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POSSIBILITY AND CONSTRAINT: AFRICAN INDEPENDENCE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE*

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ABSTRACT: On the fiftieth anniversary of an ambiguous event – the referendum giving French Africans the choice of immediate independence or a new status within a 'French Community' – this article points to the alternative forms of political action which opened up at certain moments in African history and how, at other moments, some of those alternatives closed down. It assesses concepts, issues and arguments used in writing the history of Africa, now that the recent African past – spanning the last years of colonial rule and the years of independence – is becoming a focus of historical inquiry.

KEY WORDS: African modernities, agency, colonialism, decolonization, development, historiography.

FIFTY-YEAR anniversaries in African history evoke ambiguous memories. The anniversary of Ghanaian independence recalls heroism and triumph in the struggle for independence in 1957, but turns the narrative upside down after that point: repression, corruption, military coups, foreign economic domination, material suffering. In such a context, it makes sense to mark – albeit not to celebrate – the fiftieth anniversary of an event whose meaning was ambiguous even in its own time, the referendum of September 1958 in French Africa, in which Guinea voted against membership in the French Community and for immediate independence and the other territories of French Africa voted to adhere to the French Community while negotiating over their status within it. The 1958 referendum represented a choice between two possibilities, a choice that was both laden with consequences and limited by the nature of the exercise – a plebiscite, with each territory the unit in which votes were tallied.

In the heady days after most African colonies took the path to independence as territorial states, it was easy to see the choice made by the people of Guinea as the radical one, a sharp break with colonial rule and a promise to sweep away the forces of reaction within Guinea as much as those imposed from without. The choice of the other territories was seen by some as a compromise with colonial rulers. But many of the people voting to remain in the Community thought their own vision was a more progressive and promising one. They were voting to retain an affiliation not just with France, but with each other. The French Community, they thought, offered a possibility of building a federation of African states that shared a common colonial experience and language, a political unit large and populous enough

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to exercise real power in a world of inequalities, an expression of an African nationality, rather than the colonial fiction of territorial particularity. An African federation would in turn participate as an equal member alongside European France in a supranational French confederation. As Mamadou Dia of Senegal had put it earlier, 'It is necessary in the final analysis that the imperialist conception of the nation-state give way to the modern conception of the multinational state'.[1]

If the last fifty years have made it seem as if the territorial nation-state is both 'modern' and inevitable, in 1958 it did not appear to some to be either. Perhaps the most important lesson we might learn from returning to this moment is not that any one of the political aspirations articulated at the time should be resurrected, but that the very sense of alternatives can broaden our sense of possibilities for the future.

Elizabeth Schmidt has argued that the decision of the dominant political party in Guinea, a branch of the francophone-Africa-wide Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine (RDA), to opt for immediate independence for the territory in 1958 was not a top-down imposition by Sékou Touré but a response to popular pressure within the party. Even more interesting, she shows that the 'no' vote, while a clear refusal to let France determine Guinea's political agenda, did not entail an entire rejection of the idea of supranational community, either among African territories or with France. Guinean leaders pushed to revise the terms of the referendum so that the choice was not between a French Community designed by Charles de Gaulle and national independence, but between independence and a redesigned community with African input. It was only when de Gaulle huffily refused any changes that the RDA made its decision to advocate a 'no' vote. Even after the vote, Guinean diplomats tried to keep open negotiations with France and with its neighbors over some form of supranational association, only to see the door slammed by de Gaulle.[2]

The states that voted yes in the referendum, meanwhile, continued to debate the possibilities of federation among themselves and a 'renovated' confederation with France. In the end, French Community and African federation failed, and they failed together. Whether the territorial nation-state was what African activists wanted or not, that was what they could get. It is not clear that asking who was the most uncompromisingly radical, the most genuinely anticolonial, is a fruitful historical question. The subsequent histories of Sékou Touré's Guinea or the Senegal of Léopold Senghor and Mamadou Dia do not offer convincing evidence that either go-it-alone independence or the layered sovereignty of African federation and French confederation was the better idea. And the outcome of the famous wager that Félix Houphouët-Boigny proposed to Kwame Nkrumah at the time of Ghana's independence in 1957 – whether the latter's version of independence or the former's strategy of cooperation with France would prove more successful in ten years – depends on when one makes the assessment. In the decade of the wager, Houphouët-Boigny appeared to have won: Nkrumah had been ousted in a coup, and the joy of Ghanaians in 1957 had

[1] *La condition humaine*, 29 Aug. 1955.

[2] Elizabeth Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946–1958* (Athens OH, 2007), esp. ch. 6.

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been dissipated by authoritarian rule, economic mismanagement and hardship, whereas the Côte d'Ivoire was booming economically, and its president's political machine – while hardly a model of democracy – was distributing the fruits of the export economy widely enough to hold together a large territory.[3] If we add another 25 years to the wager, however, we see that Houphouët-Boigny's strategy failed to produce political institutions and a political culture capable of sustaining his successors, export-oriented policies could not accommodate the downturn in the world economy, and the Côte d'Ivoire – whose boom had depended on the integration of workers from the north into the fertile south – was fracturing along regional and religious lines, while Ghana was holding together, conducting elections and making some economic gains. Similarly, if one wanted to bet whether states that gained independence through long-lasting armed struggle, such as Angola, Mozambique or Zimbabwe, would follow a post-trajectory more favorable to unity and popular welfare than those that had a 'softer' passage to independence, it would be hard to say; it is indeed hard to say how much flexibility their rulers had, especially in the 1980s (see below), to sustain distinctive social and economic policies, given the constraints of world depression, the policies imposed by international financial institutions, external interventions and the consequent increase in domestic political tensions.

We are now a half-century distant from the moment when alternative approaches for exiting colonial empire were still in play. What gets lost in narrating history as the triumph of freedom followed by failure to use that freedom is a sense of *process*.[4] If we can, from our present-day vantage point, put ourselves in the position of different historical actors, in 1958 – or 1945, 1966 or 1994 – we see moments of divergent possibilities, or different configurations of power, that open up and shut down. Just how wide were those possibilities? And how much did actions taken at any one of many conjunctures narrow trajectories and alternatives? In thinking about such questions, we can never distance ourselves entirely from our present, but we can imperfectly look at different people in their different presents imagining their futures.

In fifty years, we have seen what was highly contested in the late 1950s – the division of Africa by the process of colonization into territorially bounded units – become perhaps the most stable element of African history. Border revisionism has been rare – the absurd war between Ethiopia and Eritrea over a few square kilometers of turf a recent exception – and cross-border networks are important precisely because they involve frontiers. The smuggler owes his position to borders, and sanctuaries for guerrillas and intrigues by one government on the territory of another honor borders by acting across them. The long-distance, shadowy networks that moved guerrilla fighters and arms to warlords across borders in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire worked because of the encouragement

[3] Paul Nugent, *Africa since Independence* (Houndmills, 2004), 166–7.

[4] Terence Ranger recounts the perils for the historian of the nationalist narrative in 'Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30 (2004), 215–34.

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of certain established state leaders and the aspirations of warlords to lead recognized states.[5]

The entrenchment of borders has been part and parcel of what African rulers have attempted since the 1960s: to fix themselves in positions of power within territorial states. Their success has varied, and for all the 'instability' political scientists discern, reigns of rulers have been notable by any historical standard: Omar Bongo in Gabon or Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire, to take two examples of a single man remaining in power for thirty or forty years. As Nicholas van de Walle puts it, the 'longevity in power by so many corrupt and incompetent regimes despite an absolutely disastrous economic record must stand out as the truly most remarkable characteristic of Africa's recent political history'.[6]

Yet when it comes to economic and political trends over the half-century, we need to be careful. The point is not to throw out everything that independent governments did or to substitute a miserabilist narrative of an entire fifty years for analysis of variation and change. What does it mean that in many parts of Africa, up to at least the mid-1970s, one sees a steady decline of infant mortality and rise of life expectancy, substantial educational improvements and uneven, but in many cases significant, patterns of economic growth? One sees a moment of possibility when states could try to legitimate themselves by the predictable provision of modest social services to a citizenry, as well as the effects of leaders' reliance on alternative mechanisms – patronage, repression of dissent – and the efforts of people to obtain alternative means of social security – religious community, joining up with a warlord, kinship and ethnic affinity.

FROM COLONIAL TO POSTCOLONIAL STATE: LEGACY OR PROCESS?

Colonial regimes, especially in the decades after the Second World War, were moving targets. And that is a problem for arguments that posit a causal link between 'colonialism' or a 'colonial legacy' and 'the post-colony'. Let us look at three formulations that have greatly stimulated discussion of the roots of Africa's present conundrum but fall short of unraveling its dynamics.

For Crawford Young, the colonial state was 'bula matari' ('the crusher'). As a student of the Belgian Congo, Young could point to telling examples: the predatory extraction of Leopold's Congo followed by the totalizing impulses of the Belgian copper mining apparatus, the church and the Belgian government. Young sees a direct relationship between a ruthlessly extractive colonial state – an instrument for mobilizing forced labor, squeezing revenue, imposing regulation on economic activity and achieving an 'overpowering hold over the nature of discourse'[7] – and the authoritarian nature of the postcolonial state. Recent historical scholarship on colonial states,

[5] Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York, 1999).

[6] Nicholas van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999* (Cambridge, 2001), 217.

[7] Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, 1994), 225.

