular bothered them. Although officered by Europeans, it comprised locally recruited Africans who were keen to avenge themselves on the Swahili-Arabs who had oppressed them. Tippu himself retired to Zanzibar in 1891, and in 1892 and the Swahili-Arab strongholds were conquered in a war with the Belgians.

WHY WAS EUROPE ABLE TO CONQUER AFRICA SO EASILY?

Role of military technology The question of why Europe was able to conquer Africa so easily has often been debated. African confidence in their ability to handle any threat to their independence from Europe did not make allowance for the gap in military technology. Firearms played a major role in the African scramble for Africa, and the millions of guns that came into Africa from about 1860 were decisive in the changing balance of power among African polities. But their weapons, so effective against other African kingdoms, had great limitations when used against Europeans. Africans could not compete with the military technology of Europe. Even those African societies that were well armed had mainly muskets, whereas the European soldiers and their allies had breech-loading rifles and towards the end of the partitioning could bring the Maxim gun to bear. The muzzle-loaded flint-lock gun had not changed much since it had been introduced to Africa in the middle of the seventeenth century, but the number of guns produced in Europe rose markedly from the later eighteenth century when European smelting furnaces began using coal instead of charcoal.

Weaponry The Napoleonic wars further stimulated production, and at the end of the war there was a considerable surplus of firearms that could be exported. Guns thus found their

way to Africa in increasing numbers. According to one estimate, from about 1860 to the end of the century close to 20 million guns were imported into Africa. A large number of these were muskets. The rifle, which was much more accurate than the musket and had a far greater range, made its appearance early in the nineteenth century. Although some African rulers did obtain large numbers of rifles there were limits to the quantity that Africa could absorb. The best African technology could produce powder and shot locally, while blacksmiths could repair muskets. But the rifle demanded imported ammunition; few blacksmiths could repair it. Africa's iron industries, which were dependent upon intensive labour and a vast consumption of wood for charcoal, could not compete with Europe's coal-fired production. The gap between African and European iron production was to be reflected in the early years of colonial rule when cheap hardware from Europe ousted local blacksmith production. In their occupation of Africa the Europeans thus had at their disposal the breech-loading rifle and the Maxim machine gun as well as an array of field artillery that could demolish the mud defence walls of African towns. The Africans could not hope to compete with this arsenal of weapons. In the final analysis it was not simply the breech-loading rifle that gave the Europeans the advantage; the pace of new inventions defeated the Africans. They were always at least one step behind. Thus in the 1880s magazine rifles such as the Winchester repeater replaced the breech-loaders of the 1870s.

**Samory
doomed
by
techni-
cal infe-
riority**

In explaining the success of Europeans in conquering Africa, the superiority of weapons in particular, and the technical backwardness of Africa in general, feature prominently. If we take the case of Samory, the greatest of the military resisters, one of the reasons for his effective resistance was that he was not a traditional ruler but, as a forger of a new empire, he was able to break the mould of the traditional type of resistance and build up supplies of new weapons in the hands of new supporters. His army of 30 000 men were mainly footsoldiers, but there was also a cavalry elite. He was more easily able to adopt tactics such as mobile guerrilla-type warfare. But in the end his 'empire was doomed through its technical backwardness compared with the European powers that determined to crush him'. This technical backwardness went beyond a simple matter of not being able to obtain enough modern arms. Technical inferiority, writes Bill Freund, 'was embedded in a social context that could not easily be altered from within'.⁶

**Sokoto
cali-
phate**

It was virtually impossible for most African societies to contemplate action beyond the range of their traditional responses. Thus the Sokoto caliphate offered very poor resistance to Lugard. When Kano was captured, the British found huge caches of arms that had never been used. Those emirates that resisted the British did so separately, using traditional fighting methods of mounted cavalry charges against phalanxes of soldiers armed with repeating rifles. Even those states that had had long contact with Europeans, such as Asante and Benin, were technically unprepared when pressure against them mounted.

**Techno-
logical
gap**

This discussion on military technology once again raises the question of the technological gap between Europe and Africa in general. The gap applied not only to military

technology. The Africans had the advantage of numbers and they knew their terrain, but in many instances the European technology neutralised superiority of numbers.

First stages of partition; small European presence

In the early days of the partitioning there were only small parties of Europeans and the rulers did not feel threatened by them. Even in the Senegal region, Brière and Desbordes had only 500 men at their disposal. Usually the first European presence on the ground consisted of a small number of European officials and soldiers, very often fewer than 20 and seldom more than 100. They sometimes employed mercenary troops, many of them recruited locally. In Nyasaland, for example, when Harry Johnston established a colonial administration, there were 11 other Europeans besides himself, 70 Sikh riflemen from a regiment in the Punjab, and fewer than 100 Makua and Zanzibaris recruited in East Africa.⁷

Bloodshed increases towards end of partition

Oliver and Atmore write that: 'The first stages of the partition, when European states were laying claim to coastal regions and navigable rivers, and were defining on paper the boundaries running inland from these first footholds, were accomplished with surprisingly little bloodshed and conflict. The reason for this was that very small numbers of European forces were used in Africa during this time. The first occupying groups consisted of small, mobile expeditions of European officers or chartered-company officials, accompanied by a few dozen lightly armed porters, scarcely distinguishable from the expeditions of the first explorers. Africa itself was so immense that these first little groups of Europeans seldom came into contact with each other. Their attitude to the African peoples had necessarily to be that of negotiators rather than conquerors. They entered into the local politics of every region they came to, supporting the groups and factions which had some reason to be friendly, and avoiding those which were hostile. In the later stages of the Scramble, however, towards the close of the nineteenth century, when forces were somewhat larger and when the final, interior frontiers were being claimed, meetings between rival European expeditions became more frequent. Collisions occurred between the occupying forces and those of the larger and more organised African states, which often fought desperately for their survival. Numerically, the armies of these states often outnumbered the European expeditions by many hundreds to one, but the superiority of European weapons was overwhelming. A single machine-gun could put to flight a whole army of undisciplined men armed only with ancient guns and spears. As it raced towards its conclusion, therefore, the Scramble produced increasing bloodshed.'⁸

Technology of administration

Towards the end of the partition policy-makers in Europe were prepared to spend more money than they had earlier, and so we see far larger military operations – Kitchener had 20 000 men at Omdurman, Baratieri had 17 000 at Adowa. In the 1890s many expeditions consisted of 2 000 to 3 000 men. This was far more than in the early days.⁹ Europeans had the advantage of the technology of administration which the Africans lacked. By virtue of their general technological superiority the Europeans had the knowledge and technology necessary to feed and maintain large numbers of men in the field for considerable lengths of time – skills and infrastructures which the Africans did not possess. One of the problems of the Mahdi in the Sudan was to keep his large army fed in the field; Menelik faced the same problem, but he was fortunate that the Italians

did not exploit this potential weakness. There was no simple way that African societies could have remedied the deficiency without being totally transformed. The abilities of the Europeans lay rooted in the industrial revolution. Freund writes that: 'In order for African states to have resisted conquest effectively, they would have required to put up not merely a very substantial military effort, but to move towards an economic and social transformation, the creation of a milieu for the reproduction of technology that could have met the depredation of the Europeans on their own terms.'¹⁰ The Chokwe were good gunsmiths but their talents could not keep pace with the rapidly evolving military technology; even Samory and Menelik could not compete with European arms factories.

European solidarity

Besides superior military technology, medical technology (quinine in particular) and the financial and material resources that Europeans could tap as a result of the industrial revolution, one must also allow for the fact that most African societies were small. Not only were most African societies small, they were also divided, and often the largest of the states were the most divided. There was much conflict and rivalry between polities and also within polities – thus we have the Mande against the Tukolor, the Asante versus the Fante, Buganda pit against Bunyoro. After the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878 there was a period of peace in Europe, so that Europe could focus its attention on its activities abroad without having too many distractions at home. Not only was Europe at peace but, writes G. N. Uzoigwe, 'the European powers involved in the partition displayed a remarkable spirit of solidarity which not only eliminated wars amongst them but also prevented the African rulers and communities from effectively playing one European power against the other. Throughout the period under review, various European powers took on the African states one at a time, and on no occasion was an African state assisted by one European power against another. By contrast, the behaviour of the African states was not only marked by lack of solidarity, unity or co-operation but some of them did not hesitate to ally with the invading European forces against their neighbours, only to be vanquished later themselves.'¹¹

African disunity

There is little doubt that European unity and African disunity were vital in accounting for the relative ease with which Europe took over Africa. African rulers had a very limited sense of solidarity. There was no question of them joining up against a common enemy because the Europeans mostly did not fall into the category of a 'common enemy'. Ahmadu and Samory had been rivals for too long for them to join up against the French, which from the point of view of African military strength was a pity. Ahmadu was finally defeated only after the French had made an alliance with his brother, thus exploiting divisions within the polity. The Royal Niger Company extended its authority in West Africa, helped by the fact that African disunity meant that it could deal with the various polities one by one. Fighting between the Moors and the Tuareg weakened both of them, making it easier for the French to conquer them. When Lugard tackled the Sokoto caliphate between 1900 and 1903, he was able to deal with each group separately as the empire was in fact a federation of semi-independent emirates.

Secondary states divided

The new secondary states were very divided. Rabih, who moved from the Bahr al-Ghazal westwards and conquered Borno, had a divided empire when he came against the French. Although his military dictatorship was an improvement on previous rule, the people regarded him as a foreigner and had no loyalty towards him – for most of his rule he had to face opposition. In the course of their empire-building the larger empires such as the Tukolor or Samory had alienated many of the people they had incorporated, so that there was no sense of loyalty among large sections of the empire. Samory was faced with an internal revolt as a result of his trying to forcefully convert the Mandinka to Islam. Large sections of people within these empires welcomed the Europeans and aligned themselves with them.

