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The Challenge of State-Building in Africa

The history of every continent is written clearly in its geographical features, but of no continent is this more true than of Africa.

Lord Hailey, *An African Survey*

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM facing state-builders in Africa—be they pre-colonial kings, colonial governors, or presidents in the independent era—has been to project authority over inhospitable territories that contain relatively low densities of people. Sub-Saharan Africa, with roughly 18 percent of the world's surface area, has always been sparsely settled. Africa had only 6 to 11 percent of the world's population in 1750, 5 to 7 percent in 1900, and only 11 percent in 1997.¹ Relatively low population densities in Africa have automatically meant that it always has been more expensive for states to exert control over a given number of people compared to Europe and other densely settled areas. As John Iliffe wrote, "In the West African savannah, underpopulation was the chief obstacle to state formation."²

In only a few places in Africa, including the Great Lakes region and the Ethiopian highlands, are there ecologies that have supported relatively high densities of people. Not surprisingly, these areas, with the longest traditions of relatively centralized state structures, have been periodically able to exercise direct control over their peripheries.³ However, ecological conditions throughout most of the continent do not allow high densities of people to be easily supported. More than 50 percent of Africa has

¹ Calculated from John D. Durand, "Historical Estimates of World Population: An Evaluation," *Population and Development Review* 3 (September 1977): p. 259 and World Bank, *World Development Report 1998*, p. 191.

² John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 70.

³ While hampered by very poor data, Robert Bates found that, in the African polities he was able to code, "the higher the population density, the greater the level of political centralization." See his *Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 35. See also Robert F. Stevenson, *Population and Political Systems in Tropical Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

inadequate rainfall; indeed, contrary to the popular imagination, only 8 percent of the continent has a tropical climate. Approximately one-third of the world's arid land is in Africa.⁴

In Africa, two other factors have aggravated the cost of extending power in the face of low population densities. First, African countries have quite varied environmental conditions. Ecological differences across provinces of a country in West Africa, which can be coastal, forest, savannah, or near-desert, are greater than in any European country.⁵ Therefore, the models of control an African state must develop for these highly differentiated zones are more varied, and thus more costly, than what a government in Europe or Asia must implement in order to rule over their more homogenous rural areas. Second, it is expensive to project power over distance in Africa because of the combination of a peculiar set of geographical features. As Ralph Austen notes,

The geography of Africa also presents serious barriers to long-distance transport. Water travel is limited by the small amount of indented shoreline relative to the size of the interior surface of the continent, as well as the disrupted navigability of most rivers, due to rapids and seasonal shallows. The wheel was introduced into northern Africa for overland travel during ancient times but then abandoned because the terrain and distances to be covered could not feasibly be provided with the necessary roads.⁶

The daunting nature of Africa's geography is one of the reasons the region was only colonized in the late 1800s despite its proximity to Europe. The Europeans found it easier to colonize Latin America hundreds of years before despite the much greater distances involved.

Why the particular pattern of population density occurred, given Africa's geography, is not within my competence to explain.⁷ Rather, this book examines how successive sets of leaders in Africa responded to a political geography they were forced to take as a given. This is not an argument for the kind of geographical determinism that has captivated scholars from Ibn Khaldūn to Montesquieu to Jeffrey Sachs.⁸ A variety of paths were open to African leaders as they confronted their environ-

⁴ W. Bediako Lamoué-Smith and Joseph School, *Africa Interactive Maps*, CD-ROM, (Odenton, Md.: Africa Interactive Maps, 1998).

⁵ W. Arthur Lewis, *Politics in West Africa* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), p. 24.

⁶ Ralph Austen, *African Economic History* (London: James Currey, 1987), p. 20.

⁷ For a provocative thesis, see Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), chapter 19.

⁸ See Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 63; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1873), p. 255; and Jeffrey Sachs, "Nature, Nurture, and Growth," *The Economist*, 14 June 1997, pp. 19–23.

ments. However, the challenges posed by political geography, especially low population densities, could not be ignored by any leader. Such an approach offers a tremendous methodological advantage: by holding the physical environment "constant," I can focus on the precise political calculations of different African leaders over time as they sought to design their states.

In this book, I argue that leaders confront three sets of issues when building their states: the cost of expanding the domestic power infrastructure; the nature of national boundaries; and the design of state systems. Understanding the decisions made regarding each is critical, and there are profound trade-offs inherent to different approaches. Africa's political geography helped structure the responses that leaders adopted to each set of issues just as European decisions were influenced by the structural features of that region. The following two sections provide a comparison of Europe and Africa's political geographies. I then develop the analytic tools that are central to this study.

The European Experience of State Consolidation

The African experience of politics amid large supplies of land and low population densities while confronting an inhospitable physical setting is in dramatic contrast to the European experience of state-building. In Europe, through the fourteenth century, population densities were not high enough to put immediate pressure on land and compel territorial competition. As Mattingly notes, "In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the continental space of Western Europe still impeded any degree of political organization efficient enough to create a system of continuous diplomatic pressures."⁹

However, starting in the fifteenth century in Italy and later elsewhere, population densities increased. As a result, European nations began to compete for territory, a tendency that only makes sense if population densities are relatively high and vacant land is limited or nonexistent, so that the value of conquering land is higher than the price to be paid in wealth and men. In turn, there was significant pressure to strengthen states in order to fight wars. Charles Tilly notes that one of the central reasons for the creation of relatively centralized state apparatuses in Europe was the "continuous aggressive competition for trade and territory among changing states of unequal size, which made war a driving force in European history."¹⁰ Wars of territorial conquest, as chapter four notes in much greater detail, have been central to the formation of particular

⁹ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), p. 60.

¹⁰ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990–1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), p. 54.

types of states because they create, quite literally, a life and death imperative to raise taxes, enlist men as soldiers, and develop the necessary infrastructure to fight and win battles against rapacious neighbors.

Because European states were forged with iron and blood, it was critical for the capital to physically control its hinterland. Tilly notes, "as rulers bargained directly with their subject populations for massive taxes, military service, and cooperation in state programs, most states took further steps of profound importance: a movement toward direct rule that reduced the role of local or regional patrons and places representatives of the national state in every community, and expansion of popular consultation in the form of elections, plebiscites, and legislatures."¹¹ In particular, the constant threat of war and the need to protect valued territory meant that the physiology of the state forced leaders to place particular emphasis on control of remote areas that could be lost in battle. Again, Tilly notes: "Europeans followed a standard war-provoking logic: everyone who controlled substantial coercive means tried to maintain a secure area within which he could enjoy the returns from coercion, plus a fortified buffer zone, possibly run at a loss, to protect the secure area."¹² These border defenses protected the state from its external competitors and, simultaneously, completed the job of internal consolidation. Thus, frontier fortifications have been, according to Frederick the Great, the "mighty nails which hold a ruler's provinces together."¹³ Lord Salisbury—a critical participant in the scramble for Africa, and the eponym for the capital of Southern Rhodesia—even said, in exasperation, that if his military advisers had their way, they would garrison the moon to prevent an attack from Mars.¹⁴

Successful European state development was therefore characterized by profound links between the cities—the core political areas—and the surrounding territories. Indeed, the growth of states was closely correlated with the development of significant urban areas. As Tilly has argued, "The commercial and demographic impact of cities made a significant difference to state formation. . . . The existence of intensive rural-urban trade provided an opportunity for rulers to collect revenues through customs and excise taxes, while the relatively commercialized economy made it easier for monarchs to bypass great landlords as they extended royal power to towns and villages."¹⁵ Critically, for this study, he goes on

¹¹ Ibid., p. 63.

¹² Ibid., p. 70.

¹³ Quoted in John H. Herz, "Rise and Demise of the Territorial State," *World Politics* 9 (1957): p. 477.

¹⁴ Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 13.

¹⁵ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p. 49. Similarly, Michael Mann notes that

to note, "Cities shape the destinies of states chiefly by serving as containers and distribution points for capital. By means of capital, urban ruling classes extend their influence through the urban hinterland and across far-flung trading networks."¹⁶ So profound have been the ties between the major cities and the countryside that the roster of great cities that have dominated the western world (Venice, Antwerp, Genoa, Amsterdam, London, New York) stand as excellent proxies to the rise and fall of national powers.¹⁷

Understanding African Politics

However, Europe's demographic history is not shared by many other parts of the world. It is quite remarkable that by 1975, Africa had only reached the level of population density that occurred in Europe in 1500. Nor is Africa's population density unusual. Many other regions of the world are also sparsely settled. As is clear from table 1.1, Latin America, North Africa, and the areas of the former Soviet Union have population densities that are historically much closer to Africa than to Europe.

The ramifications of lower population densities can be seen in the very different history of relations between capitals and their hinterlands. In Africa, in contrast to Europe, the current states were created well before many of the capital cities had reached maturity. Addis Ababa appears to be the only example of rapid urban growth in a designated capital not under the control of Europeans.¹⁸ Elsewhere in the precolonial period, even royal villages moved periodically as "soil become exhausted or buildings deteriorated or as bad fortune indicated that the old site had lost its virtue."¹⁹ Even most of the storied towns of West Africa were quite small until after colonial rule began. For instance, in 1901, Lagos had only eighteen thousand people and Accra about twenty-one thousand, while as late as 1931 only ten thousand people lived in Abidjan. At the turn of the century, only Ibadan, with two hundred thousand, had what could be considered to be a large population. Similarly, in 1906, the

for Europe, "The state loomed rather larger in the urban sector." *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D.1760*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 423.

¹⁶ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁸ Richard Pankhurst, "Menelik and the Foundation of Addis Ababa," *Journal of African History* 2 (1961): p. 103.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Colson, "African Society at the Time of the Scramble," in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 42.

TABLE 1.1
Comparative Population Densities over Time (People/Sq. Km)

Region	1500	1750	1900	1975
Japan	46.4	78.3	118.2	294.8
South Asia	15.2	24.1	38.2	100.3
Europe	13.7	26.9	62.9	99.9
China	13.4	22.2	45.6	91.1
Latin America	2.2	0.8	3.7	16.3
North Africa	1.6	2.2	9.4	14.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.9	2.7	4.4	13.6
Former U.S.S.R. area	0.6	1.6	6.1	11.6

Sources: Calculated from John D. Durand, "Historical Estimates of World Population: An Evaluation," *Population and Development Review* 3 (September 1977): p. 259; World Bank, *World Development Report 1992* (Washington, D.C.: 1992), p. 219; and Food and Agriculture Organization, *Production Yearbook 1993* (Rome: FAO, 1994), pp. 3-14.

Table was calculated using the midpoint of the population estimates that Durand presents.

two largest towns in East Africa were Dar es Salaam with twenty thousand and Mombasa with thirty thousand people.²⁰

The Europeans, after formally colonizing Africa in the late-nineteenth century, did create many urban areas. However, these cities did not serve as the basis of state creation in the same manner as occurred in Europe because the colonizers were not interested in duplicating the power infrastructure which bound city to hinterland in their homelands. Rather, the cities were mainly designed to service the needs of the colonizers. Particularly telling are the location of the capitals the colonialists created. By 1900, twenty-eight of the forty-four colonial capitals were located on the coast, demonstrating the low priority of extending power inland compared to the need for easy communication and transport links with Europe.²¹ Rather systematically, Europeans created capitals that moved power toward the ocean and away from the interior centers of power that Africans had slowly created and that had managed to exert control over parts of their surrounding territories. Thus, Lagos became the capital of Nigeria rather than Ibadan, Ife, or Sokoto; Accra the capital of the Gold Coast (Ghana) rather than Kumasi; and Bamako (with its good links to the Senegalese coast), the capital of Mali instead of Timbuktu. Some colonial capitals, including Lusaka, Nairobi, Salisbury (now Harare), and

²⁰ Walter Elkan and Roger van Zwabenberg, "How People Came to Live in Towns," in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, ed. Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann, vol. 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 655.

²¹ A. J. Christopher, "Urbanization and National Capitals in Africa," in *Urbanization in Africa: A Handbook*, ed. James D. Tarver (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 411.

Windhoek were created de novo outside of preexisting polities in order to service the logistical and health needs of the white conquerors. Many others, including Abidjan, Banjul, Dakar, and Kinshasa, were also newly established by the colonialists but quickly acquired an African veneer because they were not in settler colonies.²² In extreme examples of how African capital cities did not follow the European pattern of extending power, Mauritania and Bechuanaland (now Botswana) were actually ruled by capitals outside their nominal boundaries during the colonial period (Saint-Louis and Mafeking, respectively).

Accordingly, once the capitals were created, they did not immediately begin to effectively extend power throughout their extensive but sparsely settled territories. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch finds that "as of the beginning of the twentieth century, the colonial penetration had barely begun."²³ W. Arthur Lewis concluded that prior to World War II, "The countryside had no continuous politics."²⁴ Tellingly, it was only in the limited number of settler colonies, almost entirely in southern Africa, that the colonial state's reach was extended in a comprehensive manner. In Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the presence of a relatively large number of white settlers who saw themselves living permanently in Africa, in contrast to most colonialists who were transients, propelled the creation of a remarkably efficient and brutal state that protected the settlers from market forces while dispossessing many Africans of their land.²⁵ The fact that wars of liberation had to be fought in Africa's settler colonies (e.g., Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia) was in good part a reflection of the simple fact that unlike the rest of Africa, where the transfer of power was astonishingly peaceful, those colonial states had the motivation and the ability to fight for power.

During the terminal colonial period, politics become national in many countries as nationalist movements emerged. However, neglect of the rural areas by colonial governments over decades, combined with organizational problems posed by a large peasant population atomistically dispersed across a vast hinterland that had few roads or telephones, deterred most politicians from investing heavily in mobilizing the rural areas. As a result, nationalist politics in the 1950s and 1960s were very much urban affairs. As Aristide Zolberg concluded:

²² See David Simon, *Cities, Capital, and Development: African Cities in the World Economy* (London: Belhaven Press, 1992), pp. 24-5.

²³ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 174.

²⁴ Lewis, *Politics in West Africa*, p. 14.

²⁵ See Jeffrey Herbst, *State Politics in Zimbabwe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), chapter 2.

But it is difficult to believe, on the basis of the evidence available, that under existing circumstances the capacity of these [nationalist] movements for “mobilization” extended much beyond intermittent electioneering and the collection of more tangible support in the form of party dues from a tiny fraction of the population. Although their ambition was often to extend tentacles throughout society, they were creatures with a relatively large head in the capital and fairly rudimentary limbs.²⁶

The nationalists received states that were appropriate to the way they had conducted their politics: primarily urban, with few links to the surrounding countryside where most of the population lived. In turn, they furthered the urban bias of their states by marginalizing peasant populations and by providing urban groups with privileged access to many of the resources allocated by the state. As Robert H. Bates documented, African politicians traditionally equated their political survival with appeasing their urban populations via subsidies even if the much larger, and poorer, rural populations had to be taxed.²⁷

After independence, many African countries made significant progress in extending administrative structures over their territories. However, African leaders still find physical control over substantial parts of the population to be a difficult issue. For instance, Goran Hyden argues that because African peasants depend primarily on rain-fed agriculture rather than on cooperative techniques of production, such as irrigation found in more densely settled areas, and because smallholders are less integrated into the cash economy than elsewhere in the world, the peasantry in Africa is “uncaptured.”²⁸ Hyden argues that because “the state does not really enter into the solution of his [the African peasant’s] existential problems” there is “a definite limit . . . to how far enforcement of state policies can go in the context of peasant production.”²⁹ Similarly, Michael Bratton has argued that “The essence of the postcolonial history of sub-Saharan Africa is therefore an unresolved political struggle: On one hand, political elites wish to extend the authority of the state over scattered populations, most of whom live in rural areas; on the other hand, peasants remain determined to preserve a realm of authority within which to

²⁶ Aristide R. Zolberg, *Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1966), pp. 34–5.

²⁷ Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 33.

²⁸ Goran Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 9–18. See also Stephen G. Bunker, *Peasants against the State: The Politics of Market Control in Bugisu, Uganda, 1900–1983* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 5.

²⁹ Hyden, *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania*, pp. 23–4.

make decisions about their own lives.”³⁰ It is hardly surprising that in a United Nations’ survey, African governments were more likely to express unhappiness over their population distributions than governments in any other regions of the world.³¹

Further, the long economic crisis that many African countries have experienced since the late 1970s has caused a profound erosion of many governments’ revenue bases and, consequently, their ability to project power. Instead of African states gradually consolidating control over their territories as time progresses, even the most basic agents of the state—agricultural extension workers, tax collectors, census takers—are no longer to be found in many rural areas. The Economic Commission for Africa lamented that, because of the poor state of the road systems, “whole areas are practically cut off from capital cities.”³² This is an especially important problem in Africa because about 69 percent of the population, on average across the continent, still live in rural areas compared to 61 percent for all low and middle income countries.³³ Some states are increasingly unable to exercise physical control over their territories. William C. Thom, U. S. Defense Intelligence Officer for Africa, has written that

Most African state armies are in decline, beset by a combination of shrinking budgets, international pressures to downsize and demobilize, and the lack of the freely accessible military assistance that characterized the cold war period. With few exceptions, heavy weapons lie dormant, equipment is in disrepair, and training is almost nonexistent. . . . the principal forces of order are in disorder in many countries at a time when the legitimacy of central governments (and indeed sometimes the state) is in doubt.³⁴

For instance, a parliamentary report of Zimbabwe’s army—long thought to be one of the more competent militaries on the continent—found that the force had only 5 percent of its vehicles in working order, monthly pilot training had been abandoned, and 70 percent of the troops in one brigade had been off duty for a year or more, on forced leaves in order to save money.³⁵

³⁰ Michael Bratton, “Peasant-State Relations in Postcolonial Africa: Patterns of Engagement and Disengagement,” in *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, ed. Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 231.

³¹ United Nations, *Concise Report on the World Population Situation in 1993* (New York: United Nations, 1994), p. 36.

³² Economic Commission for Africa, *Survey of Economic and Social Conditions in Africa, 1991–2*, (Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa, 1994), p. 117.

³³ World Bank, *World Development Report 1998*, p. 231.

³⁴ William G. Thom, “An Assessment of Prospects for Ending Domestic Military Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *CSIS Africa Notes* 177 (October 1995), p. 3

³⁵ “Zimbabwe: Report Cites UK Paper on ‘Ominous’ State of Defense Force,” *Harare*

Even the wave of democratization that swept Africa in the 1990s has not breached the center-periphery divide. The revolts since 1989 against African authoritarianism were largely urban affairs, with little participation by any organized rural group.³⁶ Not surprisingly, few if any of the political parties that have come into existence since 1989 have strong rural roots.³⁷ It still appears too difficult to organize the peasants qua peasants, despite the fact that spatial location is an excellent determinant of life chances in much of Africa.³⁸

An appropriate capstone to the comparison between Africa—precolonial, colonial, and independent—and Europe is their strikingly different traditions involving the most dramatic action typically associated with a state: warfare. Due to low population densities and the large amount of open land in Africa, wars of territorial conquest, as chapters two, three, and four will discuss at length, have seldom been a significant aspect of the continent's history. In precolonial Africa, the primary object of warfare, which was continual in many places, was to capture people and treasure, not land which was available to all. In contrast to European states that, at least at some points in their histories, needed to mobilize tremendous resources from their own populations to fight wars and were therefore forced to develop profound ties with their own hinterlands, precolonial African leaders mainly exploited people outside their own polity because the point of war was to take women, cattle, and slaves.³⁹ Thus the slave trade, especially in the eighteenth century, should be seen

Zimbabwe Standard, 11 May 1998, cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Sub-Saharan Africa*, 12 May 1998.

³⁶ Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, "Toward Governance in Africa: Popular Demand and State Responses," in *Governance and Politics in Africa*, ed. Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 1992, p. 31.

³⁷ Henry Bienen and Jeffrey Herbst, "Economic and Political Reform in Africa," *Comparative Politics* 29 (October 1996), p. 36.

³⁸ In Ghana, 80 percent of the poor and almost all of the poorest are in the rural areas outside of Accra. Similarly, in a survey of Côte d'Ivoire, researchers found that while 59 percent of all Ivoirians live in the rural areas, 86 percent of the poorest 30 percent of the population and 96 percent of the poorest 10 percent of the population live outside the cities. See respectively E. Oti Boateng et al., *A Poverty Profile for Ghana, 1987–1988*, Social Dimensions of Adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa Working Paper no. 5 (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1990), p. 14, and Paul Glewwe and Dennis de Tray, *The Poor during Adjustment: A Case Study of Côte d'Ivoire*, Living Standards Measurement Survey Paper no. 47 (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1988), p. 13.

³⁹ The classic statement is by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "The Political Economy of the African Peasantry and Modes of Production," in *The Political Economy of Contemporary Africa*, ed. Peter C. W. Gutkind and Immanuel Wallerstein (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976), p. 105. Compare to Charles Tilly "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer, and Theda Skocpol, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 183.

as part of the process by which African states grew: by capturing people rather than by gaining control over territory.⁴⁰

In the colonial and independence periods, Europeans and Africans have gone to elaborate lengths to prevent wars of conquest from occurring in Africa, a series of efforts that were strikingly successful compared to the war-torn history of Europe and other regions throughout the twentieth century. The consequential role that war played in European state development was not replicated in Africa, or in Latin America for that matter.⁴¹ In particular, African states have never had the security imperative to physically control the hinterlands in the face of competition from hostile neighbors. Since the external imperative for capitals to consolidate authority was largely absent, African leaders have had to devise an entirely different set of strategies to exert control over their territories.

The Extension of Power in Africa

How those who sought to create African states responded to the continual problem of extending authority over distance, given a particular political geography, is the focus of this book. This question goes to the very essence of politics because, as Weber and others have repeatedly noted, the signal characteristic of a state is its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force in the territory it is said to control.⁴² It is also an issue that has been analyzed almost entirely by focusing on Europe.⁴³ Scholars have concentrated on the European experience when trying to understand state development despite the fact that Europe contains only a small percentage of the states formed throughout history. In part, this myopia is due to the fact that the rise of European states is well documented. Of course, concentrating on Europe, the taproot of the nation-state, appears logical because today all states worldwide do have the form of the nation-

⁴⁰ James L. Newman, *The Peopling of Africa: A Geographic Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 129–130.

⁴¹ See the paper of my colleague Miguel Angel Centeno, "Blood and Debt: War and Taxation in Nineteenth Century Latin America," *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (May 1997): pp. 1565–1605.

⁴² Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," reprinted in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 78.

⁴³ Representative books include Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*; Brian M. Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Mann, *Sources of Social Power*; Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); and Hendrick Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

state as theorized and executed by the Europeans. Indeed, the analysis of the creation of many third world states is, by necessity, intertwined with accounts of European imperialism and colonialization.⁴⁴ There was also a long-term western project of delegitimizing nonwestern sovereignty that was critical to the colonial project and that, inevitably, seeped into the academic literature.⁴⁵

However, the European experience does not provide a template for state-making in other regions of the world. As S. E. Finer has noted in his monumental work on the history of government, "the development of states in Europe is—in a world-historical perspective—highly idiosyncratic."⁴⁶ Many other regions of the world share the African experience of having significant outlying territories that are difficult for the state to control because of relatively low population densities and difficult physical geographies. For instance, Gledhill notes that in Mexico, "The hills are associated with wildness, violence, and political freedom, the plains with docility, pacification, and susceptibility to repression, a contrast which contains an element of truth."⁴⁷ Similarly, the idea of the anarchic northern frontier that presented the opportunity to escape from the state is an integral part of old Russian political mythology.⁴⁸ In Southeast Asia, the divide between center and periphery is also often pronounced: "In many senses, the capital *was* the state, and its power radiated from center to the periphery."⁴⁹ Of course, there is also a long historical tradition of examining the American frontier and the political consequences of open spaces.⁵⁰

Similarly, the study of international relations, which has much to say

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Deborah Yashar for this point.

⁴⁵ David Strang, "Contested Sovereignty: The Social Construction of Colonial Imperialism," in *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, ed. Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 34.

⁴⁶ S. E. Finer, *The History of Government from Earliest Times*, vol. 1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5.

⁴⁷ John Gledhill, "Legacies of Empire: Political Centralization and Class Formation in the Hispanic-American World," in *State and Society: The Emergence and Development of Social Hierarchy and Political Centralization*, ed. John Gledhill, Barbara Bender, and Mogens Trolle Larsen (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 317.

⁴⁸ David Z. Scheffel, "There is Always Somewhere to Go . . ." Russian Old Believers and the State," in *Outwitting the State*, ed. Peter Saklnik (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989), p. 115.

⁴⁹ Emphasis in the original. Donald G. McCloud, *Southeast Asia: Tradition and Modernity in the Contemporary World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), p. 71.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), and Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, ed., *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). Of course, both these books examine how colonialists or whites have dealt with the frontier, rather than the perspectives of the indigenous populations.

about the nature of state development, has had an almost exclusive focus on Europe despite the presence of state systems elsewhere in the world that have had radically different operating assumptions. The focus on Europe has been continually bemoaned in the international relations literature although little has been done to correct the problem that almost the entire study of international relations is really an extended series of case studies of Europe. As Gilpin notes, "There is a need for a comparative study of international systems that concentrates on systemic change in different types of international systems."⁵¹

However, to understand the extension of power in Africa, the traditional tools of political science that stress leadership decisions, institutional structures, and systemic considerations can continue to be used. In the analysis that follows, I suggest that state consolidation in Africa can be understood by examining three basic dynamics: the assessment of the costs of expansion by individual leaders; the nature of buffer mechanisms established by the state; and the nature of the regional state system. Only by understanding all three levels is a complete analysis of the consolidation of power in Africa possible. I disregard the boundaries between comparative politics and international relations because a more holistic analysis is necessary to understand the consolidation of power in Africa, or other areas for that matter.

Costs

All leaders face costs when trying to expand their writ of authority. Given the lack of a security imperative, which forced European state-builders to place assets at the frontier at a loss, African statemakers were able, within certain constraints and given historical circumstances, to make much more nuanced calculations about the costs and benefits of broadcasting power. Of course, the extension of authority always costs something given the need to deploy soldiers and administrators. The exact nature of the costs leaders face depends, in part, on how far power is being broadcast: if a state is making an incremental step beyond its central base that can be achieved using existing capabilities, costs will be lower than if authority is being projected to an area far beyond the base, as this requires mobilization of an entirely new set of resources. Of course, consolidation of rule is also a function of how the state system defines territorial control. Consolidation may only be the investment in enough security assets to secure an area physically, while other states may have to make extensive investments in such areas as roads, telecommunications, and

⁵¹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 43.

local government in order to integrate a peripheral area into the overall economy. Thus, African leaders seeking to extend their power face a variety of costs: some inescapable in the short-term associated with conquest; some that are contingent on the scale of the changes being brought about; and some that can be postponed to the long-term that are largely associated with the consolidation of authority.⁵²

The implications of understanding, from the perspective of the state-maker, the extension of authority as a series of different types of costs that have to be met are significant. For instance, the cost calculations of African leaders were radically different than those made by Europeans: in Africa, conquest and consolidation must be understood as different processes, with different cost structures, because wars were primarily not over territory and the end of wars did not leave the organizational and infrastructure residual that was typical in Europe. As a result, as chapter five discusses at length, the desired characteristics of a state in Africa are different from those traditionally valued in Europe.

Boundaries

The second major dynamic the book examines is the politics of boundaries. Understanding boundary politics—broadly defined as attempts by states to mediate pressures from the international system through the use of buffer mechanisms to maximize their authority over territory—is obviously an important component of analyzing the extension of authority. States can and do lower the costs of controlling a territory by developing a set of boundary institutions that insulate them from possible economic and political threats while enhancing the capabilities of the center. As William J. Foltz has noted, “Who studies systems studies boundaries” because effective boundaries “increase the collective power of those within them by providing the potential for organization and preventing the diffusion of effort and energy.”⁵³

The particular institutions that mediate the pressures from the international system become of special concern to weak rulers who do not have clear control over their territory; therefore, examining them may be especially informative in understanding the politics of African state development. In many ways the most consequential buffer mechanism is the

⁵² Here I am borrowing from W. Arthur Lewis's excellent discussion of fixed costs in his *Overhead Costs: Some Essays in Economic Analysis* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), p. 9.

⁵³ William J. Foltz, “Modernization and Nation-Building: The Social Mobilization Model reconsidered,” in *From National Development to Global Community*, ed. Richard L. Merritt and Bruce M. Russett (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 39.

territorial boundary that mediates political pressures, including threats of intervention, from rivals. The traditional view of African boundaries is that they are a critical weakness of African states because they have remained unchanged despite the fact that the original colonial demarcations were done in a hurried manner that often did not account for local political, sociological, economic, or ethnic factors. As Jackson and Rosberg argue, “The boundaries of many countries, particularly but by no means exclusively in French-speaking Africa, were arbitrarily drawn by the colonial powers and were not encouraging frameworks of unified, legitimate, and capable states.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Davidson regrets that those who recognized that “the colonial partition had inserted the continent into a framework of purely artificial and often positively harmful frontiers” did not come to the fore at independence.⁵⁵ Or as Bentsi-Enchill argues, “the nineteenth century partition of Africa by the European colonial powers was not made with any attention to the boundaries of these traditional polities . . . the newly independent African states, are, in general, territorially composite and have inherent problems of domestic boundary demarcation and maintenance between the traditional polities and jurisdictions of which they are composed.”⁵⁶

In fact, the system of territorial boundaries, as this book demonstrates in detail, has been critical to the particular patterns of African state consolidation and has been seen as a tremendous asset by African leaders, both in the colonial and independence periods. Far from being a hindrance to state consolidation, African boundaries have been perhaps the critical foundation upon which leaders have built their states. In addition, the territorial boundaries help shape other buffer institutions that also insulate polities from international pressures. These other buffer institutions vary considerably but include currency exchange mechanisms (which define the means of conversion between domestic and international units of money) and citizenship rules (which determine the difference between citizens and foreigners). Chapters seven and eight demonstrate that these boundary systems have also had significant effects on African state consolidation.

Understanding the precise manner in which pressures from the international system are mediated by state structures offers a way to move

⁵⁴ Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, “The Marginality of African States,” in *African Independence: The First Twenty-Five Years*, ed. Gwendolen M. Carter and Patrick O'Meara (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 46.

⁵⁵ Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State* (New York: Times Books, 1992), p. 163.

⁵⁶ Kwamena Bentsi-Enchill, “The Traditional Legal Systems of Africa,” in *Property and Trust*, vol. 6, *International Encyclopedia of Comparative Law*, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), pp. 2–138.

beyond grand theorizing to developing concrete propositions that analyze the relationship between the international and domestic systems. There is today something of a scholarly consensus that the international system is important to understanding politics in African countries, but that even third world states have a degree of autonomy, which necessitates examining purely political factors and avoiding the economic determinism that characterizes dependency theory. Accordingly, the next logical step is to better specify how international pressures are mediated by state institutions to affect domestic politics. Such a specification will be especially useful at the end of the millenium because international forces—be they international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the even more impersonal forces of international capital markets—are perceived as having an increasingly profound effect on the domestic decisions of leaders in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world.⁵⁷ The analysis that follows demonstrates that much of this conventional wisdom is incorrect.

State Systems

Finally, the study will concentrate on the state system that successive African leaders constructed in order to further their own efforts at state consolidation. One of the reasons that Tilly's analysis is so successful for Europe is that he develops a convincing picture of the international context of state development by focusing on the continual threat of war that all nations faced. There is a similar need to understand the international context African states face, although it is radically different from Europe. It is particularly important to recognize that the international system was not simply a given for even the weak leaders who successively ruled African states. Repeatedly, this study will report that rulers in Africa created a particular type of state system in order to help them confront the peculiar difficulties they were having in exercising their authority across the territories they were said to control. Cooperation, rather than continual conflict, has characterized Africa during the last century of state-making, a vision that directly challenges traditional realist assumptions about the anarchical nature of international society and the importance of the threat of force.