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however, has found them less clear in their objectives and less capable of realizing them in practice: colonial states in Africa were, by the time of the First World War, pulling back from their earlier ambitions – both exploitative and reforming. They made their deals (like empires of the past) with local authority; they sharply limited expenses; they considered but shied away from systematic programs of development during the interwar years; they talked about 'civilizing missions' but did little to implement them; and – whatever their domineering intentions – were unable to control the forms of sociability and discourse that emerged in both rural and urban settings.[8] Most important, Young misses the changing nature of colonial power, particularly the crisis of authority that emerged after the Second World War, how colonial regimes hastily sought new interlocutors among the few educated elites they had spawned, made their compromises with trade unions, cash crop producers and other African associations, and hitched their future legitimacy to the provision of education, social services and the promise of economic development – projects which quickly proved far more costly than postwar European states could bear. The dynamic of African mobilization influencing colonial policy, giving rise to still more demands and claims, is missing from this singular vision of 'bula matari'. Young's judgement that 'A genetic code for the new states of Africa was already imprinted on its embryo within the womb of the African colonial state' fails to address uncertainties over what the code was or how strong its imprint could be.[9]

Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* also extrapolates an important component of the colonial state into a singular causal agent. His 'decentralized despotisms' were a key part of colonial rule. But there are two problems with his use of this concept to explain the ethnicization of politics after independence. First, the 'despotisms' were cross-cut by a wide range of connections – movement of peoples, rural–urban complementarity within families and over the course of a life-cycle, trading diasporas, supratribal religious movements. Rural communities were the sites of debates over moral economy and collective obligations. His bifurcated state was less bifurcated at a human level than at an abstract one.[10] For Mamdani, the

[8] Jeffrey Herbst summarizes studies on the colonial era in concluding 'how unimpressive the colonial extension of power was throughout Africa in the twentieth century'. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, 2000), 85. For examples of scholarship on colonial situations, see Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Societies in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997).

[9] Young, *The African Colonial* State, 283. For a short alternative narrative, see Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), and for a more detailed investigation of the responses of colonial regimes to African social protest, followed by their shrinking back before the costs of developmental colonialism and continued social agitation, see Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

[10] For a more nuanced view of the role of African intermediaries in shaping colonial rule – and later in its transmutations – see Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Osborn and Richard Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison WI, 2006).

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'citizen' of his title is a foil for examining the 'subject', but citizenship is little examined. That leads to the second problem with his formulation, which I have elsewhere termed the 'fallacy of the leapfrogging legacy'.[11] He has a point about ethnicized administration in the 1920s and 1930s and again in the 1990s, but the period in between is missing, as it is in Young's interpretation. Therein was a politics of citizenship. Trade unions, farmers' organizations, students, religious networks and other civic associations mobilized from the late 1940s through the 1960s. Rural politics was dynamic, and connections were made between local mobilizations and party politics.[12]

To see the expansion of a politics of citizenship from the 1940s into the 1960s, and its decline thereafter, plus its periodic resurgence in many African countries, is to take a view of recent African history that is both more tragic and more open. One might even argue that the first generation of African leaders were inclined to dismantle the structures of civic participation precisely because they had witnessed and benefitted from its success in making claims against colonial rulers, claims that they realized might be even harder for them to fulfill than they were for colonial regimes.

Achille Mbembe understands the forms of power in today's Africa differently from Young or Mamdani, but he makes a similar sequence of colonial and postcolonial forms of power: 'the general practice of power has followed directly from the colonial political culture and has perpetuated the most despotic aspects of ancestral traditions, themselves reinvented for the occasion'. Mbembe's emphasis is on the vulgarity and excess of power, the flaunting of elites' sexual and gustatory appetites, the impunity of power, the personalization of domination, the openness of extortion and predation. His emphasis parallels as well the grotesque images of African tyranny found in Western media, but also brought out in the work of some African fiction writers as far back as the 1960s.[13] The origins of such practices lie above all in the colonial practice of 'commandement', the assumption of the right to command obedience and subservience. The depiction of authoritarianism in colonial rule and of the culture of power in present-day African states contains much truth, but the colonialism that is described is a generic one, missing the dynamic that ensued from Africans pushing and tugging at colonial relationships and drawing on diverse patterns of affiliation and appeals to values and norms other than those of command and subservience. For all the insight and brilliance of his treatment of

[11] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, 1996). On 'leapfrogging legacies' and other forms of ahistorical reasoning used to make a historical argument, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 17–8.

[12] For examples of connections of rural political life to national politics, see Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison WI, 1990), and Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939–1958* (Portsmouth NH, 2005).

[13] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, 2001), 42 quoted. For imagery of grossness and decay in African fiction, see Ayi Kwa Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Boston, 1968). Critiques of Mbembe's basic argument may be found in *Public Culture*, 5 (1992).

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idioms of power and powerlessness in Africa, his 'postcolony' remains generic too.

PATHWAYS AND BLOCKAGES

Let us look beyond the abstracting of colonial and postcolonial forms of authority to the dynamics of interaction and conflict in the postwar years. Historians are still in the early stages of taking up the topics pursued by political scientists during the 1960s, when (contrary to that discipline's more recent predilections) detailed analysis of organization and ideology emerged, mostly through 'country studies'.[14] The late 1940s offered openings to political activists in colonies, thanks to the uncertainties in world politics following the war: Europe's loss of economic capacity, political initiative and self-confidence; the revolutions in Indonesia and Indochina; the independence of India; Cold War competition; and social and cultural dynamism in Africa itself.

Colonial regimes in the postwar decades were divided and uncertain over how they could reconfigure themselves. One finds, therefore, the extremes of repression, brutality and racialized representations, particularly in confrontations with Africans who didn't seem to be playing by the new rules – the French in the Madagascar revolt of 1947 and the Algerian war of 1954–62, the British in repressing Mau Mau after 1952. Yet in 1947 the French government was careful in how it responded to the great railway strike in French West Africa, and by 1952 the British government had accepted that Kwame Nkrumah was directing government business in the Gold Coast. Even in Algeria, the French government could at the same time carry out torture and begin a program of affirmative action for Muslim Algerians.[15]

That colonial regimes could be self-consciously modernizing and repressive was both an obstacle and an opportunity for African leaders. It set out a line, not necessarily clear in advance, beyond which African political parties and other organizations could not go, but the language of modernization could also be seized by African leaders, deploying the rhetoric on which colonial rulers depended for their legitimacy and self-image. How were such openings exploited by African political and social movements, and how and why were they narrowed?

[14] Political science in the 1960s and 1970s has received justified criticism for looking at Africa through the lens of modernization theory – reinforcing the interest of both African and western elites in seeing Africa follow a route supposedly taken earlier by western states. Yet the empirical studies of the time helped to discredit modernization theory. See, for example, James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1958); Aristide Zolberg, *One Party Government in the Ivory Coast* (Princeton, 1964); C. S. Whitaker, *The Politics of Tradition: Continuity and Change in Northern Nigeria, 1946–1966* (Princeton, 1970).

[15] David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War and the End of Empire* (New York, 2006); Raphaëlle Branche, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie 1954–1962* (Paris, 2001); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca NY, 2006); Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*.

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The postwar moment seemed for a time to widen the diasporic alternative. The Pan-African Conference held in Manchester in 1945 gathered influential leaders of the past and activists who would come to shape the future – from W. E. B. Du Bois and George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah – and its resolutions offered a comprehensive critique of the practices and assumptions of colonial rule. The question is why the momentum of Manchester did not endure. The most plausible explanation lies in the very fluidity of the political situation: the possibility of making concrete gains within the modest institutional openings created by French and British attempts to find a new basis for legitimacy for colonial rule. Nkrumah himself made a swift transit in 1947 from working for a Pan-Africanist organization in London to territorial politics in the Gold Coast.[16] But the territorial dynamic provided Nkrumah with what politicians need: not so much the distant prospect of a total overthrow of a global political order, but the immediate possibility of political gains and something to offer to followers. On the other side of the Atlantic, African American leaders also found that a specific focus on an American framework for claim-making, at the expense of wider affinities with Africans, was more likely to bear fruit.[17]

In one of the most illuminating studies by a historian of politics in the 1950s, Jean Allman has pointed to the ways in which the 'national' movement among Asante paralleled the 'national' movement in the Gold Coast as a whole – appealing for a single form of collective imagination and demanding external recognition of that collectivity, despite considerable diversity of interests, opinion and imagination. Both national movements were built not just on what Benedict Anderson called 'horizontal' affinity – the equivalence of all members of an imagined community – but on vertical ties, of patron to client, of youth providing the muscle by which leaders enforced the collective affiliation they claimed to represent and did battle with rival claimants for similar affiliation.[18] Contrary to a view of ethnic affinity as the building block of African politics and the source of weakness of national imaginaries, 'ethnicities' were as constructed and as uncertain as what were later recognized as 'nationalities'.

The 'nation' thus occupied an ambiguous position in political thinking in relation to both supra- and sub-territorial forms of political imagination. Colonization itself defined a potential set of political connections – what Léopold Senghor in 1945 called an 'imperial community'.[19] What our gaze backward from the era of independence fails to appreciate – or belittles – is another form of politics in Africa in the 1940s and 1950s: an effort not to escape empire, but to transform it. The efforts of francophone West Africans to turn a colonial empire into a federation or confederation, stripped of the

[16] Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London, 1973), 47–54.

[17] Penny von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca NY, 1997).