Slave revolts

It was not only among the newer empires and secondary states that divisions were chronic. Even in older states, where the rulers had achieved a good deal of 'legitimacy', the rulers did not necessarily enjoy the support of the majority of their subjects. 'The ruling groups among some long-established peoples,' writes T. O. Ranger, 'took their own advantage of the opportunities offered by nineteenth-century weapons and commerce to develop an arbitrary power, with the result that they could not count on popular support in a confrontation with the whites.'¹² For example, slaves and serfs in the western Sudan were treated harshly, and they saw in the French advance an opportunity of throwing off the yoke of their masters. Thus the French progress across the western Sudan has been described as 'a creeping slave revolt'.¹³ After the conquest of Benin, when the oba and his advisers were getting ready to organise resistance in the rural parts of the kingdom, the British put an end to this by threatening to emancipate all slaves. Disaffected slaves were not a significant factor only in the European partition; the success of dan Fodio's jihad that led to the formation of the Sokoto caliphate owed much to the fact that the slaves were opposed to their Hausa masters who had oppressed them and were eager to join up with the reformists. When the French conquered Dahomey, this was welcomed by many of the Yoruba who saw it as a release from Dahomian tyranny.¹⁴ European rule was welcomed in Yorubaland because the people were totally exhausted by war and raids and migrations that attended the breakup of the Oyo empire.

Ethiopian unity

Ethiopia was an exception. It enjoyed a remarkable degree of stability and unity. This was because the nucleus of the state was the small Christian kingdom of Shoa, which had established sources of loyalty that it could draw upon. The fact that it was an ancient Christian state helped to create a favourable image in Europe. That Menelik was able to obtain a supply of modern arms unsurpassed in nineteenth-century Africa was due not only to his skill, but also to the situation of Ethiopia *vis-à-vis* European strategic interests in the Red Sea and upper Nile. It was fortunate too that its independence was challenged by Italy, which, together with Portugal, was the weaker of the European powers involved in Africa, and not by Britain, France or Germany.¹⁵

Importance of African allies

Because the Europeans seldom, if ever, had to face a united opposition, they were always able to find allies who saw in the presence of the Europeans an opportunity of increasing their own power or in some way improving their situation. In most of the major processes of conquest, the African allies played an important role. A large

proportion of troops used by Europe were African levies. Lugard was able to subdue the Fulbe emirates of northern Nigeria with the West African Frontier force that comprised between 2 000 and 3 000 soldiers, most of them recruited from among the Hausa themselves.¹⁶ For Portugal, making use of rivalries between African polities was the only way of securing its claims to the hinterland of Angola. Portugal could not raise armies of occupation, so it exploited local rivalries. Punitive expeditions sent into the interior were armed with Portuguese weapons and officered by Portuguese, very often ex-convicts, but the members of the expedition were locally recruited Africans, obtained very often from among the political rivals of those about to be attacked. The Chaamba of the northern Sahara played a prominent role in helping the French to conquer parts of the Sahara.

Opposition by stateless societies In places such as the Ivory Coast and Nigeria the sternest opposition was provided by the 'stateless societies' where there was no central ruler to be conquered, and it was only in 1910 that the last of the Ibo villages in Nigeria were forced to accept British rule.¹⁷ These stateless societies also provided the biggest problems in administration. 'Because there was no one to make a formal surrender, there was also no one to survive in office; but in this situation, the Europeans also lost their chance for the kind of cheap conquest and cheap administration the British imposed on the Sokoto caliphate. The Ibo, or the Tiv of the Benue valley were far more expensive to conquer, and such conquests took much longer. The Europeans could try to accept the "surrender" of important people, but in fact no one had the power to make more than a personal decision to cooperate with the new rulers.'¹⁸

Later resistance Very often resistance did not accompany the annexation of a territory, partly because the actual annexation was really part of the paper partition and the new subjects did not feel the brunt of colonial rule until later. Much resistance and conquest activity followed after the paper partitioning. Thus in German East Africa labour and tax demands by the private commercial company into whose hands Bismarck had entrusted the colony resulted in the 1888 Swahili-Arab uprising, which was suppressed only at the end of 1889 after the government had sent in reinforcements and taken over direct control itself.

Rebellion in Kenya The British government took over Kenya from the Imperial British East Africa Company in 1895 and soon had to face the Mazrui rebellion of coastal Swahili. It was nine months before this was brought under control. There was initially very little resistance in the interior, but this was because the full impact of colonial rule was felt only in the early 1900s when the Uganda railway was built and Europeans began settling in the central highlands.

Narrow focus of resistance A striking feature of resistance was that it was usually based on narrow sectional interests, selfish interests. African rulers and their subjects did not see themselves as part of a larger entity, and certainly not as nations. They had a very limited view of sovereignty. Historians have been at odds about whether this early resistance can be directly linked with the liberation struggles after the Second World War. Professor A. A. Boahen of the University of Ghana, editor of volume 7 of the *Unesco general history of*

Africa, implies that there is a direct line between this early resistance and later struggles. The chapter on conquest and resistance in West Africa, written by Boahen and M'Baye Gueye, ends with the following paragraph: 'Looking back over this heroic period of African history, the question obviously suggests itself whether resistance was not "heroic madness" or a criminal attitude. These authors do not believe so. It matters little, from their standpoint, that the African armies should have suffered defeat at the hands of better equipped enemies, so long as the cause for which the resisters laid down their lives continues to haunt the minds of their descendants.'¹⁹

Internal tensions Others do not agree. Their main argument is that African rulers in general were fighting for very selfish and often very narrow ends, with which it is difficult to equate nationalism. Niger delta traders such as Nana Olumu can hardly be seen as popular spokesmen for local grievances or as forerunners of nationalism. His aims were narrow and centred on his own activities, and he had to keep a watchful eye on his slaves. Like the rulers of the secondary states, the ability of the traders to resist was limited, because they had generated a whole lot of popular grievances. The large-scale traders in the Lagos interior could not be more effective in resisting the British advance because of the restlessness of the slaves and serfs that made up their labour force.²⁰

Freund writes: 'The most interesting resistance struggles were not really those fought by African states to retain their sovereignty, for this type of resistance tended to be the class struggle of dominant elements who had themselves a strongly predatory character. More historically resonant were those popular risings against the imposition of colonial control which represented a reaction to new and oppressive demands on the masses that began to call up new kinds of leadership.'²¹

Demand for labour And the principal demand on the masses was for their labour. Historians who look at resistance from an 'economic perspective associate mass revolt not with resentment at the European attack on trade, but with the more slowly developing realisation on the part of the African populations that the whites were determined to obtain cheap labour'. Many Africans who at first might have welcomed the Europeans so that they could escape from oppressive rulers or slave-masters or rapacious Swahili traders, would change their opinion when Europeans started looking for labour. By the same token slave masters and traders might at first have been opposed to the Europeans, but later discovered that their interests coincided.²² This resistance to the demand for labour and the alienation of their land falls more into the period after the establishment of a colonial administration and will be dealt with there.

A NECESSARY TIDYING UP?

Conquest as amalgamation Professor Oliver points out that the conquest 'could also be described as the great and necessary process of amalgamation, without which there could have been no independent African states in the world today'. He goes on to say that 'although pre-colonial Africa comprised a few large states – like the Ethiopia of Menelik, the Mahdist state in the Sudan, the Fulani sultanate of Sokoto or the Asante kingdom of the Gold Coast – where subjects numbered millions, and while there were maybe thirty or forty more

which had populations of some hundreds of thousands, the normal population per sovereign unit varied between about five and twenty thousand. The number of independent polities was, at a conservative guess, around ten thousand.'

Partition as a tidying-up process Would Africa necessarily have been better off if there had been no European partitioning? He does not believe so: 'The African scramble for Africa would have gone on, and the disintegration of the nineteenth century would have gone much further in the twentieth century. Above all, we must not lose sight of the fact that, even while the European conquest of Africa was going on, in its thousandfold complexity, the links were being forged which would in the future bind one African group to another. Never mind if the roads and railways were being built with forced labour. They were, at last, being built, and the work of welding tribes into nations was beginning. Never mind if Christian missionaries sometimes took advantage of the colonial umbrella: in their schools they were already teaching the young Africans to think of themselves in wider than ethnic terms. The partition of Africa did not happen in the ideal way. It would have been much better for the future of Africa if the European colonisers had taken their shares in fewer and larger slices. But, all the same, 40 future states was a great deal better than 10,000. It was not really the partition of Africa. It was the necessary *tidying-up* of Africa, which simply had to take place if there was to be any genuinely independent Africa in the future. We can regret the modalities, but not the event itself.'²³

Inevitability of change Change was inevitable. Those states that were conquered became subject to changes resulting from their new relations with European powers. But as Bill Freund has pointed out, even Ethiopia, which was not conquered, could not simply stand still. Ethiopia could not use 'independence to renounce change and pursue purely "indigenous" historic patterns of development; it had to live within a world which was rapidly moving ahead. This dilemma would have faced other African states had they retained independence.' He goes on to say of partitioning and the colonial rule that followed it: 'Imperialist domination marked more than a phase in the history of Africa. It was the precondition of the emergence of African society as it now exists. Indeed Africa as a meaningful concept owes itself primarily to the predatory instincts of the new conquerors and then, with time, to opposition to them.'²⁴

Notes

- 1 B. Freund, *The making of contemporary Africa: The development of African society since 1800*, p. 104.
- 2 R. Oliver, 'The partition of Africa: The European and the African interpretations', African History Seminar, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, 16 October 1985, pp. 4, 6-7.
- 3 T. O. Ranger, 'African initiatives and resistance in the face of partition and conquest', in A. A. Boahen (ed.), *Unesco general history of Africa*, vol. 7, *Africa under colonial domination 1880-1935*, pp. 46-47. The quote is taken from p. 26 of the abridged edition. The other references in this chapter are to the unabridged edition.