An appreciation of the importance of being able to manipulate the state system immediately allows for an understanding of why simple cost models of state expansion are wrong. For example, Richard D. Auster

⁵⁷ Barbara Stallings, "International Influence on Economic Policy: Debt, Stabilization, and Structural Reform," in *The Politics of Economic Adjustment* ed. Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 43.

and Morris Silver develop a model of state development where the state expands until average costs are rising, an adaption of venerable cost models in economics.⁵⁸ However, this model ignores the fact that by changing the nature of the international system, states can profoundly alter the costs of gaining and consolidating control over land. Since international society determines what state control actually means, to not investigate the nature of the state system is to fail to grasp the fundamental dynamics of state consolidation. Of course, pure economic models of state expansion cannot incorporate such overarching design considerations because they are based on the assumption that states are system-takers, just as firms are assumed to be price-takers, and therefore unable to affect the economic system within which they operate.⁵⁹

That African states, perhaps best known in the literature as colonial creations and among the weakest in the world, were still strong enough to affect the state systems they operated within is critical to note because scholars have too often taken the international system as simply the background to the drama of domestic state development. One of the unfortunate implications of the division between comparative politics and international relations is that while scholars in the latter discipline have been quick to point out the effect of international forces on domestic politics, the impact of state development on international relations has sometimes not been fully appreciated. In examining how leaders affect the design of the state system, this book thus examines what Robert Gilpin has called the most fundamental type of change in the international system: "change in the nature of the actors or diverse entities that compose an international system."⁶⁰

Costs, Boundaries, and State Systems

Maximum analytic leverage is gained when the interplay between the cost of state expansion, boundary mechanisms, and the state system can be understood. For instance, the cost of territorial expansion can be manipulated by states by changing the international understanding of what it means to control territory. Similarly, particular types of buffer mechanisms increase or reduce the cost of territorial expansion. Likewise, the nature of the international system affects what kind of buffer mechanisms

⁵⁸ Richard D. Auster and Morris Silver, *The State as a Firm: Economic Forces in Political Development* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), p. 30. See also Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 106.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 27.

⁶⁰ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 39.

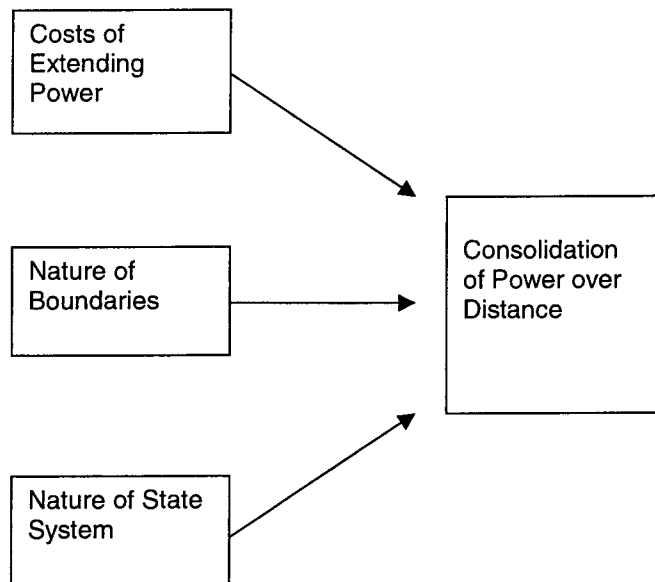


Figure 1.1. Possible Paths to State Consolidation

states can establish. Chapters two, three, and four explain the overall development of African states in the precolonial, colonial, and postindependence periods using this model. Chapters five and six then examine internal design questions to illustrate in greater detail the ramifications of the cost calculations that leaders have made. Chapters seven and eight explain the impact of different types of boundaries on state consolidation. Finally, chapter nine explains the overarching trajectory of African states and develops alternatives to the status quo that might allow states to broadcast power in a more effective manner.

Continuities in African Politics

By examining the different answers that leaders over centuries have given to the dilemmas of state consolidation, I am also offering an approach to confront the fundamental problem of studying African politics. The major difficulty scholars have is that almost all would agree with Patrick Chabal that the colonial interlude was relatively brief and that it is necessary to study lines of continuity between precolonial politics and the modern era.⁶¹ At the same time, attempting to place colonialism within the context of the continuities of African history has been stressed by

⁶¹ Patrick Chabal, *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 3.

historians who note colonial rule's artificiality, Africans' role in modifying it through protest, and the long history of intergroup conflict in Africa that predates the Europeans.⁶² However, most scholars would also agree with Crawford Young that the imposition of colonial rule changed everything:

The colonial state in Africa lasted in most instances less than a century—a mere moment in historical time. Yet it totally reordered political space, social hierarchies and cleavages, and modes of economic production. Its territorial grid—whose final contours congealed only in the dynamics of decolonization—determined the state units that gained sovereignty and came to form the present system of African politics.⁶³

Similarly, Naomi Chazan and her colleagues justify beginning their study of modern African politics with the creation of the colonial state by stating simply: “The basis of the postcolonial state in Africa is the colonial state.”⁶⁴ Or, as the manifesto of the Belgian-Congolese elite claimed in 1956, “In the history of the Congo, the last eighty years have been more important than the millenniums which have preceded them.”⁶⁵

Faced with the intuition that African politics must have deep continuities but aware of the profound disjuncture in form and practice caused by colonialism, scholars have generally been unsuccessful in developing a view of African politics that takes the precolonial period seriously while still acknowledging the traumas created by white rule. Thus, most textbooks on African politics begin their substantive discussions with the colonial state while only making the briefest of acknowledgments regarding the possibility of continuities with the precolonial era.⁶⁶

However, the continued failure to fully understand the course of African politics is unacceptable. As is argued in the following chapters, there are broad continuities in African politics that become apparent when the approach of successive leaders to the same political geography is exam-

⁶² See, for instance, J. F. A. Ajayi, “Colonialism: An Episode in African History,” in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870–1960*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 508.

⁶³ Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 9–10.

⁶⁴ Naomi Chazan et al., *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1988), p. 40.

⁶⁵ “Manifesto of the Belgian-Congolese Elite, 1956,” reprinted in *The Political Awakening of Africa*, ed. Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 99.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Chazan et al. *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*; William Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1993); Richard Hodder-Williams, *An Introduction to the Politics of Tropical Africa* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984).

ined. Given that, as chapter three discusses, the colonial and postcolonial states are such recent creations, it is also hard to believe that the political traditions developed over the centuries have not had an effect on politics since 1960. It would seem, for instance, relatively easy to make the case that precolonial traditions, still vibrant in the early part of the twentieth century in most parts of the continent, have a resonance in modern Africa compared to the rather heroic efforts Robert Putnam undertakes in order to suggest that developments in the Italian peninsula beginning around 1100 A.D. structure modern Italian politics.⁶⁷ Thus, one of the operating assumptions of this study is that Pliny the Elder was wrong: there is often nothing new out of Africa.

As some African states break down and the facade of sovereignty that was erected in the early 1960s begins to crumble, it also becomes more important to understand the past in order to foresee a better future for Africa.⁶⁸ This is not to engage in misty-eyed nostalgia, believing that somehow political formations developed hundreds of years ago can be replicated today. Basil Davidson is correct in arguing that "the pre-colonial past is not recoverable."⁶⁹ Nor should it be. However, it does seem reasonable to understand what the colonialists did and did not change several decades ago if a more indigenous alternative to the nation-state as theorized, designed, and imposed by the Europeans is to be developed. Certainly, such investigations are already beginning. For instance, Ali Mazrui looks to the African past in proposing models of dual sovereignty that would include both civilians and representatives of the security forces in a new type of parliament.⁷⁰

Conclusion

For a truly comparative study of politics to develop, the great but incomplete drama of African state creation must be understood. This drama is as important to analyze as the processes that led to the creation of France, Germany, and their neighbors. By examining both the environ-

⁶⁷ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 121. For another argument that state structures are highly path dependent, that is, they reflect events that occurred hundreds of years ago, see Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 317–8.

⁶⁸ Christopher Clapham, *Africa in the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 30.

⁶⁹ Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, p. 315.

⁷⁰ Ali A. Mazrui, "The African State as a Political Refugee," in *African Conflict Resolution: The U.S. Role in Peacemaking*, ed. David R. Smock and Chester A. Crocker (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995), p. 18.

ment that leaders had to confront and the institutions they created in light of their own political calculations, the entire trajectory of state creation in Africa can be recovered. I will demonstrate that, fundamentally, there is nothing exotic about African politics. Rather, as elsewhere, political outcomes are the result of human agency interacting with powerful geographic and historical forces. And, as is the case in other parts of the world, the viability of African states depends on leaders successfully meeting the challenges posed by their particular environment.

Two

Power and Space in Precolonial Africa

The limit of one's strength, that was the boundary.

A Yardaji villager quoted in
William F. S. Miles, *Hausaland Divided:
Colonialism and Independence
in Nigeria and Niger*

PRECOLONIAL RULERS in Africa struggled over the centuries to extend their power. While few were as direct as Emperor Haile Salaisse, who named his son Asfa-Wasen (Amharic for “expand the frontiers”),¹ the desire to expand control over people (in particular) was as much a constant in precolonial Africa as it was elsewhere in the world. It is thus hardly surprising that “among the Yoruba kingdoms, and most West African states, campaigns were so frequent as to be a normal, though seasonal activity.”² However, precolonial Africa was a world where the extension and consolidation of power meant something very different from the broadcasting of authority in Europe or in postcolonial regions of the developing world.

This chapter explores the theory and practice of broadcasting power in precolonial Africa. It focuses on the nonterritorial nature of power and how African rulers in the time before the Europeans conceived of their boundaries. While the political organizations in precolonial Africa do not resemble today's states, I argue that the different ways of broadcasting of power in precolonial Africa are eminently understandable. Thus, while the state system was radically different from the modern set of international norms and practices, there was a system of relations across polities that could be understood. The final section returns to the model developed in chapter one so that precolonial practices can be placed in comparative perspective.

¹ Christopher Clapham, “Boundary and Territory in the Horn of Africa,” in *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities*, ed. Paul Nugent and A. I. Asiwaju (London: Pinter, 1996), p. 239.

² Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 3rd ed. (London: James Currey, 1988), p. 99.

Conceptions of Power

Precolonial political practices do not figure in almost any analysis of African politics because the operations of states before the Europeans are seen as too exotic to be relevant. The critical problem for most current scholars is that power in precolonial polities was not, in the first instance, based on control of land. Unfortunately, the very basis of the modern understandings of states and state systems are tied to the control of territory. As Samuel E. Finer noted, "Tell a man today to go and build a state; and he will try to establish a definite and defensible territorial boundary and compel those who live inside it to obey him."³ The focus on control of land as the basis of state authority is not surprising in Europe where, due to population densities, land was in short supply. Indeed, an assumption that land was scarce, and therefore control of territory was an important indication of power, underlies much of Weber's own analysis.⁴ Similarly, control of territory is the basis of international understandings of state authority since states in Europe fought about land. Thus, Gilpin argues, "The control and division of territory constitute the basic mechanism governing the distribution of scarce resources among the states in an international system."⁵

Forced to anchor their analyses in the control of territory, many scholars make the mistake of suggesting that precolonial Africa had neither states nor state systems. For instance, Robert H. Jackson argues, "Africa was a continental archipelago of loosely defined political systems: a world of societies rather than states and far more recognizable to anthropology than to international relations."⁶ However, students of anthropology and history have not attempted to aggregate knowledge of institutions on a comparative basis. Instead, their focus has been on specific issues within particular societies. As a result, a comparative project cannot be discerned. Goody's 1971 remark that, "progress in the comparative study of centralized institutions in Africa has not been great"⁷ still applies decades later.

³ Samuel E. Finer, "State-Building, State Boundaries, and Border Control," *Social Science Information* 13 (August–October, 1974): p. 79.

⁴ See, for instance, Max Weber, "Structures of Power," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (England: Routledge, 1991), p. 165.

⁵ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 37.

⁶ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 67. For a similar view see E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 23.

⁷ Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition, and the State in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 16–7.

Assuming that states and systems of states did not exist in Africa simply because the European model was not followed demonstrates, at the minimum, a lack of imagination and, more importantly, a rather narrow conception of how power can be organized. To equate states with firm territorial control is to misread even much of Europe's own history. Precolonial Africa was, in many ways, similar to medieval Europe, where shared sovereignty between the church and various political units was not uncommon.⁸ Hard territorial boundaries were also a rather late development in Europe.⁹ Similarly, citizenship laws—regulations that tie individuals to a unique geographic entity—were generally not codified in Europe until the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Finer, in his world history of government, is able to analyze medieval states as states, despite their very different conceptions of territorial control, and to compare them to other types of states.¹¹ There should therefore be no objection to studying precolonial African states as states and including them in a comparative analysis.

In fact, states and state systems can be discerned in precolonial Africa if preconceptions based on Europe's recent history are discarded. African states did broadcast authority, did have firm notions of what consolidation of power meant, and did develop conventions for relations between states. Thus, Robert S. Smith, in the most detailed historical account of warfare and diplomacy in precolonial Africa, noted that, for large parts of West Africa, "international relations in peace and war were carried out in a more or less recognizable fashion, and, to go a little further, in a coherent and rational manner which showed itself capable under favourable conditions of leading to political, economic, and technical improvements in society."¹²

Mapping Power in Precolonial Africa

In precolonial Africa, land was plentiful and populations thin on the ground, especially as compared to Europe, China, and Japan. Precolonial

⁸ F. H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 60.

⁹ John Gerard Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Towards a Neorealist Synthesis," *World Politics* 35 (January 1983): p. 274.

¹⁰ A. Heldrich et al., ed., "Persons," chap. 2 in *Persons and Family*, vol. 4, *International Encyclopedia of Comparative Law* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), pp. 291–2.

¹¹ S. E. Finer, *The History of Government from Earliest Times*, vol. 3. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 1266.

¹² Robert S. Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), pp. 141–2. For an important case study, see Joseph K. Adjaye, *Diplomacy and Diplomats in Nineteenth Century Asante*, 2nd ed. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996).

polities were “surrounded by large tracts of land that were open politically or physically or both.”¹³ As a result, there were few areas where territorial competition was the central political issue because land was plentiful. Reflecting the reality of population scarcity in Africa, property rights over *people* were extraordinarily well developed in Africa compared to other parts of the world.¹⁴

In addition to the sheer abundance of land, African farmers also depended almost completely on rain-fed agriculture and therefore invested little in any particular piece of territory. As a result, few specific pieces of land were that valuable or worth a great price to defend. African agriculture was extensive, with low fixed investments in any particular piece of land, because the fundamental tool of intensive farming, the plough, spread throughout Eurasia without ever reaching Africa (except, it should not be a surprise to learn, Ethiopia). Goody describes the results of the failure to develop the plough:

In the first place it [the plough] increases the area of land a man can cultivate and hence makes possible a substantial rise in productivity, at least in open country. This in turn means a greater surplus for the maintenance of specialist crafts, for the growth of differences in wealth and in styles of life, for developments in urban, that is, non-agricultural, life. In the second place, it stimulates the move to fixed holdings and away from shifting agriculture. Thirdly (and not independently) it increases the value (and decreases the availability) of land.¹⁵

A full explanation of why the plough was not adopted by African societies is beyond this study. However, given the sheer availability of land, there may have been very little pressure to adopt instruments to improve the productivity of a given piece of land.¹⁶ At the same time, the failure of any significant society to adopt the plough meant that there was no demonstration effect that could have been the impetus for the general adoption of the technology.

African societies differed markedly from the high density Asian polities Wittfogel called “hydraulic societies” where, because of the (literal) sunk costs in irrigation works, particular pieces of land had great value.¹⁷ A

¹³ Igor Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Political Culture,” in *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 10.

¹⁴ Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, “African ‘Slavery’ as an Institution of Marginality,” in *Slavery in Africa*, ed. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 11.

¹⁵ Goody, *Technology, Tradition, and the State in Africa*, p. 25.

¹⁶ Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 14. The classic statement is Esther Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure* (New York: Aldine, 1965).

¹⁷ Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 34.

quick look at the extraordinary paddy works in Asia, the accumulated work of generations that devoted their sweat equity to intensive agriculture, makes it clear just how valuable land was in those regions. Correspondingly, in Asia, and in large parts of Europe, states had a profound interest in controlling areas of intensive agriculture because of the possibilities of high revenue flows from taxes with relatively low collection costs. At the extreme, in China, the state was large and endured through the centuries facing only competition at the borders, in part because Chinese leaders constructed a class alliance with landed warrior nobility.¹⁸ In contrast, in Africa, states found the same amount of territory less valuable because low productivity agriculture meant that there was less in the way of people or surplus to tax and collection costs were probably higher.

The Primacy of Exit

The combination of large amounts of open land and rain-fed agriculture meant that, in precolonial Africa, control of territory was often not contested because it was often easier to escape from rulers than to fight them. Africans, on the basis of sensible cost-benefit equations, would, more often than not, rather switch than fight. They could move and farm on other pieces of land relatively easily because it was not necessary to sink significant investment into the land. For instance, Robert W. Harms, in his history of the central Zaire basin, provides an important account of a society constantly expanding outward because traders responded to competition or quarreling by establishing new villages on virgin land.¹⁹ Migration to escape from social or political problems was also common among the Yoruba, the Edo, the Fon, and many others. A. I. Asiwaju notes, for example, that the reign of Oba Ewuare of Benin, in the mid-fifteenth century, was so unpopular that it generated, “waves of protest migrations which ostensibly led to the foundation of many communities of closely related groups.”²⁰ Similarly, Thomas J. Barfield notes, “the powers of the Dinka chief were weak . . . because rather than submit to his authority, dissident groups could move to a new territory if they were dissatisfied.”²¹ He goes on to note that the Zulu Empire, one of the largest agglomerations of power in precolonial African history, occurred because the land frontier closed in what is now South Africa during the

¹⁸ Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 94. See also Wong, *China Transformed*, p. 88.

¹⁹ Robert W. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500–1891* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 111.

²⁰ A. I. Asiwaju, “Migrations as Revolt: The Example of the Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta Before 1945,” *Journal of African History* 17 (1976): p. 578.

²¹ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Nomadic Alternative* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), p. 38.

nineteenth century after the Boer settlers expanded the territory under their control.²²

States without Maps

The demographic and political realities in precolonial Africa had a profound effect on the contours of the states. In particular, as control of particular pieces of land was not critical to African societies, "there was no indigenous map-making in Africa or . . . its presence is so insignificant as to justify that generalisation."²³ The only society that had a significant map-making tradition was Ethiopia, which is also one of the very few African societies that had a tradition of writing.²⁴ It was logical therefore that understandings of what it meant to control a particular territory in precolonial Africa differed markedly from the modern era. In particular, precolonial African societies unbundled ownership and control of land. For instance, Ivor Wilks, in writing about the Ashanti theory of sovereignty, noted that "rights of sovereignty were regarded as distinguishable from the exercise of authority." Thus, it was not an uncommon practice in Ashanti law for the land to belong to one person (e.g., the southern provinces to the Asantahene) but the people to another (in the case of the south, to the Fanti or the British Governor).²⁵ Similarly, Harms writes of the Nunu in what is now Democratic Republic of the Congo: "The political theory of the Nunu, like that of peoples in many parts of Africa, had long distinguished between guardians of the land and guardians of the people. According to this theory, strangers who settled in an unoccupied part of a guardian's territory could continue to be governed by their own headmen provided they recognized the ritual control of the original guardian over the land."²⁶ Land disputes between the Zulus and the early Dutch settlers were also aggravated because the Zulus believed that they could let the whites settle on land without giving up ownership while the settlers did not distinguish between occupation and ownership. Conflict between the two groups was further exacerbated by the Zulu tradition of claiming that their authority extended everywhere people had

²² Ibid., p. 47.

²³ Charles G. Hunt, "Some Notes on Indigenous Map-Making in Africa," in *Maps and Africa*, ed. Jeffrey C. Stone (Aberdeen, U.K.: Aberdeen University, 1994), p. 32. See also Jeffrey C. Stone, *A Short History of the Cartography of Africa* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1995), p. 5.

²⁴ Hunt, "Some Notes on Indigenous Map-Making in Africa," p. 34.

²⁵ Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 191–2.

²⁶ Robert Harms, *Games Against Nature: An Eco-Cultural History of the Nunu of Equatorial Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 220.

pledged obedience to the king, rather than to the kind of clear territorial claims to which the whites were accustomed.²⁷

It is striking how common the distinction between possession and control of land was given the great distances between the polities just cited. As was the case in Europe, the nature of material conditions on the ground helped structure a set of political beliefs about the nature of sovereignty.²⁸ It is only natural that societies, such as those in Europe and Asia, with relatively high population densities and with land that requires significant investment to yield the necessary level of productivity, will tolerate little ambiguity in demarcating control over territory.²⁹ Similarly, the African acceptance of far more nuanced understanding of control of territory was made possible by the fact that land often was not a scarce resource and that there were few imperatives to developing a zero-sum understanding of demarcating authority. Thus, the development of particular notions of sovereignty is highly dependent on a particular political geography and is not simply the culmination of a particular line of legal thinking.

Patterns of Territorial Control

In many precolonial societies, a significant difference existed between what control of the political center meant and what the partial exercise of power amounted to in the hinterland. Formal political control in precolonial Africa was difficult and had to be earned through the construction of loyalties, the use of coercion, and the creation of an infrastructure. Otherwise, it was too easy for people to leave. Political control could never be taken for granted given that the environment made it so difficult to continually exert authority over any significant distance. Further, the unbundling of ownership and control of land made it hard to gain complete control of a territory. As a result, the areas leaders were certain to control formally—the political cores—were of limited size and were determined by the development of an infrastructure to broadcast power. For instance, the Ashanti empire was able to extend control over relatively large distances and have some of the attributes of a modern nation-state because of an extensive series of roads that converged on the capital, Kumasi. These roads were vital to the exercise of formal authority because they allowed for the quick movement of troops and bound the

²⁷ C. de B. Webb and J. B. Wright, ed., *A Zulu King Speaks: Statements Made by Cetshwayo KaMpande* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 1987), pp. 1, 27.

²⁸ Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors*, p. 69.

²⁹ See Moore, *Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 169.

territory into a relatively coherent economy. Of places beyond the great roads, it was said, "no Asante is familiar with these places because the King's highways do not run there."³⁰

Perhaps the most concrete expression of precolonial African views of the requirements to exercise formal control over an area are found in the so-called Mankessim Constitution adopted by the Fanti Confederation in 1871 in what is now Ghana. The Confederation coalesced after a war with the Ashanti that saw the British largely abandon the Fanti.³¹ The collected chiefs noted that the primary goals of the newly formed confederation were to promote friendly relations, to improve the country, and to build "good and substantial roads (article 8, section 3)." In an exercise of (quite literal) constitutional engineering, the Fanti detailed how wide ("fifteen feet broad") the roads should be (article 26). The Fanti understood that without these roads, they would have no way to broadcast their authority and were therefore so concerned with the development of the political infrastructure that they prominently featured it in their constitution. Having gone through elaborate lengths to highlight the need to create roads in order to give meaning to their confederation, the Fanti still noted that it was up to each king and chief to carry out the resolutions approved by the king president (article 13).³² Even then, the Fanti noted that their rule would be exercised over those who would join it rather than through extension of control via administrative fiat.³³ Thus, both the very real physical requirements for extending formal authority and the utter precariousness of broadcasting power were readily acknowledged by precolonial leaders who understood the daunting geography they confronted.

Without such infrastructure, African states lacked the capability to formally control large amounts of land beyond the center of the polity because they could not project power in other ways. For instance, Wylie notes "The wealth and food supplies necessary for highly elaborate military organization and the population necessary for large armies simply did not exist in Temneland."³⁴ Warfare tended to be concentrated on seizing booty since it was hard to hold onto territory. As most farmers had nothing to seize, the most valuable treasure was slaves (i.e., the farmers them-

³⁰ See Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 1–2.

³¹ The history is reviewed in J. E. Casely Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1970), pp. 183–4.

³² The Fanti Constitution is reprinted in John Mensah Sabah, *The Fanti National Constitution* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), pp. 201–3.

³³ Fanti Confederation, "Scheme to be Submitted to His Excellency Governor J. Pope Hennessey," in *ibid.*, p. 194.

³⁴ Kenneth C. Wylie, *Temne Government in Sierra Leone* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1977), p. 55.

selves).³⁵ Due to the slave trade, capturing people who later could be sold to the Europeans or Omanis or other Africans was, in fact, one of the most profitable activities that could be undertaken at particular times in many parts of the continent. Of course, the slave trade only contributed to the notion that true power was not synonymous with the control of land. Many African states continually tried to make forays into the interior to feed the continual demand for slaves but did not try to extend formal control into those areas because it was not profitable.

Central governments were often not concerned about what outlying areas did as long as tribute was paid (sometimes in the form of slaves), and there were no imminent security threats emerging to challenge the center.³⁶ This particular view of what control meant was made possible by the ability to separate ownership and control of land. Thus, a ruler might view a distant territory as owing some kind of tribute to him (leaders were all men) without any notion that he controlled the actions of the people in the outlying areas on a day-to-day basis. Kopytoff describes the general pattern of precolonial political authority:

The core, usually the area of earliest political consolidation, continued to be ruled directly by the central authority. Then came an inner area of closely assimilated and politically integrated dependencies. Beyond it was the circle of relatively secure vassal polities. . . . This circle merged with the next circle of tribute-paying polities, straining at the center's political leash. Beyond, the center's control became increasingly symbolic. . . . The center could only practice political intimidation and extract sporadic tribute through institutionalized raiding or undisguised pillage.³⁷

Thus, even a famous kingdom such as fourteenth-century Mali maintained what was only described as "loose political ties with the far-flung districts of an empire."³⁸ Or, consider the following description of Borgu's political power in western Sudan:

³⁵ Goody, *Technology, Tradition, and the State*, p. 36.

³⁶ Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 82. Similar views regarding the reach of certain African states have been noted by, among others, D. N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900–1850* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984), p. 36; Toyin Falola and Dare Oguntomisin, *The Military in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Politics* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1984), p. 25; S. P. Reyna, *Wars without End: The Political Economy of a Precolonial African State* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1990), pp. 156–7; and Sundiata A. Djata, *The Bamana Empire by the Niger* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997), p. 23.

³⁷ Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier," p. 29. See also Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law, and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 163–4; J. Vansina, "A Comparison of African Kingdoms," *Africa* 32 (October 1962): p. 330; and Reyna *Wars without End*, p. 67.

³⁸ Charlotte A. Quinn, *Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia: Traditionalism, Islam, and European Expansion* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 35.

Bussa's supremacy was not based on its political strength or extensive domains. . . . Whether tribute was paid or not depended on the strength of the Bussa king: a strong ruler had little trouble in enforcing payment of tribute for two reasons: first, if tribute was not forthcoming retaliatory action would have occurred, and second, the benefits of security and protection which accrued from an alliance with a strong ruler constituted an added incentive for payment.³⁹

Similarly, Reyna describes precolonial east-central Sudan as a "vast pointillist landscape" with each point being "a polity within a field of empire."⁴⁰ Finally, when Ashanti took over Dagomba, it "continued to be governed by its own king and chiefs, under its traditional laws and constitution, on condition that its capital and large towns paid, each year, a handsome tribute to Kumasi."⁴¹

Correspondingly, it was natural that many precolonial African states were exceptionally dynamic. Political organizations were created, rose, and fell naturally in response to opportunities and challenges.⁴² Many outlying territories found that they could escape their rulers' authority relatively easily. For instance, Jan Vansina writes of the central African kingdoms: "provinces could break off from the kingdom whenever circumstances were favorable. This happened in Kongo, in the Kuba kingdom, and in the Lunda empire, where every ruler who was far enough away . . . became independent."⁴³ Colson claims that, "Breakaway movements were common even in West Africa and the few other favoured regions where men made material improvements upon the land. Elsewhere they formed part of the history of every state."⁴⁴

Because the broadcasting of power was constrained, there was much more cultural diversity even within precolonial empires than in later European empires. African empires in the western and central Sudan, such as Mali and Kanem-Bornu, were similar to the loose-knit empires of the European Middle Ages such as the Holy Roman Empire and the large kingdom of the Angevins that existed on both sides of the English Channel. In all these empires, "the territorial extent of the empire depended not upon the ethnic or cultural unity of the subjects but upon the mili-

itary predominance and the dynastic alliances of the small ruling group."⁴⁵ Indeed, African invaders tended to be absorbed into the ranks of the conquered, especially as they tended to marry the daughters of commoners.⁴⁶ Of course, that type of conquest contained the seeds of its own demise. As in medieval Europe, "appointed officials tended to become hereditary, and hereditary subordinate rulers to become less zealous in carrying out the wishes of the paramount ruler. Control became more nominal, and less real, the more remote the center was. Dispersal of taxing rights invites—indeed, constitutes—fragmentation of sovereignty."⁴⁷

In most parts of Africa, ethnic and other attachments were constantly in flux as polities continually expanded and contracted. Thus, Colson notes the Ibo (in what is now Nigeria) who, starting in 1967, shed a tremendous amount of blood to create their own ethnic state:

In 1870 the Ibo lived in small autonomous village communities that warred on one another. They recognized no common political leaders, though adherence to a few popular shrines provided a means of exerting widespread influence. . . . The Ibo communities may have felt some common identification as against communities of non-Ibo speakers, but this was probably minimal since they had no common names for themselves nor any tradition of a former unity.⁴⁸

The Ibo, and many other groups, were organized in such a decentralized manner because, in their areas, it was simply too costly to create polities with a larger geographic reach and because no other polity could reach far enough to extend formal authority over them. Ibo identity would change over the next century as cost structures evolved to favor larger territorial units.

Imagining Power

Not surprisingly, African conceptions of how power was broadcast over distance reflected their states' capabilities and their particular material environments. While generalizations are inevitably faulty across such a broad range of polities, it can be said that power was (quite realistically) conceived of as a series of concentric circles radiating out from the core. Wilks, in his excellent study of Ashanti authority, reports two informants

³⁹ Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, *The African Middle Ages, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Jack Goody, "Decolonisation in Africa: National Politics and Village Politics," *Cambridge Anthropology* 7 (1982): p. 8.

⁴¹ Peter Wickins, *An Economic History of Africa: From the Earliest Times to Partition* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 229.

⁴² Colson, "African Society at the Time of the Scramble," p. 28.

³⁹ Majorie H. Stewart, *Borgu and its Kingdoms: A Reconstruction of a Western Sudanese Polity* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993), p. 208.

⁴⁰ Reyna, *Wars without End*, p. 165.

⁴¹ William Tordoff, "The Ashanti Confederacy," *Journal of African History* 3 (1962): pp. 402–3.

⁴² Among the many studies making this point, see S. I. G. Mudenge, *A Political History of Munhumutapa, c. 1400–1902* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988), p. 76.

⁴³ Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, p. 247.

⁴⁴ Colson, "African Society at the Time of the Scramble," p. 44.

one hundred and fifty years apart describing Ashanti authority in the same manner: rippling out from a center point. In a rather stunning example of how little topography mattered to precolonial rulers, power was seen as radiating out in a perfect circle despite the fact that the ocean essentially cut off the southern boundary long before it “should” have ended.⁴⁹ Similarly, in two of the very rare maps drawn by African leaders in the precolonial or early colonial period, the dispersal of power is portrayed in much the same manner. In the map drawn by Caliph Muhammad Bello for Captain Clapperton in 1824 (Map 2.1) and the more detailed one drawn by Sultan Njoya of Bamum when offering his kingdom to British suzerainty in December 1915 (Map 2.2), power is displayed as radiating out from a center. As Yearwood notes:

both [maps] were dominated by a centrally placed capital with its main buildings, while the outlying territories were greatly compressed. The Sokoto Caliphate appeared as a set of cities, shown as circles, dominated by the mosques and places of Sokoto; Bamum as a network of roads linking outlying towns to the capital. In Bello’s map there was no political border, while in Njoya’s it was an inconspicuous feature.⁵⁰

The emphasis on the political center and the relative inattention paid to the hinterland nicely reflects the reality of power in precolonial Africa.