[18] Jean Marie Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison WI, 1993); Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh, 2006). For the 'horizontal' version of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

[19] Robert Lemaignen, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Prince Sisonath Youtévong, *La communauté impériale française* (Paris, 1945).

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invidious hierarchy of colonialism, in which all would be citizens with equal rights, were notable both for their persistence from 1945 to 1960 and for the partial successes they achieved along the way.

The small number of African deputies who helped to write the Constitution of the French Republic in 1946 fought hard to include an article guaranteeing the 'qualities' of the citizen to all Africans, eliminating the hated status of 'indigène' or 'sujet', with all the discrimination it entailed. Whatever its limitations, citizenship became a claim-making institution, a basis not only for correcting the flaws in the political institutions of the French Union (as the empire was renamed), but also for demanding economic and social equivalence; 'equal pay for equal work' became the slogan of the labor movement throughout French Africa.[20]

Senghor hoped to transform French rule into a layered form of sovereignty: each African territory would choose a government with authority over local affairs; French West Africa as a whole would constitute an African federation with a legislature and executive; and that federation would in turn associate with other territories and federations in a reformed French Union in which all would be rights-bearing citizens. Senghor saw nationality in terms not of Senegalese or Ivoriens but of Africans, or at least those Africans who shared the French language and the experience of French institutions.

The seriousness of the politics of claim-making, especially with regard to economic and social demands, pushed imperial citizenship to its limits, and French officials backed off. The *loi cadre* of 1956 was intended to break the cycle of demands, concessions and further demands. In *each* territory, a government elected under universal suffrage would have its own budget, and the French government hoped that African governments responsible to their own taxpayers would face the costs of civil service salaries and social services. French officials termed their new policy 'territorialization', and the advocates of federation saw it as a defeat. Mamadou Dia of Senegal expressed his 'profound and sad conviction of committing one of those major historical errors that can inflect the destiny of a people … In spite of us, West Africa was balkanized, cut into fragments'.[21] Dia and Senghor did not yet give up, but the idea of layered sovereignty now had to overcome the territorial base – with resources and patronage – that each governing party obtained. Not surprisingly, the leader of the richest of the territories, Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, was the most vigorous opponent of African federation, which would have distributed Ivorien resources more widely, and he preferred a direct association of each African territory with France.[22]

[20] These passages are based on my ongoing research. For a preliminary version, see Frederick Cooper, 'From imperial inclusion to Republican exclusion? France's ambiguous post-war trajectory', in Charles Tshimanga-Kashama, Didier Gondola and Peter Bloom (eds.), *Frenchness and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington IN, forthcoming).

[21] Discours d'ouverture du President Mamadou Dia au premier seminaire national d'études pour les responsables politiques, parlementaires, gouvernementaux, 26 Oct. 1959, 'sur la construction nationale', VP 93, Archives du Sénégal.

[22] Looking at the same story from French Equatorial Africa gives a rather different picture. The depth of civic life in those territories, often treated as a *chasse-gardée* by French corporations and the government, did not give politicians the same social basis for organization and claim-making that they had in parts of French West Africa, such as

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With the war in Algeria, the near-collapse of the French government and the advent of de Gaulle, the French Union was reconfigured yet again in 1958. That brings us to the story evoked at the beginning of this article, as a new French government proposed a constitutional referendum, which turned out not to be a contest between continued subservience of Africa to France and independence, but between conflicting visions of how to make empire into something else.

In the end, only the French Soudan and Senegal formed a federation, Mali, and despite efforts by its leaders to work out a layered form of sovereignty – territorial, Malian and French – it fell foul of the fears of leaders that their territorial base would be encroached on by their federal partner. It is easy to read the failure of the Mali Federation backward into another inevitability. But that is to miss the drama of competing visions in the period 1958–60.

Senghor and his allies were trying to work with the tension between the 'horizontal' dimension of politics – the relationship of Africans in different territories to each other – and the 'vertical' nature of Franco-African relations – Africa's need for the resources of European France. The irony of the situation was that 'African' independence as territorial states did not prove a stepping stone to African unity, but instead gave leaders, each with his own territorial base and limited resources, incentive to forge clientelistic relations with French leaders, in what was later cynically termed 'françafrique'.[23]

We can tell a related tale about British Africa, even though Britain tried to keep Africans focused on the territorial level and hoped to insulate itself from the claim-making potential of common citizenship. The crucial role of colonies and dominions in saving the empire during the Second World War – and their potential in future conflicts – was recognized in Great Britain. As dominions tried to define their own national citizenships more precisely, Britain in 1948 created a second-tier empire citizenship, derivative from the primary citizenships in each dominion, with colonial subjects included. Under this legislation, people from the colonies as well as dominions had the right to enter the British Isles, comparable to the right of citizens of the French Union to enter European France.[24] Empire, for a time, remained a field in which British, like French, Africans could maneuver.

There were experiments in federation-building in anglophone east and central Africa too, intended to promote coordination and efficiency in

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Senegal or the Côte d'Ivoire. As Florence Bernault has shown, the institutions of postwar governance themselves called into being forms of political association, rather than civic life providing a basis for entry into politics. The first generation of leaders, coming out of mission schools and the civil service, had less to bring to office than office had to bring to them, creating a brittle political structure. *Démocraties ambiguës en Afrique Centrale: Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon: 1940–1965* (Paris, 1996).

[23] François-Xavier Verschave, *La françafrique: le plus long scandale de la République* (Paris, 1998); Alexander Keese, 'First lessons in neo-colonialism: the personalisation of relations between African politicians and French officials in sub-Saharan Africa, 1956–66', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35 (2007), 593–613.

[24] Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca NY, 1997).

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regional development. These efforts, however, discredited the federal idea, for African leaders feared, with good reason, that white settlers in Southern Rhodesia or Kenya would coopt federal structures to give themselves a wider field for exercising power. The postcolonial governments in East Africa tried their own hand at sharing governmental functions, less concerned than their francophone colleagues with layered sovereignty than with economic coordination and shared services. But these attempts ran up against the unequal resources of Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya, fears that common markets and services would accentuate differentials, anxieties of leaders about their own power bases and eventually the disruptive presence of Idi Amin.[25]

If Senghor thought of turning French empire into something other than a series of nation-states, so did Kwame Nkrumah. As his Ghana became independent in 1957, he spoke of creating a 'United States of Africa'. Attempts were subsequently made at forging linkages among like-minded states, some more radical (Casablanca group), some more conservative (Monrovia group), but each state leader was preoccupied with his territorial base. The Organization of African Unity turned out to be more a union of African heads of state than of African people. There have been hints from regional organizations like ECOWAS and SADC that cooperation around concrete issues can move forward. Perhaps in the long run the hard, jealously guarded sovereignty of nation-states will prove short-lived. That might turn out to be a good thing or a bad thing – enhancing or diminishing African citizens' voice in shaping their own destiny.[26] But we are not there now.

It wasn't just African states that became more national in the 1960s. Although in both Britain and France in-migration of non-white people from the colonies produced anxieties, for a time the logic of empire trumped that of race. The right of entry of former colonial citizens into Britain and France was preserved for some years after colonies became independent. But by the 1970s, the voters and the governments of France and Britain were restricting immigration, reflecting a more exclusionary, national conception of the body politic. What Europeans, giving up ambitions of empire, were able to do that they had not done for centuries was maintain peace and cooperation among themselves. A more French France and a more German Germany were taking part in a more European Europe. The trends of the 1950s and 1960s were not simply the imposing of a supposedly European model of the nation-state on Africa, but also the pushing of European states into a more national conception of themselves at the same time, with political pundits retrospectively criticizing Africans for failure to live up to such a model.[27]

We have looked so far at how African political leaders manipulated and at times turned around European categories and institutions in a conjuncture

[25] For an early study of the general problem, see Donald Rothchild, 'The limits of federalism: an examination of institutional transfer in Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 4 (1966), 275–93.

[26] Siba Grovogui, 'The secret lives of the "sovereign": rethinking sovereignty as international morality', in Douglas Howland and Luise White (eds.), *Sovereignty Past and Present: History, Culture, Politics* (Bloomington IN, forthcoming).

[27] I am proposing a somewhat more complicated narrative of how this came about than does Basil Davidson, but the cogency of much of his criticism of the narrowing of options into that of territorial nation-states remains. *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York, 1992).

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when European powers were searching for new ways to make empire more legitimate and productive. But concepts of power in Africa were much more varied than that, as were the forms of belonging and affinity to which people attached themselves. People could debate what it meant to be a citizen – a person with rights and obligations – of a localized community as well as of a nation or an empire. Idioms of authority, claims to chieftaincies or against incumbents, invocations of supernatural power in political affairs, ideas of healing and their relation to political legitimacy – all these have been the subject of numerous anthropological investigations and, to a lesser extent, of historical study.[28] Among the most interesting has been the work of John Lonsdale, who has shown the importance of ongoing debates, in complex and overlapping political idioms, over political morality, the obligations of the affluent, the duties of the young and accountability for political actions among the people of central Kenya. Such debates were important in the 1950s and account for some of the complexity of the Mau Mau Emergency – for positions were more complicated than pro- and anti-insurgency – as well as enduring patterns of debate over moral economy in today's Kenya.[29] We have also seen recent studies connecting accusations of witchcraft and bloodsucking to debates over wealth and power in cities and countryside, in late colonial and postcolonial times.[30] Such considerations shaped not only local or oppositional movements in colonial and postcolonial Africa, but the practices of African states themselves – built, as Jean-François Bayart has emphasized, on the varied, complex and changing dynamics arising within African societies, inflected but not determined by colonial institutions – practices shaped by relations of kinship, alliance and friendship, as well as factionalization and personal violence, and by the idioms in which those relations are expressed.[31]

What is most important is not to see political language and political debates across Africa as containerized. Nor should one assume they necessarily contributed to 'national' movements, although they sometimes did. Regional networks, connections along trading diasporas within and beyond Africa, religious movements (Islamic, Christian and otherwise) that crossed space – all these brought together people in ways that had political potential in various forms. They could mobilize people to serve regional warlords, engage in traffic in arms, diamonds and other commodities, or they could

[28] Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*; Karen Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Princeton, 1985); Meredith Terretta, '"God of independence, God of peace": village politics and nationalism in the *maquis* of Cameroon, 1957–71', *Journal of African History*, 46 (2005), 75–102; Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, trans. Peter Geschiere and Janet Roitman (Charlottesville, 1997).