- 4 A. A. Boahen, 'Africa and the colonial challenge', in *Unesco general history of Africa*, vol. 7, pp. 10–11.
- 5 P. Curtin, S. Feierman, L. Thompson & J. Vansina, *African history*, p. 458.
- 6 Freund, *The making of contemporary Africa*, p. 104.
- 7 Oliver, 'The partition of Africa', pp. 4–5.
- 8 R. Oliver & A. Atmore, *Africa since 1800*, pp. 114–115.
- 9 G. N. Sanderson, 'The European partition of Africa: Origins and dynamics', in J. D. Fage & R. Oliver (eds), *The Cambridge history of Africa*, vol. 6, *From 1870 to 1905*, p. 157.
- 10 Freund, *The making of contemporary Africa*, p. 107.
- 11 G. N. Ozoigwe, 'European partition and conquest of Africa: An overview', in *Unesco general history of Africa*, vol. 7, p. 39.
- 12 Ranger, 'African initiatives', p. 50.
- 13 Oliver, 'The partition of Africa', p. 12, quoting John Lonsdale.
- 14 K. Shillington, *History of Africa*, p. 309.
- 15 Curtin *et al.*, *African history*, p. 464.
- 16 Oliver, 'The partition of Africa', p. 12.
- 17 Shillington, *History of Africa*, pp. 311–312.
- 18 Curtin *et al.*, *African history*, p. 465.
- 19 M. Gueye & A. A. Boahen, 'African initiatives and resistance in West Africa, 1880–1914', in *Unesco general history of Africa*, vol. 7, pp. 147–148.
- 20 Ranger, 'African initiatives', p. 60.
- 21 Freund, *The making of contemporary Africa*, p. 109.
- 22 Ranger, 'African initiatives', p. 61.
- 23 Oliver, 'The partition of Africa', pp. 4, 13.
- 24 Freund, *The making of contemporary Africa*, p. 109.

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Part 2

The twentieth century

The foundation of colonial rule

F J Nöthling

AFRICA'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS AND DEVELOPMENT

During the twentieth century, especially since the 1950s, the economic growth and the high rate of technological development of Africa, the continent has become a focus of attention in the world. The continent's growth is becoming a reality and is spreading the hope of a better future for the continent. The continent's growth is becoming a reality and is spreading the hope of a better future for the continent. The continent's growth is becoming a reality and is spreading the hope of a better future for the continent.



The foundation of colonial rule

Views on colonialism

Colonialism has a negative connotation: it implies the uncalled for rule of subordinate groups or peoples by foreign powers. After the Second World War anti-imperial opinion branded it as an 'evil'¹ that had to be uprooted at all costs and when the era of decolonisation arrived, African leaders told their followers that any form of self-government, even misgovernment, was preferable to colonial rule. Currently, many blame colonialism as the sole cause of the deplorable conditions prevailing in independent Africa. In contrast to this view, the founders of colonial Africa saw their rule in different terms – as a positive influence that ended slavery, war and tyranny while introducing social and health services and education.

AFRICA'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS AND DEVELOPMENT

Significance of Africa Despite the imperialistic propaganda about the 'white man's burden', the 'civilising mission' and the 'holy duty' that accompanied the partition of Africa, the continent was of minor significance in the wider European or global economic context. In Robinson and Gallagher's phrase, the acquisition of the African colonies was merely the 'scraping of the bottom of the barrel'² and the rapidity of the partition was primarily an effort to eliminate rivals and safeguard any future benefits which the continent might hold. Having completed the partition, the greatest concern of Africa's new masters was to prevent the colonies from becoming a financial burden to the mother country. Imperial-

ism, after all, was not popular enough to allow European statesmen to saddle enfranchised taxpayers at home with the burden of carrying the costs involved in economic development or the introduction of administrative systems in the new African acquisitions. This forced any ideas of imperial responsibility into the background. Africa was the concern of those officials saddled with administering the new colonies and those businessmen and missionaries who had some interest in the continent. Besides this, the concept of the welfare state had not yet been developed – European governments expected private enterprise to take the initiative.

Economic obscurity With the exception of West Africa, where trade with the outside world had been going on for centuries, Africa's economic obscurity was apparent in the limited trade the continent enjoyed with Europe in the first years after the partition. In 1913 Africa was involved in only 7 per cent of all British trade, while the figure for France amounted to 10 per cent; Egypt, Algeria and South Africa were the major participants in this regard. Trade with tropical Africa accounted for less than 2 per cent of British trade and less than 1 per cent of French trade. In 1912 the Belgian Congo's share in Belgian trade was about 1 per cent while the trade between Germany and her African colonies amounted to even less. In the case of the Portuguese, despite strong protectionism, trade with the African colonies fluctuated between 7 and 10 per cent in the years between 1905 and 1926.³

Factors mitigating against change With a few exceptions, Africa did not bring immediate prosperity to the new European mother countries. Except for West Africa, the indigenous economies were not geared to meet European requirements. First of all the blacks had to be persuaded to produce goods for the European markets, and this implied a complete economic revolution of the indigenous economy in some areas.⁴ Several factors inhibited such change. The necessary channels of communication between colony and mother country were absent. Because of the continent's geographical features, suitable production areas in the interior were not linked with the outside world. Africa possesses only a few partially navigable rivers and tropical diseases caused havoc among stock animals. The use of human portage as an alternative was not only undesirable, but was subject to many other limitations. This meant that the construction of railways – a capital-intensive undertaking – had to be faced, while roads and telegraph lines were also necessary for efficient administration. Construction implied exploration and basic surveying which had political and financial implications; African resistance to these activities not only prevented effective action but slowed down the potential economic development of the continent.⁵ Furthermore, Africa's export commodities were limited. Natural rubber, for which there was a demand until about 1912, was one such commodity. From East Africa, where the ivory and slave trade endured for a long time, raw cotton was exported, but this became possible only after the local population had been compelled to change to cotton.⁶

Exports In West Africa the export of cocoa and coffee was steady, however, as was the export of raw cotton, palm oil and groundnuts. This was the outcome of the changed dispensation introduced by European colonialism. In spite of constant internecine warfare and banditry in pre-colonial times, Africans and Europeans had managed to maintain

long-distance trade across disrupted frontiers. With the arrival of colonialism, a wider and more solid political order appeared, releasing most Africans from the duties of defence and opening up possibilities for more productive enterprises. Limited investment created opportunities for some to plant crops such as coffee and cocoa, without the danger of seeing them cut down by raiders before they could bear fruit. With the experience that more than fifty years of 'legitimate' trade brought to West Africa, the coastal region easily adapted to the new money economy inaugurated by the colonial era. Towns, markets, money and credits existed before the partitioning and its cocoa and groundnut industries were well established before 1905. The changes that set in after partitioning merely amplified trade which already existed in this region and finally reoriented it from the old trans-Saharan routes towards the ocean-based enterprises of the twentieth century. This contrasted with the central parts of Africa where European commerce was more destructive and demanded more direct European involvement, which broke down indigenous economic, political and social institutions.

**Build-
ing of
railways**

Imports were sluggish and included machinery and quality consumer goods destined mainly for South Africa and Algeria, while the demand for cotton goods remained strong. Capital investment was small and long term in outlook, going mostly to agriculture, industry and transport, especially railways. Besides the need for capital, the construction of railways depends on political stability, and this was responsible for the change from informal to formal empire: the continent itself could not provide the necessary security. By 1905 railway construction was in full swing and when the First World War broke out, important centres in the interior had been reached. Nearly all of these lines were built from the coast to the interior in an attempt to facilitate the export trade. Internal links did not develop because they were not economically viable – all inland areas produced the same commodities and could not generate enough mutual trade to justify internal linkages. The railway lines determined which resources and regions developed, and the inherent rigidity of railway communication caused the unbalanced growth that came to characterise the continent. The key points of the railway system grew into new urban complexes while regions not served by the railways fell into decay or failed to progress. In this way the West African coastal region, which was relatively well developed by 1914 when compared with its hinterland and the Sudanic belt, outstripped the interior economically.