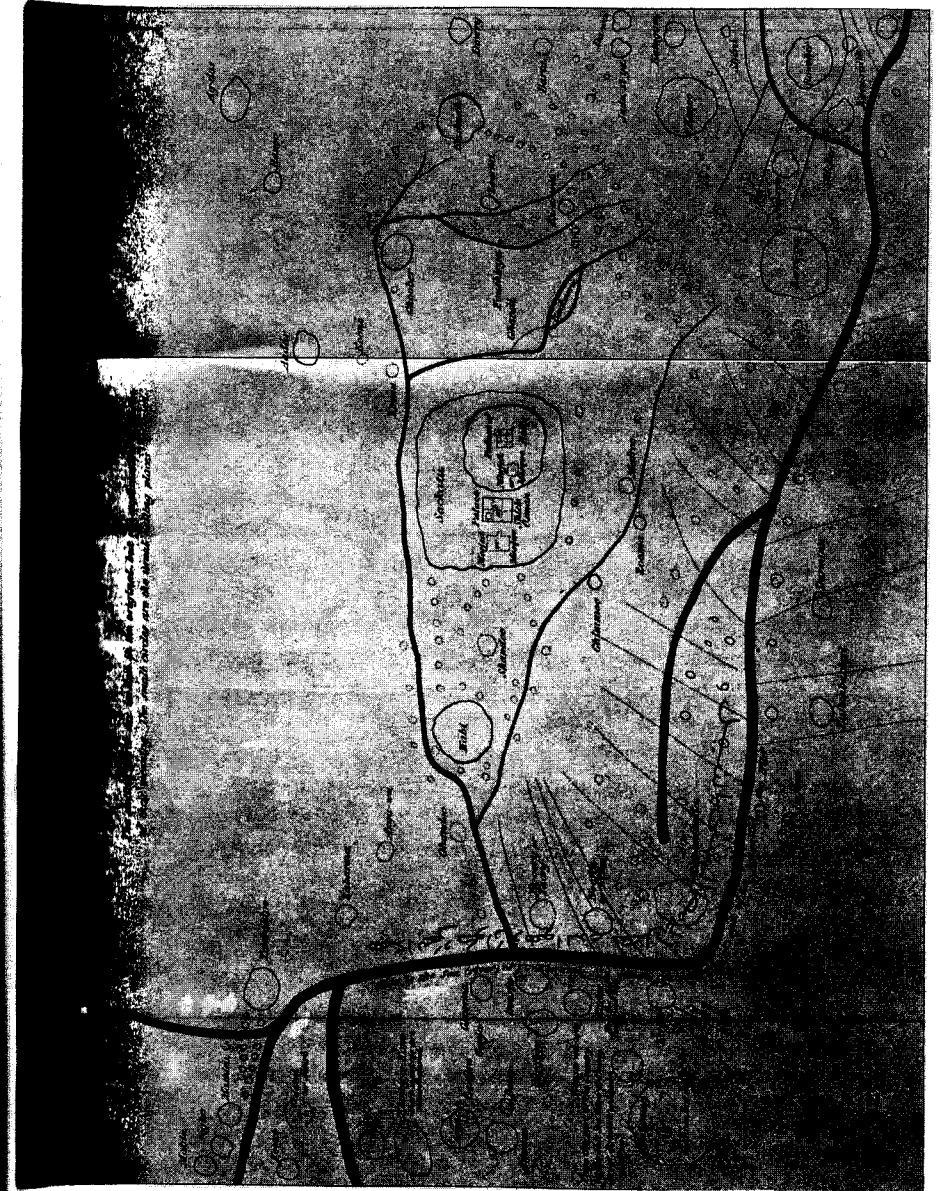
The Determinants of Power

The physiology of the precolonial African state was radically different from what was found in postmedieval Europe, where more attention was devoted to physically controlling (more valuable) territory and, in particular, significant assets were placed in the hinterland to deter and to defeat possible invaders. While African leaders would not want, under normal circumstances, to lose territory to other powers, it would often not be worth the price to actually try to defend outlying areas. The foregone revenue was probably not great since the area was at the periphery of the state. Given that sovereignty was not exclusive over many areas, it was quite possible that some revenue might still be received if the center could manage to mount attacks that might scare the outlying populace into paying tribute, no matter what the new masters did.

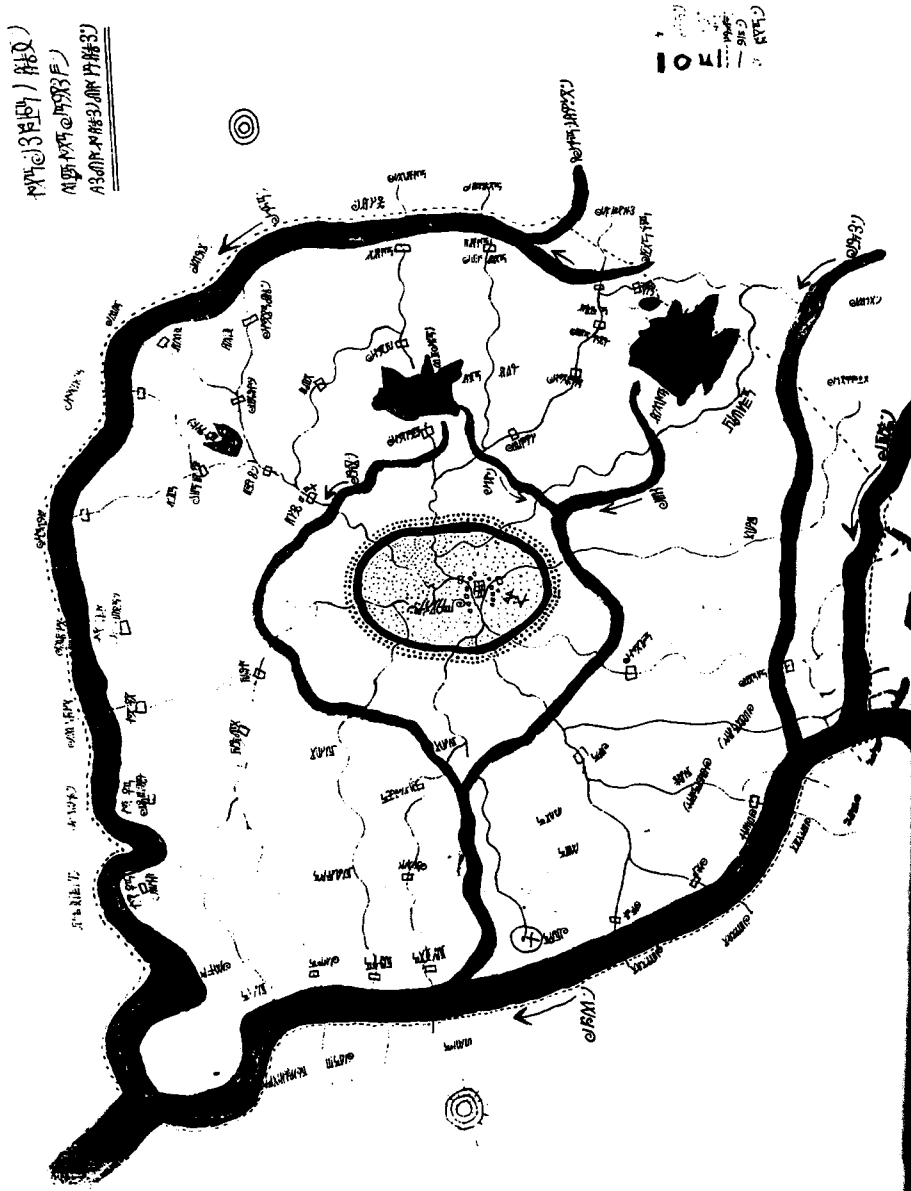
The diameters of the circles of authority were determined by how far

⁴⁹ Ivor Wilks, “On Mentally Mapping Greater Asante: A Study of Time and Motion,” *Journal of African History* 33 (1992): pp. 182–3.

⁵⁰ Peter J. Yearwood, “From Lines on Maps to National Boundaries: The Case of Northern Nigeria and Cameroun,” in *Maps and Africa*, ed. Jeffrey C. Stone (Aberdeen, U.K.: University of Aberdeen, 1994), pp. 36–7. The original citations are listed on the maps.



P 2.1. A reproduction of Caliph Muhammad Bello's Map of Central Africa. Source: Dixon, Hugh, Clapperton, and Walter Haden, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823, and 1824* (London: Murray, 1828), p. 370.



2.2. Map Drawn by an Njoya of Bamum in offering his kingdom to British authority in 1915. ref: C0649/7/10908, Royal Office Archives.

the center actually could project the different types of authority. Wilks reports that the Ashanti conceived of their empire as radiating out in all directions for twenty days walking or roughly a month for a messenger to depart from the capital Kumasi and return from the frontier. Any farther was deemed too difficult to administer because the lag in response time was too great. While the armies of Ashanti occasionally campaigned beyond the border, the “reach of government . . . was recognized as less than that of the military . . . The mental map of Greater Asante as a month reflected, it may be supposed, a rational recognition of reality: that without any major change in the speed of communications, no lands more distant than a month from Kumase, in and out, could effectively be administered even though they might be subdued for the duration of a campaign.”⁵¹ Wilks’s estimate of individuals covering about ten miles a day is similar to Hilton’s estimate of twelve miles per day in the Kongo Kingdom in what is now Angola and Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁵² The actual distance a messenger could walk in a reasonable period of time defined the boundary because the exercise of authority was bound tightly to the ability to project coercion. Olfert Dapper, a seventeenth-century Dutch geographer, provided a contemporary account of the inevitable result of not physically being able to reach an area in a reasonable period of time: “The Count of Soyo is the most powerful vassal of the King of Congo, but he is not the most faithful or the most subject. Because the forest of Findemguolla encompassing his states serves as a strong bulwark and renders him nearly inaccessible to a great army, this count no longer wants to recognize the King of Congo as his sovereign and believes that he should be given the status of an ally.”⁵³

Across Africa, states were naturally largest in the savannah belt of West Africa because, “only here could horses and camels be used to speed the movement of armies and to permit large-scale trade between the various regions.”⁵⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, in some areas of Africa, it was so difficult to broadcast power that there were, essentially, no centralized political organizations above village level. Although African historiography has shown a profound bias against studying stateless societies, there were areas, such as Eastern Nigeria, where the broadcasting power did not extend beyond each individual village.⁵⁵

African states were expanding in the nineteenth century immediately

⁵¹ Wilks, “On Mentally Mapping Greater Asante,” p. 184.

⁵² Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of the Kongo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 83.

⁵³ Olfert Dapper, “The Kingdom of Congo,” in *Central and South African History*, trans. Robert O. Collins (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1990), p. 35.

⁵⁴ Colson, “African Society at the Time of the Scramble,” p. 35.

⁵⁵ David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in Southern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 3.

before the European division of the continent. Hargreaves speaks of an "African partition of Africa" in West Africa during the nineteenth century citing, among other developments, the Fulani jihad of Sokoto, the rise of Bornu, and the empires of Samory and Rabeh.⁵⁶ Elsewhere in Africa, relatively large states were being created, including the rise of the Zulu empire, the strengthening of the Malagassy state under Radama I, and the cementing of the Omani hegemony on the East African coast under Sayyid Said. As Hrbek notes, there was in many parts of Africa in the nineteenth century, "the growth of a unified and highly centralised state with an absolute monarch unrestricted in his power by any freely elected council."⁵⁷

The expansion of some states in Africa in the nineteenth century was an important development. While local forces were undoubtedly crucial in the rise of these states, "all these processes were going on in the 'contact' zones and were due to some extent to external impact and influence."⁵⁸ Many states grew because of their ability to participate in the increasing amount of international trade generated by the growing European presence on the coasts of Africa. Thus, Wilks describes the building of the Akan state: "Those who controlled the production and sale of gold were those able to procure a supply of unfree labor. Those who procured unfree labor were those able to create arable land within the forrest. Those who created the arable [land] were those who founded the numerous early Akan polities."⁵⁹ Even more important was the introduction of the gun into parts of Africa in the nineteenth century. The gun, wielded by soldiers on horses, changed some of the calculations of power in Africa because these weapons made it easier to conquer relatively large amounts of low-value territory. One commentator on the rise of Bornu noted the effects of firearms:

Among the benefits which God (Most High) of His bounty and beneficence, generosity, and constancy conferred upon the Sultan was the acquisition of Turkish musketeers and numerous household slaves who became skilled in firing muskets. Hence the Sultan was able to kill the people of Amaska with muskets, and there was no need for other weapons, so that God gave him a great victory by reason of his superiority in arms.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ John D. Hargreaves, "West African States and the European Conquest," in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duigan vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 199.

⁵⁷ Ivan Hrbek, "Towards a Periodisation of African History," in *Emerging Themes of African History*, ed. T. O. Ranger (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968), p. 48.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of the Asante* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993), p. 96.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Goody, *Technology, Tradition, and the State*, p. 54.

Guns also reinforced the centralization of power because, unlike the bow and arrow, they could be kept in magazines until they were needed and then collected. The fact that gun manufacturing did not become significant in Africa, in contrast to Japan and Ceylon, which quickly developed indigenous means of manufacturing firearms, furthered centralization because the weapons could only be garnered in trades with Europeans, transactions that usually were controlled by the central state.⁶¹

Although trade and the introduction of the gun may have allowed African polities during the nineteenth century to expand their circles of rule, different practices and traditions regarding the expansion and consolidation of state power did not emerge. The large states and empires that appeared were not able to develop fundamentally different systems for ruling their hinterlands that would have allowed for the extension of more formal types of control. There may simply not have been enough time, given that the European conquest of Africa followed shortly after the introduction of the gun. At the same time, the basic fact that population densities were so low that the value of land was fundamentally different than in Europe and Asia had not changed.

That the size of some African polities changed in response to new economic opportunities and technological developments suggests that precolonial Africa had dynamic states that can, in fact, be understood using the traditional tools of politics. Rather than simply being "primitive" or so unlike other states that they were unique, precolonial African polities developed as logical responses to their physical environments, most notably the cost of extending power over distance, much like European states developed characteristics in response to the overwhelming characteristic of their political environment: war for territory. Those who consign precolonial polities to the realm of anthropology miss a great deal.

However, those who would romanticize the African past also ignore the rather brutal power calculations that African leaders were making. For instance, Basil Davidson, in his history of the state in Africa, claims that "They [precolonial states] endured because they were accepted. And they were accepted because their rules of operation were found to be sufficiently reasonable in providing explanation, and sufficiently persuasive in extracting obedience. . . . Dissidence and protest might be frequent. The structures of accountability could well enough absorb them."⁶² Similarly, Bates claims that in precolonial Africa, "those who held positions of privilege had to insure that the benefits created by the states were widely shared" because otherwise the citizenry would leave.⁶³ In fact,

⁶¹ This discussion depends on *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶² Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, p. 88.

⁶³ Bates, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*, p. 42.

there is little evidence from this review of power in precolonial Africa that the primary determinant of a state's duration was accountability (Davidson does not provide any either). Rather, the opposite appears to be true: states rose and fell, expanded and contracted, largely in relation to the amount of coercion they were able to broadcast from the center. Those states that expanded in the nineteenth century did so because the technologies of coercion, rather than of accountability, improved. Throughout the precolonial period, African states were exquisitely designed around the precise amounts of authority they were able to broadcast in particular areas, hardly an indication that the norms of reciprocity and accountability held major sway in precolonial Africa.

Buffer Mechanisms

Given the centrality of mechanisms for broadcasting power in precolonial Africa to the design and size of the state, buffer mechanisms are particularly important to examine. If African states could avail themselves to ways of regulating flows of people, money, or goods from neighboring states, they might be able to strengthen their presence in outlying areas without depending on the rather expensive deployment of coercion. In fact, buffer mechanisms were largely absent in Africa. As a result, the ambiguous nature of authority in outlying areas was aggravated because there was no way for states to substitute for the use of coercion when extending their writ of authority.

The absence of buffer mechanisms is most obvious when examining territorial boundaries. Societies without maps were hardly in a position to create hard territorial boundaries. In fact, the notion of the "frontier as boundary," was largely unknown in precolonial Africa.⁶⁴ Power tended to dissipate in increasingly distant hinterlands that were under the nominal control of a distant center rather than be marked by sharp geographic disjunctures. Frontiers tended to be thought of as border regions or zones where more than one polity could actively exercise authority and where the contours of power were confused rather than corresponding to the rigid demarcations of the modern world.⁶⁵

Similarly, precolonial African states lacked the ability to control two of the most common and important flows across boundaries: people and money. For instance, the free movement of people was a widely accepted tenant in many precolonial polities. Shack notes, "there is just enough evidence to suggest that African strangers, and indeed strangers of other

⁶⁴ A. I. Asiwaju, "The Concept of Frontier in the Setting of States in Pre-Colonial Africa," *Presence Africaine* 127/128 (1983): p. 45.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46. See also Aidan W. Southall, *Alur Society: A Study of Processes and Types of Domination* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 248.

racial and ethnic origins, once moved with relative ease between indigenous African polities."⁶⁶ Of course, relatively large amounts of open land allowed for the easy acceptance of strangers but the fact remains that no mechanism or set of norms was ever developed to control inflows of people in most precolonial polities.

Also, many African polities had no official currency that might reinforce their physical presence in remote areas by demanding that legal tender be in a particular form. Instead, states adopted the currency that was most popular throughout the trading region. For instance, by the end of the seventeenth century, both iron and copper rods were commonly found in West Africa. During the nineteenth century, cowrie shells became increasingly important, and their use was particularly noticeable along major trade routes of West Africa. However, even during much of the nineteenth century, manillas (horseshoe-shaped currencies made of copper and brass) and metal bars were used in many parts of the region, especially in the hinterland away from major trading areas.⁶⁷

The uses of cowries and metal rods as currency in West Africa meant that there was no currency exchange mechanism. Cowries were used, for instance, to pay for goods from East Africa and were also circulated throughout the West African internal market. There were multiple sources of cowries and of other currencies. Since no one state controlled the money supply, sudden inflations sometimes occurred because new technologies or new traders could suddenly drastically increase the supply of one or more of the currencies. For instance, after 1850, West Africa experienced the great cowrie inflation when the currency rapidly lost value, in part because of increases in its availability due to importation of the shells by the European powers.⁶⁸ Precolonial states were unable to protect themselves from this sudden debasement of their own currency. It would be hard to find a more dramatic example of how difficult it was for these states to mediate pressures from the international environment.

State Systems without Maps

Just as individual African polities were designed in accordance with their environments, so precolonial African international relations evolved according to the particular domestic circumstances facing individual states.

⁶⁶ William A. Shack, introduction to *Strangers in African Societies*, ed. William A. Shack and Elliott P. Skinner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 8.

⁶⁷ On currency history, see Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers*, pp. 157-63 and Marion Johnson, "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa, Part One," *Journal of African History* 11 (1970): pp. 32-7.

⁶⁸ Okonkwo A. Nwani, "The Quantity Theory in the Early Monetary System of West Africa with Particular Emphasis on Nigeria, 1850-1895," *The Journal of Political Economy* 83 (February 1975): p. 190.

Arguably, the most distinctive aspect of precolonial international relations, in contrast to the current international system, was the diversity of states. African states were not necessarily unitary because the extension of power was so confused. cursory examination of what appear to have been unitary states immediately reveals a much more complex reality made possible, in part, by the unbundling of ownership and control of land. In the Sokoto Caliphate, and undoubtedly elsewhere, Adeleye reminds us that even at the height of that state's power, "the area within its perimeter did not wholly come under its jurisdiction" as there were still "pockets of enemy states and people."⁶⁹ Similarly, as Wilks notes for Ashanti, "It is arguable that the union, the Asanteman, has survived precisely because different (and even conflicting) concepts of its nature have always been possible. Did member states, for example, have a right to secede, or was the union indissoluble?"⁷⁰ Finally, the early Yoruba kingdom of Oyo is described as "a large number of internally autonomous kingdoms whose rulers were said to derive their crowns from Oyo and were the vassals of the Alafin."⁷¹

African international relations reflected the complexity of shared sovereignty and multiple state forms. Thomas Hodgkin provides some very good examples:

This aspect of international untidiness, so to speak, may help one to understand why the Merinid sultan should on occasion address the ruler of independent Mali as though he were a vassal; why Idris Aloma should at the same time regard himself, and generally be regarded, as *Khalifa* and appear to accept the Caliphate of al-Mansur; why Umar, Shehu of Bornu, should describe himself as "the Mutawalli of Bornuh Province" when addressing the Pasha of Tripoli, just as almost three centuries earlier Mai Idris, while clearly recognized as the ruler of an independent state beyond the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, can yet be described by Murad III as *wali* of the *waliya* of Bornu; why for a long period of time it should have been uncertain whether Masina under Shaikh Ahmadu fell within the Sokoto Caliphate or was a Caliphate in its own right."

This confusion was similar to that experienced in medieval Europe when there was a much less clearly defined international system. As Garrett Mattingly notes, "Kings made treaties with their own vassals and with the

⁶⁹ R. A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804-1906* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), pp. 52-3.

⁷⁰ Wilks, *Forests of Gold*, p. 112.

⁷¹ Peter Morton-Williams, "The Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo," in *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Daryll Forde and P. M. Kaberry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 37.

⁷² Thomas Hodgkin, "Diplomacy and Diplomats in the Western Sudan," in *Foreign Relations of African States*, ed. K. Ingham (London: Butterworths, 1974), p. 22.

vassals of their neighbors. They received embassies from their own subjects and from the subjects of other princes, and sometimes sent agents who were in fact ambassadors in return. Subject cities negotiated with one another without reference to their respective sovereigns."⁷³ The precolonial African state system nicely reflected the domestic realities on the ground. As power was shifting and difficult to maintain over distance, the very nature of diplomacy between units was likely to be complicated. Interstate relations were not seen as completely distinct from the domestic maintenance of power. For instance, there were few instances in precolonial Africa of separate offices to handle foreign affairs.⁷⁴ Embassies tended to be of the "visiting" type because communications were so poor and because the hierarchy of power was so ill-defined that permanent missions were impossible to establish and probably unnecessary.⁷⁵ As boundaries were confused, often there was simply no clear line to demarcate the end of domestic politics and the beginning of foreign affairs, although formal diplomacy between distinctly different states was possible and did occur.

Overall, precolonial Africa was a state system without fictions. Instead of pretending that a state controlled an area that it could not physically reach, much more nuanced and subtle possibilities of shared sovereignty were possible. Instead of simply assuming that the formal political center spoke for the entire polity, there was far less of a distinction between domestic and foreign affairs as the state negotiated with other states and, sometimes, its composite parts. Finally, instead of developing a template that all states had to fit, there was a diversity of forms in precolonial Africa that was appropriate to the very different physical and economic settings in different parts of the continent. Rather than simple "primitivism," these developments reflect an appreciation of how power was actually deployed in precolonial Africa. The form and practice of domestic and international politics was in harmony with the challenges posed by the political geography.

Conclusion

Using the analytic scheme developed in chapter one, it is now possible to understand in a comprehensive manner the extension of authority in precolonial Africa. Cost calculations directed leaders to formally control only a political core that might be a small percentage of the territory over which they had at least some claim because the cost of extending formal

" Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, p. 26.

" Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa*, pp. 10-11.

" Hodgkin, "Diplomacy and Diplomats in the Western Sudan," p. 20.

authority in Africa was very high. This particular cost structure came about for several reasons. First, the physical geography was daunting to leaders, especially given the limited technologies of coercion that they could employ, although states did expand when the technologies of power, especially after the introduction of the gun, improved. Second, formal control was difficult to achieve given the primacy of exit and the unbundling of sovereignty and control. The immediate fixed costs facing any leader who wished to extend authority were thus extremely high as roads were expensive to build and armies could only be deployed so far. As a result, beyond the political core, power tended to diminish over distance.

Second, African states had few ways in which to mediate the pressures from outside their core areas, especially regarding the regulation of flows of people or money. This was hardly surprising given that boundaries were soft: the presence of zones where sovereignty was essentially shared with neighboring polities made it very difficult for strong mechanisms to exist that would have insulated individual units from flows of people and money. At the same time, the physiology of African states meant that there was little need to establish firm buffer mechanisms because many developments affecting people and money in outlying areas were of little concern to the core, given that the central political authorities did not have the ambition of formally ruling over distant areas. Of course, the lack of buffer mechanisms also strengthened the need for states to have differing levels of authority over different areas.

Finally, the state system that precolonial Africans developed also heightened the costs African leaders faced when extending power. Precolonial leaders received no help from the international system. If they only partially controlled an outlying area, some other state was able to fill the remaining vacuum. If no state could extend authority of any type into an area, then a vacuum was tolerated and decentralized villages were left to govern themselves. Further, if a state's hold over an outlying area became more tenuous, it was perfectly legitimate for the hinterland to break away. The bill for extending authority was always due and it could never be avoided.

In terms of the basic model developed in chapter one, all three factors (cost, boundaries, and the state system) under consideration make it relatively difficult to extend the power of the state. States found it hard to extend authority from the center outward. At the same time, the weakness of boundaries made it impossible to delimit an area that could then be claimed exclusively by a state. Finally, the state system was unforgiving and did not allow for the extension of formal authority without the deployment of a corresponding power infrastructure. As a result, considerations revolving around the costs of extending power dominated political

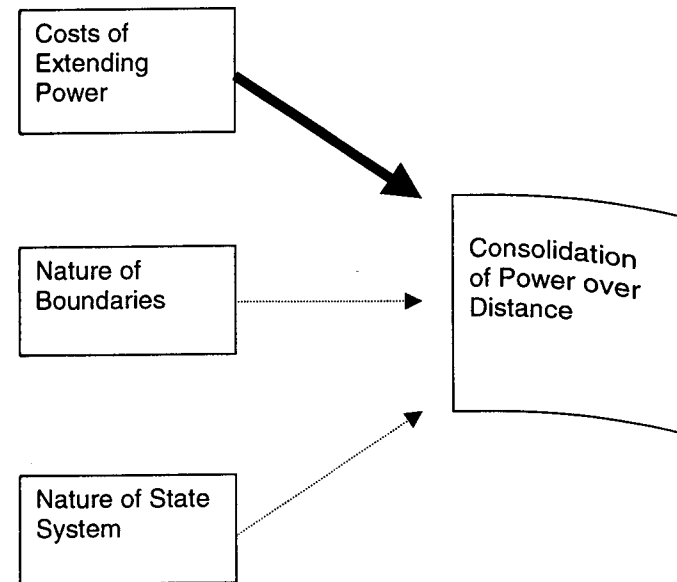


Figure 2.1. Paths to State Consolidation in Precolonial Africa

calculations. Precolonial African states therefore had precisely the opposite physiology of many in Europe: the power assets were concentrated in the center with gradations of authority extending into the hinterland. The European model of placing significant assets in the hinterland to protect against outsiders and to make the boundaries real was neither viable nor relevant.

Given time, it is possible that basic calculations of power, and the African state system itself, might have changed fundamentally in light of the developments prompted by increased international trade and new weaponry in the nineteenth century. The dynamism of the precolonial portion of the nineteenth century suggests that African leaders were beginning to dramatically change their calculations of how it was possible to broadcast power. However, just as these new developments were becoming salient and the new African states were reaching maturity, the European conquest of Africa began in earnest. Africans were suddenly confronted with peoples who had very different conceptions of power but who would have to operate in the same physical environment as the precolonial leaders. What the Europeans did and did not change is the focus of the next chapter.

Three

The Europeans and the African Problem

The problem continues unsolved. The conquering races of the world stand perplexed and worried before the difficulties which beset their enterprise of reducing that continent [Africa] to subjection.

Edward W. Blyden, *The African Problem and the Method of its Solution*

THE PROFOUND CHANGES wrought by European colonialism in Africa have legitimately been cited as so fundamental as to mark a new era in African politics. Crawford Young, in his monumental review of the African colonial state, argues that many of the pathologies of modern Africa can be traced to the particularities of colonialism in Africa.¹ In addition to creating the immediate predecessors to today's states, the Europeans brought about a host of other changes in Africa that have reverberated to our own time: they created a system of boundaries and frontiers new to Africa; they established novel economic systems based on mines and cash crops; they built infrastructure systems that still determine patterns of trade; and they left their religions, languages, and cultural practices.

However, the significance of the profound changes the Europeans wrought often obscures the fact that they also developed an intricate set of responses to the problem of how to control people and territory in sparsely settled lands while devoting the absolute minimum to administration. What the Afro-Caribbean diplomat Edward W. Blyden called "the African Problem"—the inability of Europe to conquer Africa in the same manner as other regions—continued throughout the brief (by historical standards) period of formal European rule. As a result, analyzing the European extension of power in Africa is particularly difficult because the massive changes imposed by the Europeans direct attention away from the incomplete and highly differentiated manner in which they actually ruled over different parts of the continent.

Given the schizophrenic nature of colonial power in Africa, it is not

surprising that a remarkable amount of disagreement exists about the nature of the states the Europeans created. On one side, there is Robert H. Jackson's almost benign description of colonialism: "In most cases they [the colonial governments] were little more than elementary bureaucracies with limited personnel and finances and were more comparable to rural country governments in Europe than to modern independent States."² In other work, Jackson has argued that colonialism was a highly legalistic, rule-based system:

It is obvious that Western powers had certain military and economic interests in partitioning the non-Western world into various dependencies. They staked their claims on a wide scale in the latter half of the [nineteenth] century; but they rarely did so outside of a legal and moral framework that, while accommodating the interests of the great powers, also recognized and respected the legitimate concerns and rights of all sovereign states, large and small.³

On the other side, Crawford Young repeatedly uses the image of *Bula Matari*, the crusher of rocks, to describe colonial states in Africa, which had despotic tendencies despite the precariousness of their rule. Young writes that the colonial state, "managed in a short time to assert a powerful hold on subject society and smash its resistance."⁴ Young finds the motivation for creating this instrument of hegemony in the Berlin West African Conference (hereafter called the "Berlin Conference") of 1884/1885, which demanded effective occupation as the basis for the exercise of sovereign power. He suggests:

The affirmation at Berlin of the "effective occupation" doctrine made clear that sketching out vague spheres of influences would not suffice for confirmation of proprietary title. . . . The hegemony imperative, driven by the doctrine of effective occupation, immediately required a skeletal grid of regional administration. Its priorities were clear, its tasks minimal: the imposition of basic order and the creation of a revenue flow.⁵

As a result, by World War I, Young finds that, "the basic superstructure of hegemony was in place. The allocation of colonial space among the imperial occupants had been resolved; the territorial grid of alien domination was firmly in place."⁶ Thus, it is hardly surprising that Young and

¹ Robert H. Jackson, "Sub-Saharan Africa," in *States in a Changing World: A Contemporary Analysis*, ed. Robert H. Jackson and Alan James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 139.

² Robert H. Jackson, "The Weight of Ideas in Decolonization: Normative Change in International Relations," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, ed. Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 115.

³ Young, *The African Colonial State*, p. 139.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹ Young, *The African Colonial State*, p. 9.

Turner could describe the Congolese state, that bastard child of colonialism, as having a desire to organize the economic and political space of the colony so that no subject could “escape the overarching uniformities imposed by the nature of the state, its vocation of total control of the subject population, and its productionist orientation.”⁷ They approvingly cite Balandier when noting that “domination—pervasive, systematic, comprehensive characterized all aspects of the ‘colonial situation.’”⁸

Mahmood Mamdani has a different vision of colonialism but one that reaches many of the same conclusions as Young regarding the hegemonic reach of the colonial state. He starts by arguing that the overwhelming motivation for European colonialism in Africa was economic: “The end of slavery in the Western hemisphere underlined the practical need for organizing a new regime of compulsions, except this time within newly acquired African possessions.” Mamdani suggests that as slavery ended, Europeans needed to colonize Africans at home so that they could grow cotton for “the Satanic Mills.”⁹ As a result, a central assumption by Mamdani, like Young, is that the European powers were highly motivated. However, he places much more emphasis in his major work on the colonial state on the invention of tradition, an analytic concept first fully deployed in Africa by Terrence Ranger.¹⁰ For Mamdani, the Europeans had a clear cultural model that they worked methodically to impose on Africa in order to rule: “Like all colonial powers, the British worked with a single model of customary authority in precolonial Africa. The model was monarchical, patriarchal, and authoritarian. It presumed a king at the center of every polity, a chief on every piece of administrative ground, and a patriarch in every homestead or kraal.”¹¹ Similar to Young, Mamdani argues that colonialists were able to extend their rule throughout their African possessions: “The more custom was enforced, the more the tribe was restructured and conserved as a more or less self-contained community—autonomous but not independent—as it never had been before. Encased by custom, frozen into so many tribes, each under the fist of its own Native Authority, the subject population was, as it were, containerized.”¹²

However, he places far less emphasis on the level of physical force (the

⁷ Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 36.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 37.

¹⁰ Terrence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹¹ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, p. 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

crushing of rocks) than Young. Rather, Mamdani argues that, “European rule in Africa came to be defined by a single-minded and overriding emphasis on the customary.” He suggests that this focus came about because of the British experience in India which evolved from a belief in a civilizing mission to a “law-and-order obsession with holding the line.”¹³ This is not to say that the colonialists were content to do little when they ruled Africa. Rather, Mamdani’s book is a long analysis of the many actions the Europeans took to create a “decentralized despotism” whereby, “achieving a hegemonic domination was a cultural project: one of harnessing the moral, historical, and community impetus behind local custom to a larger colonial project.”¹⁴

These debates revolve, in fact, around very different assumptions about how colonialism was able to project power. Jackson focuses on the very small size of the colonial governments, while Young is more concerned with the coercion that these small units (there is no debate about the limited presence of Europeans) imposed on African social systems. Mamdani finds that the Europeans were able to exercise power not in the traditional manner of direct rule but through changing notions of what was customary culture to both divide and rule.