[29] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (Athens OH, 1992); Derek Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth NH, 2004). On debates in the political crisis of 2007–8 in Kenya, see the blogs of John Lonsdale and Angelique Haugerud on Opendemocracy.net, Feb. 2008.

[30] Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, 2000); Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* (Chicago, 2005).

[31] Jean-François Bayart, *L'état en Afrique: la politique du ventre* (Paris, 1989), 317–18, 324.

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provide a basis for cooperation in the name of human rights, gender equality, religious faith, or other principles.

The narrowing of possibilities in the run-up to independence in much of Africa had a double dimension to it. One was the focus on territorial units, as colonial regimes organized elections on a territorial basis and as electoral victories brought command of patronage and other resources within such units. Second was the effort of first-generation presidents and prime ministers to immunize themselves from a politics of citizenship and stake their future on a more personalistic, clientelistic form of politics. Observers still note, however, that both rural and urban communities continue to debate the meaning of nation and the nature of accountability,[32] and we have witnessed the repeated resurgence of citizenship politics in Africa. These include the wave of 'democratizations' starting in the 1990s and elections in which incumbents were voted out in Zambia, Senegal and elsewhere, offering hope for a renewed politics of citizenship and transparency, often followed by efforts by the new leader to keep resources under tight and personal control. This cyclical pattern – as in Kenya as this article is being written – has kept both hope and frustration alive. We will not understand the patterns of politics from the 1960s through the present without taking the opening of possibilities as seriously as we do their closing down.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INDEPENDENCE

Let us explore pathways and blockages in a double sense, in regard to concepts that are more or less fruitful and patterns in economic life and in regard to the patterns that we can discern in African economies and politics since independence. We can begin with some concepts that point to crucial issues, but give us answers before we've really posed the questions.

1. Neo-colonialism

We are not faced with a stark choice between true independence – whatever that might mean in an interconnected and unequal world – and colonialism by other means. That outside powers, financial institutions and corporations meddle in Africa, proclaim standards by which African states should be evaluated, and maintain asymmetries of power is all too clear. We need to understand precisely how this is done, and, if neo-colonialism has its uses as an epithet, it is less useful as an analytic tool.[33] Decolonization – after the escalations of claim-making in the 1950s – was for colonizing powers a shedding of obligations as well as of power, turning the claims of citizens into supplications for aid.[34] Neither old powers nor new ones wish to take the risk of African subjects or citizens directing claims at them. At the same time,

[32] The origins of such debates during colonial times and their continued importance are emphasized in Gregory Maddox and James Giblin in the Introduction to their *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania* (London, 2005), 1–12.

[33] A similar objection can be raised in regard to occasional claims that Africa is being 'recolonized' – by humanitarians and developers in the name of doing good for Africans, if not by international financial institutions and Western military forces in their own interests.

[34] Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*. Keese's sharp analysis ('First lessons in neo-colonialism') of the hesitations and difficulties of French leaders in establishing

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sovereignty gave African leaders the possibility for shopping around for multiple patrons overseas, for exercising more direct control over patronage resources within the country, and for using policy instruments unavailable under colonial rule, such as currency control.

To say this underscores the importance of revisiting, in historical perspective, questions of political economy – somewhat neglected in the more cultural and social orientation of intellectual fashions lately. Take the famous 'Kenya Debate' of the late 1970s, animated by political scientists and economists on the left of the political spectrum. To simplify somewhat, the 'dependency' or 'underdevelopment' school saw an economy dominated by transnational corporations (TNCs), with Kenyan entrepreneurs in at best an intermediary role between peasant producers and the TNCs, and state officials ensuring their own role in maintaining this division of labor. The more classic Marxists thought that the relatively extensive accumulation of land resources by Kenya's white settlers in the colonial period was giving way to a land-owning Kenyan bourgeoisie that was moving into large-scale commerce, finance and industry, putting Kenya, albeit tenuously, on a capitalist road.[35]

Another thirty years have gone by and both the patterns of change and the debate itself could be grist for the historian's mill.[36] The classic school has set forth a theoretical possibility, and a few ex-colonial countries, Malaysia for instance, seem able to follow it. Kenyan entrepreneurs have perhaps exercised more initiative than the dependency school would have it, but not with the effects postulated by the classic Marxist interpretation. Contestation over who could accumulate what resources – with the Moi administration trying to shift access to its own clients and supporters – shaped economic structures that have accentuated landlessness without producing a dynamic form of capitalism. These considerations might lead us to focus on the specific historical and structural conditions – in international capitalism as well as inside Africa – that promote contests for control of narrow linkages and the extraction of existing resources rather than uncertain efforts to expand them. The Kenya debate has the virtue of having been a genuine debate – leading to exploration of alternative possibilities – and the debate

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postcolonial relationships with former colonies – and writing off some of them in the process – still uses this inadequate term.

[35] Colin Leys wrote a classic statement of the dependency case, then changed his position to assert the development of a Kenyan capitalist class. *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism* (Berkeley, 1974); 'Capital accumulation, class formation, and dependency – the significance of the Kenyan case', in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1978*, 241–66. Scholars such as Peter Anyang' Nyongo, Apollo Njonjo, Raphael Kaplinsky, Gavin Kitching, Michael Cowen and Michael Chege were among those weighing in. The debate is reviewed and updated in Rok Ajulu, 'Thinking through the crisis of democratisation in Kenya: a response to Adar and Murunga', *African Sociological Review*, 4 (2000), 133–57.

[36] For a historian's take on political economy during the transition to independence, see Robert Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire: State and Business in Decolonizing Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya, 1945–1963* (Princeton, 1998). There is a great deal of historical work to be done on the political economy of the postwar era, but one can still profitably consult Ralph Austen, *Africa in Economic History* (London, 1987), and A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973).

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has now shifted to South Africa, where the dynamics of capitalist development and continuing extremes of inequality remain uncertain in their direction and consequences.[37]

2. The miracle of the market

Advocates of neo-classical economics have been eager to pick examples to show that markets could produce miracles: for a time Kenya and the Côte d'Ivoire served such a purpose, and their becoming tarnished should have been no surprise.[38] Markets themselves are part of a structure of power, of social relations and of culture, and the point of view that acquired such influence in international circles in the 1980s juxtaposed the messy realities of African states against a 'market' abstracted from its historical basis. The actual markets that Africans have experienced, before, during and after colonization, have channeled resources in specific ways. Turning discussion of the undeniable economic catastrophes in many African countries into a simple denunciation of 'bad government' juxtaposed against 'good markets' does not get us very far.

Tensions between theoretical generalizations and patterns on the ground are evident in regard to land. In 1945 colonial officials in London, for example, insisted that African forms of land tenure were a brake on economic progress and that privatization and individualization of titles was necessary both for economic progress and to create a class of responsible property owners with an interest in social order. To this day, World Bank officials keep pushing the virtues of individual land titles. But Angelique Haugerud, who has studied the problem in Kenya where title regularization was strongly pushed, concludes, 'There is little direct evidence here or elsewhere in Africa on whether issuing official land title deeds contributes significantly to higher agricultural productivity'. Land titles can be used to monopolize resources and keep them out of use as well as to promote healthy competition. As Sara Berry's research over many years in cocoa farming in Nigeria and Ghana suggests, forms of land tenure that acknowledged the layering of interests in land – original users, migrant farmers, farm laborers and tenants – did not impede one of Africa's most vigorous cash crop revolutions. In cases she studied, attempts to individualize title led to conflict over land access without clear resolution; the 'big man' accumulated land, but without the full dispossession of a class of people. However serious the tensions and inequality, legal uncertainty puts pressure on the 'big men' to obtain the consent of wider communities to the distribution of land, at the expense of positive effects of individualized tenure that may be more theoretical than actual.[39]

[37] Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (New Haven, 2005); Gillian Hart, *Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Berkeley, 2002).

[38] For a nuanced view, see Robert Bates, *Beyond the Miracle of the Market: The Political Economy of Agrarian Development in Kenya* (Cambridge, 1989).