**Avoid-
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Compulsory methods were introduced to procure the necessary labour, and various taxes were levied to stimulate the money economy. These steps were taken to try to prevent the colonies from becoming financial burdens to the mother countries. This was one of the reasons why the chartered and concession companies initially enjoyed preference. Most of them failed, but some were still active in Rhodesia, Mozambique and French Equatorial Africa early in the twentieth century. A change became apparent in about 1908 when European governments 'more or less reluctantly committed themselves to governing Africa'.⁷

GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN THE MOTHER COUNTRIES

- The British Colonial Office** In Britain, the Colonial Office came into existence in the last decade of the eighteenth century, long before the partition of Africa. Its original function was to supervise the colonies of settlement such as the Cape Colony, Natal and Sierra Leone. Gambia, the Gold Coast and Lagos were mere additions to this responsibility. After the completion of the partitioning, the Foreign Office saw no further reason for continued involvement in the many protectorates which Britain had inherited from this process, and transferred responsibility for their control to the Colonial Office.
- Dominions Office and High Commissions** This changed the character of the Colonial Office, because it became increasingly involved in the administration of the indigenous population while its dealings with independent white settlers decreased. To deal with this part of the empire a special branch of the Colonial Office, the Dominions Office, was formed in 1907 and the Union of South Africa came under its jurisdiction. The British High Commissioner in South Africa continued to hold responsibility for the three High Commission areas of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. The Rhodesias, ruled by the British South Africa Company, also remained under the High Commissioner's jurisdiction, while the other colonies on the continent fell under the auspices of the Colonial Office. The exception was the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, which remained under the Foreign Office. A minister of colonies, responsible to the British parliament, stood at the head of the Colonial Office, and in the course of time a staff assisted him which comprised experts in the agricultural, economic, educational, anthropological and other fields.
- France** Control of French colonial territories was in the hands of the Minister of the Marine until 1881 when a deputy minister of commerce and colonies was appointed. Mutual differences between businessmen and naval officers initially hampered the functioning of the department until a Conseil Supérieur de la France d'Outremer was formed twelve years later. Senators, deputies from colonies with parliamentary representation, and deputies elected for specific service on the council served on this body. It had limited powers and in 1894 a ministry of colonies was established which governed through decrees. The ministry's authority applied to French West and Equatorial Africa, Somaliland and Madagascar. Tunisia and Morocco were protectorates and fell under the foreign ministry while the Department of the Interior controlled Algeria, formally regarded as a province of France.
- Germany** After Bismarck's sudden acquisition of some colonies for Germany during the early 1880s, the expectation was that the administrative responsibility and the cost of these should be borne by chartered companies rather than the government. This played a decisive role in the move towards colonialism. These German chartered companies were based upon the model which the British had set up in North Borneo, but they failed because German traders politely refused to be saddled with the administration of the new colonies. Trade was their business.⁸ In 1886, all of the German colonies were incorporated into the mother country and German laws were made applicable to them. The emperor stood at the head of the colonies and control was effected through the chancellor and one official in the Foreign Office. They governed through decrees and

the delegation of power. After Bismarck's fall in 1890, a colonial section was formed in the Foreign Office and the chancellor created a colonial council. Four years later Dr Paul Kayser became director of colonies and took control of this section in the Foreign Office. By 1907 German colonialism had developed a poor reputation and a colonial office was introduced to rectify this.

Italy and Belgium In 1905 the Italian government took over control of Somaliland from the chartered company under which it had previously been administered, and after the conquest of Libya in 1912, Italy appointed a colonial minister. This was preceded by the reluctant Belgian takeover of the Congo Free State from its sovereign, Leopold II. For Leopold, the Congo Free State was the realisation of a dream, and he became the absolute ruler of this vast region as his private property. With the aid of a prime minister and a treasurer, laws were formulated and decisions taken. Financial problems soon began to plague Leopold and by 1894 the Belgian government was involved. The official transfer followed much later: on 15 November 1908, when the Congo Free State received a new constitution, the *Chartre Coloniale*. Leopold was demoted to the position of constitutional monarch of the Belgian Congo and a minister of colonies and the Belgian parliament made laws and controlled the colony's budget from Brussels. A colonial council advised the minister but this body could not enforce his decisions.

Portugal Similarly, direct control from Lisbon characterised the highly centralised system Portugal used to govern its colonies in Africa. A ministry of colonies was created in 1911 and was the outcome of the republican dispensation which was established in that country in 1910. Decentralisation formed part of the republican policy towards the country's colonies and was related to the view that blacks in the colonies had a claim to official protection. The outbreak of the First World War prevented any direct action in this regard.

In all the metropolitan countries, the newly created colonial ministries enjoyed little power or influence at cabinet level. Decisions influencing developments in the African colonies were often taken on other levels, and colonial governors and officials, as well as politics in the mother country, were often more significant agents of change.

THE POWERS OF COLONIAL GOVERNORS AND OFFICIALS

The Colonial Regulation Portugal relaxed the ties between mother country and colonies in 1899 with the announcement of the Colonial Regulation. This was an effort to create a coherent administrative system and a governor was appointed in each separate colony while a kind of colonial parliament was introduced. In this way the colonies enjoyed a degree of self-government and entered a decade of progressive development. Lisbon, however, prevented any independent action.

British governors The British appointed a governor for each separate colony upon the advice of the Minister of Colonies. He was the highest authority in each territory and although governors were responsible to the government in London, strong personalities such as Lord Milner in southern Africa, Frederick Lugard in Nigeria and Lord Cromer in Egypt

often managed to influence the authorities in the capital city. The governors' most important task was to bring the colonies to financial self-sufficiency.

French governor-general In the French federal blocks of West and Equatorial Africa a governor-general stood at the head of affairs while lieutenant-governors ruled in each constituent part of the territories which formed the federations. The governor-general's power grew steadily as he alone could communicate with Paris or interpret decrees from the mother city. In the two protectorates of Tunisia and Morocco, a resident-general stood at the head of the government and in Algeria, which was regarded as an integral part of France, a governor-general, appointed by the French president, administered the region.

Belgian governor-general An administrative-general, later known as a governor-general, represented Leopold II in the Congo Free State. An advisory committee consisting of deputy governors-general and the commander of the Force Publique (Congoese army) and four directors assisted him, but he consulted them only when he deemed it necessary. After the Belgian takeover, the governor-general retained his wide powers to issue decrees and all officials were subordinate to him. A government council made up of nominated officials, some black members, various other whites and some representatives of mining interests was retained. As before, the governor-general needed to consult this council only if he thought it necessary. All actions were subject to the approval of the Belgian parliament.

Colonial service training Colonial governors often attempted to improve the quality and quantity of their rule but schemes to realise these aims were often turned down in Europe by officials who thought only in terms of balanced budgets. It was preferable that public money should be spent on social services at home. In Britain, for example, this domestic spending increased from 18 per cent in 1900 to 33 per cent thirteen years later. Money was a major source of friction between governments in Europe and colonial governors on the spot in Africa. Another source of estrangement was social differences. Officials who made the civil service their chosen career were usually enlisted through examinations. In France and Germany they were part of the bureaucratic elite and they were highly rated because of their financial expertise. They regarded themselves as more capable than the men on the spot who were often haphazardly recruited to save money. Before 1914 there was not much call for these men in Britain and high qualifications were not required. However, as early as 1889 the French offered training at the Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outremer for those who aspired to higher posts in the colonial service. This training centre was open to all French citizens but by 1907 only seventy of the approximately 500 senior officials in Africa had been trained there. In due course the school became a symbol of the unity that existed between France and its colonies.⁹

Other colonial powers followed this example and in 1906 Portugal founded the Escola Colonial. The Belgians created a similar institution in 1911 and nine years later they also established a colonial university in Antwerp. In Britain and Germany many colonial officials came from the ranks of the military, as candidates from this sphere were regarded as capable of working with large numbers of people. The German administration included recruits from the civil service where they had undergone specialised

training. Others in turn were eager for adventure and the French and the Belgians often appointed white colonists into posts similar to those in which the British (in British West Africa) used blacks and the Germans (in German East Africa) employed Indians.

THE INFLUENCE OF METROPOLITAN PARLIAMENTS

- Britain** Despite the fact that the metropolitan parliaments had the final responsibility for the African colonies, colonial affairs did not enjoy much attention in the years before the First World War. Early in the twentieth century the Liberal Party was in power in Britain and although the consent of parliament was necessary to balance colonial budgets, interest in colonial affairs was so scant that the hottest debating point in the British parliament was the scandal in the Congo Free State! The amount of money voted by parliament for the colonies was usually meagre, and the 'leftists' in the Liberal and Labour Parties even resigned themselves to the inevitability of the situation, changing their previous condemnation of imperialism to discussions on how best to rule Britain's colonial possessions.
- France** The French parliament did not have much jurisdiction over, or interest in, colonial affairs. Only Algeria, with its three senators and six deputies in the National Assembly, received some attention. The highest authority was the French cabinet and it was only on that level that legislation could be changed.
- Germany** In Germany the Reichstag had full control over colonial budgets and in other respects colonial affairs were subjected to metropolitan political manoeuvres. Conflicts between people with a definite colonial interest such as soldiers, settlers, businessmen and missionaries were manipulated by Liberal, Catholic and Socialist politicians.
- Belgium** The Belgian parliament was extremely reluctant to take control of Leopold's state in Africa, but the growing virulence of the campaign against the Congo Free State awakened public opinion in Belgium. The gravity of the situation moved the parliament to a reluctant and unenthusiastic takeover¹⁰ despite its involvement in the colony's financial problems in the 1890s. After 1908 Belgium's prime consideration was to evade conditions that could lead to a repetition of the earlier scandal.
- Portugal** Because of the mercantile foundation of the Portuguese empire, a narrowly integrated relationship existed between colonies and mother country prior to the beginning of the republican period in 1910.

THE SEARCH FOR FINANCIAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY

- Concession companies** Financial self-sufficiency was possible only if the basis of each colony's income could be widened, and this meant the extension of trade. In West Africa the British encouraged the export of commodities produced by blacks. In French West Africa too, Governor William Ponty endeavoured to create close cooperation between the commercial sector and the government in the years between 1908 and 1915. He preferred agriculture to remain in the hands of the indigenous population and refused to allow concession companies into the federation. In French Equatorial Africa the government was com-

mitted to limiting official spending, and on the advice of Savorgnan de Brazza, concession companies received large concessions which gave them a monopoly to buy local products. Although this was a cheap method of administering the colony, it opened the way for scandals. The Germans also made use of concession companies and this was especially evident in the Kamerun. Often these companies were in foreign hands, which meant that the economic resources of the colonies were available to them but that the Germans themselves still had to bear the responsibility when the foreigners' activities led to scandals there too.