It is clearly necessary, given the widely different views of colonialism, to develop a much more systematic view of the extension of European authority. Following the analytic scheme previously developed, this chapter explores the broadcasting of European power by examining the cost structure facing white leaders attempting to broadcast power, the nature of the boundaries established by the Europeans, and the state system that was created by the particular needs of state-builders and which, in turn, greatly affected the consolidation of power. However, unlike the three works discussed above, or almost any other study of European colonialism, this chapter does not simply assume that European rule represented a fundamental break in the way power was exercised on the African continent.

Colonialism before the Scramble

The harshness of European colonization of Africa during the twentieth century often obscures just how late formal control of territory by Europeans, especially in the hinterland, came to the continent. In fact, before 1885, very little territory beyond the coasts was formally controlled. For instance, the Portuguese, during their centuries of contact with Africa after 1500, opted not to conquer large amounts of territory, as the Span-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

ish did in the Americas, but instead tried to influence existing African polities by converting them to Christianity (e.g., the Kongo Kingdom based in São Salvador). Or a coastal capital was created to coordinate a system of trading bases that would obviate the need for formal control of the interior. Thus, the castle at Elmina controlled the entire Portuguese and later Dutch activities in West Africa while Cape Coast and Christenburg were the capitals for the English and Danish enterprises on the Guinea Coast. Eventually, the British would gain control over all three coastal outposts and select Accra as their capital.¹⁵

Little to nothing was done to formally control the interior. Thus Earl Grey, writing in 1853, wanted to consolidate and increase the influence of Britain on the Gold Coast and, in particular, hoped to build roads, which, he noted, "are in all countries among the most efficient instruments of civilization." However, Parliament was unwilling to increase the vote for that purpose.¹⁶ Grey and the Fanti Confederation clearly had much the same idea about the necessary infrastructure for rule, but Britain was unwilling to pay the fixed costs necessary to exercise control over the hinterland. In fact, British administrators, in what would become Ghana, argued as late as 1870 that there was no reason to maintain the old road network that had been central to the exercise of power in the past.¹⁷

The Select Committee on West Africa reporting in 1865 provides an excellent window into the specifically British, and more generally European, view of Africa twenty years before the Berlin Conference. The Select Committee had been asked to consider the status of British establishments on the West Coast of Africa. After taking extensive testimony, the committee acknowledged that the British government could not withdraw from West Africa, although there was clearly some sentiment among committee members to do so. The committee did recommend that there be a policy of not extending British presence to new territory or otherwise expanding the responsibility of the government except to promote the administration of existing settlements. Further, the committee hoped that British policy would be to encourage the transfer of administration to Africans.¹⁸ There was no vision of how Britain might actually formally control even the land near its then meager holdings in West Africa.

Thus, in 1865, the Lieutenant-Governor in the Cape Coast informed the secretary of state for the colonies that he had posted a notice defining

¹⁵ Christopher, "Urbanization and National Capitals in Africa," p. 410.

¹⁶ Earl Grey, *The Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), p. 280.

¹⁷ Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* p. 12.

¹⁸ Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast), *Report* (London: House of Commons, 1865), p. iii.

the limits of British territory as the distance of a cannon shot, or five miles from each castle or fort, in order to bring European laws to the Africans while not interfering with domestic slavery. The secretary of state responded that the Cape Coast government should "avoid any expression" that "bore the appearance of extended jurisdiction over territory at the Gold Coast."¹⁹ Similarly, before 1884, Germany and France were officially opposed to expansion into Africa and Portugal was too weak to realize her colonial ambitions.²⁰

Not surprisingly, given their limited ambitions for territorial control, the Europeans had adopted a very African view of space and boundaries. As late as 1750, the "film of fact" that Europeans had for Africa, in comparison to the much more distant Asia and the Americas, was very thin. For instance, "nothing was known of the course of the White Nile before it met with the Blue beyond the reports of Ptolemy sixteen hundred years before, the course of the Congo was unknown except for the last one hundred and fifty miles, and even the direction of the flow of the Niger was uncertain."²¹ Colonel Ord, when testifying before the Select Committee in 1865 admitted, when asked what constituted the northern boundary of the Cape Coast protectorate, "We know so little of the interior of the country, that I am unable to say. The natives themselves, no doubt, are fully aware of what constitutes the boundaries between their respective countries [*sic*]." He went on to admit that as regards the eastern frontier, "There is no definite boundary."²²

There were many reasons for the late and limited European interest in Africa. Lack of commercial opportunities was certainly important. Hallett concludes that, "Europe possessed no strong incentive to explore what was, after all, by far the poorest of the great continents."²³ Even in the early 1880s, on the eve of the scramble for Africa, the British government still expressed little interest in African colonies, demanding that they pay for themselves, an unlikely prospect given the high fixed cost of establishing administrative structures. In the words of the permanent under secretary of the Colonial Office, Sir Frederick Rogers, African colonies were "expensive and troublesome."²⁴ In addition, Europeans tended to die in large numbers when they tried to live on the continent. That West Africa was "the white man's grave" convinced James Africanus

¹⁹ Africanus B. Horton, *Letters on the Political Conditions of the Gold Coast*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1970), p. 155.

²⁰ Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 17.

²¹ Robin Hallett, "The European Approach to the Interior of Africa in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 4 (1963): p. 191.

²² Quoted in Select Committee on Africa, *Report*, p. 41.

²³ Hallett, "The European Approach to the Interior of Africa," p. 196.

²⁴ Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, p. 48.

Horton that the permanent occupation of West Africa "is impossible of realization; it is a mistake and a delusion."²⁵

South Africa, after the discovery of the Witwatersrand, was an exception to the general African pattern. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, the tremendous mineral discoveries around the Rand prompted massive white immigration and the creation of what was, in places, an extraordinarily well-developed state apparatus. However, despite the effort by Rhodes and others to find the "second Rand" in other parts of Southern Africa (often called "the white man's sanitarium"), a significant European presence did not develop there until very late in the colonial period. Great Britain only reluctantly took control of Southern Rhodesia in 1923 after the failure of the British South Africa Company to find another mineral extravagance. In fact, half of the Rhodesian white population immigrated after 1945. Similarly, Portuguese rule in Mozambique and Angola, while stretching back centuries, was sporadic, and Lisbon was unable to move much beyond its coastal acquisitions. Colonies were allowed to disappear and the large white settlements that characterized both territories right before independence in the 1970s were products of the *Estado Novo* created by Antonio Salazar in 1928.²⁶

For most of the nineteenth century, as Hargreaves notes, "The object of 'free-trade imperialism' was to extend the area open to European activity, rather than to establish national reservations."²⁷ European practices were largely congruent with existing precolonial politics that did not stress the control of territory. As a result, in the mid-nineteenth century, the great West African leader Al Haj 'Umar said, "the whites are only traders."²⁸ In many ways, before 1885, the Europeans were just another African group that played the political game according to long-established rules. Especially beyond the coasts, there is little evidence of any kind of significant colonial project that would foreshadow European domination of Africa in later years.

A State System for Conquest on the Cheap

The scramble for Africa that broke out in the last decades of the nineteenth century is not easily explained. A necessary development was the advent of new technologies that finally allowed Europeans to conquer

²⁵ James Africanus Horton, *West African Countries and Peoples* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), p. 69.

²⁶ Young, *The African Colonial State*, p. 152.

²⁷ J. D. Hargreaves, "The Making of the Boundaries: Focus on West Africa," in *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984*, ed. A. I. Asiwaju (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 19.

²⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*

THE AFRICAN PROBLEM

the continent nearest to them. By the 1850s, quinine prophylaxis reduced deaths from malaria by four-fifths and made occupation possible. More importantly, by the mid-1880s, French forces had adopted the Maxim gun, which fired eleven bullets per second. Muskets used early in the 1800s took a minute to load, had a range of 80 meters, and a variety of factors motivated the scramble: European advances in the world, significant open land to conquer elsewhere in the division of Africa, even if there was uncertainty about the nature of the spoils of Africa, yielding in general to the precise factor that was most important in its search for a rich historical Africa that will inevitably be inconclusive in its search for a rich historical Africa. Hobson's and Lenin's view of colonialism inspired for a rich historical Africa had, but makes little sense for the rest of Africa. As Iliffe noted, Africa was not central to European economies: during the 1870s it accounted for little more than 5 per cent of Britain's trade, most of it with Egypt and South Africa. Commercial interests in tropical Africa were vital to annexation on the west coast, but elsewhere merchants, such as Germans in Zanzibar, often opposed colonial conquest lest it disrupt existing trade. . . . Rhodes's British South Africa Company never paid a dividend during the thirty-three years it administered Rhodesia.³¹

As is now well known, for Great Britain, the vast majority of investments after 1870 did not go to Africa or Asia, but to other parts of the Commonwealth and to South America.³² There is, for example, very little evidence that land was conquered for cotton, the commodity in areas they had conquered (note the sequencing), they fostered cotton in areas they were not that committed: "Had the opposing forces within the colonial state agreed on a consistent strategy of colonial development, had it had better access to financial and ideological resources, and had the senior

³¹ Iliffe, *Africans*, p. 192.

³² The debate is a long and interesting one. The major statements include D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973); J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: James Pott and Company, 1902); Robert C. Tucker, *Imperialism: The Official Mind of the Victorians* (New York: Knopf Press, 1963); and V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1916).

³³ Iliffe, *Africans*, p. 192.

³⁴ D. K. Fieldhouse, "Imperialism: An Historiographical Review" 14 (1961): p. 199.

colonial administration been less ambivalent about the use of compulsion, perhaps the outcome would have been different."³³ Lewis concludes, generally for tropical administration: "The prevailing posture of colonial governments continued to be one of neglect, even after the transport revolutions had opened up new possibilities."³⁴

The True Colonial Achievement

What is most remarkable about the scramble for Africa is not that it happened, but that it occurred so late, so fast, and without significant fighting between the colonialists. In the twenty-five years beginning in 1880, Africa—still mysterious in the mid-1870s, and then considered *terra incognita*—was colonized, and ten million square miles and one hundred and ten million people (including North Africa) were brought under European rule.³⁵ Maps 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 demonstrate how quickly the Europeans moved from 1880 to 1914, when colonial occupation was largely finished. It was not obvious, *a priori*, that Europe could have divided up so a large land mass so quickly without conflict given the tensions on the European continent at the time and the rather remarkable tendency for Europeans to go to war.

Further, adding to the complexity of the European task of dividing Africa was the nature of the changes in frontiers formal colonialism imposed. The Europeans could not continue to play by African rules given that the norm of unambiguous sovereignty was so deeply imbedded in their operational code, especially the precept that each square foot of land could be controlled by one and only one power. During the conquest, they rejected the fuzzy borders that had been adopted through the long period of partial European occupation of the coast. Lugard wrote, "something had to be done to prevent European rivalries developing into war. . . . Our rivals were constantly enroaching on our shadowy boundaries."³⁶ Tellingly, the scramble initiated a huge effort to map Africa. As the colonial project progressed, geographers were soon asking, "How can we get maps of Africa?"³⁷

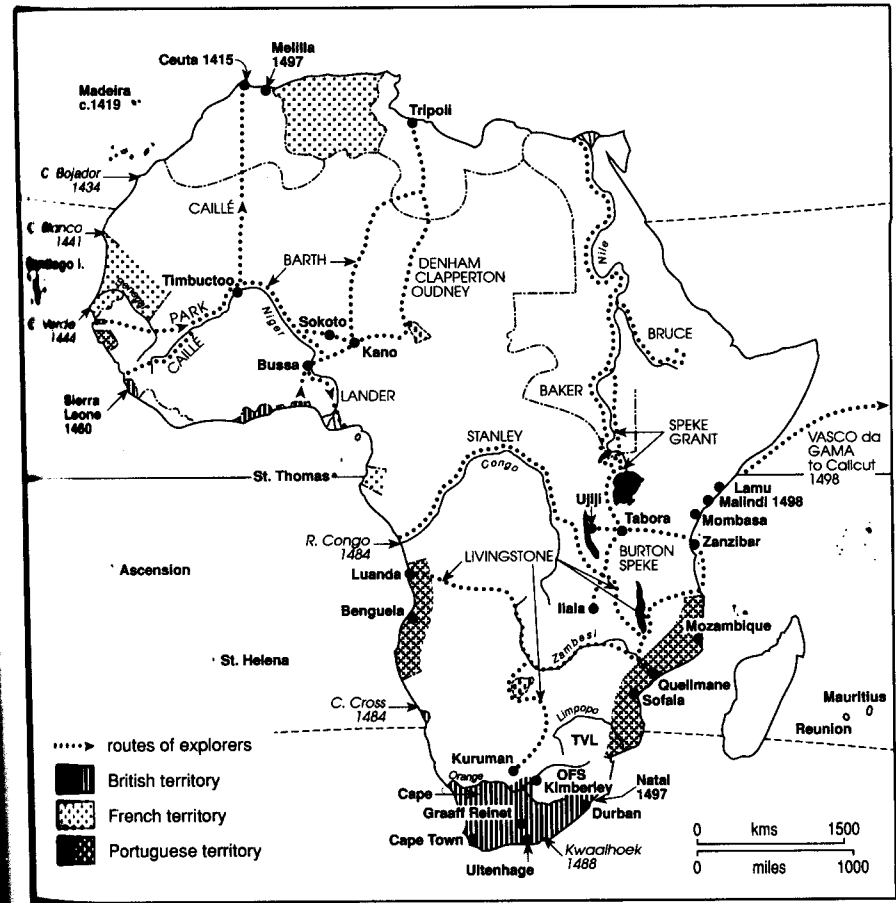
³³ Richard L. Roberts, *Two Worlds of Cotton: Colonialism and the Regional Economy of the French Soudan, 1800–1946* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 10. See generally Anne Phillips, *The Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989), p. 156.

³⁴ W. Arthur Lewis, *Growth and Fluctuations* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), p. 212.

³⁵ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), p. 1.

³⁶ Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 5th ed. (London: Frederick Cass and Co., 1965), p. 14.

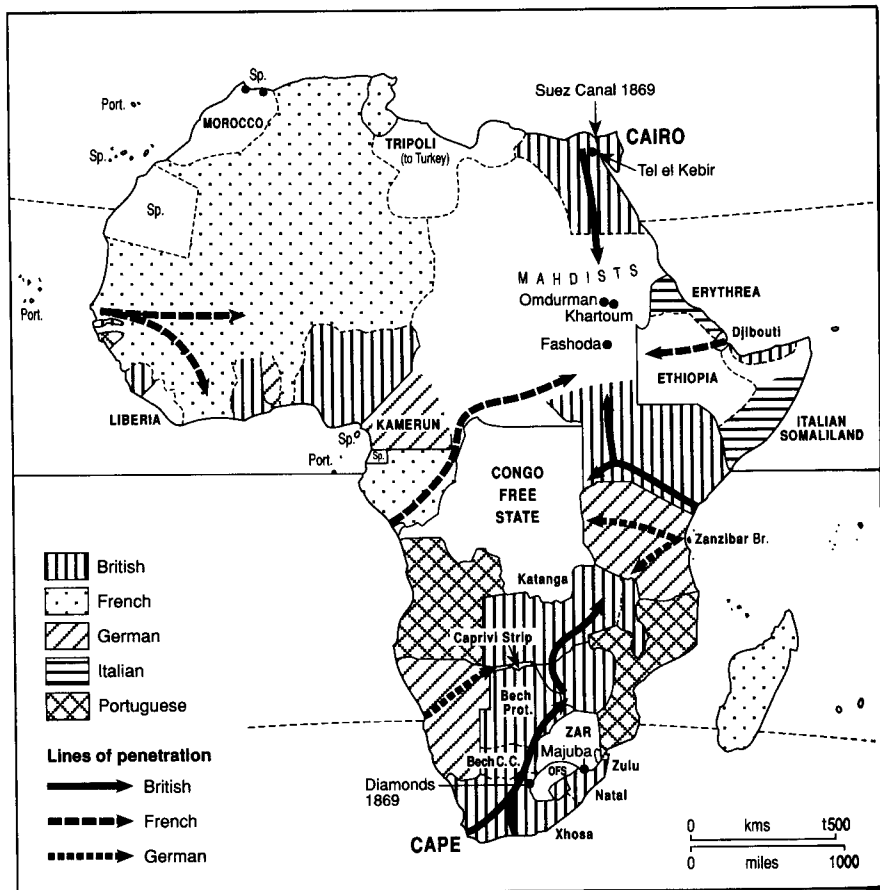
³⁷ See the article with that title by J. H. Holdich, *The Geographic Journal* 18 (1903), especially p. 591.



Map 3.1. European Penetration to 1880. Source for Maps 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 is Brian L.L. Griffiths, *The Atlas of African Affairs*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1974). Used with permission of the publisher.

Neither Administrators nor Conquerors

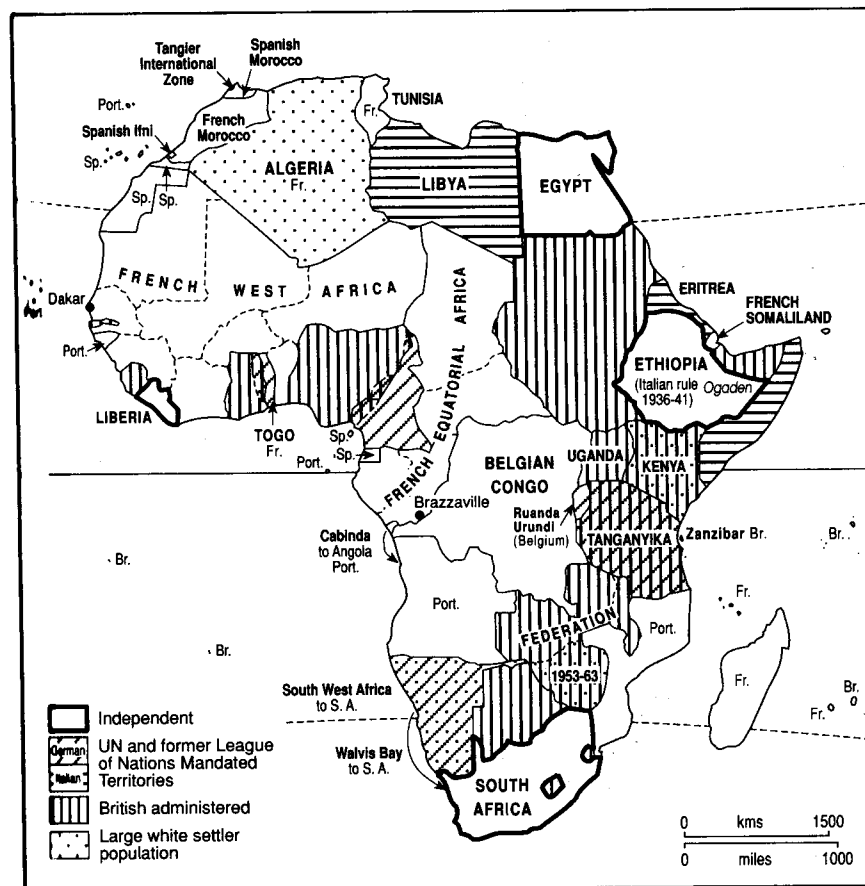
While the Europeans, rather suddenly in the mid-1880s, had decided to conquer Africa, they were extremely ambivalent about ruling Africa. In particular, Britain, France, and the other powers were unwilling, given the high cost of administration and the low probability of reward, to develop extensive administrative networks. As was the case with the Ashanti, European armies often operated beyond the space that could be administered by their state. H. F. Morris notes for Great Britain (and



Map 3.2. The Scramble

undoubtedly the other European countries), “annexation would have entailed the establishment of elaborate administrative control over these great areas, and this Britain was in no position to undertake, even had she at that time the wish to do so.” He notes that Britain was unwilling to “incur more than a minimum financial commitment,” because the geographic limits of the African territories were “nebulous” and because it was difficult to determine who the indigenous rulers were.³⁸ Reflecting the reluctance to go into Africa and assume control, Lord Salisbury

³⁸ H. F. Morris, “Protection or Annexation? Some Constitutional Anomalies of Colonial Rule,” in *Indirect Rule and the Search for Justice: Essays in East African Legal History*, ed. H. F. Morris and James Read (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 42–3.



Map 3.3. Colonial Africa

would bemoan the “inconvenience of protectorates,” which was caused by the scramble for formal control of Africa.³⁹

The Europeans were also not interested in war—the other method of unambiguously conquering territory—because costs would be high and benefits were similarly unclear. The rhetoric of the time spoke of “neutralizing Africa” so that the principle of “no European wars beyond the line” could be respected.⁴⁰ As *The Economist* reported in 1884, the actual

³⁹ As quoted by Margery Perham, *Lugard: The Years of Adventure, 1858–1898* (London: Collins, 1956), p. 88.

⁴⁰ Ronald Robinson, “The Conference in Berlin and the Future in Africa, 1884–1885,” in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of*

boundaries in Africa were less important to the colonialists than avoiding conflict amongst themselves in a part of the world that was of questionable value and far from home:

Nothing could be worse for West Africa or for Europe than to leave to local officials opportunities of quarrel, which they are sure to use. No one wants informal war all along the Congo, with Portugal pleading her weakness as an excuse for claiming everything, and France talking about her susceptibilities, and Germany sending out Professors with flags which nobody may touch, and England stubbornly determined that the wishes of the blacks, who are usually on her side, shall be sufficiently regarded.⁴¹

Similarly, *The Observer* argued, "it is scarcely more than the truth to say that the most important thing in colonial matters is to have a clear and unambiguous policy."⁴²

The refusal to either administer territory or fight over it was especially important in Africa because the continent's political geography did not allow any other principle around which to organize territorial control. The practice of precolonial African politics, especially the lack of territorial boundaries, the ease of exit, and the existence of traditions of shared sovereignty, provided relatively little information to would-be boundary creators.

Also, topography alone could not provide guidelines for creating a system of borders in Africa. First, Africa does not have the kind of mountain ranges that have served as political boundaries in some places, and in any case, mountains need to be exceptionally high in order to affect political organization.⁴³ More generally, topography seldom, if ever, can provide the foundation for a system of political boundaries. The assumption that there are "natural frontiers" that can somehow be delimited on the basis of topography, and that would therefore be less arbitrary than borders drawn by people, is much more problematic than is normally assumed. As Jan Broek deftly noted, "No doubt certain physiographic features may be more useful than others as boundaries, but it is man who determines which of these will be used. This also explains the remarkable fact that

Partition, ed. Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Ronald Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 23.

⁴¹ *The Economist*, 15 November 1884, reprinted in Elfi Bendikat, ed., *Imperialismus: Interessenpolitik und Konfliktregelung 1884-5* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Autoren-Verlag, 1985), p. 156.

⁴² *The Observer*, 19 October 1884 in *ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴³ The political implications of Africa's topography are explored by Derwent Whittlesley in *The Earth and the State: A Study of Political Geography* (New York: Holt, 1939), p. 304, and by S. Whittemore Boggs in *International Boundaries: A Study of Boundary Functions and Problems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 155-75.

nations usually envisage their natural frontiers as lying beyond their actual borders."⁴⁴

The Berlin Conference

The Europeans were therefore faced with the difficult problem of wanting to demarcate a vast but not clearly differentiated territory, but having no desire to either administer it formally or fight amongst themselves over it. How then was the scramble for Africa to proceed? Instead of acting as combatants in an international system typically described as anarchical, the colonial powers devised a way to collude for their common good. The specific mechanism used to divide up Africa peacefully was the Berlin Conference of 1884/5.

The conference helped resolve a profound conflict between the European powers over how the extension of power was to proceed in Africa. To simplify, on one side of the debate was Germany. Its view was that "future powers occupying territory there [Africa] should have no legal claim to it unless they exercised strong and effective political control."⁴⁵ As the newest colonizer, Germany had an interest in trying to embarrass the older colonizers and attempting to invalidate their claims. The latecomer to colonialism was unlikely to gain wide swaths of territory and therefore could conveniently argue that each colonial possession had to be effectively controlled or be given up. Great Britain, on the other hand, wanted, in light of her relatively large colonial possessions, to minimize the responsibilities of occupying powers because her existing protectorates might be called into question if there were new rules adopted that put up costly responsibilities for the occupying powers.⁴⁶

In the end, contrary to what Young implies, the British view prevailed. The Berlin Conference went to considerable lengths to stress the minimalist nature of the obligations Europeans assumed when they claimed formal control of territory in Africa. The two relevant chapters of the conference's final protocol deserve to be quoted at some length because they are quite telling about the extent to which the new international system was designed to take into account the disinclination to rule what the Europeans had conquered:

⁴⁴ Jan O. M. Broek, "The Problem of 'Natural Frontiers,'" in *Frontiers of the Future*, ed. O. M. Broek (Los Angeles: California University Committee on International Relations, 1961), p. 11.

⁴⁵ E. Crowe, *The Berlin West African Conference, 1884-1885* (London: Longmans, 1903), p. 177.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Article 34: Any Power which henceforth takes possession of a tract of land on the coasts of the African continent outside of its present possessions, or which, being hitherto without such possessions, shall acquire them, as well as the Power which possesses a Protectorate there, shall accompany the respective act with a notification thereof addressed to the other signatory powers of the act, in order to enable them, if need be, to make good any claims of their own.

Article 35: The signatory powers of the present act recognise the obligation to ensure the establishment of authority in regions occupied by them on the coasts of the African continent, sufficient to protect existing rights, and, as the case may be, freedom of trade and of transit under the conditions agreed upon.⁴⁷

All that a European country had to do was establish some kind of base territory on the coast, and then it was free to expand inward without having to establish, except in an ill-defined "reasonable time," an administrative presence in order to fulfill the obligations of effective occupation.

There appears to have been no belief on the part of the participants at the time of the Berlin Conference, or after, that the rules of occupation demanded the creation of European hegemony on the ground. For instance, a Belgian amendment that "effective occupation" should include provisions "to cause peace to be administered" was struck out from the final Berlin proclamation.⁴⁸ Rather, Berlin enabled the Europeans to conquer Africa while doing as little as possible to control it. The rules were so vague that they would be difficult, if not impossible, to enforce.⁴⁹ Indeed, "occupation" did not actually refer to seizure of land but was a more generic term for the acquisition of sovereignty. Most territory in Africa was not actually physically conquered but ceded, more or less legitimately, by African rulers.⁵⁰ Thus, many misunderstand the fundamental purpose of the Berlin Conference.

The conference never dealt explicitly with the interior of Africa. Quickly, the "hinterland theory" was promulgated. Under this theory, any power occupying coastal territory was entitled to claim political influence over an indefinite amount of inland area. In an irregularly sized continent, this was bound to cause problems, and a certain level of ridiculousness was reached when France tried to restrict the borders of

⁴⁷ "General Act of the Berlin Conference," in *The Scramble for Africa*, ed. R. J. Gavin and J. A. Betley (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1973), pp. 299–300.

⁴⁸ The relevant diplomatic history is provided by Crowe, *The Berlin West African Conference*, pp. 176, 191.

⁴⁹ Jörg Fisch, "Africa as *terra nullius*. The Berlin Conference and International Law," in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition*, Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Ronald Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 351.

⁵⁰ Malcolm Shaw, *Title to Territory in Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 34, 38.

Nigeria on the basis of a line that formed the hinterland of Algeria.⁵¹ In the end, the hinterland theory was rejected because it was unworkable.⁵² However, the fact that it was even seriously considered suggests that the need to prove effective occupation was not central to gaining control over the vast majority of Africa, beyond the coasts. Elizabeth Hopkins was left to conclude that, "The principle of effective occupation, so central to the claim of imperial legitimacy on coasts following the Berlin Conference, would have little bearing on the partition of Africa inland."⁵³

Administration on the Cheap

The Berlin Conference was exceptionally successful in establishing the rules for the conquest of Africa without requiring extremely expensive formal systems of administration. First, the conference's rules allowed any European power to preclude others from contesting a piece of territory that it had claimed as under its sphere of influence.⁵⁴ For instance, the British assumed a "paper protectorate" through the Royal Niger Company after 1886 in the Oil Rivers Protectorate in what would later become Nigeria. In the words of the new vice-consul, "our policy may for the present chiefly assume a negative character. So long as we keep other European nations out, we need not be in a hurry to go in."⁵⁵ These are not the words of an official with a hegemonic project. Or, as Morris argues,

The establishment of protectorates was for Britain in the 1880s and 1890s an ideal solution to the problem of the international scramble for African possessions. She would thus exclude her rivals from gaining control over the area concerned, while retaining a free hand as to what degree of internal control she would then or later decide to exercise, and, indeed, as to whether she might not later wish to withdraw completely.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p. 12.

⁵² G. N. Uzoigwe, "Spheres of Influence and the Doctrine of the Hinterland in the Partition of Africa," *Journal of African Studies* 3 (1976): pp. 196–7.

⁵³ Elizabeth Hopkins, "Partition in Practice: African Politics and European Rivalry in Rufumbira," in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition*, ed. Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 415.

⁵⁴ M. F. Lindley, *The Acquisition and Government of Backward Territory in International Law* (London: Longmans, Green, 1926), p. 210.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, p. 117. See also H. L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), p. 193.

⁵⁶ Morris, "Protection or Annexation?" p. 43. See also William Edward Hall, *A Treatise on the Foreign Powers and Jurisdiction of the British Crown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894), p. 224.

Second, by requiring the exchange of information in an environment where knowledge of boundaries was otherwise lacking, the conference enabled European countries to avoid conflict over territories that had already been claimed. M. F. Lindley notes the importance of this process:

It was largely owing to their use [the arrangements recognizing the protectorates of other states] that despite the keen competition for territory in Africa and Oceania, the primary division amongst them of those parts of the world was effected by peaceful methods. Difficulties were anticipated and avoided by the exercise of an accommodating spirit on both sides; and force, which loomed so largely in the colonial settlements of the eighteenth century, gave place to agreement.⁵⁷

At the same time, the Europeans found it easy to conquer African polities, although there would be some limited armed resistance. For instance, the imperialist Richard Meinertzhagen was able to conquer half a million Africans with three white men, twenty black soldiers, and fifty black police.⁵⁸ In his review of African resistance to European colonialism, Crowder notes, "Perhaps the most striking feature of the invading armies was their small size in comparison with the African armies which opposed them."⁵⁹ The cost to Britain of conquering seventy million African subjects was about fifteen pence each, most of that spent not on armies but on railroads that followed the soldiers.⁶⁰ There would be much unarmed resistance to colonialism but, as will be discussed, not of the type or of the magnitude to physically challenge European rule.

The Europeans took advantage of the weak indigenous threats to their rule and the peaceful international environment established by Berlin to gain what would, under most circumstances, have been a highly questionable, and contestable, title to territory. For instance, the conference allowed Europeans to legitimate the practice of signing treaties with African chiefs so as gain control of territory in a legalistic manner instead of conquering it, even though few traditional African leaders actually had control of their land as understood by the Europeans. Lugard describes the treaty-making:

⁵⁷ Lindley, *The Acquisition and Government of Backward Territory*, pp. 210-1. See also Friedrich Kratochwil, "Of Systems, Boundaries and Territoriality: An Inquiry into the Formation of the State System," *World Politics* 39 (October 1986): p. 39.

⁵⁸ Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, p. 422.

⁵⁹ Michael Crowder, "West African Resistance," in *West African Resistance: The Military Response to Colonial Occupation*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Crowder (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1978), p. 6.

⁶⁰ Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *State and Class*, bk. 1 of *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (London: James Currey, 1992), p. 18.