[39] Angelique Haugerud, 'Land tenure and agrarian change in Kenya', *Africa*, 59 (1989), 61–90, 61 quoted; Sara Berry, *Chiefs Know Their Boundaries: Essays on Property, Power, and the Past in Asante, 1896–1996* (Portsmouth NH, 2001); Catherine Boone, 'Property and constitutional order: land tenure reform and the future of the African

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3. Globalization

Scholars who deploy this concept address an important concern – that Africa cannot be studied simply within itself but also needs to be viewed in relation to wider connections and a wider field of power. The question is whether the word evokes a set of references and questions that get us very far.[40] In one of its manifestations, it refers to tendencies in the world markets, particularly capital markets, after the 1970s, accelerating after the fall of the Iron Curtain. That version is too narrow. Another version sees globalization as a process dating at least to the fifteenth century. That version is too broad. It is neither new nor surprising that Africa has long existed in the world; what is important is to understand the mechanisms of connection and the extent to which they channeled interaction in directions that enhanced future possibilities or reproduced their own narrowness. Mechanisms of exchange in particular commodities – from slaves to oil – do not necessarily provide linkages that stimulate trade in other commodities. Colonial conquest cut off some economic connections and fostered others. That a country with as much potential wealth as Kenya depended for overseas connections on a single-track, narrow-gauge railroad largely completed around 1900, doubled by a two-lane, pot-holed highway, gives us the literal manifestation of the narrow channels which some colonial economies created – and which have fostered patterns of economic concentration and inequality.[41]

The most common African pattern of overseas trade – a narrow range of export items moving along narrow pathways – differs from historic patterns in Southeast Asia, for example, where high-density commercial exchange and productive units predate the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century advent of European imperial power, whose profits depended on the vitality of regional interactions and never quite supplanted them.[42] It is the mechanisms of connection, their limitations and their consequences over time on which we need to focus.

Colonial governments in the postwar years, and their successors in the 1960s and early 1970s, often tried to foster deeper market integration, only to see development efforts choke on the bottlenecks they were supposed to overcome: high costs of labor and property at vital nodal points, shortages of skilled labor, lack of planning personnel with both local knowledge

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state', *African Affairs*, 106 (2007), 557–86. Where individual titles were entrenched via white settlement, the issue takes on a different valence – and has been handled in contrasting ways in South Africa and Zimbabwe. See Jocelyn Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893–2003* (Athens OH, 2006).

[40] I have published an extended critique of the concept of globalization elsewhere. See the chapter 'Globalization' in Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

[41] In 1939, 1947 and 1955, a few thousand dockworkers in Mombasa could cut off Kenya's and Uganda's connection to the outside world. In January 2007, small bands of men, angered by apparent manipulation of election results, again blocked these narrow pathways.

[42] Scholars like Christopher Bayly and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have stressed the importance of the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian networks, presenting a picture more complex than the 'expansion of Europe'. An alternative narrative, drawing on such scholarship, is presented in Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires and the Politics of Difference in World History* (Princeton, forthcoming).

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and technical skill and the vagaries of the markets and institutions of twentieth-century capitalism. For a time at least, most newly independent governments continued what colonial predecessors had been trying to do since the war: working towards a more formalized economy and society, attempting to impose regulations and order on the opening up of businesses, on the rules of external and internal commerce, on land use and urban design, on forms of inheritance, on the criminal law. Public health campaigns and educational reform are part of the story. As Jane Guyer points out, 'formalization' efforts in Nigeria lasted only about ten years and subsequent deformalization efforts were 'piecemeal', fostering uncertainty in transactions and inconsistency and insecurity in how people could get things done.[43]

What is variously called the informal economy, fast capitalism or criminalization – including international trade in arms and conflict diamonds – required highly specific, personalized networks. They hardly constitute a web of global connection. That worldwide economic downturns, notably in the 1970s, were more catastrophic in Africa than elsewhere reflected the narrowness of the channels that linked Africa to the outside world and the importance to ruling elites of maintaining their own access and that of their clients to those channels. Africa's part of world exports fell from 3·5 per cent in 1970 to 2 per cent in 1999; Africa suffers from capital flight, not an excess of foreign investment or too deep integration into the world economy.[44]

4. African exceptionalism

By the 1990s, some African intellectuals described themselves as 'Afro-pessimists'. The apparently more favorable trajectory of Southeast Asian states that had emerged from a colonial past gave rise to a kind of African exceptionalism that was the mirror image of American ideologues' assertions of an American exceptionalism. The latter asserted that American individualism, openness and opportunity had led the United States to escape the blockages of class distinction, state–society conflict and oppressive conquest overseas that had bedeviled Europe – and it gave rise to a critique from the left that insisted that the United States was very much a part of the same history of exploitation and imperialism as was Western Europe. African exceptionalism has had no such compelling reply, for critical scholars are caught between countering uniformly negative images of an entire continent and reluctance to minimize the very real problems facing most of Africa.[45]

The most insidious conception is to link problems of poverty, ill health and violent conflict to an essential, ahistorical nature of Africa – at one time

[43] Jane Guyer, *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa* (Chicago, 2004), 157.

[44] Thandika Mkandawire, 'The global economic context', and Camilla Toulmin and Ben Wisner, 'Introduction', in Wisner, Toulmin and Rutendo Chitiga (eds.), *Towards a New Map of Africa* (London, 2005), 6–7, 159–60.

[45] Emery Roe, *Except-Africa: Remaking Development, Rethinking Power* (New Brunswick, 1999).

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seen in terms of racial inferiority, often in supposed cultural characteristics, sometimes as a necessary consequence of one or another environmental condition.[46] Only a little less dubious are reducing Africa's situation to an all-determining slave trade or colonization, or, lately, globalization – also attributing the state of Africa to the apparently inherent characteristics of Europeans and Africans, one seen as perpetrators and the other as victims.

5. The weak state

African states are not weak: they have remarkable capacity to keep their borders intact and some regimes have shown remarkable capacity to stay in power, whatever one thinks of what they have done with their power. One could argue that the ability of civil society to act on the state has been more limited, except in cycles of citizen mobilization. But the line between state and 'not-state' is not so clear, and much of the literature assumes a single type of state juxtaposed against a particular vision of civil society, both based on idealized extrapolations of European forms. Leaders operate through patrimonial ties, not just recognized institutions; businessmen can be rent-seekers, just as much as politicians. Political leaders have at times been able to mobilize followers and turn themselves into warlords, but, as William Reno points out, most warlords originate in the state itself. At one extreme, governments – in their unofficial as well as official capacity – can organize militias, hate campaigns and systematic violence, as in Rwanda leading up to 1994 – but in other contexts warlords and their followers operate in conjunction with, against and at a distance from a state; the current violence in Darfur, with its connections to armed factions crossing the Chad–Sudan border in both directions, as well as in eastern Congo, fit the latter model more closely.[47] Once again, such patterns need to be seen historically: in the tensions between different loci of power that developed before and during the colonial era, given the limits of colonial abilities to control social and economic relations across a territory, and in the efforts of postwar political parties and later of independent governments to harness regional networks to their own authority – but with insufficient capacity to make the state connection pay off for all participants. But one also sees the citizenship politics of the past echoing in the present: in episodes of citizenship mobilization, in people's acceptance of borders, territorial integrity and, indeed, patriotism as meaningful concepts.

The question is not simply how to study Africa, but how to subject transnational corporations, the organization of global markets and the power

[46] Africa bashing, stronger on denunciation than explanation, is a favorite sport of journalists and others, including some Africans. Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York, 2000); Robert Calderisi, *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn't Working* (London, 2007); George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa's Future* (New York, 2005).

[47] William Reno, 'Insurgencies in the shadow of state collapse', and Douglas Johnson, 'Darfur: peace, genocide and crimes against humanity in Sudan', in Preben Kaarsholm (ed.), *Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa* (Athens OH, 2006), 25–48, 92–104.

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of non-African states to the same degree of scrutiny. To take an abstracted 'West' as a model and to try to diagnose why Africa has not lived up to it not only gets Africa wrong, but gets the West wrong as well.[48] It is a problem for the future as well – the 'world economy' should not be taken as a given while African economies only are subject to reform.[49]

COLONIAL STATES, INDEPENDENT STATES AND DEVELOPMENT, 1958–2008

Can we think more clearly about the last fifty years of African history? Not necessarily at a level of generalization implied by the concepts discussed above. We could focus less on a generic colonialism, capitalism, markets and governance or on 'African culture' and 'African thought' as generalizable constructs, and more on actually existing economies, politics and societies. We could recognize shifting trends and variation in the last fifty years of African history, something easily lost in generalizations about stagnation and malaise.

It is too easy to dismiss 'development' as a failed policy and an external imposition, or to put all emphasis on more 'local' alternatives – markets, civic society organizations and small-scale efforts at coping and improvizing. Many problems can be best dealt with outside of the nexus of state planning and foreign aid projects, but the most likely alternative to state provision of public services of general utility – public health services, education, security, roads – is misery and incapacity, and there has been plenty of both since the downsizing of governments under structural adjustment in the 1980s.[50] And 'civil' or 'informal' structures are, in their own ways, as much the product of history – of actions taken or not taken – as are states and development projects.[51] That international donors can mobilize, if they so choose, to combat a scourge affecting Africa – fighting HIV/AIDS or recurrent campaigns for malaria eradication – fails to address the underlying problem that affects the

[48] If the dependency school argument that sees the impoverishment of the periphery as the cause of the wealth of the core is too simple, the relationship of imperial power to the development of capitalism has received more subtle and penetrating treatment. See, in particular, Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2000).

[49] For a critique of international relations theory for taking stylized 'Western' norms as a standard to impose on the rest of the world, see Siba Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions* (New York, 2006). See also James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, 2006).