White settlement; West Africa

The settlement of whites was another attempt to promote financial self-sufficiency. In British West Africa, white settlers did not play a prominent role despite the fact that until 1914 there were more whites in private employment in the Gold Coast than in government service. The same applied in Nigeria, where whites were active in business and commercial circles. In 1910 the British government took steps to safeguard black land rights against European commercial influence through legislation, and in 1911 the Colonial Office refused to grant the control of labour in the two colonies to the mining companies. This was because they feared that it could hamper cocoa production. They also took steps to prevent the Lever soap company from obtaining monopolistic concessions. In these efforts the Colonial Office was not always successful since strong governors sometimes managed to override London, as Lugard did in 1914 when he acted in favour of the Nigerian tin industry.

East Africa and the Rhodesias

It was not long before other parts of British Africa, such as the highlands of the East African Protectorate (Kenya), were seen as suitable regions for white settlement. The railway line between Mombasa and Kisumu on Lake Victoria, which the British built because they felt it necessary to control the high waters of the Nile, and which cost the British taxpayer R16 million by way of a subsidy, became an important motive for white settlement in the area. As early as 1903, before its completion, the line was showing a financial loss, which sparked the hope that the settlement of whites along the line could turn it into a profitable undertaking. Sir Charles Eliot, the commissioner of the protectorate, encouraged this after 1900, and the British government gave its official support. Consequently, Kenya began to attract small groups of immigrants, especially from South Africa. The same process took place in Northern Rhodesia, while Southern Rhodesia was regarded as an evolving settler colony from about 1890. Small groups of planters settled in Uganda and Nyasaland and had the same aspirations as their fellow settlers elsewhere in British Africa.

Advantages and disadvantages of white settlement

This kind of settlement had specific advantages. The immigrants possessed the potential to start large-scale production and the colonial government could employ them at lower cost than recruits from the mother country. The possibility that these immigrants could manage the evolution of colonial rule was tempting, but it also held some risks. Special aid was often needed to get white production started and there was the danger that the resulting competition with blacks for land could cause resistance from the indigenous people – and that this might prove expensive to control.

As in East Africa, white settlement in German South West Africa created a similar situation, especially after the great rebellions that took place in the territories early in the twentieth century. The Germans therefore reconsidered their administrative and economic strategy, but this resulted in settler opposition. Bernhard Dernburg was particularly sympathetic towards the reforms introduced by Governor Albrecht Freiherr von Rechenberg (1906–1911) in German East Africa, but these reforms soon became enmeshed in Reichstag politics – where the settlers had more influential support than Rechenberg. This enabled the settlers to entrench their position in the two German settler colonies.

THE POLITICAL BASE OF THE SETTLERS

- Settler representation** The most obvious base of white political power was their representation on government institutions in the colonies and their influence in the metropolitan parliaments. With the exception of the Maghrib and Senegal, whites were never granted any political power in French Africa. The constitutional power of German settlers grew most progressively in German South West Africa. In 1909 whites controlled local government in their own areas and when regional councils with limited budgetary power were introduced in 1913, settler representation was equal to that of the officials. In German East Africa the whites had a majority on the governor's advisory council in 1912, and by the time that war broke out in 1914 they could elect their representatives on the councils of two coastal towns.
- Power-sharing** The pragmatic British preferred their traditional policy of power-sharing as it had evolved in the old colonial empire. In tropical Africa the white population was small, however, and it was uncertain how this pattern would develop. Southern Rhodesia had the largest white population, and initial control lay in the hands of the British South Africa Company, but by 1907 elected members had a majority on the legislative council. A few nominated non-official members took their seats in the legislative councils that were introduced in Kenya and Nyasaland in the same year. Kenyan whites saw this as the beginning of their development towards self-government, but the large number of Indians who were settled in the colony soon challenged this assumption.
- Legislative councils** Seen in broad perspective, the legislative councils in the British West African colonies of Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Lagos were similar to those elsewhere on the continent. The settlers, however, were black English-speaking minorities, and were literate and Christian. Some were the descendants of emancipated slaves and were 'people [who] prided themselves on being British subjects'.¹¹ The regions where these people lived were formal British colonies and, in contrast to the neighbouring protectorates, this meant that the populations of these colonies were British subjects. By 1906 the governors of all the British colonies in West Africa were advised by legislative councils on which one or more non-official nominated blacks served. The scope of these councils differed, since their hinterlands existed as separate protectorates. Only Sierra Leone's legislative council had jurisdiction over its hinterland, while Lagos's power extended as far as southern Nigeria in the period from 1906 to 1914. In the case of the Gold Coast and Nigeria, the extension of British power into the hinterland actually

reduced the power of their legislative councils. This was part of a tendency to limit the participation of blacks in the central government, since doubt existed about the extension of similar power to the indigenous population of the interior whose lifestyle did not fit in with the Western-educated blacks in the coastal societies. Educated blacks consequently began to disappear from the political scene. The same happened in the colonial administration: anglicised blacks were used during the nineteenth century but they were later replaced by whites. Blacks thus filled subordinate positions, and gradually they also lost these.

THE MOVE TOWARDS INDIRECT RULE

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As the European powers extended their influence into Africa's interior, the question that arose was how best to govern these new 'tropical dependencies' which were unfit for white settlement and were seen as backward regions that had to be developed at minimal cost. Besides the economic considerations, the unequal distribution of the indigenous population complicated the administrative process. The result was the increasing use of the traditional elite in systems which have been called 'native administration' and 'conjunctive administrations'.¹² Existing indigenous government institutions began to enjoy preference despite the fact that the basic approach of the mother countries towards the administration of Africa did not support this view.¹³

British
indirect
rule

Britain was the forerunner in the use of traditional rulers and this gradually became known as indirect rule. This meant that the indigenous power structure was integrated with that of the colonial power. Indigenous customs were retained as far as possible and as long as these did not conflict with Western culture. Indirect rule also reflects the pragmatic attitude the British held towards colonial rule. The British African empire consisted of a wide variety of peoples and cultures and control was possible only if policy was adapted to these specific circumstances. Practical feasibility rather than an ideological base was the primary consideration and this slotted in neatly with the view that blacks were not yet ready to fit into Western administrative systems. Indirect rule could serve as a training ground for blacks to learn to adapt – a view that linked up with the British opinion that it was logical that all colonies eventually attain self-government. In this sense indirect rule could serve a double purpose, since it aided the preservation of the indigenous way of life until the African societies were capable of standing on their own feet in the new order that colonialism had brought to the continent.

North-
ern
Nigeria

Conditions in northern Nigeria were ideal for the development of indirect rule. After the region came under direct British protection in 1898, Frederick Lugard, the commander of the West African Frontier Force, was appointed high commissioner in 1900. Since the welfare of the colony evoked little enthusiasm in the British parliament, Lugard was forced to control this vast territory with a limited budget and insufficient staff. This made direct rule impossible; moreover it would have been unwise for the new rulers to interfere with existing government structures while their control was still shaky. The situation in northern Nigeria differed completely from that in southern Nigeria. The north was poor and had no exit to the sea. It was also Muslim-oriented. During the rule

of the Royal Niger Company the region had experienced indirect rule because the company had used it to keep costs low and profits high. It was thus expected that traditional headmen would act against the slave trade and create circumstances that favoured trade. Lugard's previous experience of indirect rule in Uganda and his loathing of educated or what he called 'trousered blacks' paved the way for indirect rule in northern Nigeria.

Position of the emirs Northern Nigeria's Fulbe emirs remained in effective control over their Hausa subjects after the British takeover. They had officials who aided them with the administration of justice, maintenance of law and order, and collection of taxes. Lugard retained the emirs and their officials, while respected inhabitants were made headmen of certain districts. In terms of the jurisdiction the emirs had been granted by the colonial ruler, they could appoint or dismiss officials, grant land and handle disputes, maintain law and order and supply essential services. These duties were performed under the supervision of the resident-commissioner and all regulations made by the emirs were subject to the approval of the British government. In this way the traditional administrative and legal systems remained intact within the framework laid down by the colonial government. The governor and lieutenant-governors remained the supreme authorities. They could dismiss the emirs, organise the armed forces, promulgate laws, levy taxes and control the whites.

Local budgets The headmen collected the taxes levied by the colonial government and deposited the money into a native treasury. Part of this tax remained under the control of each emirate and, together with funds obtained from licensing monies, was used for local development. Each emir had to draw up a budget in consultation with the resident-commissioner and the lieutenant-governor had to approve the budget. This placed a great deal of self-determination in the hands of the blacks and was seen as an important element of their administrative training.

Resident-commissioners The resident-commissioner acted in an advisory capacity. His conduct had to be unobtrusive, and Lugard laid down guidelines for this conduct in his annual reports and *Political memoranda*. The resident-commissioners supervised the emirs and had to convey assignments in such a way that they did not detract from the dignity of the traditional leaders. The emirs were compelled to follow the advice of the resident-commissioners and had to issue government commands in their personal capacities. The emirs were therefore accountable for the consequences of these instructions. It was the task of the resident-commissioners to see that the political and social systems of the groups under their control remained intact. They had to acquaint themselves as best they could with the indigenous customs, ceremonies and traditions in the areas where they were stationed. In this way British rule became interwoven with existing structures and the mother country was able to rule unobtrusively with a minimal number of officials.