Treaties were produced by the cartload in all the approved forms of legal verbiage—impossible of translation by ill-educated interpreters. It mattered not that tribal chiefs had no power to dispose of communal rights, or that those few powerful potentates who might perhaps claim such authority looked on the white man's ambassador with contempt. . . . The Sultan of Sokoto, for instance, regarded the subsidy promised to him by the chartered company as a tribute from a vassal.⁶¹

Where local treaties were not adequate for territorial division, the Europeans relied on arbitrary lines based on latitude and longitude.⁶² As a result, about 44 percent of African boundaries are straight lines that either correspond to an astrologic measurement or are parallel to some other set of lines.⁶³

Chartered companies, in a kind of privatized imperialism, also were often used by the metropolitan powers to rule over large parts of Africa. Lugard admitted that these companies were, at best, an imperfect form of government. However, "they came forward at a moment when the Government, compelled by the action of other Powers to take some decision, not unnaturally shirked the responsibility of directly administering great regions, at a cost of which no estimate could be made."⁶⁴ In particular, the major colonial powers, Britain and France, were sometimes not involved in direct conquest and often ceded their territories to the companies. Company rule continued later in Africa (as late as 1923 for southern Rhodesia) than was the case almost anywhere else in the world.⁶⁵ The result of ruling through these traditional and commercial agents, Lugard pithily noted, was that Europeans could, "persuade themselves that the omelette had been made without breaking any eggs."⁶⁶ Or as one colonial official in West Africa wrote in 1890: "the old dread of increasing our responsibilities by taking over more territory has, I venture to think, been proved by experience to be somewhat of a bugbear."⁶⁷

An examination of the final colonial map suggests just how little power capabilities had to do with the extension of authority in Africa. Britain,

⁶¹ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p. 15.

⁶² J. D. Hargreaves, "West African Boundaries and Partition," p. 319.

⁶³ K. M. Barbour, "A Geographical Analysis of Boundaries in Inter-Tropical Africa," in *Essays on African Population*, ed. K. M. Barbour and R. M. Prothero (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 305.

⁶⁴ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Phyllis M. Martin, "The Violence of Empire," in *History of Central Africa*, ed. David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin, vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1983), p. 8.

⁶⁶ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p. 17.

⁶⁷ "A. W. L. Hemming: Minute, West African Expansion, 10 November 1890," in *British Policy towards West Africa: Select Documents, 1875-1914*, ed. C. W. Newbury (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 206.

the power most capable of extending its rule, largely limited its conquests in West Africa to coastal territories. In southern Africa, Britain did gain control of lands in the interior, but these were primarily conquered for it by Rhodes's company and would not fully become part of the empire until the 1920s. The French did control significant interior portions of West Africa, but these trophies reflected less its army's abilities than, rather bizarrely, the desire of the French *navy* to redeem itself after past humiliations.⁶⁸ It was the European powers that had not previously demonstrated colonial ambitions—Portugal (the “sick man of Europe”), Bismarck's Germany, the *King* of the Belgians—that formally claimed large amounts of uncontested territory and whose claims were subsequently recognized, despite the fact that they had the most limited abilities to project power.

The disjuncture between power capabilities and extent of empire was possible because, under the Berlin rules, formal European rule could mean almost anything the European capitals decided. Thus,

the term “protectorate” gradually changed its meaning from that of a pact with the ruler of a State, which maintained its internal but not its external sovereignty, to a declaration of the territorial status of a region included in the Empire, in which not only the external, but in varying degrees the internal sovereignty also, had passed to the controlling Power, in many cases (since unexplored regions were included) without even the “treaty” consent of the people.⁶⁹

The British, at least, did maintain the notion of protectorates throughout the colonial period. However, the Portuguese and French soon were treating their African colonies as integral parts of their mother country through such concepts as the Overseas Provinces of Portugal and Overseas France.⁷⁰ That these (rather preposterous) pretences could be so readily accepted, given how detached Lisbon and Paris were from many of the decisions their colonial governors were taking, much less what was happening on the ground, demonstrates the profound effect that the particular international regime constructed for conquering Africa had on imagined relations between Europe and the African periphery.

The Limited Ambitions of the Colonial State

The Berlin Conference, whatever its long-term repercussions, had little immediate effect on politics in most of Africa. As Wesseling duly notes,

⁶⁸ Wesseling, *Divide and Rule*, pp. 177–8.

⁶⁹ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p. 35.

⁷⁰ Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, p. 6.

“The partition of Africa was recorded by the Europeans on their maps, but the matter rested there for the time being. . . . In Europe conquests preceded the drawing of maps; in Africa the map was drawn, and then it was decided what was going to happen. These maps did not therefore reflect reality but helped to create it.”⁷¹ Or as Blyden mockingly noted in 1890,

Notwithstanding the reports we receive on every breeze that blows from the East, of vast “spheres of influence” and large European possessions, the points actually occupied by white men in the boundless equatorial regions of that immense continent may be accurately represented on the map only by microscopic dots.⁷²

It would be quite some time before the Europeans would even take up, in a serious manner, the task of ruling over large parts of Africa. As Kirk-Greene reminds us, “Occupation was by no means yet synonymous with administration. Any serious move towards the next phase of the new colonial presence, that of consolidation of civilian government and the introduction of economic development plans, was overtaken by the First World War.”⁷³

Of course, if the European powers had fought significant wars in Africa, either against each other or Africans, part of the inevitable detritus of those conflicts would have been the establishment of some kind of security establishment with the accompanying infrastructure of roads, railroads, and extended administrative systems that armies need to fight. Without such conflict, the infrastructure of rule was slow in coming. As a result, for many rural areas in Africa, formal colonial administration can be counted as only lasting the sixty years starting from the turn of the century. Or as Coquery-Vidrovitch notes:

At the turn of the century, peasants could still refuse to submit either to African despotism or to White domination. White soldiers and administrators were too few in numbers to be able to impose colonial law in the bush; for example, in 1900, after the failure of attempts at White colonization, Angola contained only some three thousand Portuguese . . . although trade with Europe had been carried on since the sixteenth century, the Shona and Ovambo rural communities had remained in isolation until after 1870.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Wesseling, *Divide and Rule*, pp. 363–4.

⁷² Edward W. Blyden, *The African Problem and the Method of its Solution* (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Brothers, 1890), p. 5.

⁷³ A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, “The Thin White Line: The Size of the British Colonial Service in Africa,” *African Affairs* 79 (1980): p. 26.

⁷⁴ Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara*, p. 185.

In the more distant hinterland, Europeans did not manage to exercise formal authority for several decades after technically gaining control of the territory. Suret-Canale noted that before 1945, "the significant changes affected only the main towns and the big commercial ports. In the bush nothing changed."⁷⁵ Harms, in his study of the Nunu, notes that, "life in the swamps did not change drastically until 1926 when the Belgian colonizers consolidated the scattered homestead."⁷⁶ The Maka in southeastern Cameroon were not conquered until 1910.⁷⁷ Similarly, in 1905, one observer noted, "The Congo was never conquered; vast areas of our colony have never effectively been taken over."⁷⁸ For Chad, always the extreme example, DeCalo concludes that "sixty years of colonial rule did not effect any major changes."⁷⁹

Even at the height of colonial rule, governments, reflecting the power gradients made possible by Berlin, penetrated the rural areas in only a partial and incomplete manner. In 1939, the average British district commissioner was responsible, with his staff of Africans, for an area roughly the size of Wales. Ruling over the roughly 43 million people in British tropical Africa in 1939 were a grand total of 1,223 administrators and 938 police.⁸⁰ Similarly, there were 3,660 officials to govern 15 million Africans in French West Africa, 887 to govern 3.2 million in French Equatorial Africa, and 2,384 to govern 9.4 million in the Belgian Congo in 1938.⁸¹

A limited administrative presence was also possible because, even after 1917, the Europeans did little in most parts of the continent to change the biological facts on the ground. The signal aspect of colonialism in Africa was how few European settlers there were. For instance in 1936, near the zenith of the first colonial occupation of Africa, and just before the Second World War would divert European attention and resources elsewhere, the white population in South Africa totaled 2 million and whites accounted for roughly 25 percent of the population. However, in no other settler society could such a critical mass of whites be established. Thus, the ratio of whites to Africans in Kenya was one to two hundred,

⁷⁵ Jean Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, 1900-1945* (London: C. Hurst, 1971), p. 155.

⁷⁶ Harms, *Games against Nature*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Peter Geschiere, *Village Communities and the State: Changing Relations among the Maka of South-Eastern Cameroon since the Colonial Conquest* (London: Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 133.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa*, p. 172.

⁷⁹ Samuel DeCalo, "Regionalism, Political Decay, and Civil Strife in Chad," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 18 (March 1980): p. 31.

⁸⁰ Kirk-Green, "The Thin White Line," pp. 39-40.

⁸¹ Robert Delavignette, *Freedom and Authority in French West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 18.

in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), one to twenty, and in South West Africa (now Namibia), one to ten. In the vast majority of colonies without settler populations, the white presence was minimal at most. There were, for instance, only 1.86 French settlers for every thousand Africans in French West Africa in 1938.⁸² Similarly, in the colonies where assimilation was possible, it was only done slowly. Thus, by 1950, there were only thirty thousand *assimilados* out of Angola's four million Africans and only five thousand assimilated Africans out of Mozambique's population of six million.⁸³ Hancock concludes that "South Africa was the only African territory south of the Sahara where the thinly held frontier of European settlement might be said to have evolved into a deeply-rooted European society."⁸⁴

Having few Europeans to protect, the colonial state was notably slow in expanding the spatial reach of the security forces, arguably the essence of any state. As Killingray reminds us, "Colonial Africa, like eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England had only rudimentary policing. Towns were policed by the government, particularly those areas where Europeans and the African educated elite lived . . . Outside the towns and away from the main lines of communication, policing was very much a hit and miss affair where 'much [was] left to hazard.'⁸⁵

Nothing so epitomizes the limited ambitions of many colonial states, and the failure to establish empirical statehood, as the small size of the security forces that existed in the colonies through the terminal colonial period. In the British-ruled colonies, even during the terminal colonial period, when security forces might have been expected to have burgeoned due to the nationalist upheavals, the number of men in arms was unknown over one per thousand civilians compared to one in a hundred for Britain and other developed countries. As late as 1957, the official report of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) stated: "It will be many years before the police force is strong enough to be able to accept the responsibility for enforcing law and order throughout the Territory. There must therefore for some considerable time be a sharing of responsibility between the police and other organizations for the maintenance of law and order."⁸⁶ For both France and Britain, Gutteridge concludes that the low

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸³ James Duffy, "Portuguese Africa, 1930 to 1960," in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, ed. I. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 179.

⁸⁴ W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 1.

⁸⁵ The quotation is from William Wickham's description of English policing in the eighteenth century. David Killingray, "The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa," *African Affairs* 85 (1986): pp. 414-5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

number of men in arms suggests a "willingness to operate locally on a very narrow margin of safety in relation to any security crisis. . . . The European powers in Africa raised local colonial military forces to fit their world-wide strategic needs; and their criteria, therefore, rested inevitably on imperial rather than on local policy."⁸⁷

Finally, to complete the picture of the weak capabilities and modest ambitions of colonial states, it is important to note the detachment of African colonies from the metropolises that might, under different conditions, have supplied them with the resources to broadcast authority. Reflecting the hubris that propelled them to conquer Africa, the Europeans were initially enormously optimistic about their ability to project power in Africa. King Leopold wrote, "The sea bathes our coast, the world lies before us. Steam and electricity have annihilated distance. All the non-appropriated lands on the surface of the globe (mostly in Africa) can become the field of our operations and our success."⁸⁸ However, in reality, African colonial operations were still very distant from the metropole. From the very beginning, the colonial state, and its component parts, had a substantial degree of autonomy. For instance, even in the supposedly highly centralized French system, "Distances and a claim to local expertise made the governor-general almost independent of Paris, whereas the governor was little controlled by his superior in Dakar or Brazzaville. . . . Often [the governor-general] carried out policies diametrically opposed to the regulations coming from Paris."⁸⁹ Indeed, the governor-general complained in 1934 of his subordinates' "manifest intention to leave the governor-general in ignorance."⁹⁰ In the Belgian territories, "the men on the spot in the Congo were left largely to their own devices."⁹¹ Similarly, in the Portuguese empire, governors in the late-nineteenth century complained "of an ignorant, remote and inflexible Lisbon establishment." It was not until the mid-twentieth century that real changes were made. Thus, the ministry of colonies in Lisbon grew from a staff of seventy-seven in the mid-1890s to more than forty thousand in the late 1960s.

⁸⁷ William F. Gutteridge, "Military and Police Forces in Colonial Africa," in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 316.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, *Africa since 1800*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 103.

⁸⁹ William B. Cohen, "The French Governors," in *African Proconsuls: European Governors in Africa*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 25.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹¹ L. H. Gann, "Belgian Administration in the Congo: An Overview," in *African Proconsuls: European Governors in Africa*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 370.

⁹² Douglas L. Wheeler, "Portuguese Colonial Governors in Africa, 1870-1974," in *African Proconsuls: European Governors in Africa*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 425.

Developing the Contours of the Colonial State

The practitioners of British and French colonialism were well aware, often to the point of obsession, of just how meekly they had penetrated the vast parts of Africa they had suddenly committed themselves to ruling. Lord Hailey, the great student of British colonialism, noted, for instance, "Every government in Africa has been faced by the initial difficulty of administering an extensive area with a small European staff, frequently ignorant of the local native custom and language."⁹³ Similarly Delavignette, in many ways the most insightful of the French practitioners, said of the territory that the French had taken over, "The geographical dimensions were large but the density of population was very low. It was in this contrast between the vastness of the territory and the modest size of the population that the administration had to function."⁹⁴

A great deal of ink has been spilled in comparing the British theory of indirect rule through traditional authorities to other types of European colonialism in Africa that depended more on the rule through white officers on the ground ("direct rule"). In theory, European colonialism in Africa could be arrayed across a spectrum from the Portuguese with the most direct system of rule to the famous system of indirect rule theorized by Lugard and practiced at least in northern Nigeria. The French and Belgians were somewhere in between, with the former being more in the direct rule camp and the latter tending more toward the British model.⁹⁵

Reality, as it often has a tendency to do in Africa, always interfered with the theory. For instance, in some British areas, indirect rule meant the appointment of councils of elders whose writ did not extend much beyond a village, while in other areas, it meant the recognition of an already powerful ruler who had authority over hundreds of thousands of people. Sir Philip Mitchell, governor of Buganda from 1935 to 1940, denied that territory was under indirect rule while his successor, Sir Charles Dundas, thought that British relations with the Kabaka were the very model of indirect rule.⁹⁶ Similarly, Crowder argues that a central feature of indirect rule was its noninterference with the boundaries of traditional polities, while the French routinely rearranged the land that

⁹³ Hailey, *An African Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 527-8.

⁹⁴ Robert Delavignette, "The Territorial Administrator in French Black Africa," in *Robert Delavignette on the French Empire*, ed. Camille Garnier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 21.

⁹⁵ The typology is developed at some length by Michael Crowder, "The White Chiefs of Colonial Africa," in *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, ed. L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 329-36.

⁹⁶ D. Anthony Low and R. Cranford Pratt, *Buganda and British Overrule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 163-76.

chiefs governed.⁹⁷ However, Barrows reports that in Sierra Leone the British dramatically rearranged the areas individual Mende chiefs controlled.⁹⁸ Indirect rule was not a success in Eastern or Western Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), and was not even attempted in Kenya. Indeed, Kirk-Greene finds that even in parts of Northern Nigeria, the *locus classicus* of the theory, colonial precepts were not always followed.⁹⁹ It is not a surprise that Djata reports that the French tried both direct and indirect rule in the Middle Niger Valley.¹⁰⁰ The notion of a single-minded colonial approach to ruling Africa is therefore unsupported by the evidence.

Of course, such confusion was probably inevitable, given that so much of "colonial science" was made up in the face of particular exigencies and often by the man on the spot rather than in the colonial capital, much less in Europe. It is important always to remember Hailey summing up French and British colonial theory: "Neither system owes its origin to any preconceived theory of rule."¹⁰¹ The hallmark of colonial theories was their extreme flexibility at the expense of theory. For instance, the central tenet of the French colonial theory of association was flexibility to meet the particular geographic and ethnic characteristics of the state.¹⁰² In his brilliant lecture on colonial administration, subtitled "*Et Maintenant, Lord Lugard*," Hubert Jules Deschamps, former governor of the Ivory Coast, noted, "one can scarcely detect the French administrative policy previous to 1945; it differed from yours [Britain's] . . . only in its more familiar style and less clearly defined goals."¹⁰³ Such confusion was hardly surprising, given the profound ambivalence with which the Europeans colonized Africa in the first place.

Examining the advent of indirect rule in Northern Nigeria—the supposed model for the rest of British colonial Africa—gives some idea of

⁹⁷ Michael Crowder, "Indirect Rule—French and British Style," in *Historical Problems of Imperial Africa*, ed. Robert O. Collins et al. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1994), p. 181.

⁹⁸ Walt Barrows, *Grassroots Politics in an African State* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1976), p. 79.

⁹⁹ Anthony Kirk-Greene, "Le Roi est mort! Vive le roi!": The Comparative Legacy of Chiefs after the Transfer of Power in British and French West Africa," in *State and Society in Francophone Africa since Independence*, ed. Anthony Kirk-Greene and Daniel Bach (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 19–20.

¹⁰⁰ Sundiata A. Djata, *The Bamana Empire by the Niger: Kingdom, Jihad, and Colonization, 1712–1920* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996), p. 185.

¹⁰¹ Hailey, *African Survey*, p. 527.

¹⁰² Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 106.

¹⁰³ Hubert Jules Deschamps, "Association and Indirect Rule," in *Historical Problems of Imperial Africa*, ed. Robert O. Collins et al. (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1994), p. 172.

how the new conquerors reacted to the central political problem of extending their power. Sir (later Lord) Frederick Lugard—the codifier of indirect rule and without a doubt the most important practitioner of colonialism in Africa—spoke at the dawn of colonial rule during the installation of the Sultan of Sokoto in 1903. He portrayed the British as much as anything as succeeding the old rulers:

The old treaties are dead, you have killed them. Now these are the words which I, the High Commissioner, have to say for the future. The Fulani in old times under Don Fodio conquered this country. They took the right to rule over it, to levy taxes, to depose kings and to create kings. They in turn have by defeat lost their rule which has come into the hands of the British. All these things which I have said the Fulani by conquest took the right do now pass to the British.¹⁰⁴

However, rather than hewing closely to an established theory, Lugard justified retaining the old African system of rule as a very practical response to the problems he faced. He argued that "so vast a country, inhabited by many millions, must always be inadequate for complete British administration in the proper sense of the word . . . it was, therefore, imperative to utilise and improve the existing machinery."¹⁰⁵ Lugard himself had no fixed notion as to the extent to which power would be wielded by the Emirs,¹⁰⁶ and much was clearly made up as he went along.

In some ways, the British managed to duplicate many aspects of pre-colonial rule, including the incomplete domination of the subject population that was inevitable when foreigners tried to rule through local structures. The Africans recognized that the system of indirect rule was, in many ways, a familiar one rather than an invention originating in a grand cultural project Mamdani suggests the British had for their colonial subjects. A. I. Asiwaju summarized what might be called the Ibadan school of historical studies of indirect rule:

while the white rulers thought of this colonial device [indirect rule] as something they fashioned for their own purpose, the various indigenous African societies thought of it as something that could be adapted and reduced into workable local procedures to serve interests and alliances that both preceded and outlived formal colonial rule in the respective localities. In the particular case of the Yoruba, British Indirect Rule was a most welcome opportunity for

¹⁰⁴ Frederick Lugard, "The Speech at Sokoto," in *The Principles of Native Administration in Nigeria*, ed. A. H. M. Kirk-Greene (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Frederick Lugard, "Memo no. IX: Native Administration," in *Political Memoranda*, ed. Frederick Lugard (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1970), p. 298.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Bull, "Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria, 1906–1911," in *Essays in Imperial Government*, ed. Kenneth Robinson and Frederick Madden (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 50.

specific groups and subgroups to improve their political status vis-à-vis their neighbors; it became a veritable instrument for the continuation of the pre-colonial struggles to impose and resist domination.¹⁰⁷

The Africans were unimpressed with the extent of the administrative reforms made by the white man. As Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, noted in his memoirs, "They [the British] made no drastic changes, and what was done came into effect only after consultation. Everything went on more or less as it had done, for what could one Resident, an assistant and a few soldiers in Sokoto do to change so vast an area as Sokoto Emirate?"¹⁰⁸

The Sinews of Power

However, despite all the caveats, the different theories of colonial rule have had a profound impact on how scholars have viewed the different colonizers. From the perspective of this study, the difference between direct and indirect rule is particularly interesting because the theories suggest very different ways by which the colonial state broadcast power. Unfortunately, while there has been much debate over how much the colonial empires differed from one another, little systematic evidence has been brought to bear. In keeping with the observations of Earl Grey and the Fante who noted the importance of road building in the nineteenth century, I use road density (kilometers of roads per square kilometer) as a way of measuring the colonial ability to broadcast power. When roads finally were built, they, more than railroads or waterways, brought the most profound changes to African society. As the United Nations noted in an early review of African road systems, "Although waterways and railroads constitute the main transport routes, roads form a connecting link between them and also with the seaports . . . [roads] serve as the ultimate tentacles which, as further pushed forward, create links between farms and markets and provide access to unexplored areas. It is thus no surprise that roads figured prominently in *Mister Johnson*, a great colonial novel by Joyce Carey,¹⁰⁹ and *The Famished Road*, a classic novel written in the post-independence period by Ben Okri. Okri starts *The Famished Road* in a particularly haunting manner: "In the beginning there was a river. The

¹⁰⁷ A. I. Asiwaju, "Indigenization of European Colonialism in Africa: Processes in Yorubaland and Dahomey since 1860," in *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884-1885 and the Onset of Partition*, ed. Stig Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 443.

¹⁰⁸ Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, *My Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 19.

¹⁰⁹ Joyce Carey, *Mister Johnson* (London: Michael Joseph, 1961).

river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry."¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, surprisingly little attention has been given to roads as a measure of the ability to exert authority. While center-periphery relations were a major topic for modernization theorists, these scholars were more interested in measures that examined changes in identity or overall modernity rather than the extension of the state apparatus.¹¹¹ Novelists seem more attuned to how power is really broadcast than those who study political science.

Table 3.1 portrays road density in African colonies in 1935, in 1950, and in 1963. By necessity, data are somewhat sparse but Hailey has a fairly comprehensive collection for the early years. Of course in Africa, a road, very much like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder. Certainly, what counts as a road in Africa would not necessarily be the same as in Europe. Roads, for the purpose of this study, are defined as anything that could reasonably be said to be able to carry motor traffic at least part of the year (i.e., the dry season).

The overall figures suggest just how unimpressive the colonial extension of power was throughout Africa in the twentieth century. The South African figures are convenient to use as markers because, while that South African state, having gained independence in 1910, had a series of governments that were not intent on serving the African majority, the South African state, having gained independence in 1910, was vitally interested in extending its reach throughout its territory. At the height of the first wave of colonialism in the late 1930s, the figures for all of the colonial possessions already look bleak compared to South Africa. In the following twenty-five years, while there is a significant effort to build some roads in Africa, it is obvious that the colonial reach is nowhere near as impressive as occurs in South Africa. The failure to extend power is hardly surprising given the lack of political or economic incentives to develop true state hegemony.

As expected, there were variations within colonial empires, although the French do not disaggregate their colonial regions to allow for a sensitive analysis. When comparing the different colonial empires, it becomes apparent that the French, despite whatever notions of direct rule they had in theory, were in general less successful in extending their administrative net than the British and, perhaps more surprisingly, the Belgian effort to extend roads in the Congo, however, is statistically more impressive than what France achieved. Whatever their rhetoric,

¹¹⁰ Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (Cape Town, South Africa: David Philip, 1992).

¹¹¹ Harrows, *Grassroots Politics in Sierra Leone*, p. 3.

TABLE 3.1
Road Density in Colonial Africa (Km of Road/Square Km of Land)

Colony	1935	1950	1965
Basotoland	.02	N.A.	.02
Bechuanaland	.001	N.A.	.01
Gambia	.004	.09	.11
Gold Coast	.04	.05	.11
Kenya	.03	.05	.06
Nigeria ^a	.02	.04	.06
Northern Rhodesia	.02	.02	.03
Nyasaland	.06	.07	.11
Sierra Leone	.03	.04	.06
Southern Rhodesia	.04	.06	.11
Swaziland	.11	N.A.	.11
Tanganyika	.02	.04	.06
Uganda	.03	.06	.06
British Empire Average	.02	.04	.06
French Equatorial Africa ^b	.007	.007	.06
French West Africa ^c	.01	.02	.06
French Empire Average	.009	.014	.06
Belgian Congo	.02	.04	.06
Ruanda-Urundi	.10	N.A.	.11
Angola	.02	.03	.06
Mozambique	.03	N.A.	.06
South Africa	.11	.23	.23

Sources: Road data from Lord Hailey, *An African Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 1549–65; International Road Federation, *World Road Statistics* (London: IRF, 1950); United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *A Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1960–1964* (Addis Ababa: UNECA, 1968), pp. 118–9; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *A Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1967* (New York: United Nations, 1969), p. 121. Land area from International Road Federation, *World Road Statistics, 1966–1970* (Geneva: IRF, 1971), pp. 11–6 and World Bank, *World Development Report, 1998* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 190–1, 232.

a) Includes British Cameroons

b) Includes Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, Moyen-Congo, Ubangi-Shari (now Central African Republic), but not British Cameroons.

c) Includes Dahomey, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Upper Volta.

d) Data from 1965

The French started late in their effort to penetrate the African hinterland and critically, never developed the infrastructure to rule directly. As Hailey notes, “In French West Africa roads hardly existed outside certain urban areas in 1914.”¹¹² Subsequently, the French never caught up to the even, slow pace of the British.

The common colonial failure to extend the infrastructure of power probably outweighs whatever differences in colonial practice suggested by the different theories when it comes to the spatial reach of the state. As a prominent French author noted, “In West Africa the differences between British and French rule] were far less deep than was sometimes imagined. The economic system was the same: the economy was controlled by the same trading monopolies (the Compagnie de l’Ouest Africain, the United Africa Company, and others) and agriculture was left to the ‘local peasants.’”¹¹³

A clear reflection of the inadequacy of the extension of power, via roads or other mechanisms, can be found in the obsession that colonial rulers had with traveling. Because they did not have systems that allowed for a permanent government with a physical presence throughout their territories, colonial officials spent a great deal of time traveling around their territories to bring the state, as it were, to the people. Thus, understanding his limited capabilities, Lugard’s scheme for dividing the amalgamated Nigeria into administrative units was based on finding the maximum area an administrator could traverse and “maintain touch with” the population, physical control clearly not being a priority or even an issue.¹¹⁴ Similarly, Delavignette notes that for the French colonial service, “the art of going on tour” is the “essential principle of ruling. The tour, which could be done by foot, car or horseback, was done to learn what was happening.”¹¹⁵ Van Vollenhoven’s comment that “Only one’s presence, personal contact, counts. The circular is zero” would be repeated by French colonial administrators until the end of their rule in Africa.¹¹⁶ The resonance with the Ashanti notion of the perimeters of the state being defined by how far a messenger could walk in a month is palpable.

¹¹² Hailey, *African Survey*, p. 1561.

¹¹³ Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa*, p. 348.

¹¹⁴ Frederick Lugard, “Memorandum on the Administration of Nigeria submitted to the Secretary of State, May 1905,” in *Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria*, ed. A. H. M. Greene (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), p. 211.

¹¹⁵ Delavignette, *Freedom and Authority in French West Africa*, p. 42.

¹¹⁶ William B. Cohen, *Rulers of Empire: The French Colonial Service in Africa* (Stanford,

Hoover Institution Press, 1971), pp. 63–5.

Exit

Given the European failure to extend power, it is hardly a surprise that migration, the traditional African response to political distress, continued throughout the colonial period. Young, Mamdani, and others who argue for the strength of the colonial state ignore just how great the continuity with precolonial politics was, at least in regard to the major avenue open to Africans disaffected with those who ruled them. While the period of violent protest against colonial rule was brief and snuffed out quickly by superior European firepower in the early part of the twentieth century, Africans continued to subvert the state for many years by simply leaving. During the early colonial period, the presence of open land and weak administrative structures outside the cities made it only natural that many Africans responded to abuses by simply escaping to an area that was not under the direct control of the European power. Thus, Allen F. Isaacman notes that withdrawal was a common response to Portuguese rule in Mozambique. He reports that at times, "entire chieftaincies migrated across national boundaries to avoid Portuguese rule."¹¹⁷ Similarly, because British colonialism was relatively less oppressive than French rule in West Africa, "massive protest emigrations involving whole villages and townships from the French to the British side of the Nigeria-Dahomey border were common and regular occurrences in Western Yorubaland in the period 1914–1945."¹¹⁸ Asiwaju goes on to note that,

Protest migrations were a universal phenomenon in almost all French West African colonies. For example, protest migrations . . . were staged by the Bariba, especially during the rising in French Borgu in 1916, and by the Wolofs from French Senegal to British Gambia. Similar migrations occurred among various ethnic groups moving from French Guinea to both Portuguese Guinea and British Sierra Leone.¹¹⁹

In fact, the early colonial period seems to have been the high point of migration in many areas. The abuses of colonial authorities provided incentives for many Africans to migrate but potential barriers, such as borders, were too weak to be real deterrents to people seeking the exit option. There was also a substantial amount of forced migration.¹²⁰

The new migrants apparently had relatively little problem finding land

¹¹⁷ Allen F. Isaacman, *The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique: The Zambesi Valley, 1850–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 108.

¹¹⁸ A. I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889–1945* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 141.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ K. C. Zachariah and Julien Condé, *Migration in West Africa: Demographic Aspects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 31.

on which to settle. Asiwaju writes, for instance, that the migrants into British Yorubaland were able to settle on the frontier and establish permanent settlements.¹²¹ In fact, relatively recently in historical time, in many parts of Africa it was easy to move beyond established political authority because, even in states that had established strong central administrative structures, the geographical reach of the centralized political power was extremely limited. For instance, Charles van Onselen describes a "New Nineveh" in the South Africa of the 1890s where a small population could exist separately from the political community on the Witswatersrand by moving a relatively short distance into the hills.¹²²

Colonialism's End

The natural progression of colonial rule might well have been to build from the center—where formal control was required by international convention and sheer practicality—outward, so that eventually the entirety of each colony was physically administered by the state. This did not happen for several reasons. First, the colonialists still confronted the traditional African problems: the costs of extending rule turned out to be exceptionally high given limited benefits. Second, events in Europe began to distract the colonial powers in the 1930s until finally the war essentially stopped extension of all administrative systems. As a result, the practice of colonialism before World War II never exceeded the very limited vision formed in the first decade of the twentieth century when Africa was formally conquered. As usual, Frederick Cooper describes the situation deftly,

The more ambitious projects of colonial conquerors soon proved unrealizable. From roughly the time of World War I to the mid-1930s, France and Great Britain scaled down their ambitions to remake and systematically exploit the African continent, and asserted that their goal was to preserve African societies and culture while permitting only slow changes from within. The much celebrated policy of "indirect rule" . . . represented an attempt to make retreat sound like policy.¹²³

Joyce Carey, who published *Mister Johnson* in 1939, describes well the muted ambition of the colonial officials: "No long views—the age for long views ended twenty years ago—and above all, not too much zeal."¹²⁴

¹²¹ Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*, p. 147.

¹²² Charles van Onselen, *New Nineveh*, vol. 2 of *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witswatersrand, 1886–1914* (London: Longman, 1982), p. 177.

¹²³ Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 11.

¹²⁴ Carey, *Mister Johnson*, p. 209.

Accordingly, the French were not willing to undertake the costs associated with the politics of assimilation and they abandoned some, but not all, their goals of making Africans into Frenchmen.¹²⁵ Colonial Minister Albert Sarraut in 1932, having already argued that France was not benefiting from its involvement in Africa four decades after Berlin, suggested that France should concentrate on "islands of prosperity" that could be developed for export, primarily along the coast, and that "We can now sketch a map of useful Africa."¹²⁶ At about the same time, S. Herbert Frankel, in a critical economic treatise, was calling Africa "a continent of outposts."¹²⁷ The Portuguese also only had limited ambitions to penetrate African society. The purpose of the *regime do indigenato* was "fundamentally neither to encourage nor suppress: it was to maintain. The African world in Angola and Moçambique was to exist in a kind of limbo while the Portuguese got on with their job of making a success of white colonial development."¹²⁸

After World War II, it was simply too late to change the power gradients that were the natural result of Berlin. First, the European powers were reconstructing themselves, and therefore hardly had the resources to make a major effort to broadcast power in Africa.¹²⁹ The data on road construction displayed in table 3.1 does indicate a significant increase in construction from 1950 to the end of colonialism, but the base was so pathetically low that total road density aggregates are still extremely unimpressive by 1963. Second, although few understood it immediately after World War II, the tidal wave of African nationalism would soon begin, leaving in its wake dozens of independent countries by the early 1960s. Whatever the original colonial administrative project for the 1950s, it quickly became the decade when attention was devoted to, first, forestalling efforts at independence, and then making hurried attempts to prepare colonies for the transfer of power.¹³⁰

Nonhegemonic Rule

To stress the limited and incomplete nature of colonial rule is not to deny its brutality. Indeed, a central feature of colonial rule was violence. In this

¹²⁵ Crowder, "Indirect Rule—French and British Styles," p. 185.