[50] Here lies the weakness in the often-perceptive critique of William Easterly of foreign aid and state planning: correct in pointing out the sustenance that this nexus has given to corrupt, ineffective and repressive governments; short-sighted in not addressing the fact that some kinds of activities do require central planning, provision of services of generalized utility and the means to finance them. *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and so Little Good* (New York, 2006). From another point in the political spectrum, the anti-state argument of James Scott is equally oversimplified. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

[51] Abdul Raufu Mustapha, 'Rethinking Africanist political science', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3–4 (2006), 3–10, esp. 8.

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sustainable provision of any form of healthcare: the weakening of public health services in Africa since the 1970s.[52]

However problematic the history of much that African states and development agencies have done, state-bashing and development-bashing don't constitute much of an answer.[53] Can we build networks of piped water and electricity and work out an epistemological critique of 'development' at the same time? Can we note the Eurocentric criteria by which 'modern' life is coded and still recognize the aspirations of Africans who take risks and make sacrifices to improve the material conditions of their families? Can we examine historically the roots of extreme inequality around the world without assuming that 'developed' Europe should be everybody's model?[54]

I have argued elsewhere that colonial states were gatekeepers: weak in their leverage over people and territory, deriving revenue and power from controlling the narrow linkages between the internal colonial economy and the outside world.[55] Like all two-word descriptions, 'gatekeeper state' is more useful for questions it suggests than for supplying an explanation in itself. Part of its usefulness is in calling attention to alternative possibilities: development initiatives of late colonial and early postcolonial governments promised social improvements and economic diversification to get beyond the widely acknowledged inadequacies of colonial economic policies. Yet many first-generation rulers, caught within the limits of territorial borders and uncertainty over whether they had the means to give voters a stake in the political system, feared that the accumulation of wealth by individuals and groups not beholden to the leadership could undermine their power; Nkrumah's campaign against the autonomy of cocoa-growers in Ghana was the pioneer of efforts to sterilize accumulation within the polity.[56] That foreign investment and foreign aid soon became so important to development funding – and eventually to the mere existence of some governments – reinforced gatekeeping as a strategy of rule.

[52] Meredeth Turshen, *Privatizing Health Services in Africa* (New Brunswick NJ, 1999); Randall Packard, *The Making of a Tropical Disease: A Short History of Malaria* (Baltimore, 2007).

[53] Development has become the focus of historical investigation, and one of the best studies of how this politics played out at the local level is Monica van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger, 1920–1960* (Portsmouth NH, 2002). More generally, see Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds.), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays in Knowledge and History* (Berkeley, 1997).

[54] For a useful exposition of the importance and insufficiency of the 'political economy' and 'postmodernist/postcolonialist' schools among Africanists see Steven Robins, '"The (Third) world is a ghetto"? Looking for a third space between "postmodern cosmopolitanism" and cultural nationalism', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 1–2 (2004), 18–27. For a thoughtful Latin Americanist's take on issues of development, inequality and cultural critique, see Barbara Weinstein, 'Developing inequality', *American Historical Review*, 113 (2008), 1–18.

[55] Cooper, *Africa since 1940*. My argument is cousin to Jean-François Bayart's emphasis on the extraversion of African polities and the 'politics of the belly' within them. *L'état en Afrique*.

[56] See the pioneering study of Bjorn Beckman, *Organizing the Farmers: Cocoa Politics and National Development in Ghana* (Uppsala, 1976).

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The first generation of rulers understood how to build political constituencies to make claims on colonial states. They may have suspected that the nationalism they had evoked in the independence struggle was thin, not because people had some inherently African belief in the superior virtue of 'tribe', but because local resources were essential to prevent too much dependence on a wage economy or a state one could not trust.[57] They often underestimated the extent to which national *sentiments* had grown in the period of mobilization, but they had good reason to doubt that they had the resources to consolidate them into predictable political support. Historians have barely begun to consider a subject which at one time obsessed political analysts – the distinction between radical or socialist regimes and those that were more market-oriented (or in the perspective of the time 'pro-Western'). Such studies will likely underscore the importance of *efforts* of leaders to define distinct pathways for economic change, in line with elite and popular perceptions of liberation, progress and autonomy. They will likely point as well to the constraints imposed by the limitations of the nation-state form and the vulnerability of rulers within it, constraints growing tighter over time with the harsher conditions for export-oriented, credit-hungry states in the world economy starting in the 1970s.

African leaders of varying viewpoints could, in the end, fall back on the instruments of control developed by colonial regimes, on tax and aid revenues that were easily centralized, and on paramilitary and clientage systems centered on the ruler's personal connections.[58] The wave of coups that began in Africa in the 1960s suggest that there was nothing paranoid about the fears of so many rulers. Efforts to get around the gate – through cross-border networks, regionally or ethnically based forms of patronage, leading in some cases to warlordism – were the other side of the coin. Unlike the case in richer countries with more diverse economies, the consequences of losing power in most African states were likely to be dire.[59] The gate was worth a struggle.

Gatekeeping states were especially vulnerable to the machinations of outside powers, which could either provide the sustenance an unpopular regime needed or sponsor alternatives. The pattern was set in 1960 with American and Belgian action against Patrice Lumumba in the Congo – at first intriguing with secessionists in Katanga, then backing Joseph (as he then was) Mobutu. The harm done by Soviet, American and South African efforts to

[57] The thinness of nationalism was suggested long ago by Aristide Zolberg, *Creating Political Order: The Party States of West Africa* (Chicago, 1966).

[58] Jane Guyer notes that even the limited forms of direct taxation of colonial regimes were dismantled by some African states, fearful that their capacity to penetrate rural society was insufficient to collect revenue. Revenue depended more on import–export trade – including single sources like oil – or foreign aid. 'Representation without taxation: an essay on democracy in rural Nigeria, 1952–1990', *African Studies Review*, 35 (1992), 41–79. See also Christian von Soest, 'How does neopatrimonialism affect the African state's revenues? The case of tax collection in Zambia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45 (2007), 621–45.

[59] There was not necessarily a sharp line between the strategies of gatekeeping state elites and gatehopping networks, for rulers worked through networks as well as state institutions. See, for example, Janet Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa* (Princeton, 2005).

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stir up or aid one side in conflicts in Southern Africa in the late 1970s and 1980s was immense and contributed to the continent's malaise in those years.[60] Yet the post-Cold War 1990s witnessed conflicts sustained by international arms and diamond networks, not just by the machinations of foreign states, but rooted above all in struggles over state power, often spilling over state borders. The effects of such conflicts have been devastating, undermining more sustainable forms of economic development, destroying hard-built social and economic infrastructure, turning a new generation of potential citizens and workers into youthful soldiers, spreading disease and malnutrition.[61]

When rulers attempted to push their authority into rural areas, the results varied. Sometimes hierarchically organized rural societies or decentralized communities could frustrate government initiatives or deflect them to the advantage of regional intermediaries; sometimes rural elites were able to install themselves as power brokers to whom central government leaders had to accommodate; sometimes governments crushed the power of farmers' organizations, often crushing agriculture at the same time.[62]

The extremes of the gatekeeper state are found in oil economies, and that explains the paradox that Nigeria, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville and Angola are simultaneously rich and poor. The claims of ordinary citizens on oil revenue are particularly weak, since oil production involves little labor. Angola in the 1980s and 1990s was almost a caricature of conflict over gatekeeping: a government pumping oil and buying arms, versus a rival trying to get around the gate by smuggling diamonds and buying arms.[63]

From the point of view of the ruled, insecurity often led to strategies economists describe as 'straddling': individuals or different family members moved back and forth between local agriculture, urban wage labor and overseas jobs, contributing to village social resources so as to secure one's support in a home community and clientage relationships to political figures.[64] These do not reflect an outdated culture that values collectivity over individual achievement, but rather strategies to preserve social ties vital to communities whose historical experiences include the slave trade, colonial labor recruitment, depressions and the ups and downs of government programs and export markets. The quest to keep options in play helps

[60] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005), 137–41; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

[61] For an economist's estimates of the costs of conflict on the poorest of the poor, see Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford, 2007).

[62] Catherine Boone, *Political Topographies of the African State: Territorial Authority and Institutional Choice* (Cambridge, 2003).

[63] Tony Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil State* (2nd ed., Bloomington IN, 2004); Christine Messiant, 'Angola: the challenge of statehood', in David Birmingham and Phyllis Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa: The Contemporary Years since 1960* (London, 1998), 131–66.

[64] Gavin Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* (New Haven, 1980); Sandra Barnes, *Patrons and Power: Creating a Political Community in Metropolitan Lagos* (Bloomington IN, 1986); Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community* (Berkeley, 1984).

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explain the apparent paradox of high unemployment in Africa, combined with shortages of labor adapted to industrial production. Trends towards a more stable workforce, evident from the late 1940s through the 1960s in some places, have been reversed.[65]

International economic circumstances and policy made the situation in the 1980s worse. The drastic fall in the prices of Africa's primary products after 1980s and high interest rates induced by the ballooning debt of the United States had catastrophic effects on government revenues, peasant and worker incomes, and social welfare institutions – not to mention on the capacity of any government to choose what sort of development policy it would follow. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, meanwhile, came under pressure from the Reagan administration to impose a much stricter orthodoxy on borrowers than in the past.[66] The structural adjustment policies, however much African policies were in need of reform, had what Nicholas van de Walle calls a 'deeply corrosive effect on state capacity'. Reforms in the name of 'getting prices right', cutting back on the 'rents' associated with government regulation, and reducing government budgets encouraged rulers to conserve what was most important to them – control of the gate – while social expenditures, including education and health, and infrastructure could be cut.[67] The turn away from supporting development among international financial institutions in the 1980s did not so much produce new and better ideas for economic policy as provide a rationale for writing off African states' demands for international support. Now that development is back in policy-making circles – and the stultifying Washington Consensus is no more – it remains to be seen whether new versions to development are all that new and improved.[68] Development still evokes vital needs and uncertainty over how to meet them.