Lugard's administration One of Lugard's greatest achievements was the simplification of the emirs' tax system. In consultation with the emirs, he developed a new system which increased the annual income of northern Nigeria to R400 000. This was still insufficient but lack of funds did

not deter Lugard from developing the territory. In 1901 he took steps against slavery and dismantled its legal status; all slave children born after 1 April 1901 were to be freed. Road building and railway construction improved communication while better use of the navigable part of the Niger River and improvements to the Lagos harbour in 1907 were intended to do the same. By 1910 it was obvious that none of these projects could make northern Nigeria self-sufficient and the British began to think in terms of the amalgamation of the protectorates of northern and southern Nigeria to lighten the financial burden on the mother country. This idea was supported by the educated elite along the coast and by the officials in Lagos. It signified the consolidation of metropolitan power and also met the requirement of more effective occupation as projected during the Berlin Conference in 1884. Lugard, who left northern Nigeria in 1907, was recalled to implement the idea and he recognised the opportunity of expanding indirect rule to the south. When amalgamation was achieved on 1 January 1914, indirect rule found its way to the south.

Weakness of indirect rule

The weaknesses of indirect rule then began to appear. There were no emirs in southern Nigeria, and Lugard was mistaken in his view that the Yoruba family states had similar governmental structures, as was true in northern Nigeria. The Yoruba oba lacked the autocratic power of the emir because in these communities authority was shared among a number of chiefs, each of whom held far less power than the British realised. A similar situation existed among the Ibo. They had few chiefs whom the British could use because ward meetings formed the base of Ibo political power and even the elders found it difficult to control these meetings.¹⁴

GERMAN TENDENCIES TOWARDS INDIRECT RULE

Administrative problems

Like the British, the Germans also experienced a shortage of men and money to govern the regions under their control. In 1901 only 77 white officials ran the Kamerun, while 23 sufficed for Togo.¹⁵ These areas were characterised by the same wide variety of cultures and political systems, but in contrast with the British, the Germans lacked the experience the British had gained of ruling foreign people. When Bismarck proclaimed the German protectorates he thought in terms of government by the merchant companies, based upon the model of the chartered companies the British used in India,¹⁶ but the companies on whose behalf Bismarck acquired these colonies politely refused to get involved in colonial administration.¹⁷ His expectations came to nothing and by 1886 the German government were in sole control of the protectorates. Gradually, as indigenous resistance to the German presence was overcome, civil government was introduced.

Local government

In this process the Germans gave full recognition to ethnicity.¹⁸ Like the British, they came into contact with the Fulbe system in Kamerun. In German East Africa, with its greater ethnic variety, the Arabic akida system offered a base upon which the Germans could build. From 1904 they felt that they were following well-founded British and Dutch principles and a form of local government arose that was very reminiscent of indirect rule. Local headmen performed certain administrative tasks and collected taxes, made roads, supplied draft labour and assisted in the administration of justice.

In German Africa these headmen were under much stricter control than in British Africa.

German West Africa The application of the system differed from region to region. In Togo, recognised headmen retained their positions, but where there were no headmen, the Germans recruited some from the ranks of the village chiefs or loyal employers – a step that opened the way for ‘local big men’ to grab power and to undermine other strong leaders who had previously held sway.¹⁹ In Kamerun, too, the Germans tried to retain the traditional authority – even where their conquest had destroyed it. They were most successful in Adamawa where the headmen received the right to keep a portion of the taxes they collected. Governor Theodore Seitz wanted to create a representative council which could decide on the application of the local finances but Berlin refused to approve this measure.²⁰

German East Africa In German East Africa the Germans relied heavily on the indigenous power structures that existed in the region. There were many strong traditional headmen and where there was a shortage, the existing Swahili bureaucracy from the days of the Zanzibar sultanate were used. The town governors or liwales and the subjected akidas in the country retained their authority. By 1913 many akidas had already received training in government schools but because they were Muslims they were not attuned to local traditions.²¹

Ruanda Between 1907 and 1913 the system reached an advanced stage of development in Ruanda. Indigenous headmen maintained law and order without becoming bureaucrats or agents for a foreign ruler and between 1906 and 1916 the district officer of the Mwanza district went further: he regarded the traditional rulers as the sole representatives of their subjects. He used them to implement development projects and was strongly in favour of the formation of native treasuries. During the governorship of Albrecht Freiherr von Rechenberg, attempts were made to involve the headmen in the administration of justice; indigenous courts were given greater independent jurisdiction. German East Africa, however, lacked a person like Lugard who could oversee the codification of indigenous law in the colony.

More formal indirect rule When Wilhelm Solf, an Anglophile who believed in the idea of a national culture and admired British colonial policy, took control of the German Colonial Office in 1911, Germany moved closer to a more formal use of indirect rule. Solf was worried about the disruption that certain groups in Togo and Kamerun had suffered during the partition, and in 1913 he paid the German West African colonies a visit to determine how future colonial policy should evolve. His journey included a visit to Northern Nigeria where he admitted his admiration of the British system to Lugard. Solf regarded the protection of indigenous law and tradition as the most suitable policy – despite the criticism of some minor white officials, missionaries, European capitalists and educated blacks.²² He believed that the Fulbe and Hausa speakers would benefit from indirect rule but remained uncertain about the financial implications, such as the use of native treasuries. Solf’s first step was to increase the authority of the residents and political officials in the north of Kamerun. His plans were interrupted, however, when the First

World War broke out and the German West African colonies fell into British and French hands.

THE UNCERTAINTIES OF ASSOCIATION

Principle of assimilation The French belief in the superiority of their culture and their willingness to welcome strangers within their ranks formed the basis of the assimilation policy, which they accepted as a principle as far back as the seventeenth century.²³ In the eighteenth century this principle found philosophical expression in the belief in the inherent equality of man, the teachings of Rousseau and Voltaire, the declaration of the rights of man, and the abolition of slavery.

The Algerian testbed Although efforts to assimilate the Indians of Canada, or, for that matter, the inhabitants of the French colonies in the West Indies and in the Indian Ocean, were not very successful, they did not discourage the belief in assimilation. In the nineteenth century Algeria became the testing ground for this principle. The presence of whites in this Muslim region complicated matters and made the process of assimilation a two-sided affair: administrative assimilation, preferred by the colonists, who were known as colons, and second, the original idea of absorbing non-French elements into French culture. The Algerian experience was complicated by the military significance of the French presence in the country – the result of Muslim resistance to French presence in Algeria. During his reign Napoleon III realised that Algeria was an Arab country and a shift towards what became known as association set in while the requirements for assimilation were met. After his fall, however, the Third Republic intensified its efforts to assimilate the indigenous population. Although these steps failed, they caused a significant shift in favour of association in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Senegal In war-ridden Algeria the military initiated the move towards a 'politique d'association'. General Thomas-Robert Bugeaud worked for a change of policy with particular emphasis on obstructing the influence of the colons, and subsequently one of his disciples, Louis Faidherbe, carried this idea to Senegal, which became the model for French local administration in the black African federal blocks. Faidherbe's expansion of French influence brought France into contact with a wide variety of different sub-Saharan cultures. In 1857 Faidherbe replaced the initial military rule with a new administrative system based on the Algerian example which aimed to effect the domination and control of the area at the lowest possible cost. It comprised a regional administration with permanent officials controlling districts called *arrondissements*. These officials were given the responsibility of supervision of local chiefs. They had to keep the peace and promote circumstances that favoured trade, although specific functions for these district officials were not defined until 1863.²⁴ Indigenous chiefs had a specific role in the system since they controlled the *cercles* into which the districts were divided. They held considerable power and had independent control over justice, police, trade and agriculture. They also had to convey orders to the local village chiefs who owed them allegiance.

Diminished power of chiefs With this system, the erosion of the power of the chiefs began. Faidherbe replaced those who failed to serve his purpose, and in 1863 the powers they initially held were taken away when Jean Jauréguibery defined the powers of the district commissioners. These officials were granted control of administrative, judicial and police matters while the authority of the chief was limited to smaller cantons where he supervised the village chiefs. Because of inefficiency on the part of the men responsible for putting Faidherbe's policy into effect, the scheme failed and renewed efforts were made to select more suitable people for these posts. The calibre of officials improved after 1887, but in 1894 some were still regarded as common and coarse.²⁵

Hierarchy of men The last years of the nineteenth century saw a change in the views on the equality of man which underpinned the principle of assimilation. The colonial experience had underlined the different social and economic structures to be found there. Belief in the basic equality and unity of mankind was now considered naive: Europeans visualised a hierarchy within the ranks of mankind with themselves at the top. This placed doubt on the ability of the colonials to assimilate French culture. It was regarded either as impossible or likely to be a very slow process. The experience of French army officers in Indo-China was another contributory factor in the development of a preference for association rather than assimilation.

Association Joseph Gallieni was an army officer who was strongly in favour of new administrative techniques. He gained experience in Senegal and Indo-China, especially in his contact with the civilisation of Tonkin, where he preferred to use the elite drawn from the ranks of the conquered peoples to serve as a subordinate governing class. This enabled the French to utilise their limited colonial personnel to the full. Useful local customs could be retained and undesirable ones could be discontinued, paving the way for 'proper' development.²⁶ This was a policy of association, although it did not imply that all chiefs automatically retained their positions: the French often replaced those who were incompetent with others who were deemed more suitable for their needs. In 1896 Gallieni introduced this policy to Madagascar in an effort to stabilise the country. He occupied only a small part of the disputed area, using members of the indigenous population as middlemen between the new government and the masses. The region was then developed peacefully to lure surrounding rebellious groups into submission. By 1905, when the island was peaceful again, the administration was expanded with Malgassians in subordinate positions. Usually these officials were from the Merina because they had an advanced Western education.