¹²⁶ Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, p. 33.

¹²⁷ S. Herbert Frankel, *Capital Investment in Africa: Its Course and Effects* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 30.

¹²⁸ Duffy, "Portuguese Africa, 1930 to 1960," p. 181.

¹²⁹ See, for instance, "The Colonial Empire and the Economic Crisis," circulated in July 1948 to British colonial governors and reprinted in Richard Rathbone, ed., *British Documents on the End of Empire: Ghana*, series B, vol. 1 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1992), pp. 90–98.

¹³⁰ See, for instance, C. Jeffries, "The Africanisation of the West African Governments," written in March 1943 and reprinted in Rathbone, *British Documents on the End of Empire*, p. 20.

ward, as both Young and Mamdani document at great length, the African colonial state can hardly be likened to an English county government. However, pervasive violence and control should not be confused. The extent of violence was, in many ways, not an indication of control but the result of the very limited presence of administrative structures in many areas outside the major cities. When the colonialists wanted to get something done, they had to use force rather than the regular sinews of government. Phyllis M. Martin, following from Leroy Vail, calls European rule in central Africa, at least before 1920, the "rule of the feeble."¹³¹ The root source of much of the violence that permeated colonial Africa would seem to be in the incomplete nature of European administrative structures on the ground in the African hinterland. After studying cases from the Cameroon, Burnham concludes "the situation could only be altered by a truly radical change, one which succeeded both in completely destroying the permissive social ecology which facilitates population movements as well as one which generated new structures of local-level political control."¹³² Burnham suggests that the French did not succeed in making such changes, although they tried to create "natural" villages for the groups who were so mobile.¹³³

Nor is it essential to this argument to deny that Europeans often manipulated traditional rule. However, as with the continual resort to violence, the decentralized despotism that Europeans sometimes tried to create was more a sign of weakness than of strength. As Lugard recognized, it was the failure to physically extend the power of the central state apparatus to the rural areas that caused the colonialists to devote attention to manipulating local structures for their own purposes rather than a grand project. However, befitting its status as a second (or third) best strategy, the use of decentralized power did not create hegemony. First, there was no point to creating "hegemony" given the extremely limited colonial interest in most African colonies. For the most part, Europeans only wanted order preserved and their limited economic interests protected. When European rule was challenged during the terminal colonial period, the colonialists would leave rather than fight. In doing so, of course, they were acting like typical African rulers in the precolonial period.

Second, European interest in Africa produced a confused and un-systematic rule that did not in crucial aspects resemble the kind of committed cultural project that Mamdani suggests. If the British could not agree amongst themselves if there was indirect rule in Uganda, how could they be expected to subvert traditional practices in a single-minded

¹³¹ Martin, "The Violence of Empire," p. 8.

¹³² Philip Burnham, "Regroupement and Mobile Societies: Two Cameroon Cases," *Journal of African History* 16 (1975): p. 593.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 585.

and competent manner? Such confusion, rather than a systematic determination to rule Africa in a particular way, was the fundamental feature of European colonialism. Robert Heussler concluded for British policy (and undoubtedly for the other Europeans): "There was no overall theme that London stuck to decade by decade, exhorting all of the territories in a uniform way. Often, moreover, it seemed that the influence of colonies on the mother country was more substantial than hers on them."¹³⁴ Similarly, the official historian of the colonial office asked what the guiding principles of native administration were during the interwar years and could not find any.¹³⁵

Finally, as David Apter understood before most, the use of traditional authorities over the long-term to administer foreign authority was dysfunctional and led to the destruction of some of the local elites who lost the very basis of their power.¹³⁶ The Europeans wanted to use the "existing machinery" but they were not willing to allow the machinery to continually adapt, as it did in the precolonial period, to new political challenges and opportunities. Lugard was aware of what a deleterious effect the system of indirect rule would have on local African authorities: "The advent of Europeans cannot fail to have a disintegrating effect on tribal authority and institutions, and on the conditions of native life. This is due in part to the unavoidable restrictions imposed on the exercise of their power by the native chiefs."¹³⁷

Nowhere is this deadly embrace more evident than in the colonial approach to the extension of traditional authority. In his famous ninth political memorandum, Lugard demanded that colonial officials ignore traditional African practices regarding the mapping of power: "The area over which each Paramount Chief has control will be marked on the map, and no alteration will be made in it except on the Lieutenant-Governor's recommendation, and with the Governor's approval."¹³⁸ He had justified this reform in *The Dual Mandate*: "Small and isolated communities, living within the jurisdiction of a chief, but owing allegiance to the chief of their place of origin—a common source of trouble in Africa—should gradually be absorbed into the territorial jurisdiction."¹³⁹ It would have been impossible to implement such policies and have African

¹³⁴ Robert Heussler, "British Rule in Africa," in *France and Britain in Africa*, ed. Prosser Gifford and Wm. Roger Louis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 592.

¹³⁵ R. D. Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy, 1938–48* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1982), p. 4.

¹³⁶ David E. Apter, *Ghana in Transition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 151.

¹³⁷ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p. 215.

¹³⁸ Lugard, "Memo no. IX: Native Administration," p. 312.

¹³⁹ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, p. 213.

leaders retain their traditional legitimacy because that legitimacy, as explained in chapter two, was derived from their having won control of particular areas or peoples rather than having been assigned them by the whites. Thus, Lord Hailey could write of the African officials the British governed through, "Everywhere the supervision exercised over them must bring home the lesson that the sanction for their authority is no longer the goodwill of their own people, but the recognition accorded to them by the administration."¹⁴⁰

As a result, there was an extremely mixed record of establishing local authorities. As Peter Geschiere notes in an extraordinary analysis, even in adjoining areas of the same colony, the British and French sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed to establish local agents, depending critically on the adeptness of the white rulers and whether local circumstances favored the new institutions. In other areas of Cameroon, the people continued to have loyalty to authorities whose rule predated the arrival of the whites.¹⁴¹ Especially given the European ambivalence about ruling Africa and the modest resources they devoted to that task, it is not surprising there were a wide variety of outcomes when the white conquerors tried to co-opt local institutions. Pierre Alexandre describes the outcomes well:

the diversity of local situations was very great. In one region the customary hierarchy and the imported hierarchy could be reconciled tolerably well . . . In another the customary hierarchy persisted, sometimes underground and sometimes unofficially tolerated, side by side with the white man's chieftaincies or pseudo-chieftaincies . . . Elsewhere the imported hierarchy planted on an anarchical population managed to take root . . . Elsewhere again it proved quite impossible to impose the system.¹⁴²

Terrence Ranger also came to realize that he, or his readers, may have been too dogmatic about the impact of colonialism on local authorities and should have been more appreciative of the diversity of local outcomes in Africa. Ranger would later argue against finding a "single great tradition coming to an end under colonialism" but rather for discovering, "a pluralism both before, during and after colonialism."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Hailey, *Africa Survey, 1938*, pp. 539–40.

¹⁴¹ Peter Geschiere, "Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing Chieftaincy, French and British Style," *Africa* 63 (1993): pp. 166–7.

¹⁴² Pierre Alexandre, "Chiefs, Commandants, and Clerks: Their Relationship from Conquest to Decolonisation in French West Africa," in *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Roles under Colonial Rule and Independence*, ed. Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime (New York: Africana Publishing, 1970), p. 39.

¹⁴³ Terrence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa," in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A. H.*

Conclusion

Rather than centralized or decentralized despotism, the Europeans provided a set of answers to the African problem that allowed them to avoid the costs inherent to hegemony. The cost of extending power beyond the cities and specific highly valuable economic assets such as mines and plantations was still exorbitantly high. The Europeans, whatever their formal theory of rule, were generally unsuccessful in changing cost structures to allow for a systematic expansion of authority into the rural areas. Rather, in a critical example of how the nature of the state system affects the consolidation of authority, the Berlin Conference allowed for a power gradient, whereby formal control was exercised in the cities while authority was highly variable in the rural areas.

Unlike precolonial African leaders, the European proconsuls had created a friendly enough state system so that they could claim formal control over land and people, although their power infrastructures were extremely limited. For the first time in Africa's history, territorial boundaries acquired salience. The common assertion that Africa's boundaries are meaningless because they are arbitrary is wrong. Rather, the boundaries were, in many ways, the most consequential part of the colonial state. The establishment of a territorial grid that was respected by other powers allowed European rulers to be free of competition from other imperial states and enabled them to establish internal administrative structures at a pace that was convenient, given the resources they were willing to deploy. Only the strength of the boundaries allowed the colonialists to have such a mixed record in establishing local authorities. If the boundaries could have been challenged, rule over the hinterland would have had to have been stronger. Osterhammel is correct in arguing that the Europeans established territorial-states, rather than nation-states, in Africa.¹⁴⁴

Thus, the first critical buffer mechanism that the Europeans created was the physical boundary itself, because the new boundaries successfully mediated pressures from the international system and allowed Europeans to rule on the cheap. As chapters seven and eight show, the creation of a boundary system also allowed for the development of other buffer mechanisms regulating money flows, and, to at least a small degree, the movement of people (during the late colonial period).

The costs of state expansion were still high given the fact that the physical environment was still daunting and the technology and resources

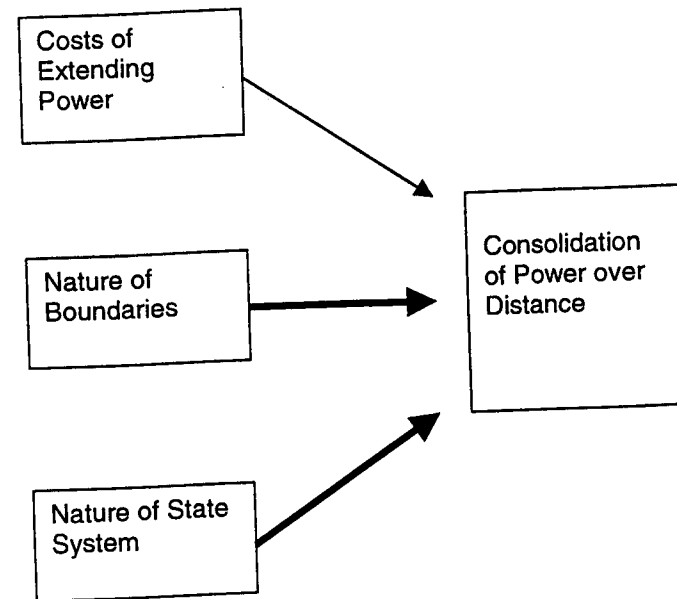


Figure 3.1. Paths to State Consolidation in Colonial Africa

the Europeans were willing to deploy were limited. However, the new state system and the establishment of at least one important buffer mechanism significantly reduced some of the effective costs of state consolidation. Figure 3.1 graphically displays the notion that the boundaries and the state system were the major avenues by which the colonial state was consolidated. The physiology of the colonial state was therefore different in some important respects compared to what was found in precolonial Africa. However, in terms of how leaders actually ruled, the colonial state still shared important similarities with many precolonial systems. In particular, only core areas continued to be ruled through formal means. Beyond the core, the whites continued the tradition of having very weak formal structures of rule. The primary reason for the continuation of so many precolonial practices was that while the state system created at Berlin allowed for absolute external sovereignty (the protection from encroachment by other powers), it did not provide states much assistance with the tasks of actually ruling over internal areas. Inevitably given the same geography, colonial rulers turned to some of the practices that precolonial leaders had devised. However, over the long-term, the colonial design was, as was eventually recognized, a problematic solution because Europeans were not willing to allow the old African practice of continual change in the nature and size of the units—critical responses to the problems posed by low population densities—to continue.

M. Kirk-Greene, ed. Terrence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 80.

¹⁴⁴ Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997), p. 68.

If precolonial Africa was a time when fictions of rule were not allowed, European colonialism was a combination of domestic administrative structures and a state system that went to elaborate lengths to uphold the notion that Europeans were actually ruling Africa. European rule was no fiction. Colonialism was marked by extreme violence, the development of new economic systems, and fundamental changes in many social practices as foreign languages, religions, and ideologies were introduced. However, neither was the case that the Europeans had established states that actually sought to rule over all the territories that were indeed said to be theirs. That would be the stated ambition of their African successors.

Four

The Political Kingdom in Independent Africa

The new nations of the African continent are emerging today as the result of their struggle for independence. This struggle for freedom from foreign domination is a patriotic one which necessarily leaves no room for difference.

Julius K. Nyerere, "The African and Democracy,"

AFTER GAINING INDEPENDENCE in the early 1960s, African leaders were faced with an exquisite dilemma. They recognized that the states that emerged from Berlin were artificial and did not, in many cases, actually rule their putative nations other than through the use of exceptional violence. Yet, if the states, with their colonial power gradients, were to change, the new leaders would have to give up many of the newly tasted benefits of power and face considerable uncertainty about their own fate and the fate of their nations. In a rare instance of not muddling through on a question of monumental importance, the Africans decided early and decisively that the colonial map should be retained.

As a result, postindependence African leaders were faced with the problem of how to extend power over their territories given the incomplete and highly variable administrative systems they inherited from the Europeans. Following their colonial predecessors, the new leaders decided against gaining control of African territory through wars of expansion or by claiming control of territory on the basis of the administrative facts on the ground. At the same time, despite much rhetoric about recovering the African past, the new leaders rejected the entire precolonial tradition of multiple sovereignties over land with soft borders. Instead, Africa's leaders devised a set of domestic and international strategies that, much as during the colonial rule, gave maximum flexibility to the leaders when deciding how to expand the actual geographic reach of the state while formally preventing any outside challenge to their territorial control. Therefore, the particular international system and domestic institutions that African countries erected have had profound effects on the ability of the state to consolidate authority, either by collecting taxes or

by developing bonds of loyalty through nationalism, which are still apparent four decades after independence.

The critical question unresolved in the literature is the degree to which power practices actually changed at independence. Jackson's well-known view is that the dramatic change at independence was in the nature of sovereignty. He has argued that starting with the famous Harold Macmillan "wind of change speech" in 1960, "empirical statehood went rapidly into eclipse" and a new form of juridical statehood based on a "rights-model of international relations" became dominant. In the new model of international relations, epitomized by United Nations' General Assembly Resolution 2621, states no longer had to earn sovereignty (through the establishment of a national government that could enforce its authority) but deserved it, simply on the basis of being decolonized.¹ There is no doubt that there were changes in international practices surrounding the decolonization process and Jackson is right to highlight them. However, this analysis of power consolidation suggests that, at least in some ways, there were important continuities from the Berlin rules to the modern era that often are ignored.

This chapter explores what is, in many ways, the most revolutionary aspect of Africa's independence: the attempt to build a large number of states during peace. It devotes special attention to the boundaries and state system that the Africans constructed for themselves. Finally, the chapter explores the relative peace that resulted from the decisions made by Africans and how, ironically, the seeds of some countries' destruction were planted in the actions taken by leaders as a consequence of these early decisions.

Units and Boundaries

Many similarities existed between the wave of decolonization, which began with Ghana's independence in 1957, and the process of colonization formalized by the Berlin Conference in 1885. Independence occurred at a time and speed that all of the protagonists, notably the Africans, never expected, much like the colonization of Africa was a shock to all concerned. In both processes, there was almost no attention given to the viability of the units being created. And, perhaps most importantly, after the deed was done, the international community, led by the protagonists, had to create law to justify what had been accomplished and to prevent the new arrangements from being torn asunder by war.

African leaders at independence confronted the states as demarcated by

¹ Jackson, "The Weight of Ideas in Decolonization: Normative Change in International Relations," pp. 117, 125.

the Europeans and, at times acting unilaterally and at times collectively, actually made two sets of interrelated decisions: to retain the nation-state as the exclusive unit of organization and to retain the boundaries that the white colonizers had drawn. Although passing reference often is made to the problematic geography of many African states, the particular decisions the early leaders made regarding national design are so fundamental that many analyses of African politics simply begin with an examination of the dramas of domestic politics, as if the design of the stage was irrelevant and no other configuration was possible.² This is a significant analytic error, as chapter five will demonstrate, because decisions regarding national design inevitably affected the options available to African leaders on a host of domestic policy issues.

The Nation-State as Organizing Principle

As chapter two documents, in precolonial Africa, a wide variety of political organizations—villages, city-states, nation-states, empires—rose and fell. However, at independence, African leaders turned their backs on this diversity of forms. While borrowing the names of great states from Africa's past (e.g., Benin, Ghana, Mali),

the educated elites in West Africa—for a long time, it would be much the same in South Africa—saw Africa's own history as irrelevant and useless . . . when it came down to brass tacks, to the question of who should take over from the British when the British withdrew, they demanded a more or less complete flattening of the ethnic landscape.³

The retention of the European nation-state was encouraged and welcomed by Africans. Even as trenchant a critic of colonialism as Ghanaian Professor A. Adu Boahen could note that one of the positive aspects of European rule was the creation of new states with clearly defined (albeit inappropriate) boundaries in place of "the existing innumerable lineage and clan groups, city-states, kingdoms, and empires without any fixed boundaries."⁴

In the early 1960s (or now, for that matter), there were few intellectual sentiments that could effectively counter the draw of the nation-state.

² Thus, Mazrui could argue that traditionalism was a strong theme in African politics but only examine the retention of traditional leaders such as the kabaka of Buganda, and largely ignoring the rejection of traditional African notions of boundaries and how power was to be demarcated. Ali A. Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 35–6.

³ Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, pp. 102–3.

⁴ A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 95.

For instance, much of the pan-African movement that sporadically erupted during the twentieth century was based in the West Indies and the United States and did not even have a vision for a postcolonial Africa, much less one that could move beyond the European nation-state. Of the great pan-African Congresses held in the twentieth century, only the fifth, convened in Manchester, England, in October 1945, had significant African representation that might have led to innovative thinking about national design in Africa.⁵ However, as colonialism ended, Africa's new leaders did not see foresee an organizing principle for politics other than the nation-state. An examination of the writings of the African nationalists the colonial empires found particularly radical—Kenyatta, Lumumba, Machel, Mugabe, Touré—reveals no desire for any alternative to the state as theorized and designed by the Europeans.⁶

Further, when decolonization happened, it came so quickly and Africans were so intent on seizing power that there was neither the time nor the motivation to develop whole new concepts about the method of national political organization. As a U.S. government intelligence assessment correctly noted in 1961, "The problems of political survival and of maintenance of law and order have kept African leaders from concentrating on their interrelationships."⁷

The international embrace of the nation-state was also an important element in the rapid African rejection of any indigenous alternative. First, the nation-state was seen as the very essence of modernity by nationalists (e.g., Mao, Nehru, Ho) who were part of the post-WWII revolutionary movement that led, for the first time, to one type of political organization having a practical monopoly on organizing political activity across the globe. Second, the United Nations and its related organizations (including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization) created an extraordinarily powerful template that molded international society by recognizing only nation-states as legitimate actors in the international community. In particular, membership in the General Assembly, the essential gateway to sovereignty, was open to any nation-state that gained independence but was not available to any other form of organization. Thus, exceptionally

⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (New York: Viking Press, 1947), p. 244.

⁶ See Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); Patrice Lumumba, *Congo, My Country* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962); Robert Mugabe, *Our War of Liberation* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1983); Barry Munslow, ed., *Samora Machel: An African Revolutionary* (London: Zed Books, 1985); Ahmed Sékou Touré, *Strategy and Tactics of the Revolution* (Conakry, Guinea: Press Office, 1978).

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, "The Probable Relationships of the Independent African States," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Africa, 1961-1963*, ed. Nina Davis Howland (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), p. 299.

small states such as Lesotho, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau can be members of the General Assembly, but larger units like the Zulu or Ashanti groups, which were previously organized as empires, cannot. This is not merely a debating detail, as membership in international organizations provided important financial benefits that were denied to other forms of organization.⁸

The momentum the nation-state developed was so great that even those who were legitimately committed to true Pan-African structures saw their efforts come to nothing. For instance, Julius K. Nyerere, shortly before becoming Tanganyika's first prime minister, advocated that all of East Africa gain independence simultaneously so that the region could retain the institutions of unity that had been created by the East African Federation. Nyerere, presciently, warned that if each country in East Africa gained independence separately, "the feeling of unity which now exists could . . . be whittled away" as interests reified around the old boundaries.⁹ In contrast, Kwame Nkrumah, the most publicly fervent pan-Africanist, argued that it was critical for Ghana to gain independence first and then the elaborate panoply of pan-African structures he envisioned could come into place.

In fact, Nyerere's more pessimistic view of African leaders was correct and Nkrumah's optimism about the willingness of his colleagues to place Africa before their own new countries (however artificial they might be) was misplaced. As Sylvanus Olympio, Togo's first leader, noted in a moment of bitter insight, "political unification is only desired by those political leaders who believe they could come out on top in such unions."¹⁰ Mazrui is thus wrong to blame the "West" for the imposition of rigidly defined national states on Africa.¹¹ In fact, this is exactly what African leaders decided would be best for their countries and themselves, despite the fact that the colonially inspired units were so at odds with the traditional African practices that had evolved to meet the challenges of low population densities.

So complete was the desire to retain the design of the national units that much of the *internal* colonial apparatus was also retained. As Delavignette notes,

⁸ On the tendency of international systems to favor like units, see Hendrik Spruyt, "Institutional Selection in International Relations: State Anarchy as Order," *International Organization* 48 (Autumn 1994): p. 546.

⁹ Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 85.

¹⁰ Sylvanus Olympio, "Reflections on Togolese and African Problems," in *Africa Speaks*, ed. James Duffy and Robert A. Manners (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1961), p. 75.

¹¹ Ali Mazrui, "Africa Entrapped: Between the Protestant Ethic and the Legacy of Westphalia," in *The Expansion of International Society*, ed. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 289.

[T]he independence movement maintained the same administrative core as had existed during the colonial epoch. Only the names were changed: the circle was now called the department, and the *commandant de cercle*, the prefect . . . On the eve of independence, French Black Africa had 500-odd basic administrative circumscriptions consisting of circles and subdivisions. The independent republics in 1960 had 576 in all . . . The machinery had changed hands but not the parts.¹²

Critically, there were very few attempts to change the location of the capital as designated by the Europeans to a place that would either be more logical for the administration of the country or would signify a reversion back to precolonial practices. The few countries that did try to move capitals have had very mixed experiences. Malawi relocated to Lilongwe from Zomba after independence, but largely because South Africa financed the project due to the gratitude the white government felt to Hastings Banda for continuing diplomatic relations. Nigeria has moved some offices from Lagos to Abuja but financial problems have caused delays of many years in the timetable. Tanzania's move from Dar es Salaam to Dodoma and Côte d'Ivoire's relocation from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro have gone so slowly that diplomatic offices remain in the old capital.¹³ More often than not, old precolonial centers—including Ibadan, Kumasi, Masvingo (the site of old Zimbabwe)—have either been ignored or are seen as competing for loyalty with the (colonially inspired) national capital.

What is most noticeable about the international relations of early African independence is that all of the supranational arrangements, which actually seemed to be divergences from the sovereign nation-state as inherited from the Europeans, failed. The Mali Federation, the East African Federation, the aborted Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union, and "Senegambia" all either did not get off the ground or rather quickly crashed, precisely because they challenged the domestic authority exercised by political elites.¹⁴ Africa is also littered with the carcasses of failed economic unions (e.g., the Economic Community of West African States), and the volumes planning putative continental organizations that were never realized are legion. Thus, the 1980 *Lagos Plan of Action*, the apotheosis of the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) desire to create pan-African institutions, asked for the creation of an African Economic Community, supported by an African Monetary Fund and an African Mutual

¹² Delavignette, *Freedom and Authority in French West Africa*, p. 276.

¹³ D. Pfaff, "The Capital Cities of Africa with Special Reference to New Capitals Planned for the Continent," *Africa Insight* 18 (1988): p. 193.

¹⁴ Claude E. Welch Jr., *Dream of Unity: Pan-Africanism and Political Unification in West Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 356.

Guarantee and Solidarity Fund.¹⁵ Of course, none was even attempted because the hopeful architects of these new creations, like the planners of many aborted groupings, could not offer leaders significant enough incentives to abdicate even small bits of power. The regional organizations failed, despite the fact that many donors were sympathetic to them, because Africa's political fragmentation made aid to individual countries problematic.¹⁶

Boundary Maintenance

Once it was clear that the European nation-state would serve as the organizing principle for African politics, it was probably inevitable that African leaders would decide to retain the boundaries as created by the colonialists. In the early 1960s, the founding members of the OAU faced the same problems that the colonialists did when they came to power. Again, the demography, ethnography, and topography of Africa made it extremely difficult for new, more "rational" borders to be established. The African nationalists did not advocate returning to precolonial practices because they knew that precolonial practices had nothing to offer them when thinking of how to rearrange "Kenya" or "Guinea." Precisely because precolonial states were not organized on a territorial basis, they could have little resonance in a world organized around hard boundaries.

Similarly, the new leaders had no interest in organizing boundaries around actual territorial control. As noted in chapter three, the colonial state apparatus that had been inherited did not provide for true pan-territorial rule and the newly independent states had not had time to expand their administrative nets. As a result, basing boundaries on what each state actually controlled would result in the territory of most states becoming smaller. Further, much of the continent would have to experience a long period of profound uncertainty as administrative presence and territorial claims were, somehow, correlated.

African leaders were also unwilling to resort to war as a way of determining boundaries because the leaders recognized at the onset that violent redrawing of boundaries would threaten their own positions. The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 had provided an astonishingly vivid warning of the human cost of boundary change, especially

¹⁵ Organization of African Unity, *Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980–2000* (Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies, 1982), pp. 87, 126.

¹⁶ See, for instance, a paper prepared by the U. S. State Department's Policy Planning Council, "Selected Aspects of U.S. Economic Aid Policy for Africa," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Africa, 1961–1963*, ed. Nina Davis Howland (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), p. 296.

since Africa's leaders were conscious of how peaceful the transfer of power had been.¹⁷ In any case, even if a new state had the desire to change its borders, it probably could not have done so because the armies inherited by the post-independence leaders were generally little more than mechanized police forces.¹⁸

As a result, among the first acts of the Organization of African Unity was to eliminate any hope that the idea explicit in its name could actually be realized. In particular, the OAU's 1964 resolution on border problems pledged member states, "to respect the frontiers existing on their achievement of national independence."¹⁹ Thus, there was an almost immediate determination that the OAU Charter, written in 1963 and demanding (article III, paragraph 3) the, "Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State and for its inalienable right to independent existence"²⁰ meant the states as mapped by the Europeans.

Therefore, African boundaries have been almost unchanged since independence; the only significant deviation was the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia. However, even this development was, especially from the perspective of the Eritreans, to a significant degree a question of decolonization rather than secession. Most of the interstate conflicts in Africa that have occurred were not, as in Europe, wars of conquest that threatened the existence of other states, but conflicts over lesser issues that were resolved without threatening the existence of another state. For instance, Tanzania invaded Uganda in 1979 to overthrow Idi Amin, not to annex Uganda. Even South Africa's destabilization efforts against its neighbors in the 1980s were primarily attempts to influence the policies of the majority-ruled countries, not to change the borders of the region. Lesotho or Swaziland would not exist today if South Africa had any real territorial ambitions. Similarly, in the bloody wars over Zaire/Democratic Republic of the Congo in the late 1990s, there was a continued recognition of the old boundaries. For instance, in 1998, Rwanda and Uganda decided to try to oust Laurent Kabila and replace him with a more manageable puppet in order to have their security concerns addressed. They did not try to simply seize territory in eastern D.R.O.C. and declare that their states had grown, even though this would have been far easier than re-

¹⁷ This view is identified and praised by the International Court of Justice in *Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso/Republic of Mali)*, *Judgment*, I. C. J. Reports 1986, pp. 566-7.

¹⁸ Walter L. Barrows, "Changing Military Capabilities in Black Africa," in *Arms and the African*, ed. William Foltz and Henry Bienen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 101.

¹⁹ Organization of African Unity, "O.A.U. Resolution on Border Disputes, 1964," in *Basic Documents on African Affairs*, ed. Ian Brownlie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 361.

²⁰ Organization of African Unity, "Charter of the O.A.U.," in *Basic Documents on African Affairs*, p. 3.

placing the government in far-away Kinshasa. In the few conflicts that did have the potential to threaten fundamentally the existence of states—Somalia's attempt to invade Ethiopia in the 1970s and Libya's war against Chad in the 1970s and 1980s—the aggressor did not succeed.

The growth and structure of African militaries are indicative of the relative peace that they have experienced on their external borders for most of the postindependence period. African armies expanded rapidly after independence and took roughly fifteen years to reach maturity. In 1963, at the dawn of independence, the average African army had 0.73 soldiers for every thousand people. By 1979, that figure had more than quadrupled to 3.10 soldiers per thousand citizens. The size of African armies then began to decrease so that by the mid-1990s, there were only two soldiers per thousand citizens across the continent.²¹ African armies are, by comparative standards, small. In 1994, African countries had on average only 57 percent as many soldiers per thousand citizens as the average developing country (2 versus 3.5).²² In a stunning indication of how little security concerns have affected state actions, African governments cut defense spending disproportionately when they were forced to reduce spending.²³ One of the primary reasons for coups in Africa and the rest of the third world is that soldiers have so little to do. As a result, they seek to carve out a role for themselves in politics.²⁴

Thus, the vision in much of the international relations literature of states emeshed in some kind of Hobbesian struggle in a merciless international environment really has very little resemblance to Africa as ruled by the colonialists or Africans. In particular, the realist view of the world is problematic in systems where the use of force between units is not a serious concern.²⁵ In Europe, as noted in chapter one, there was a long period where open conflict and hostility was the norm but this was due to the presence of a very particular set of geographic and demographic facts. In particular, a defining feature of European international relations was the ceaseless struggle for territory. As a result of this difficult environ-

²¹ Calculated from Donald George Morrison, Robert Cameron Mitchell, and John Naber, *Black Africa: A Comparative Handbook*, 2nd ed. (New York: Paragon House, 1989), pp. 167-8; and U. S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1985* (Washington, DC: ACDA, 1985), p. 47; and ACDA, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1995* (Washington, DC: ACDA, 1995), p. 54.

²² ACDA, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1995*, pp. 53-4.

²³ Mark Gallagher, "Government Spending in Africa: A Retrospective," *Journal of African Economies* 3 (April 1994): pp. 86-7.

²⁴ Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Military Withdrawal from Politics: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 114-5.

²⁵ Robert Powell, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neoralist/Neoliberal Debate," *International Organization* 48 (Spring 1994): p. 333.

ment, Tilly estimates that the "enormous majority" of states in Europe failed.²⁶ Even those that survived changed frequently, given the hostility of their environments. For instance, it took between three and five hundred years for the modern French frontier to be established.²⁷

However, all of Africa's weak states have survived. Neither the colonial nor the independent state system that have, successively, defined international relations in Africa since 1885 have been hostile to weak states. Rather, both systems have been highly organized and designed to protect the frontiers of countries who could not necessarily defend themselves. While there are many reasons for the relative lack of international war, the fact that territorial competition was not a significant motivation for either the colonialists or the rulers of independent Africa undoubtedly has been a significant factor. For instance, the security dilemma—the notion that each state's effort to become more secure threatens another state—is rooted in a world where armies had to be massed on frontiers in order to protect territory. Thus, Kenneth Waltz notes that, "contact generates conflict and at times issues in violence."²⁸ Without having to compete for territory, Africans could devise rules by which all could become more secure.

THE END OF SELF-DETERMINATION

One implication of the OAU's solution to the boundary problems faced by the African countries was, as the quote from Nyerere at the beginning of this chapter indicates, to effectively quash the right of self-determination. This right, which all African nationalists had relied upon during the fight to gain independence, posed an extraordinary threat to the leaders of the newly independent countries because it implied that the many disgruntled minorities in these countries had a legal right to destroy the territorial integrity of their states through secession. Of course, self-determination via secession was also the traditional African manner of resolving disputes in many parts of the continent. While the OAU Charter recognizes "the inalienable right to all people to control their own destiny," the OAU Principles are designed to promote the rights of states rather than individuals. The first three items of the principles (in article 3 of the Charter) affirm sovereign equality of all member states, noninter-

²⁶ Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 38.