When international pressure to 'democratize' was added in the 1990s, the basis for the classic liberal bargain – social services in exchange for taxes and orderly participation in political institutions – was lacking.[69] The temptation was strong for rulers to make gestures towards formal electoral institutions, but continue doing what they did best – keeping political and economic resources out of the hands of rivals. Such blockages, at their worst, have fostered civil wars between factions contending for power and the 'apocalyptical destructiveness' of young men who participated in such struggles. Instances of violent conflict became more numerous in the 1990s. But so too did multi-party elections, national conferences and other openings in the political system – far short of a revolution in governance, often manipulated from above, but nonetheless a sign both that rulers were casting about for new ways of preserving their power and that a politics of citizenship could be revived.[70]

[65] James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, 1999).

[66] Westad, *Global Cold War*, 359–60.

[67] Van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*, 95, 121–34.

[68] For the new development initiative, see Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York, 2005).

[69] See Herbst, *States and Power*, 131, for a related argument.

[70] Toulmin and Wisner, 'Introduction' to Wisner, Toulmin and Chitiga (eds.), *Towards a New Map of Africa*, 17; Paul Richards, 'Forced labour and civil war: agrarian

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African politics did not change in lockstep. The end of white domination in Portuguese Africa and Rhodesia in the 1970s came at a time of growing pessimism regarding the political and economic situation in countries that became independent in the 1960s. To a significant extent, the 'late' decolonizations reflected a playing out over time of the earlier pattern: racial domination could no longer be overtly defended internationally and independent states provided both models and sanctuaries for liberation movements. But they – and the conclusion of the struggle against white domination in South Africa in 1994 – are also markers of the importance of mobilization and struggle in African history: of persistence and courage, of deep commitment to fighting injustice and the mobilization of wide support. Political mobilization is not just a story of the 1950s and 1960s.

The sequence of struggles trapped, for a time, newly independent Mozambique and Angola in their political and geographical conjuncture, as South Africa (at times with US backing) tried to harass its independent neighbors in a vain attempt to block the spread effects of liberation. The fulfillment of national independence and deracialization brought southern Africa into the conundrum of national sovereignty and gatekeeping – except perhaps for South Africa itself, in which the greater development of industrial capitalism, the possibility for elites to prosper outside of government-controlled channels, and the higher capacity of the state to provide resources to a significant portion of its citizens makes it plausible, although hardly certain, that it will follow a trajectory distinct from that of its neighbors, despite the inequalities and harshness of its economic system.[71]

The label 'neo-patrimonialism' has been much used to characterize African states, and it has come in for justified criticism, particularly when it appears as an intrinsic characteristic of an African polity. The 'neo' does not add much – patrimonialism is itself a concept that operates at a certain level of abstraction and generalization, with all the possibilities and limitations characteristic of such analysis. Max Weber used this concept to examine the extension of the power of the 'patriarch' beyond the family unit and the importance in politics of images of paternal authority as well as lines of personal loyalty and subordination. If Weber was trying to distinguish patrimonial from bureaucratic modes of governance, we can use this concept to point out their mutual relationship, not least the persistence of personalistic and clientelistic forms of organization in the contemporary world. Aristide Zolberg, writing in 1966, was one of the first to suggest that the mass party and mass mobilization were not the only dimensions of politics in the 1950s and 1960s. Parties were machine-like and depended on aggregating local followings – over which the party leaders had little control – and channeling hierarchies of loyalty toward the top. He points out that political

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underpinnings of the Sierra Leone conflict', in Preben Kaarsholm (ed.), *Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa* (Athens OH, 2006), 187; Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, 1997).

[71] On the latter point, see Seekings and Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa*.

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leadership sought legitimacy through multiple means at this time, memories of anticolonial struggle, distribution of offices and goods, images of a paternal state, as well as the hierarchy of personal connections.[72]

Patrimonialism was thus a principle among others, but the first generation of African leaders – starting with Nkrumah in the 1950s – soon began to erode the horizontal politics of citizenship in favor of the vertical politics of patrimonialism, suppressing trade unions, farmers' organizations and other associations of civil society, eliminating rival political parties and rendering elections meaningless, stigmatizing dissent as an assault on national unity. Even as respected a figure as Julius Nyerere could insist that 'The struggle for freedom from foreign domination is a patriotic one which necessarily leaves no room for difference', and he practiced what he preached.[73] Patrimonial authority was hardly unique to Africa; it is the thinning out of alternatives, especially a politics of citizenship, that stands out.

Here we come to the narrowing of possibilities during the process of decolonization. The vision advocated by Senghor, Dia and others – indeed by Sékou Touré for a time – of layered sovereignty at territorial, federal and French Community levels promised a spreading out of authority and alternative loci of power at each level that might provide a check against concentration at any one of them. The now-open archives of the Mali Federation allow us to see debates and resolutions of specific issues of multileveled governance; records of the French Community suggest that as long as France was motivated to keep its supranational power together, African leaders could exercise significant influence over its policies.[74]

The Mali Federation collapsed above all through the interests that the leaders of Senegal and Soudan had acquired in a territorial base within each territory and their fear of encroachment. We can only speculate whether such problems could have been resolved. With the failure of African federation, African leaders' interest in a French confederation was considerably diminished, and relations with France became a matter for bilateral negotiations. Therein lies the structural situation which fostered patrimonial politics at both the national and international levels: of singular African states, with their narrow channels through which resources moved in and out of national territory, with individual leaders seeking relationships to leaders and corporations abroad. Most African governments accentuated the gatekeeping dimension of the colonial state by minimizing the resources of lower levels of government and concentrating them in the hands of the central state, often in the office of the president. Turning politics into an all-or-nothing struggle

[72] Zolberg, *Creating Political Order*. Patrick Chabral and Jean-Pascal Daloz may have a point in seeing that such forms of politics are functional in their own ways, but they do not given an adequate account of their consequences. *L'Afrique est partie! Du désordre comme instrument politique* (Paris, 1999).

[73] Nyerere, quoted in Herbst, *States and Power*, 97.

[74] Archives of the Fédération du Mali (fonds FM), Archives du Sénégal; Fonds Foccart (FPU and FPR), Archives nationales françaises. One concession won by African leaders in 1959 was to get France to recognize multiple nationalities within the Community, each in turn providing rights of the citizen on territories throughout the Community.

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for power at the center, they were taking another step away from the layering of power that was an alternative advocated in the 1950s.[75]

It took two sides to foster patrimonialism on the international level. Its Euro-African origins are illustrated in Véronique Dimier's research on the European Commission's development programs. Its top leadership operated not on the basis of disinterested studies of projects and resources, but through personal ties to African leaders. French military and civilian leaders also organized their client networks in former colonies; Russian and American leaders went to some trouble cultivating African leaders. The durability of someone like Mobutu Sésé Séko cannot be understood outside of the internationalization of clientage – cultivated from both sides.[76]

Studying personalistic interfaces is particularly hard to do. The people who forge them know what to hide, and the formal structures that leave the clearest archival traces are not necessarily the ones that count for the most. Some anthropologists and political scientists have shown remarkable skill (and courage) in unraveling the politics of shadowy networks within and across state lines, and of war zones.[77]

GENDER, GENERATION AND POLITICS

The tensions of possibility and constraint apply to questions of gender and generation. Studies of Rhodesia, Guinea and Tanganyika point to the involvement of women in early political and social struggles, including activism in party politics. But these cases also suggest an increasing effort on the part of leaders to turn formal politics into a masculine domain, both during and after the coming to fruition of independence movements.[78] We see not only the masculinization of politics – making the holding of office in legislatures, trade unions and administrations a largely male affair – but also a politics of the 'big man', who insisted on his masculine prerogatives, as Lynn

[75] One solution to the distribution of power within a state was tried in Nigeria during and after the Biafran war, when the government broke up a 3-province federal state – in which a simple alliance of two parties could dominate the entire system – into first 12, then 19, units. The potential of a less centralized system was drowned in oil, but Nigeria has not experienced a second Biafran war. More generally, see Jesse Ribot and Phil René Oyono, 'The politics of decentralization', in Wisner, Toulmin and Chitiga (eds.), *Towards a New Map of Africa*, 205–28.

[76] Véronique Dimier, 'L'institutionnalisation de la Commission européene (DG Développement) du rôle des leaders dans la construction d'une administration multinationale 1958–1975', *Revue Etudes Internationales*, 34 (2003), 401–27; Keese, 'First lessons in neo-colonialism'.

[77] Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia, 1997); Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*; Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience*; William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, 1995); William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, 1998); Edna Bay and Donald Donham (eds.), *States of Violence: Politics, Youth, and Memory in Contemporary Africa* (Charlottesville, 2006).

[78] Timothy Scarnecchia, *The Urban Roots of Democracy and Political Violence in Zimbabwe* (Rochester NY, 2008); Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanzanian Nationalism, 1955–1965* (Portsmouth NH, 1997); Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*.