Influence of the Ecole Coloniale In the early 1900s the Ecole Coloniale, which favoured assimilation, and where future colonial administrators were trained, began to lean towards association. This was a result of the influence of people such as Gallieni and other colonial officials, whose overseas experience underscored the differences between France and its empire in terms of social, economic and political institutions. Association advocated respect for the traditions of the colonial societies, especially the chieftainship, but also pointed out that the unique character of these societies called for special institutions that differed from those found in France.²⁷ Association refuted the idea of making Frenchmen from the colonial people. Instead, it was suggested that France should aid these people in

developing according to their own potential, implying that France should associate itself with and respect the colonial societies. As such, it was not dissimilar to the British idea of indirect rule or government through indigenous structures. Although most French administrators were convinced of the value of association, few were willing to take the step towards indirect rule. Association basically meant paternal, authoritative rule. As Louis-Hubert Lyautey, a famous French exponent of association, once declared: 'We have direct administration in our blood.'²⁸

Morocco Lyautey was one of Gallieni's disciples and served under him in Tonkin and Madagascar before he became resident-general of Morocco in 1912. During his reign, which lasted until 1925, Lyautey made the French occupation less overpowering. He refused to make Frenchmen out of the Moroccans and, in accordance with the principles of association, tried to promote the development of the sultan's authority under French control. Lyautey revised and reformed Morocco's administration and, where he deemed it necessary, new administrative techniques were introduced. All these steps were taken in the name of the sultan, in the hope that an administrative elite would develop that might, in the future, associate Morocco with France through its own inner conviction. The colons and foreign entrepreneurs were kept under strict control and the regions they could exploit were limited.²⁹ Lyautey's task was easier because Morocco was a protectorate, but in reality the country had lost its independence and been subjected to France.

Association and indirect rule Association thus reformed 'native rule' into a policy very similar to indirect rule, but there were some important differences. The French preference for centralisation remained, since decentralisation reminded the French of feudal and regressive government. These were negative influences, detrimental to the people, while centralisation was a progressive force. To the French, purposeful administration was absolute and pervasive³⁰ and anything that eroded this principle amounted to the abdication of power. This was a result of French history, the tradition of the Ancien Régime, Napoleon I and the revolution. Another difference between association and indirect rule lies in the dissimilar social backgrounds of French and British officials. Because they came from the middle and lower middle classes, French officials abhorred all feudal and monarchical institutions – ideologically they were hostile towards African chiefs. In contrast, their British counterparts regarded the African traditional elite with greater sympathy. To the French they were retarded, feudal, untrustworthy with a tendency towards exploiting their subjects. It was their task to liberate the masses from these evil influences. French pride in their culture made them unable to show true respect to African chiefs, and even the few officials that did not regard African institutions as undesirable were unwilling to pay any public respect to African chiefs.

For all practical purposes the French maintained the chefs de canton but stipulated the geographical limits of the canton, the power a chief could hold and the person who could occupy the position. Village chiefs were left undisturbed if they were not guilty of some form of misconduct. In acephalus societies such as those in the Congo, individuals who had previously held only religious power were given political authority too. Even in these instances the French did not see any value in the institutions

they used. In several regions French rule actually destroyed chieftainships since the chiefs had responsibilities to collect taxes and provide labour. In carrying out these duties they were often scorned and rejected in their communities and were called government puppets. When they were no longer useful to the colonial rulers their jurisdiction was restricted even further. The hostility of local commanders prevented the application of association to its fullest extent. Local commandants preferred their own autocratic rule to the element of indirect rule that the principle of association implied.

DIRECT CONTROL – PORTUGUESE AND BELGIAN STYLE

Formal administration During the last decade of the nineteenth century the Portuguese began formal administration of their colonial possessions despite pressure to reduce their deficits in Africa and despite the fact that they controlled only about 10 per cent of these areas. This move was to some extent the outcome of the demand for effective occupation formulated at the Berlin Conference, but the expectations of concessionaire companies for economic opportunities also played a role. In the implementation of this process, the Portuguese encountered problems similar to those experienced by the other colonial powers: cultural diversity, urbanisation and the influence of the *mestiços*, or people of mixed blood. Despite this, the Portuguese believed in strict assimilation and direct control and made no provision for individual African interests or any form of indirect rule.

Portugal: maintenance of traditional society The Portuguese regarded themselves as the permanent guardians of the indigenous population or *indígenas*, who comprised 98 per cent of the total colonial population. They were seen as potential taxpayers, labourers, producers in the traditional economy and possible *civilizados*, or people who could be integrated into Portuguese society. In theory, however, the Portuguese aimed at the maintenance of traditional society and in the first districts or *circoscriçãos*, introduced in Mozambique in 1907 and in Angola in 1911, the tribal system and traditions were left intact.³¹ Regions principally inhabited by Africans were subdivided into *postos*, governed by a *chefe de posto*, and these were subdivided again into *regedores* controlled by a *regulo*. Usually these were village headmen or *civilizados*. The *chefe de posto* ruled the black inhabitants directly and traditional law was recognised, but no separate courts were allowed. In cases involving blacks only, judgement was given by the *chefe de posto* who, in cooperation with the local chief, had to take native custom into account. Although the right to communal land was recognised, blacks had to pay a native tax and perform labour to which the Portuguese attached a significant civilising influence. In this, the Portuguese colonies did not differ significantly from the other colonies in Africa.

Portuguese administrative system Before the 1890s, when Portugal's hold on the interior was very weak, it was forced to recognise the independence of many of the indigenous chiefs. With the introduction of an administrative system this situation changed. The Portuguese had no specific use for the chiefs and gave preference to village headmen whose duties included tax collection and the organisation of the labour supply – responsibilities for which they received no privileges in return. The *regulo* was no more than a government agent in the village and very few of these men came from the ranks of the traditional ruling class – those who

did often preferred to act as arbitrators between the *regulos* and the people. The *chefe de posto* exercised direct control and his duties included the keeping of law and order, the building and maintenance of roads, control over the liquor trade, the promotion of agriculture, tax collection, and labour supply. His responsibilities also included the development of a Portuguese way of life, promotion of the use of the Portuguese language and fostering, among the *indigénas*, loyalty towards the Portuguese motherland. There were few *chefe de posto* and their salaries were meagre. This contributed to their pursuit of private trade and their misuse of the small police force against the native population – steps that did not promote the civilising influence that was expected from them.

Leopold's administration

In contrast with the Portuguese, with their long but limited experience of ruling Africa, the Belgians had no previous experience, nor had they had commercial contact with the continent. Leopold II advocated minimal interference in tribal affairs. As his officials penetrated deeper into the interior, they divided the colony into districts that became known as provinces and in 1906 there were fourteen such provinces which were subdivided into zones, *secteurs* and *postes*. Since the region was in turmoil before the establishment of the Congo Free State, and because Leopold had too few officials to serve in the region,³² control was largely ineffective and abuses were rife as missionaries, Arab slave dealers and an assortment of adventurers continued to exploit the situation.

Attempts at reform

In 1891 Leopold attempted to effect positive change by giving the indigenous authorities a share in the determination of their own affairs. Chiefs became responsible for specific tasks³³ but this did not have the desired effect. Often the chiefs were appointed arbitrarily, and because they did not come from the traditional ruling class, they were regarded as lackeys of the government. Administration left much to be desired as badly paid agents could supplement their meagre incomes by obtaining bonuses for delivering larger rubber quotas. The judiciary was in their hands and malpractices were rife, creating widespread international reaction to conditions in the Free State.

Chefferie system

This convinced Leopold that he needed to reform this policy, which undermined the position of the chiefs for pure economic gain. In 1906 the colony was divided into chieftainships called *chefferies* in an effort to restore the system his agents had destroyed. The system began to resemble indirect rule, because the legal duties and rights of chiefs were specified and – even more significant – they became salaried links between the government and the indigenous authority. As part of their responsibility they had to give the assurance that the will of the colonial power was being carried out at the lowest level and a chief's only right was to control the movement of people living in his *chefferie*. An attempt was made to respect native customs so long as these were not contrary to public order and healthy development, but in practice this effort failed because ignorance about local customs fragmented tribal institutions even further and the shortage of good administrators militated against any form of sound administration.

Position of chiefs After 1910 the Belgian government tried to take this development a step further and divided the Congo into chefferies and sous-chefferies, each with a salaried chief, who enjoyed official recognition, at the head of its administration. He was given explicit administrative and police powers including responsibility for conveying administrative ordinances to his subjects, keeping the peace, assisting in census returns and tax collection, and also recruiting members of the Force Publique. He had to inform the government of all crime, drug and slave trading and the outbreak of infectious diseases. His criminal jurisdiction was limited to small matters under official control.³⁴

The chief remained a government agent and his acceptability to both the government and his subjects was of vital importance for the success of the system. There were no clear rules about the division of the Congo into chefferies and sous-chefferies. The result was chaotic. In 1911 there were 2 200 chiefs and their number grew to 4 000 in 1918. Many of them were colonial auxiliaries without local roots, which made the system one of direct rather than indirect rule³⁵ because the Belgians adapted the indirect principle to serve their own purposes.³⁶ After its introduction, some years elapsed before the Belgians gave any indication of how this system should develop. The first move in this direction was made in 1917 when it was suggested that the chieftainship would eventually disappear as chiefs became civil servants.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic coercion African resistance to European rule not only slowed down the economic development of Africa's marginal share in the global economy,³⁷ but evoked various forms of economic coercion of which the most blatant was the direct appropriation of cattle – a method some of Africa's indigenous warrior economies such as the Ndebele, Ngoni and Masai also practised regularly. In similar fashion, the Rhodesian pioneers confiscated Lobengula's cattle after the defeat of his kingdom in 1893. Other forms of pressure included the appropriation of land, forced or partly coercive labour recruitment, the gathering of crops, and various taxes. These methods were attacked in humanitarian and missionary circles as well as in metropolitan parliaments. This pressure and the economic developments taking place in the colonies initiated reform in the first decade of the twentieth century. Metropolitan governments tightened control over companies active in the African colonies and regulated the action of officials responsible for these regions. After the rebellion of 1896–1897 in Rhodesia, the Belgian takeover in the Congo in 1908, and also under Bernhard Dernburg's control of the German colonies between 1906 and 1910, reform was introduced which relieved the harsh methods of the first years of colonial rule.³⁸

Investment in colonies This did not replace the demand for financial self-sufficiency, and private investors, bankers, traders, planters and business undertakings were encouraged to become involved in the colonies while taxes were drawn up to attract such investment. Import duties and hut or poll taxes were introduced to provide funds for the running of the colonies, and the British government thought in terms of occasional grants and loans to help the fledgling colonies towards this financial goal. The French and German governments (and, after 1908, the Belgians too) pumped more money into their colonies than

the British. Economic policy was designed to serve European enterprises or African farming. In West and Equatorial Africa, where white settlement was not encouraged, the local infrastructure developed around the needs of African peasant farmers and European commercial groups. In regions such as Kenya, Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo, where white settlement did take place, the government concerned itself with the needs of white farmers, plantation owners or mining. Funding came from African tax revenue, forced labour and occasional subsidies from the mother country.