²⁷ Malcolm Anderson, *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1996), p. 23.

²⁸ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 103. See also Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30 (October 1977): pp. 168–9.

ference in the internal affairs of member states, and respect for the states' sovereignty and territorial integrity.²⁹ Self-determination was deemed only to apply to those countries that were still colonies or that were still under white minority control.

The effective elimination of the right to self-determination after independence has occasionally been challenged in Africa. Undoubtedly, the most important protest was the recognition accorded by Tanzania and several other states to the rebel Biafran regime during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). The government of Tanzania said that it understood the need for Africa to prevent the disintegration of existing states. However, it was compelled to go against existing norms because "Africa has watched the massacre of tens of thousands of people, has watched the employment of mercenaries of both sides in the current civil war, and has accepted repeated rebuffs of its offers to help by mediation or conciliation."³⁰ President Nyerere argued that, "the people must feel that this State, or this Union, is theirs; and they must be willing to have their quarrels in that context. Once a large number of the people of any such political unit stop believing that the State is theirs, and that the Government is their instrument, then the unit is no longer viable."³¹ The OAU rejected these sentiments and, in 1967, reaffirmed its respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nigeria and other African states; condemned attempts at secession anywhere in Africa; and proclaimed that the Nigerian Civil War was an internal affair.³²

Similarly, the right to Eritrean self-determination was never recognized, despite the fact that the Eritreans had an excellent case for self-rule based on the abrogation of international agreements by successive governments in Addis Ababa and despite the fact that the Eritreans had physical control over at least some of the land they claimed. Instead, Eritrea only was recognized as an independent state once a military victory was won over the government in Addis Ababa, the traditional way that international society has recognized new states.³³

The project of defeating any internal attempts at rearranging boundaries was undoubtedly helped by the strong balance of force in favor of the state compared to African societies. In the early 1960s, while armies

²⁹ Organization of African Unity, "Charter of the OAU," pp. 2–3.

³⁰ Government of Tanzania, "Tanzania Recognizes Biafra," in *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook, 1966–1970*, ed. A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 208.

³¹ Julius K. Nyerere, "Why We Recognized Biafra," in *ibid.*, p. 211.

³² Organization of African Unity, "OAU Resolution on the Situation in Nigeria, 1967," in *Basic Documents on African Affairs*, ed. Ian Brownlie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 364.

³³ James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 262.

were weak, almost all the guns that were available in Africa were controlled security forces. Power being a relative concept, African states were thus in the most important way classically Weberian because they had a monopoly on the use of force throughout most of their territories.

A FRIENDLY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Several developments at the international level helped African leaders in their effort to continue the inherited state system. First, the Cold War had the effect of providing African countries with patrons when their boundaries were challenged internally or externally. The superpowers were concerned with cultivating clients in all parts of the world and therefore were willing to help African nations crush ethnic rebellions or threats from neighbors. A secret 1963 U.S. document argued that an important U. S. interest, right after keeping Africa free of communists, was "to restrain violence in general and preserve the present territorial order as the most feasible alternative to chaos."³⁴ Thus, Zaire won crucial aid from the U. S. in turning back the Shaba rebellions; Chad relied on France to retain its territorial integrity in the face of Libyan aggression; and Ethiopia was given critical military support by the Soviet Union in order to resist Somalia's irredentist claims. During the Cold War, the superpowers were actually exceptionally attentive to African sensibilities concerning boundary maintenance. Indeed, despite continual meddling throughout the continent, not once did either superpower, or any other outside power, offer significant support to an African effort to overturn an existing boundary. This deference continued after 1989. For instance, when President Kabila was threatened by a rebellion in eastern D.R.O.C. in 1998, the U.S. immediately said that it wanted, "the Government in Kinshasa to be in a position to control its territory" and therefore "believe[d] strongly in the territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,"³⁵ in spite of the compelling evidence that such integrity did not exist on the ground.

In particular, the international community embraced the goal of boundary stability established by the OAU to effectively prevent the application of the norm of self-determination to a group of people once their country has become independent.³⁶ For example, in the case of a border dispute be-

³⁴ "The Strategic Importance of Africa," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Africa, 1961-1963*, ed. Nina Davis Howland (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), p. 331.

³⁵ Steven Erlanger, "U. S. Sees Rwandan Role in Congo Revolt," *New York Times*, 5 August 1998, p. A8.

³⁶ Gino J. Naldi, "The Case Concerning the Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso/Republic of

tween Mali and Burkina Faso, the International Court of Justice stated explicitly that because African states had decided to retain the colonial boundaries, the practices of the region must be respected despite the apparent conflict with the principle of the right to self-determination.³⁷ More generally, the world community has allowed any country, no matter how underdeveloped its political and economic institutions, to enjoy the full privileges of sovereignty. Thus, a late Eisenhower administration document on Africa recognized that while many West African countries were "sorely lacking in both human and economic resources, this fact does not and will not slow the drive toward self-government and independence." The document noted with approval the desire for African countries to be "accepted as equals and be treated with dignity and respect," sentiments that were to be operationalized partially by membership in the United Nations.³⁸

Allocating Legitimacy

While the state system designed by the Africans managed to preserve the units and boundaries as designed by the colonialists, politics at the domestic level quickly demonstrated signs of significant instability, as a large number of governments voted into power in the early 1960s either were overthrown by their own militaries or the leaders themselves moved to fundamentally alter the systems in order to reduce the level of political competition. Some countries (including Ethiopia, Congo, and Ghana) also faced insurgencies of varying strengths that sometimes had physical control of territories far from the capital. Thus, African politics were the exact opposite of traditional political science models of domestic and international politics: the politics between countries was extremely well-ordered (as opposed to the Hobbesian model of international relations) while domestic politics did not evidence many signs of stability.³⁹ African leaders were therefore forced to develop a set of decision rules that would indicate who was actually in charge of the states that were assumed to be permanent and that could not be interfered with.

Mali): *Uti Possidetis* in an African Perspective," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 36 (October 1987): pp. 901-2.

³⁷ International Court of Justice, *Case Concerning the Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso/Republic of Mali)*, p. 567.

³⁸ National Security Council, "Statement of U. S. Policy toward West Africa," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Africa, 1958-1960*, ed. Harriet Dashiell Schwar and Stanley Shaloff (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), p. 117.

³⁹ See Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist," *World Politics* 35 (October 1982): pp. 23-4.

This problem came to a head with the first coup in West Africa when Togolese president Olympio was killed in a military revolt on 13 January 1963. There was significant sentiment to condemn the coup because African leaders were obviously afraid that the same fate might be visited upon them. However, after a brief period of ostracism, Togo was allowed to reenter normal diplomatic relations with other African countries and to sign the Charter of the Organization of African Unity.⁴⁰ While the OAU Charter does (article III, paragraph 5) offer “unreserved condemnation, in all its forms of political assassination,” leaders were not willing to make judgments about the legitimacy of governments. As Boutros-Ghali noted, there was no attempt similar to the Central American effort (the so-called Tobar Doctrine) to not recognize governments that had come to power via forceful means.⁴¹

Instead, the OAU established a decision-making rule that preserved African borders and prevented any kind of external competition while requiring only minimal levels of effective domestic sovereignty. To do so, the OAU said, in effect, that if an African government is in control of the capital city, then it has the legitimate right to the full protection offered by the modern understanding of sovereignty. Thus, Olympio’s killers were recognized as the legitimate government of Togo because they controlled Lomé, not because they were perceived by the Togolese as legitimate or because they physically controlled the territory of the country. As a result, even if an African country did not have physical control over its own territory, by the rules of the international community, it could not be challenged by other domestic groups or by outsiders. In fact, large countries such as Ethiopia, Zaire, and Angola at various times did lose control of parts of their territories to opponents but the international community always recognized whoever controlled Addis, Kinshasa, and Luanda as the unquestioned leaders of those territories. Thus, Mobutu was recognized as the ruler of Zaire even though he controlled little more than Kinshasa and its environs for the last years of his rule and continued to be recognized as the leader while the forces of Laurent Kabila marched through the country in late 1996 and early 1997. Kabila was only recognized as the legitimate ruler when he captured Kinshasa on 17 May 1997. As William J. Foltz notes, the rule reflects the reality that, “the greatest point in common among those who attend OAU

⁴⁰ See “No More African Groups,” *West Africa*, 1 June 1963, p. 597.

⁴¹ Tobar, foreign minister of Ecuador, set down a principle in 1907 declaring that a state should not recognize a foreign government that comes to power by regicide, popular rebellion, or coup d’état. This doctrine was included in the 1907 Washington Convention, ratified by five Central American states, and by the 1923 Washington Convention, ratified by the same states. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “The Addis Ababa Charter,” *International Conciliation* 546 (January 1964): pp. 28–9.

summits is that they control capital cities.”⁴² Indeed, the Charter of the OAU begins, “We, the Heads of African and Malagasy States and Governments” while the UN charter starts with “We, the Peoples of the United Nations.” As a result, Boutros-Ghali detected early on the trend toward an “Africa of Heads of State.”⁴³

This decision rule was popular with the international community. Physical control of the capital (still usually located on the coast) is the easiest indication of political presence for outsiders to discern. It would have been far more difficult for the international community to have recognition rest on measures of popular support or administrative presence throughout a country. Finally, states have relations with other states. The OAU decision rule that territorial control or popular legitimacy was irrelevant therefore meshed nicely with the operational code of international diplomacy.

The Organization of African Unity thus offered a very clear guide to the geographic nature of power gradients after independence. The center, essentially the capital city, has to be controlled but the degree of authority outside the capital could be highly variable. The African leaders were then free to extend their rule throughout their territories as they found convenient. The resemblance between the rule of control of the capitals and the Berlin rules is not accidental. Control of the capital is the analogue to the minimal level of government presence that the Europeans first defined at the Berlin Conference. As with the Berlin rules, the Addis rules (if they can be so named after the city where the OAU charter was signed), allowed the continent to continue to be demarcated in a way that most of the protagonists would agree is irrational while preventing any external challenge to rule. Thus, while Jackson is right that the admission of African states to the community of sovereign nations is in many ways a revolutionary development given their lack of “empirical statehood,”⁴⁴ this development also should be seen as a logical progression from the Berlin rules, which did not demand much in the way of an administrative presence for a colonizer to claim control of the territory.

It is telling that the international system, created in good part by the Africans, no longer demanded a theory of rule. As noted in chapter three, colonial governors of the respective European powers were obsessed with the problem of ruling over vast areas with low population densities. They

⁴² William J. Foltz, “The Organization of African Trouble: How and Why it Works and Does not Work,” Report 689-AR, U.S. Department of State, mimeograph, September 1983, p. 18.

⁴³ Boutros-Ghali, “The Addis Ababa Charter,” pp. 25, 45.

⁴⁴ Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 25.

therefore promulgated all nature of theories of rule as, if nothing else, explanations of how they were trying to cope with an unprecedented administrative problem. No similar fixation is evident in the writings of independent African leaders. The assumption at independence was that the accession to power in the capital was synonymous with the ability to rule their entire territorial expanse, a belief firmly supported by the international community. Thus, Nkrumah famously argued that, with independence, "We have won the political battle. . . ." ⁴⁵ Similarly, Lugard's eventual successors in independent Nigeria were not obsessed with the problem of extending power over a sparsely populated hinterland because they believed (falsely as it turned out) that independence would solve the problem of broadcasting power. For instance, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first Nigerian prime minister said, during the 1959 debate over the motion to ask for independence, that "I am confident that when we have our own citizenship, our own national flag, our own national anthem we shall find the flame of national unity will burn bright and strong." ⁴⁶ Similarly, Nnamdi Azikwe, the first premier of the eastern region of Nigeria, would claim that, "The North and the South [of Nigeria] are one, whether we wish it or not. The forces of history have made it so." ⁴⁷

The Political Consequences of Peace

As with Europe, the particular external environment that African countries confronted had a profound effect on internal arrangements. African countries faced the luxury of escaping the brutal history of continual war that so mars the barbaric European experience in the twentieth century. However, the problem of state-building in times of peace and, in particular, of extending authority, is nonetheless consequential and, given the dominance of the belligerent European experience, largely unexplored. Standard narratives of European state development highlight the crucial contribution of war. Thus, Samuel P. Huntington argued that "war was the great stimulus to state building," and Charles Tilly went so far as to claim that "war made the state, and the state made war." ⁴⁸ Similarly,

⁴⁵ Kwame Nkrumah, "Tenth Anniversary of the CPP," in *Selected Speeches of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah*, ed. Samuel Obeng (Accra: Ghana Advance Press, 1973), p. 4.

⁴⁶ Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, *Mr. Prime Minister* (Apapa, Nigeria: Nigerian National Press, 1964), p. 37.

⁴⁷ Nnamdi Azikwe, *Zik: A Selection of Speeches of Nnamdi Azikwe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 102.

⁴⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 123, and Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State Making," p. 42.

nomadic states in inner Asia were forced to acquire a higher level of social organization than would have been required to solve their domestic problems in order to defend themselves from their sedentary neighbors. ⁴⁹

At the most basic level, war in Europe acted as a filter whereby weak states were eliminated and political arrangements that were not viable either were reformed or disappeared. Weak states do exist in Europe today—Belgium is one example—but the near-constant threat of war prompted most states to become stronger in order to survive. The contrast between this evolutionary development and the current situation in Africa, where even states that are largely dependent on foreign aid will continue to exist for the foreseeable future, in good part because of the protection afforded by the international system they helped to create, is dramatic. More specifically, war in Europe played an important role in the consolidation of many now-developed states in ways that are particularly important to an understanding of how power is broadcast: war caused the state to become more efficient in revenue collection by forcing leaders to dramatically improve administrative capabilities (thereby allowing states to fund nationwide administrative and economic systems), and war created a climate and important symbols around which a disparate population could unify and bond with the state in a manner that legitimized the capital's authority. That African countries have, to date, largely failed to solve these problems has important implications for their ability to consolidate power and has had a significant impact on the evolution of their political economies.

Taxes

There is no better measure of a state's reach than its ability to collect taxes. If a state does not effectively control a territory, it certainly will not be able to collect taxes in a sustained and efficient manner. At the same time, a widely distributed tax base helps guarantee consolidation of the state by generating a robust revenue stream. Perhaps the most noticeable effect of war in European history was to cause the state to increase its ability to collect significantly more revenue with greater efficiency and less public resistance. Given the freedom of European states to attack

University Press, 1968), p. 123, and Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State Making," p. 42.

⁴⁹ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 7.

each other, states that could quickly raise money could successfully threaten neighbors with a war that might lead to significant damage or even complete destruction. Richard Bean writes, "Once the power to tax had been successfully appropriated by any one sovereign, once he had used that power to bribe or coerce his nobility into acquiescence, that state could face all neighboring states with the choice of being conquered or of centralizing authority and raising taxes."⁵⁰ While success in war depended on many factors, including technology, tactics, and morale of the troops, raising sufficient revenue was a necessary condition to prevent defeat. As Michael Mann notes, "A state that wished to survive had to increase its extractive capacity to pay for professional armies and/or navies. Those that did not would be crushed on the battlefield and absorbed into others—the fate of Poland, of Saxony, of Bavaria in [the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries]. No European states were continuously at peace. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that a peaceful state would have ceased to exist even more speedily than the militarily inefficient actually did."⁵¹

War affected state finances for two reasons. First, it placed tremendous strains on leaders to find new and more regular sources of income. While rulers may have recognized that their tax system was inadequate, a war may have been the only prompt that would have forced them to expend the necessary political capital and to deploy the coercion required to gain more revenue. For instance, in Mann's study of taxation in England between 1688 and 1815, he finds that there were six major jumps in state revenue, and that each corresponds with the beginning of a war.⁵² The association between the need to fight and the need to collect revenue is perhaps clearest in Prussia, where the main tax collection agency was called the General War Commissariat.⁵³

Second, citizens are much more likely to acquiesce to increased taxation when the nation is at war, because a threat to their survival will overwhelm other concerns they might have about increased taxation. In fact, taxation for a war can be thought of as a "lumpy" collective good: not only must the population pay to get the good, but it also must pay a considerable amount more than the current level of taxation, because a

⁵⁰ Richard Bean, "War and the Birth of the Nation State," *Journal of Economic History* 33, (March 1973): p. 220.

⁵¹ Michael Mann, "State and Society, 1130–1815: An Analysis of English State Finances," in *States, War, and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology*, ed. Michael Mann (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 109.

⁵² Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, p. 486.

⁵³ Michael Duffy, "The Military Revolution and the State, 1500–1800," in *The Military Revolution and the State, 1500–1800*, ed. Michael Duffy, Exeter Studies in History no. 1 (Exeter, U.K.: University of Exeter, 1980), p. 5.

small increase in revenue often is not enough to meet the new security threat facing the state.⁵⁴ In this way, taxation for a war is like taxation for building a bridge: everyone must pay to build the bridge and a small increase in revenue will not be enough, because half a bridge, like fighting half a war, is useless.

Thus, war often causes a "ratchet effect," whereby revenue increases sharply when a nation is fighting but does not decline to the ante bellum level when hostilities have ceased.⁵⁵ Once governments have invested the sunk costs in expanding tax collection systems and routinized the collection of new sources of revenue, the marginal costs of continuing those structures are quite low and the resources they collect can be used for projects that will enhance the ruling group's support. Ironically, it is under external threat from others that European states were able to consolidate control over their own nations.

War in other societies at other times often played the same kind of role that external conflict did in Europe. For instance, the South Korean and Taiwanese states have been able to extract so many resources from their societies in part because the demands to be constantly vigilant provoked the state into developing efficient mechanisms for collecting resources and controlling dissident groups.⁵⁶ A highly extractive state also can cloak demands for greater resources in appeals for national unity in the face of a determined enemy.

It is extraordinarily difficult, outside times of crisis, to reform elemental parts of the governmental system, such as the means of taxation. Since taxes are so consequential to every business decision, over time the tax system reflects a large number of political bargains made by the state with different interest groups. Edward Ames's and Richard Rapp's conclusion that tax systems "last until the end of the government that instituted them" and that tax systems in some European countries survived "almost intact" from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries until the late eighteenth century may be an exaggeration, but their conclusions suggest just how much inertia a particular system for collecting government revenue can develop over time.⁵⁷ Other than war, no type of crisis demands that the state increase taxes with such forcefulness, and few other situations would impel citizens to accept those demands, or at least not resist them as strongly as they otherwise might have. It is therefore hard to counter

"Lumpy" goods are products that are not useful if only part is purchased. Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 56–7.

⁵⁴ Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, pp. 483–90.

⁵⁵ Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 274.

⁵⁶ Edward Ames and Richard T. Rapp, "The Birth and Death of Taxes: A Hypothesis," *Journal of Economic History* 37, no. 1 (March 1977): p. 177.

Tilly's argument that "the formation of standing armies provided the largest single incentive to extraction and the largest single means of state coercion over the long run of European statemaking."⁵⁸

AFRICAN PUBLIC FINANCE

War's effect on the structure of government revenue is important to Africa because the continent's political geography has a profound influence on possibilities for taxation. Given low densities of population dispersed across large hinterlands, it was difficult for precolonial states to tax individuals. It was also hard to derive rents from land the way that feudal governments did in Europe because land had such a low value and because it was easy for the population to avoid land-based taxation.⁵⁹ As a result, most precolonial governments were dependent on taxing trade. Gaining revenue from international commerce, which usually originated in the political center, also was easier for precolonial states than to tax individuals, especially given the uncertain sovereignty that so many precolonial states had over their outlying areas. Of course, for many African states, gaining tribute from outlying areas via war or the threat of war was also a significant means of gaining revenue.

Not surprisingly, colonial governments were unable to solve the revenue problem because there was not a fundamental change in the nature of population distribution and because economic development, except in the settler colonies, was extremely slow. As a result, most colonial governments were also highly dependent on revenue from customs duties. Hopkins estimates that customs duties accounted for about two-thirds of the total revenue for the greater part of the colonial period in both the West African anglophone and francophone colonies.⁶⁰ Reflecting their modest motivations for ruling in Africa, the states the Europeans created did not develop impressive institutions for collecting revenue.

Aid from the metropole, the other important revenue stream for colonial governments, was, of course, a direct transfer to the capital. As a result, these flows worked to retard additional efforts to gain revenue from the countryside given the low cost of receiving aid versus the high cost of developing rural collection systems. After World War II, when colonial governments finally began a limited focus on development projects, transfers from abroad, especially the metropole, became critical. For

⁵⁸ Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," p. 73.

⁵⁹ Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

TABLE 4.1
Structure of Government Revenue (Percent of Total Government Revenue)

Level of Per Capita Income	Taxes on Foreign Trade	Indirect Internal Taxation	Internal Direct Taxes	Other Revenue
Less than U.S.\$80	44	22	22	11
Greater than \$81 to \$199	36	14	29	21
Greater than \$200	33	22	28	17

Source: Economic Commission for Africa, *A Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1960-1964* (New York: United Nations, 1968), p. 186.

Note: Data are for three of the years between 1959 and 1964.

instance, in francophone territories, transfers from France accounted for 75 percent of total capital formation.⁶¹

Independent African countries inherited the fiscal structures their colonial predecessors constructed. In the early 1960s, when the vast majority of African countries were about to receive independence, most governments were still highly dependent on indirect taxation, especially taxes on foreign trade. Table 4.1 provides a snapshot of just how difficult it would be for African leaders to mobilize a consistent revenue stream. In this sample, internal direct taxes accounted for only 22 to 29 percent of government revenue at the dawn of independence. Indeed, indirect taxation, especially taxes on international transactions as a percentage of government revenue, had risen in the 1950s as colonial governments started to undertake large-scale infrastructure projects and quickly exhausted the savings that had accrued over previous decades.⁶² At least some African countries also received a significant amount of their revenue from nontax sources, especially from mineral concessions.⁶³ This statistic is highly variable and, particularly in the 1960s, not well recorded. In 1960, data from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) suggests that 16.5 percent of total government revenue was accounted for by nontax revenue.⁶⁴

Finally, foreign aid was also a significant feature for many newly independent governments. In the early 1960s, foreign aid tended to be over-

⁶¹ Economic Commission for Africa, *Economic Survey of Africa since 1950* (New York: United Nations, 1959), p. 186.

⁶² Economic Commission for Africa, "Public Finance in African Countries," *Economic Bulletin for Africa* 1 (June 1961): p. 13.

⁶³ Mark Gersovitz and Chris Paxson, "The Revenues and Expenditures of African Governments," *Journal of African Economies* 5 (June 1996): p. 206.

⁶⁴ Economic Commission for Africa, *A Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1960-1964* (New York: United Nations, 1968), pp. 199-201.

whelmingly funneled through the state apparatus. Western powers were skeptical that a significant private sector could develop given their racist perceptions of Africans' entrepreneurial talents (especially after colonial governments had done their best to suppress African entrepreneurs for the previous sixty years). In the early 1960s, a time when the centrally planned Soviet Union was viewed as in some ways more technologically advanced than the U.S., there was also much greater optimism about the efficacy of the state as an economic unit. The World Bank suggested to many African countries that they expand the number and extent of state-owned enterprises in order to increase the vibrancy of the economy. Finally, most foreign aid was directed at large infrastructure projects (ports, hydroelectric projects, roads) that only governments could operate.⁶⁵ The ECA estimated that extraordinary revenue and loans, of which foreign aid composed a very large amount, accounted for nineteen percent of total government revenue across Africa in 1960 and eighteen percent in 1965.⁶⁶

TAXES AND PEACE

Even in the 1960s, it was recognized that the structure of government revenue in Africa was highly problematic. First, the revenue streams produced were clearly inadequate. African states were desperately short of revenue to fund even minimal state services (e.g., pay nurses' salaries, buy books for schools, supply transport for agricultural extension services) that their populations had been promised in the heady days after independence. In addition to these recurrent costs, African countries were in need of more extensive and more efficient tax systems because the process of development requires large expenditures on infrastructure (including, of course, roads) to promote economic activity throughout the country.⁶⁷ W. Arthur Lewis estimated that the public sector in Third World countries should be spending on the order of 20 percent of GDP on services, exclusive of defense and debt repayment.⁶⁸ For the countries the ECA had data for, government expenditures amounted to only 17 percent of GDP in 1960 and only 22 percent in 1968 before defense

⁶⁵ For an overall review of the evolution of foreign aid, see Jeffrey Herbst, *U.S. Economic Policy Toward Africa: Promoting Reform in the 1990s* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1992).

⁶⁶ Economic Commission for Africa, *Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1970*, pt. 1 (New York: ECA, 1971), p. 138.

⁶⁷ W. Arthur Lewis, *The Evolution of the International Economic Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 39.

⁶⁸ W. Arthur Lewis, *Development Planning: The Essentials of Economic Policy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 115.

(which averaged about 27 percent of government expenditures in both years) and debt payments.⁶⁹ While these figures are only rough estimates, given the problems associated with African economic statistics in the 1960s, they illustrate the extent of the fiscal problem facing African states at independence.

By 1968, the Economic Commission for Africa was already warning that public expenditure in many countries was rising ahead of revenue (despite significant economic growth) and that the share of GDP absorbed by taxes was not related to the growth of the overall economy.⁷⁰ The ECA recognized that African countries relied on indirect taxes because they were convenient and relatively inexpensive to collect, given the nature of the inherited colonial administrative systems, by then only slightly modified. However, the UN agency noted that income tax still could be applied to some individuals with relatively high salaries and that some people did have substantial savings. It complained with a degree of honesty seldom found in more recent publications that "generally sufficient consideration was not given to the possibilities of developing and strengthening other forms of taxation. The shortage of revenue in most cases was due to the fact that the taxation potential was not fully exploited. In many cases it was not only due to bad tax administration but also the result of resistance from powerful pressure groups who blocked the way to effective tax reform."⁷¹

In direct contrast to the European experience of states being prompted to collect taxes efficiently due to a threatening external environment, the ECA detected no urgency on the part of African governments to raise money: "the problem of collection lies with the government agency responsible for tax collection. But invariably tax laws are not enforced because of the laxity of government officials." It went on to note that before it was reformed (and undoubtedly since those reforms lapsed), the Liberian tax collection agency, like many others across the continent, was, "woefully disorganized and painfully demoralized."⁷² Similarly, the ECA described the reasons for poor tax collection in the midwestern state of Nigeria: "The problem was that a number of leading figures in the society were being allowed to avoid their [tax] obligations. Avoidance has been too easy because big businessmen and self-employed professionals have felt that Government was afraid of them, or that they could 'buy off' tax officials. Sometimes the officials were afraid to take

⁶⁹ ECA, *Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1970*, pp. 327-8.

⁷⁰ ECA, *Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1960-1964*, pp. 186-7.

⁷¹ ECA, *Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1970*, p. 141.

⁷² Economic Commission for Africa, *Survey of Economic Conditions in Africa, 1972*, pt. 1 (New York: United Nations, 1973), p. 232.

TABLE 4.2
Comparative Structure of Central Government Revenue (% of Total Revenue)

Region	Taxes on Income, Profits, and Capital Gains	Taxes on International Trade and Transactions	Nontax Revenue
Africa	23.15	27.75	17.01
Asia	23.98	15.89	21.57
Eastern and Central Europe	17.65	6.53	12.30
Latin America	19.78	18.52	15.01

Source: International Monetary Fund, *Government Finance Statistics Yearbook 1997* (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 1997), pp. 4–5.

Note: For “Africa,” only sixteen countries are included. Statistics are for latest year available.

action because they felt that the defaulters might use their social connections to victimize them.”⁷³

Despite these warnings, African governments did not work energetically to change their revenue structure. Guyer notes, in one of the rare studies of direct taxation, that, in Nigeria, “since independence . . . the taxation systems set up by colonial governments have been all but dismantled, particularly at the local level.” She explains that the atrophy of direct tax systems came about because of several different reasons, including populist ideology, civil disorder, and “the increased importance of national wealth coming from large, single sources such as minerals and government loans.”⁷⁴ Income taxes did increase across Africa to 28 percent of government revenue in 1985. However, in the critical period 1985–1996, when many African countries were engaged in economic reform, the percentage of government revenue attributable to income taxes actually declined to 25 percent.⁷⁵ Table 4.2 indicates that, in the late 1990s, African countries are still much more dependent on a combi-

⁷³ Ibid., p. 233.

⁷⁴ Jane I. Guyer, “Representation without Taxation: An Essay on Democracy in Rural Nigeria, 1952–1990,” *African Studies Review* 35 (April 1992): p. 43.

⁷⁵ Data is from ECA, “Public Finance in African Countries,” *Economic Bulletin For Africa* 1 (June 1961): pp. 16–8 for 1958, and World Bank, *African Development Indicators, 1997: Data on Diskette* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1997). Data for the period from 1958 to 1980 on a continental basis are not available and even the more recent information presented here should be viewed with caution, given how poorly many African countries kept their accounts in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, one of the manifestations of the reliance on indirect sources of revenue was the retardation of a felt need to make public finance transparent.

nation of taxes on international transactions and nontax revenue than developing countries in other regions.

As a result, African governments were unable to increase their fiscal base. As figure 4.1 indicates, total government revenue as a percentage of gross domestic product did improve in the early 1980s. However, those gains subsequently disappeared so that by the mid-1990s, governments had not substantially increased the amount collected in taxes, as a percentage of the total economy, compared to 1980.

Close observers of African public finance today detect the same lack of seriousness with which the ECA was obsessed with in the 1960s. For instance, Collier notes the political origins of the public finance problem in Africa:

[Taxation] is normally constrained by two mechanisms: popular consent and the law. . . . [in independent Africa] the two usual constraint mechanisms failed. . . . In some countries, governments collect taxes in an arbitrary fashion, because the lack of trustworthy audited accounts has left governments with the choice of failing to collect revenue on profits or collecting it on an arbitrary basis. In many countries, de facto lump-sum assessments are common and so tax rates have little meaning in practice. . . . Thus the fear of high taxation in the private sector goes hand in hand with very low revenues being collected through taxes in many African countries.⁷⁶

The process of tax collection that Collier describes is suggestive, more than anything, of a tribute system where the state has essentially given up on regular tax collection and instead relies on extracting irregular lump sums from corporations and individuals. The political revolution that Africans experienced starting in the early 1960s has yet to lead to a fiscal revolution.

PUBLIC SPENDING AMONG FRIENDS

The inability to change the structure of the revenue stream had an immediate and obvious impact on overall government finances. In the face of poor revenue growth, African countries have depended on deficit spending for growth in government revenue. Figure 4.2 suggests that, especially for the period of 1985–1996, government expenditures and deficit spending moved in tandem. It is clear that African countries have not been completely dependent on internal revenue flows, even over the medium term, when making their expenditure decisions.

Normally, governments would not have been able to increase spending based almost completely on borrowing. However, governments south of

⁷⁶ Paul Collier, “The Marginalization of Africa,” *International Labour Review* 134 (1995): p. 552.