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Thomas, for example, shows in studying the words and actions of Kenya's legislators on reproductive issues.[79]

But those trends were subject to countertrends too. A self-conscious feminist movement exists in a number of African countries, from Senegal to Kenya and especially South Africa, that confronts gender issues with a directness not apparent early on.[80] Such efforts may be linked to international movements, and they are subject to counterattacks for representing 'foreign' values, but in fact such movements are no stronger than their local components, to which outsiders might give aid and support and above all a sense that gender norms, like many others, develop and change in a wide context. Another kind of gender politics plays out at more intimate levels. As Aili Mari Tripp has argued for Tanzania, the decline of formal employment after the 1970s has taken away some of the basis for male empowerment within households, whereas women's place in so-called informal economies – despite episodes of state harassment – proved more resilient and sustained many families.[81]

Generation also has a history.[82] What is striking about the role of young men in postwar African history is less their occupying a specific role than their *availability*: as supporters of political parties – starting with Nkrumah's political movement in the Gold Coast; as toughs who serve political henchmen – from urban slumlords to warlords in Liberia or Sierra Leone; but also as dutiful contributors to family economies.[83] In past eras, young men often served well-defined social roles, as warriors for instance. Youth could adapt to new roles – the migrant laborer, for instance – taking their place within both a family economy and a larger system of exploitation. The postwar era brought both possibilities and blockages. In Kenya in the early 1950s, many young men found themselves blocked as they sought resources for marriage and full adulthood; their plight fed the Mau Mau

[79] Lynn Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley, 2003). The many fine studies of gender include Lisa Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Men, Women, and Wage Labour in Southwest Nigeria* (Portsmouth NH, 2003); Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher (eds.), *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* (Portsmouth NH, 2003); Dorothy Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors: Gender, Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Development among Maasai, 1880s–1990s* (Bloomington IN, 2001); Dorothy Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy (eds.), '*Wicked*' *Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa* (Portsmouth NH, 2001).

[80] Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison WI, 2006); Gwendolyn Mikell (ed.), *African Feminism: The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Philadelphia, 1997).

[81] Aili Mari Tripp, *Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania* (Berkeley, 1997).

[82] See, for example, Meredith McKittrick, *To Dwell Secure: Generation, Christianity, and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsmouth NH, 2002); Lesley Sharp, *The Sacrificed Generation: Youth, History, and the Colonized Mind in Madagascar* (Berkeley, 2002).

[83] Richard Waller, 'Rebellious youth in colonial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), 77–92; Alcina Honwana and Filip de Boeck (eds.), *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Trenton NJ, 2005); Kaarsholm, *Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa*, especially the articles of William Reno, Koen Vlassenroot and Kaarsholm on Sierra Leone, eastern Congo and KwaZulu-Natal, respectively.

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revolt.[84] Some elders in Kenya – and a similar argument has been made about the Gold Coast – saw the militance and violence of youth as going against the wisdom of elders.[85] The pattern repeats itself with the disillusionment and lack of opportunities after the 1970s economic crisis in different parts of Africa: youth can again become less a stage of life leading to adulthood than a permanent trap. The blockages of generation help to explain the incidence of anger directed against the misrule of elders, against the wealthy, against the institutions of state, against neighbors perceived to have an advantage. They also explain why youth became available to serve causes other than their own – not least of all warlords. Yet young men also support their parents and other relatives. Many take high risks to migrate to Europe or North America, and the remittances they send back have become a key component of survival and status in countries like Mali and Senegal.[86]

Some scholars claim that urban youth have become part of a globalized culture, living off fragments of style and taste taken from the media, disconnected from social networks as well as belief in a national project. But studies show that all these possibilities exist: youthful patriots who wish to recover a national vision as well as alienated individuals and groups, as likely to invoke local visions of the supernatural as Hollywood images of redeeming violence.[87] Nor is the appeal of extra-African culture particularly new – the aspiring, respectable Christian gentleman and the Garveyite radical are part of the past of African youth. The availability of young people for a wide range of purposes – dutiful sons sustaining a family economy, patriots, participants in religious movements, violent henchmen – remains part of Africa's present as well as its past.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The last fifty years of African history cannot be understood apart from the suffering and disillusionment experienced in Africa, something that academic historians, especially those who do not live on the African continent, have difficulty in conveying in their texts. The courage and persistence of

[84] See the contributions of John Lonsdale to Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*.

[85] B. A. Ogot, 'Revolt of the elders: an anatomy of the loyalist crowd in the Mau Mau uprising', in B. A. Ogot (ed.), *Hadith 4* (Nairobi, 1972), 134–48; Allman, *Quills of the Porcupine*.

[86] François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens OH, 1997). For two other forms of French–African connection, see Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, 2006), and Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo – Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (Bloomington IN, 2000).

[87] Mamadou Diouf emphasizes the global reference, 'Engaging postcolonial cultures: African youth and public space', *African Studies Review*, 46 (2003), 1–12. Jay Straker finds continued evidence in Guinea of the continued relevance to youth of national patriotism and possibilities of development. 'Youth, globalisation, and millennial reflection in a Guinean forest town', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 45 (2007), 299–319. There is now a growing body of literature that treats sociability, sports and the leisure activity of the young. Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge, 1995); Charles Tshimanga, *Jeunesse, formation et société au Congo/Kinshasa 1890–1960* (Paris, 2001); Susann Baller (ed.), 'The other game: the politics of football in Africa', special section of *Afrika Spectrum*, 41 (2006), 325–453.

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people who fought injustice should also not be lost from view even as one tries to analyze the conditions which made their victories possible. The discipline of historical writing and the intensity of memory should not be mutually contradictory. Any attempt to detach personal experience from critical practices risks leaving memories in the possession of specific groups. What distinguishes a white settler's story of how happy Africans were on white farms until African politics spoiled everything from an activist's story of political mobilization and police harassment is not just that one corresponds to a different 'identity' claim from the other, but that research can make a case for the greater validity of one of these perspectives. There is also a danger that stories of colonial oppression and heroic struggle might be abused by new agents of power to ratify their own positions and hide their own misdeeds beneath a veil of anticolonialism and African authenticity. The distinguished Algerian historian Mohammed Harbi points out that nationalist inversions of colonial discourse 'evacuate the ambiguities and ambivalence from the colonial fact'.[88] Preserving the sense of ambiguity and ambivalence is not simply a matter of academic refinement, but of recognizing, in the present as much as the past, the possibility of alternative political goals and strategies.

Scholarship is hardly exempt from the asymmetrical relations of power that affect every other dimension of Africa's relations to the wealthy regions of the world. The pressure on African intellectuals to engage with theoretical positions in fashion elsewhere – from rational choice theory to postmodernism – is much higher than the pressure on European and North American academics to come to grips with the intellectual and cultural perspectives emerging from African milieux – elite as much as popular. But neither African nor non-African scholars are faced with a dichotomous choice between 'inside' or 'outside' perspectives, any more than Africans educated at a mission station were faced with a dichotomous choice between the Christianity as taught by foreign missionaries and a timeless African culture. Debates over issues of moral economy, gender relations and politics took place and take place in a complex and interactive set of idioms.[89]

At least as important as epistemological distinctions and interactions is the economic asymmetry. In the 1970s, when I first went to Africa, that was where the intellectual action was – in debates among scholars and intellectuals about the relationship of present-day politics to scholarship in history, sociology, political science and literature. Schools of historical thought developed around African universities and journals – the Ibadan school, the Dar es Salaam school, the Kenya Debate. Since then, the emigration of African scholars means that one is more likely to reproduce such debates – with similar personnel – in an American university than an African one.[90] Valiant efforts by CODESRIA and some African universities, with

[88] Mohammed Harbi, 'Colonisations, histoires coloniales, temps présent', in Benjamin Stora and Daniel Hémery (eds.), *Histoires coloniales: héritages et transmissions* (Paris, 2007), 222.

[89] For one example of such debates and idioms, see Peterson, *Creative Writing*.

[90] Adebayo Olukoshi, 'African scholars and African studies', in Henning Melber (ed.), *On Africa: Scholars and African Studies*, Discussion Paper, 35 (Uppsala, 2007), 7–22. Many African scholars are political exiles as much as economic ones. Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani (eds.), *Academic Freedom in Africa* (Dakar, 1994).

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whatever means they can obtain, suggest that here too there are countertendencies.

We are now fifty years from a moment of ambiguity in the African past. The present is always a moment of ambiguity – it separates a trajectory whose direction we know from one whose direction we do not. In between, we have seen global conjunctures where multiple possibilities seemed in play (late 1950s), others when economic and political conditions were highly constrictive (early 1980s), and still others when revolutionary change in some places overlapped with a slide into violence and despair in others (compare South Africa with Rwanda and Sierra Leone in the 1990s). In all these periods, we see trajectories varied enough for us to be wary of a single 'postcolonial' configuration, and enough mutual influence and connection among different parts of Africa and impact of outside forces to make us want to ask about general trends.

As historians, we begin our exploration of the past from our own vantage points, but we also try within the limits of the possible to recreate the circumstances and perspectives of people who do not share our present-day lives – and above all to see the alternatives and constraints they faced at particular moments. In seeing the consequences of alternatives taken and alternatives lost, we raise important issues of responsibility and accountability. In contrast, searching for legacies or looking for a determining moment in the past risks misunderstanding not only the past, but the extent and limitations of alternatives for the future. Africans have imagined different sorts of political communities; they have worked creatively with the tension between citizenship in a state and personal loyalty, between their rootedness in place and particularity and their connections to a wider world. They will continue to do so in the future – in ways we cannot yet perceive and whose implications we do not yet know.

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