Colonial economies

The colonial economies were controlled from the European capitals and included all trade as well as currency and banking. The colonial administration made the laws concerning land and labour, and economic planning and commerce was the first sector that was regulated. Britain and Germany continued their policy of free trade in Africa and tried to persuade the other colonial powers to do the same. British Africa remained a free trade area for most of the colonial period and it was only after 1932 that some restrictions and preferential duties were introduced. The economy was not run for the exclusive benefit of the mother country and no monopolies were ever enforced. Investors from Britain played a significant role in the former German colonies where conditions for foreign enterprise were always favourable. In contrast, France followed a protectionist policy and in terms of its preference for close assimilation between itself and its colonies, France wanted a close economic integration with colonies serving the interest of the mother country. Only when international treaties forced France to follow free trade principles did it follow the open door policy. The Méline Tariff of 1892 brought all colonies under control of metropolitan tariffs and the hold of the metropolitan tariff system on the colonies was partially relieved in 1928. France dominated the trade of its colonies more than any other colonial power (with the exception of Portugal, whose colonies were of especial importance to it, and became even more so after the Second World War) – a situation that continued after independence was granted in the 1960s. No monopoly of colonial commerce existed, and although France, Belgium and Portugal traded more with their colonies than any rivals, foreign merchants did enjoy a considerable proportion of this trade.

Land matters

African dependence on land for their livelihood continued during the colonial era and in most cases indigenous forms of land tenure remained intact in one form or another. Traditional systems were often preserved by colonial paternalism. This restricted the opportunities for Africans to sell land and also ran counter to the interests of white settlers, planters and concessionaires. This pressure on land was limited to areas of temperate climate and it varied in relation to the total population and the availability of water and fertile soil. When the European conquest began, ample land was available. Rhodesia was a vast area, thinly populated by about a million people who lived in specific localised regions. After the conquest, the inflow of settlers and the growth of the African population changed this, and land became more intensively utilised. Africans lost the right to use vast sections of land, especially that in the proximity of the railway lines. New techniques of agricultural and stock farming introduced by the whites resulted in an increased use of land by the Africans who adopted these new

techniques. African cattle ownership increased from 55 000 in 1902 to 377 000 in 1913 and they cultivated 295 000 ha of land in 1908 compared with 223 000 ha in 1902.³⁹

**Con-
ces-
sions**

In the regions where white settlement had not occurred, land remained in the hands of the Africans. White land ownership in British West Africa and German Togo was restricted to real or supposed indigenous interest and whites could lease land only for mining or timber use. Few concessions were granted in French West Africa since the French were wary to do so because of problems they had encountered in Algeria and earlier efforts to force Africans off their land in Senegal. A different policy was followed in French Equatorial Africa, where the French tried to open up the area. Forty companies received 70 per cent of the land in large concessions but because of abuses this practice was limited in 1906. Three types of concession were used in the Congo Free State after the takeover by the Belgian government in 1908. Leopold II had granted some land to railway companies and the land which commercial companies received in Katanga included administrative and commercial control. Other concession companies received the right to market forest products while some individuals and European commercial enterprises received land for commercial purposes. All in all, 21 million ha of land were eventually granted to these European establishments and shortly before the Congo became independent, the Africans retained 49 million ha. After the Portuguese took control of their share of Africa, they tried to develop their colonies by granting land to settlers and concessionaires. Late in the nineteenth century associations such as the Nyasa Company and the Mozambique Company were given large estates on which they ruled like governments. In contrast, efforts to establish peasant farming schemes were largely unsuccessful.

**Forced
labour**

The absence of mechanisms which could change labour into a commercial commodity linked to European capital soon caused labour problems for the Europeans. When they tried to intensify the production of commodities such as rubber, the lack of transport facilities and the difficulty in supplying economic incentives led to a chronic shortage of manpower. This resulted in the use of coercive or forced labour. Conscripted labour was at its most brutal in the early days of colonialism, when efforts were made to intensify the production of indigenous products such as natural rubber. Most of the atrocities associated with forced labour occurred in the Congo Free State and in French Equatorial Africa; the Germans, too, resorted to it in Kamerun, albeit on a smaller scale. Compulsory labour was used in the building of roads and railways, portage and other government work. Government officials sometimes resorted to coercion on their own initiative but they also used chiefs to recruit for them. Taxation and other fiscal methods were other indirect forms of recruitment. The nature of coercion took many different forms and varied in intensity. In communities where tribal cohesion was strong, a recruiter could not make contracts with individuals and had to work through the local political authority. These workers were often supplied in return for specific payment. This system was therefore quite different from the use of brute force – which indeed also occurred.

Conscripted labour was usually associated with a backward economy where technological aid was limited, supervision poor, labour output low, and where there were no

economic incentives. Demand for this labour often exceeded the supply. While some colonists could afford to wait until the material needs of the Africans moved them to seek paid labour, mines, plantations, farming, and construction works were constantly seeking labour. The advocates of forced labour reasoned that it was justified by Africa's chronic shortage of manpower since the already underpopulated continent's population was decreasing. It was also reasoned that in precolonial times Africans were not accustomed to selling their labour or their crops on the open market to the highest bidder. European conquest had done away with the economic compulsion and organised violence that characterised precolonial society. These factors, they argued, made forced labour a legitimate form of taxation and was necessary in order to draw Africa into a money economy.

'Scientific colonialism'

When the views of 'scientific colonialism' began to prevail early in the twentieth century, forced labour ran into difficulties. The German Bernhard Dernburg was an important proponent of the new policy. He believed that proper transport facilities, good marketing techniques, training and management, and economic incentives would suffice to provide sound economic growth. The Africans were not merely wage labourers but potential purchasers of German goods, and while Dernburg controlled the German colonies, obligatory labour in these colonies was reduced. The use of forced labour by private undertakings was the first to be eliminated, but labour conscripted for government purposes carried on far longer. Shortly after the First World War it became restricted, then regulated and finally abolished in most areas outside the Portuguese empire. Eventually, international conventions largely abolished it, and its use became restricted to emergencies such as floods, certain communal projects and wartime needs.

Benefits of colonialism

In contrast to its harsher, detrimental effects, European colonialism also introduced specific benefits to the Africans. Slavery, including domestic servitude, was abolished, inter-tribal wars were stopped, and the large migrational sweeps by armed hordes which had once demolished whole societies disappeared. Freed from these threats African traders, herdsmen and agriculturists could pay more attention to their daily pursuits. Agricultural production increased and improved communication provided opportunities formerly marred by the constraints of pre-colonial times. Some learned new skills and obtained new employment as drivers, telegraph operators, printers, clerks, and interpreters, all of which widened their perspectives beyond the limits of the old tribal society. Elementary services dealing with health and education came into being, initially subsidised by private enterprise and the missionary societies. Colonialism contributed to the growth of new towns which developed into the cities of the twentieth century. Cities created new demands for food and services which stimulated the rural economy and it was in the new urban environment that the new bureaucracy developed. The towns were agents of westernisation as they did away with the old pre-colonial trade restraints such as tolls, tribute and traditional duties which the chiefs had usually levied. These advantages were augmented by the introduction of trading licences, the enforced cultivation of certain crops, hut tax and forced labour. The new colonial bureaucracies shaped the African colonies into proper administrative and

political units and gave them credit in European eyes – some African colonies succeeded in raising money in Europe for the development of railways and other public works. Furthermore this had been done with remarkably limited white manpower, which had placed severe restraints on the ability of the colonial authority's coerciveness and had limited its ability to shoulder large developmental tasks.

Economic growth

Before the outbreak of war in 1914, Africa experienced remarkable economic growth. Exports increased sharply, especially from West Africa where proper economic incentives and good communication enabled some Africans to respond remarkably well. In the Gold Coast, some African farmers became the pioneers of the cocoa industry while other crops such as groundnuts, cotton, coffee, maize and palm oil became vitally important. Economic growth formed part of a positive response to the new demands of colonialism in some tropical colonies such as the Southern Gold Coast, Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda. Between 1880 and 1913, growth in their modern sectors equalled that of Western Europe.

When the First World War broke out, parts of Africa prospered and producers were able to take advantage of the rising prices of primary commodities. Mineral production increased and in regions such as Katanga and Southern Rhodesia, factories arose to supply products which Europe could no longer produce in abundance after July 1914. This is one side of the story – African resistance to colonial rule and the effects of the war brought hardship and suffering to others, as will be seen in the following chapter.

Notes

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- 5 J. D. Fage, *A history of Africa*, p. 387.
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- 24 W. B. Cohen, *Rulers of Empire: The French colonial service in Africa*, p. 11.
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