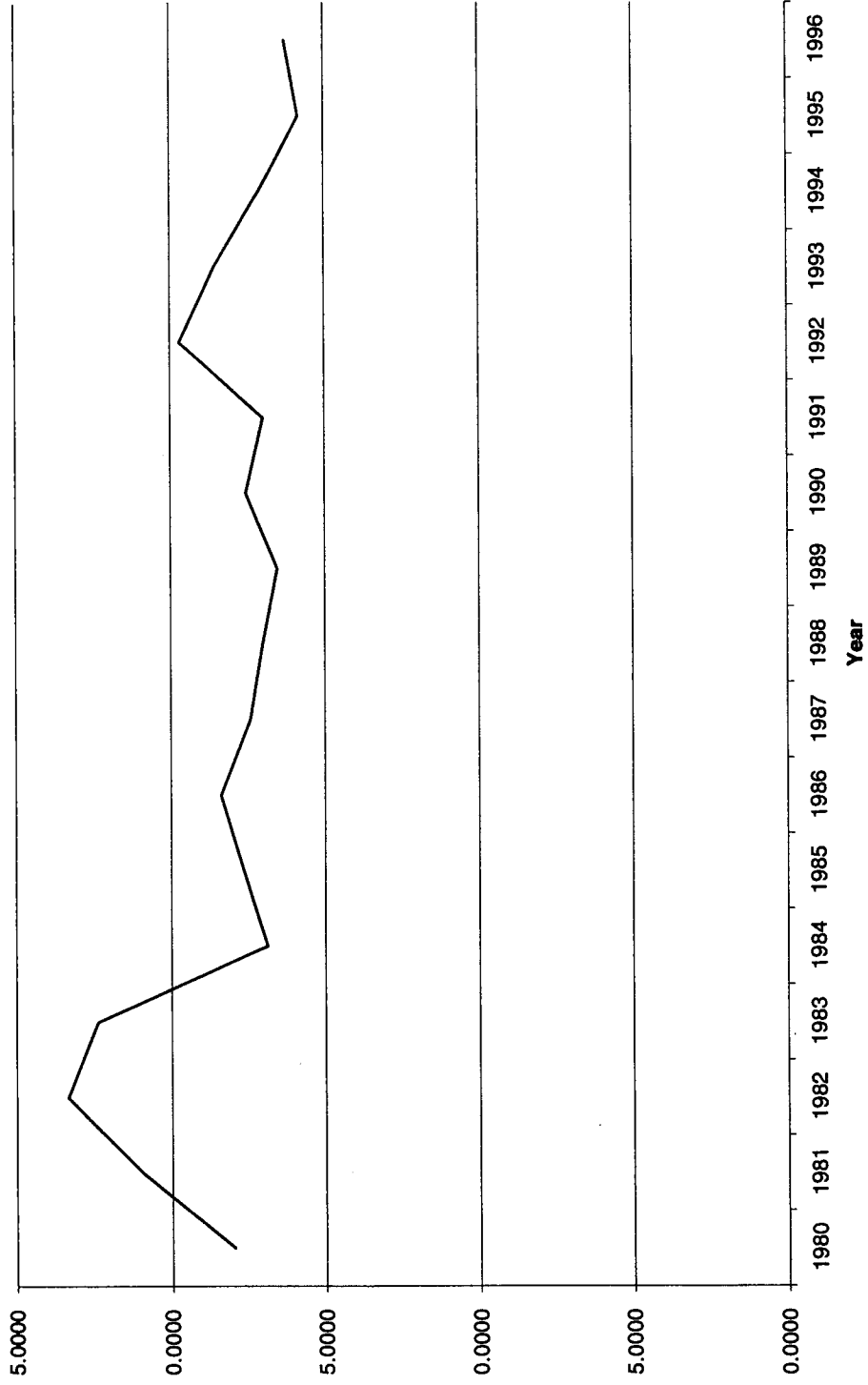


Figure 4.1. Government Revenue over Time. Source for figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3: World Bank, *African Development Indicators*, 1997.

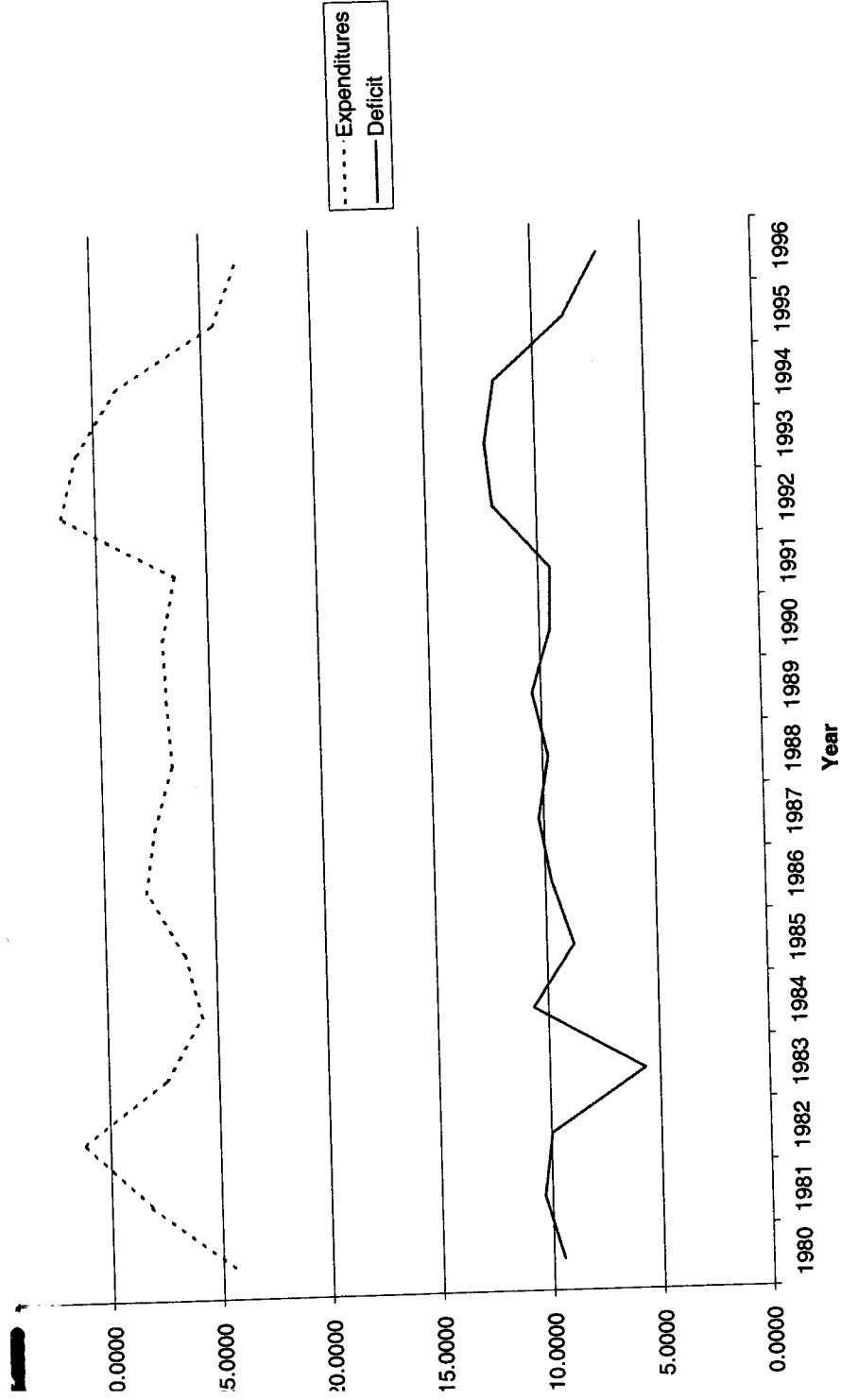


Figure 4.2. Expenditures and Deficits

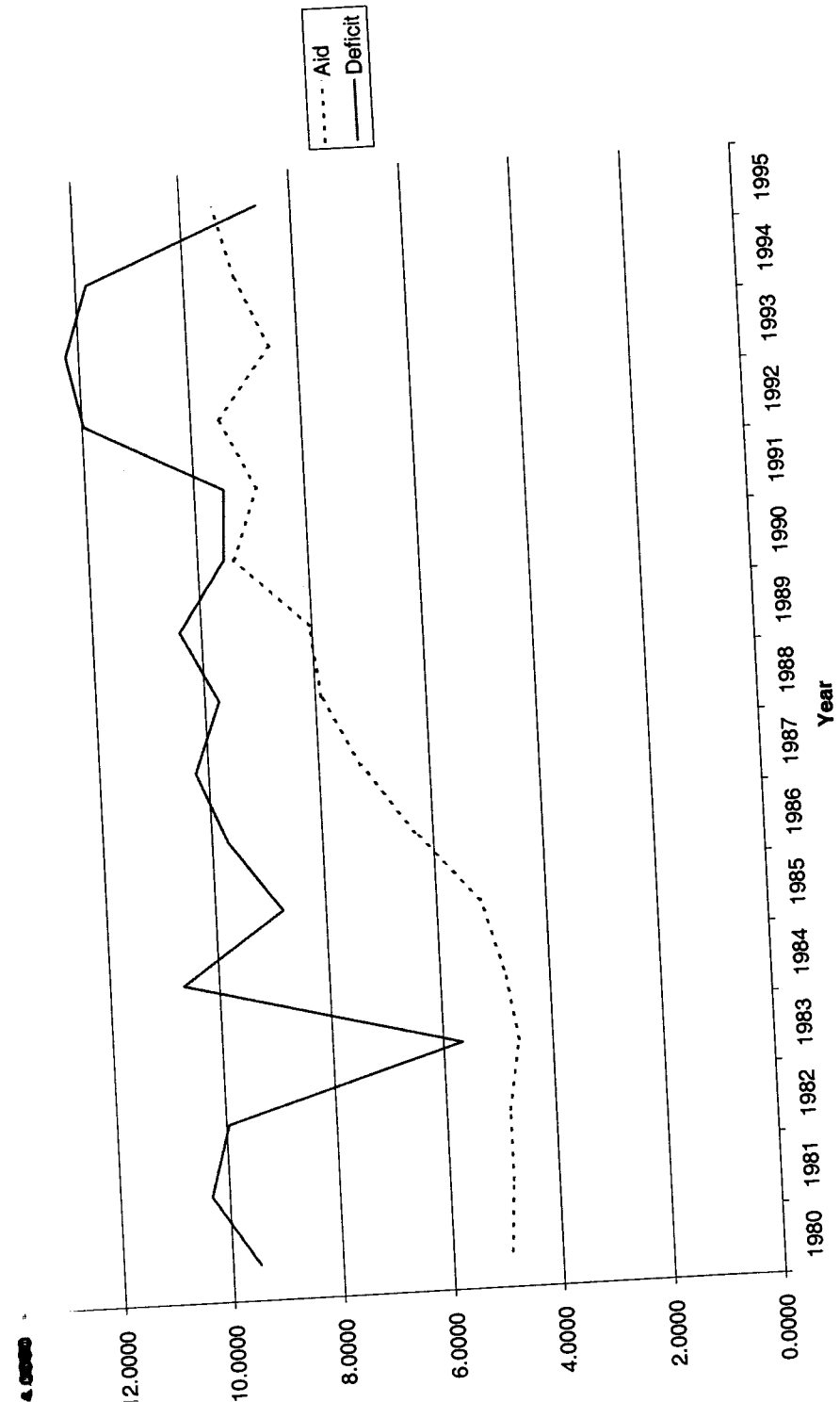
the Sahara found one revenue stream they had was robust: foreign aid. As figure 4.3 demonstrates, foreign aid increased enough during the period between 1980 to 1995, to allow African governments to spend more than their domestic revenue stream would have allowed. Indeed, donors managed to catch up relatively quickly to African governments when deficits began to increase after 1983. While it is often the case, especially in recent years, that external donors have demanded economic reform and prompted greater economic change than would have been generated internally, looking at the current environment in comparative perspective, it is easy to see how much less threatening the world is today for even weak states in Africa compared to Europe during the formative period of many of those countries. Joseph Stiglitz, in his role as chief economist of the World Bank, has even argued that foreign aid should be treated as a legitimate and predictable source of government revenue.⁷⁷ If European states had finances as problematic as many African countries, they may not have survived in an era which punished fiscal failure. Instead, in the era of African independence, the international community kept many governments solvent.

The obstacles posed by large peasant populations, significant non-monetarized sectors, and widespread poverty are, of course, important contributors to the revenue crisis of the African state. However, these problems do not fully explain why poor states do not extract greater resources from society in a manner that is less economically harmful. Factors such as political will, administrative ability, and the population's willingness to be taxed—issues that can be affected by the decisions of political leaders—are also crucial in understanding why states are unable to achieve their potential level of taxation in a benign manner.⁷⁸ For instance, Margaret Levi successfully shows that in such diverse cases as republican Rome, France, and England in the Middle Ages, eighteenth-century Britain, and twentieth-century Australia, levels of taxation were affected primarily by political constraints faced by rulers, despite the fact that the structure of most of these economies also posed significant barriers to increased tax collections.⁷⁹ Anderson estimates that revenue gains

⁷⁷ Joseph Stiglitz, "More Instruments and Broader Goals: Moving Towards the Post-Washington Consensus," 1998 WIDER Annual Lecture, Helsinki, Finland, 7 January 1998, found at: <http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/exttme/js-010798/wider.htm>, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Raja J. Chelliah, "Trends in Taxation in Developing Countries," *International Monetary Fund Staff Papers* 18, no. 2 (July 1971): p. 312. On the possibility of changing fiscal arrangements in Africa, see Dennis Anderson, *The Public Revenue and Economic Policy in African Countries*, World Bank Discussion Paper no. 19 (Washington, D. C.: World Bank, 1987), pp. 14–5.

⁷⁹ Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue*, pp. 104–5.



in the range of 20 to 30 percent were possible in Africa in the 1980s by increasing charges on public services.⁸⁰

What stands out is that Africa did not face the same kind of security threat as Europe, and, therefore, the pressure to mobilize revenue through efficient administration, including efficient nationwide systems to collect revenue, is much lower. It would be foolish to say that significant interstate war would have solved Africa's many fiscal problems. However, it is obvious that African countries have not solved the problem of how to motivate administrative systems to mobilize the maximum amount of revenue efficiently in times of peace. As a result, the spatial structure of revenue, and thus of the state itself, is very much as during the colonial period: concentrated in the capital and the few other areas of the country where it is easy to tax.

Domestic security threats, of the type African countries face so often, may force the state to increase revenue; however, civil conflicts result in fragmentation and considerable hostility among different segments of the population. Public acceptance of tax increases, a crucial factor in allowing European states to extract greater resources in times of war, will be a much more complicated issue in civil disputes. As Mann notes, "the growth of the modern state, as measured by finances, is explained primarily not in domestic terms but in terms of geopolitical relations of violence."⁸¹

Nationalism

While critical, taxes are not the only measure of how a state consolidates power. Also important is the far more nebulous idea that the nation and the state are bound together through a series of emotional ties often expressed in the iconic symbols of nationalism. Nationalism can be thought of as another way for the state to consolidate its power over distance not, as with taxes, through the agencies of coercion but through the norm of legitimacy. As such, nationalism is a particularly interesting issue for Africa because it may represent a way of broadcasting state authority that does not require the financial resources that poor countries lack. The dawn of independence in Africa thus presented leaders with another avenue for the extension of state power.

At independence, Africa's new leaders were well aware of just how

⁸⁰ Anderson, *The Public Revenue and Economic Policy in African Countries*, p. 18. See generally, Zmarak Shalizi and Lyn Squire, *Tax Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, World Bank Policy and Research Series Paper no. 2 (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1988).

⁸¹ Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, p. 490.

artificial the creations they were about to inherit were. Nationalism, which was never nearly as strong or widespread (especially outside the major cities) in Africa as many had thought, was palpable in the late colonial period because of the excitement generated by the surprisingly sudden prospect of independence. However, there was still the real problem of how to build ties between the population and the state once the euphoria dissipated and the reality of disparate nations facing weak and geographically constrained states became obvious.

European nation-states were hardly natural. As the history of France demonstrates, European states at one time had to deal, and in some cases are still coping with, highly diverse populations that did not have many emotional links with the state. In Europe, this problem was solved in good part by war. Indeed, the presence of a palpable external threat may be the strongest way to generate a common association between the state and the population. External threats have such a powerful effect on nationalism because people realize in a profound manner that they are under threat because of who they are as a nation; they are forced to recognize that it is only as a nation that they can successfully defeat the threat. Anthony Giddens recounts the effects of World War I: "The War canalized the development of states' sovereignty, tying this to citizenship and to nationalism in such a profound way that any other scenario [of how the international system would be ordered] subsequently came to appear a little more than idle fantasy."⁸² Michael Howard notes the visceral impact of wars on the development of nationalism throughout Europe:

Self-identification as a Nation implies almost by definition alienation from other communities, and the most memorable incidents in the group-memory consisted in conflict with and triumph over other communities. France *was* Marengo, Austerlitz and Jena: military triumph set the seal on the new-found national consciousness. Britain *was* Trafalgar—but it had been a nation for four hundred years, since those earlier battles Crecy and Agincourt. Russia *was* the triumph of 1812. Germany *was* Gravelotte and Sedan.⁸³

Similarly, in Japan, the Tokugawa Shogunate's armed conquest was "inextricably connected" with the regime's legitimacy.⁸⁴ As a result, it is hardly surprising that the critical monuments (e.g., Trafalgar Square, Arc de Triumph, Brandenburg Gates) in so many European capital cities are

⁸² Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 235.

⁸³ Michael Howard, *War and the Nation State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 9. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁴ Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 152.

militaristic. They celebrate the central events that not only preserved the state but also forged its links with the population.

African states, except for the small number (Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe) that fought wars of national liberation to gain independence, did not go through the trauma of war that might have resulted in a nationalism that would have made the term nation-state a reality. A reading of the national anthems—songs written and/or endorsed by the state to express the ties between nation and state⁸⁵—make clear that many early leaders understood the particular problem of building nationalism during times of peace. The writers of the Benin national anthem recognized how pacific their new age was:

Formerly, at her call, our ancestors
Knew how to engage in mighty battles
With strength, courage, ardor, and full of joy, but at the price of blood
Builders of the present, you too, join forces
Each day for the task stronger in unity
Build without ceasing for posterity.⁸⁶

The “Song of Abidjan” is even more direct in celebrating Côte d’Ivoire’s independence:

Proud Citizens of the Ivory Coast, the country calls us
If we have brought back liberty peacefully
It will be our duty to be an example.⁸⁷

So great was the peace that Africa experienced at birth that some national anthems showed a schizophrenia in calling for devotion both to the nation and to Africa. Thus, the chorus of the national anthem in Mali starts

For Africa and for you, Mali.⁸⁸

Indeed, a few national anthems dispense with any call to loyalty to the nation-state and demand general devotion to “Africa.” Thus, “God Bless Africa” (more famously known as *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*), which has served, at one time or another, as the national anthem of Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, is actually a hymn rather than a praise song to the nation-state. In fact, it says nothing about any of those states:

⁸⁵ See, F. Gunther Eyck, “The Setting,” in *The Voice of Nations: European National Anthems and their Authors*, ed. Gunther Eyck (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. xiii.

⁸⁶ “L’Aube Nouvelle,” in *National Anthems of the World*, ed. W. L. Reed and M. Bristow, 8th ed. (London: Cassell, 1993), p. 60.

⁸⁷ “L’Abidjanaise,” in *ibid.*, p. 271.

⁸⁸ “National Anthem of Mali,” in *ibid.*, p. 323.

God Bless Africa
Let Her fame spread far and wide
Hear our prayer
May Gold bless us!
Come, Spirit, come!
Come! Holy Spirit!
Come and bless us, her children!⁸⁹

In this anthem, there is a clear disjunction between the desire to bless Africa and the needs of national leaders to create ties to their populations by invoking specific national icons. As a result, the development of a national identity is that much more difficult. There is apparently no African national anthem that celebrates the creation of the nation through blood and iron as does the “La Marseillaise”:

Arise, children of the fatherland
The day of glory has come
Against us the blood-stained banner
Of tyranny is raised,
The banner of tyranny is raised,
Hear, in the fields, the roar
Of her fierce soldiers.
They come right into our arms
To slaughter our sons and our consorts.
Patriots, to arms!
From your battalions
Let’s march, let’s march!
May the tyrant’s foul blood water our furrow.⁹⁰

France, of course, is one of the outstanding examples of a nation that has managed to overcome significant linguistic and territorial divisions over a short period of time to create a true national identity. This is a task that still eludes most African countries.

Thus, Anthony D. Smith is absolutely right when he writes, “the central difficulty of ‘nation-building’ in much of Africa and Asia is the lack of any shared historical mythology and memory on which state elites can set about ‘building’ the nation.”⁹¹ Economic development, which early African leaders and the songs they wrote identified as the new struggle that Africa would engage in, and presumably the moral equivalent of war in Europe, has largely been a disaster in much of Africa as large parts of the

⁸⁹ “God Bless Africa,” in *ibid.*, p. 556.

⁹⁰ “La marseillaise,” in *ibid.*, p. 196.

⁹¹ Anthony D. Smith, “State-Making and Nation-Building,” in *States in History* ed. John A. Hall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 258.

continent are no richer today than they were at independence. As a result, national identity remains highly problematic in many African countries and often has lower salience than membership in other groups. As Ndeswa writes of Kenya, "the socially enacted relationship between ethnic identity, authority, and legitimacy competes with the legally sanctioned membership, authority, and legitimacy of the nation-state."⁹²

This is not to argue that nationalism is absent in Africa or in other parts of the developing world. However, leaders of these states do face a particularly difficult problem in promoting the identification of the nation with the state. Unfortunately, there is no good way to measure nationalistic fervor, much less develop a time series of such sentiments. It is clear that African leaders have yet to systematically develop a strategy of how to build nationalism in times of peace.

Killing the Golden Goose

In Europe there was an almost symbiotic relationship between the state's extractive capacity and nationalism: war increased both as the population was convinced by external threat that they should pay more to the state, and, at the same time, the population united around common symbols and memories that were important components of nationalism. Fighting wars may be the only way in which it is possible to have people pay more taxes and at the same time feel more closely associated with the state. As a result, the state was able to consolidate its power across the breadth of its territory in two ways: by constructing the fiscal infrastructure to fund the administrative apparatus, and by gaining the loyalty of the nation that could be drawn upon through the construction of nationalistic symbols. Ironically, the threat of international war helped solve the problem of the domestic consolidation of power.

In Europe, as taxation fell on individuals and corporations, there was an immediate need for states to reach compromises with the people and the institutions they were taxing. The need to fund warfare only highlighted the connection between taxation and state survival. As Tilly makes clear, the history of Europe is in many ways a series of structured bargains where the state is only allowed to tax more if it makes certain concessions to those being taxed, or when the populations understand that their survival is dependent on paying more to the state.⁹³ While these bargains were usually in favor of the state, it was clear to rulers that because expenditures were directly tied to taxation, they faced a political

⁹² Stephen N. Ndeswa, "Citizenship and Ethnicity: An Examination of Two Transition Moments in Kenyan Politics," *American Political Science Review* 91 (September 1997): p. 602.

⁹³ Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, p. 99.

restraint on expenditures. At the same time, since direct taxation is relatively transparent, individuals and institutions could immediately see how much of a burden the state was imposing on them and protest against excessive government spending if the cost to them was becoming too high.⁹⁴ In practice, of course, the relationship between taxation and popular sentiment was much more complicated and there are certainly few times in history when populations thought that they were undertaxed. However, leaders understood that there was some relationship between the level of government expenditure that was possible and continued public acceptance of their rule.

A reliance on indirect taxation and nontax revenue streams attenuates, if not eliminates, the link between government taxation and popular support. Indirect taxation makes it exceptionally hard for individuals or groups to understand how much they are being taxed. For instance, indirect taxation in the form of higher prices for certain imported goods is simply much harder to gauge than income or sales taxes. In addition, it is simply easier for the state to tax international transactions because it is not required to interact with individuals but simply control access points on the borders. As a result, the state will be under less pressure to bargain with the population in order to gain revenue. Of course, there is no popular constraint on spending non-tax revenue or on foreign aid. As a result, the kinds of bargains that European governments had to make with significant components of the population in order to ensure fiscal viability are largely absent in African countries. Due to the long peace African countries experienced, they not only did not have to reach accommodation with their populations over taxation policies, but the international community has actually subsidized their highly inefficient attempts at garnering revenue. At the same time, the other means by which the state might identify with the population were highly constrained.

Given that the revenue stream that African countries received was not dependent on making compromises with the domestic population, leaders were able to divert large amounts of revenue to their own purposes and to their own followers. When leaders receive large amounts of money without making compromises with the local population, they are free to spend it in nonproductive ways, especially by enriching themselves and their followers. For instance, the Nigerian experience has been so disastrous because the oil money has flowed in as essentially a windfall. The perhaps inevitable result was depicted starkly by the Nigerian government itself in 1987:

⁹⁴ A point noted early by J. R. McCulloch in his 1845 classic, *A Treatise on the Principles and Practical Influence of Taxation and the Funding System* (Edinburgh: Scottish Economic Society, 1975), p. 155.

The crucial role of the government in the development of the political economy, converted the government and public bureaucracies into an arena in which politicians and bureaucrats became pawn brokers. As a result of the struggle to control the government and institutions, corruption became part and parcel of the political economy.⁹⁵

Similarly, the Political Bureau, created by General Ibrahim Babangida to review the country's political structure, noted that since oil came online,

Earned revenue was lavished on unviable and grandiose projects which were very poorly thought through, and enormous contracts grossly inflated. Corruption flourished on a scale almost impossible to imagine. . . . All interests converged on the appropriation and consumption of oil revenues.⁹⁶

While the Nigerian experience is exceptional in terms of the amount of money wasted, the general dynamic of governments spending revenue in an unproductive manner when faced with little countervailing pressure is common. There is a marked tendency to overshoot on patronage when there is not a hard political constraint on expenditures. For instance, the Kenyan government eventually spent an extra 1.35 Kenyan pounds for every extra K£1.00 received during the late 1970s coffee boom.⁹⁷ More generally, across the continent, elites developed norms which differed drastically from the European determination to build the state in order to ensure their, and the state's, physical survival. Corruption in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa should not be seen merely as theft by individuals seeking to raid the coffers of the state. Rather, as Richard Joseph has noted, the distribution of state offices "is legitimated by a set of political norms according to which the appropriation of such offices is not just an act of individual greed or ambition but concurrently the satisfaction of the short-term objectives of a subset of the general population."⁹⁸

Thus, a World Bank study of firms worldwide found that private companies in Africa rated corruption the single greatest obstacle to doing business, the only region other than Latin America where corruption featured so prominently.⁹⁹ Within many African states, government revenue becomes what Ostrom and her colleagues call a "common pool" re-

source. That is, leaders treat revenue as a resource that can be exploited and, potentially, overexploited unless they reign themselves in, much as farmers have to develop self-regulatory apparatuses not to overuse water in large irrigation schemes. In general, Ostrom and her colleagues are optimistic about the ability of individuals to solve common pool resource problems. However, they note that it is unlikely for the resource problems to be solved in "sparse" environments where, "individuals have no expectation of mutual trust and no means of building trust through communication and continued interaction." Of course, this is precisely the situation caused by a reliance on indirect taxation and nontax revenue in political contexts where nationalism is low. In such instances, even Ostrom and her colleagues believe that the "tragedy of the commons" will be repeated and participants will be likely to over appropriate and under provide.¹⁰⁰

This is not to argue that the Europeans were inherently less greedy during their critical state-building phase. Rather, opportunities for corruption were limited in Europe by the exigencies created by the need for rulers to physically defend their states. What is often distinctive about rent-seeking in Africa is that it is so high as to be seemingly suboptimal: leaders steal so much from the state that the state itself begins to crumble and, along with it, the opportunities for future rent-seeking behavior. Yet, those states were generally safe from external attack, even as they crumpled internally. Indeed, contrary to what is often said, the post-World War II international system has been exceptionally friendly to weak states. States that had experienced such internal decay in Europe in previous centuries, or elsewhere, would have been destroyed by their neighbors. As a result, Africa has not only poorly performing states but also failed states. Leaders in Zaire, Liberia, Somalia, and elsewhere did not just steal, they stole so much as to cause the state to dissolve. In many other countries, government performance has been so poor that, as chapter one documented, basic infrastructure in many countries is crumbling.

Conclusion: Firm Boundaries and Weak Internal Control

In terms of the model of state authority developed in chapter one, the physical costs of state expansion are still relatively high, especially given the poverty of African states. Indeed, many African leaders were clearly

¹⁰⁰ Elinor Ostrom, Roy Gardner, and James Walker et al., *Rules, Games, and Common-Pool Resources* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 319, 328. See also Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny, "Corruption," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 108 (1993): especially p. 609.

⁹⁵ Government of Nigeria, *Government's Views and Comments on the Findings and Recommendations of the Political Bureau* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1987), p. 8.

⁹⁶ Political Bureau, *Report of the Political Bureau* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1987), p. 35.

⁹⁷ David Bevan, Paul Collier, and Jan Willem Gunning, *Controlled Open Economies: A Neoclassical Approach to Structuralism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 352.

⁹⁸ Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 67.

⁹⁹ World Bank, *World Development Report 1997* (Washington, DC: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 42.

not successful in expanding the scope of the state so that they could be said to be ruling their entire territories. Some states did make significant gains in the most basic measure of the consolidation of state authority: the collection of taxes. However, continental performance was, on average, extremely poor. Leaders were under very little pressure to expand their taxation systems in particular so that the state would have a physical presence throughout the country. Many African leaders actually engaged in activities that so enriched themselves that the scope of the state contracted. There is also no clear evidence of a growth in nationalist sentiment that would bind states to their populations. Thus, leaders calculate that it is not necessarily beneficial to them to expand the state outward through the process of constructing an elaborate infrastructure of power.

As a result, how power was actually expressed was often similar to the precolonial model of concentric circles of authority. States had to control their political cores but often had highly differentiated control over the outlying areas. Indeed, there was often no immediate imperative to improve tax collection in the hinterlands or to do the necessary work so that those outside of the capital could be bound to the state through symbolic politics.

However, the African states did create hard boundaries that were extraordinarily effective in preserving the integrity of their states. As a result, a divergence could result in how power was mapped and how states were mapped. African politics was no longer in particular harmony with the political geography. Indeed, the hardness of the territorial boundaries (as opposed to their design) was particularly striking. Africa's political geography seemingly favored more nuanced and dynamic demarcations because the broadcasting of power was unlikely to be uniform across space and time, given the generally low levels of population density. Yet the boundaries became institutionalized because of a congruence of domestic and international political factors.

As was the case in the colonial period, Africa's land borders were far from being irrelevant because they were artificial. Rather, the boundaries have been absolutely essential to the particular pattern of state consolidation that occurred across the continent. While they may not appear to be well guarded or to even have a physical manifestation at the frontier of many countries, the borders have performed their essential function: preserving the territorial integrity of nations despite the difficulties that the political center had in expanding its control over territory. In this way, the boundaries were actually more powerful than European territorial boundaries for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because African leaders quickly came to understand that they were under no threat from external attack and that the prospects for attacks on the integrity of the state from within were improbable. European leaders for

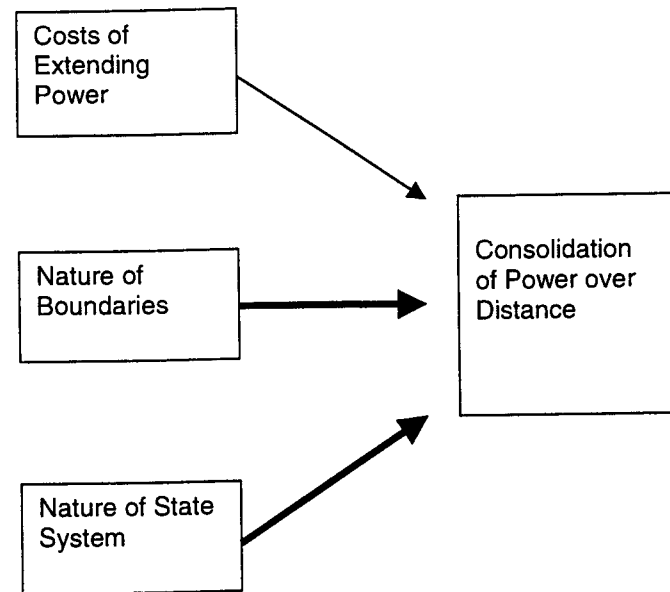


Figure 4.4. Paths to State Consolidation in Independent Africa

the last several hundred years lived in a different world and therefore had altogether different concerns about the fate of their nations.

In an extraordinary use of diplomacy, African leaders were able to arrange a state system that reinforced their own biases to retain the states that the colonialists had demarcated. This success in preserving units and boundaries has been phenomenal from the perspective of leaders. As a result, the international system allowed leaders to have full legal control of the territories that were within their borders. The international system tolerated, and to a limited degree even encouraged, a particular political economy that was biased in favor of providing revenue for patronage and funded the political perquisites of leaders rather than consolidating the state apparatus. Thus the state system created by the Africans was also critical to the consolidation of African states because it defined what control by the central state apparatus meant.

In and of itself, the granting of maximum sovereignty was not nearly as radical a change as Jackson suggests, given how seamlessly the conventions designed at Berlin segued into the Addis rules. What was perhaps more remarkable was that this benign international environment did not lead to improved prospects for the expansion of state authority but, in some very significant ways, retarded the broadcast of power. Independent Africa had thus become a state system with considerable fictions that

were in remarkable contrast to precolonial Africa, where control of almost every square mile of land had to be earned and was often challenged. These fictions held for many years but, as chapter nine discusses, by the turn of the century some of the basic failures in state consolidation had become evident to all.

Part Three

NATIONAL DESIGN AND DOMESTIC POLITICS