

Colonialism and the African Experience

Virtually everything that has gone wrong in Africa since the advent of independence has been blamed on the legacies of colonialism. Is that fair? Virtually all colonial powers had “colonial missions.” What were these missions and why were they apparently such a disaster? Did any good come out of the African “colonial experience”?

INTRODUCTION

Colonization of Africa by European countries was a monumental milestone in the development of Africa. The Africans consider the impact of colonization on them to be perhaps the most important factor in understanding the present condition of the African continent and of the African people. Therefore, a close scrutiny of the phenomenon of colonialism is necessary to appreciate the degree to which it influenced not only the economic and political development of Africa but also the African people’s perception of themselves.

This chapter focuses on the major European colonial powers in Africa. It will begin by comparing and contrasting in some detail the racial attitudes of the British, the French, and the Portuguese, proceeds to discuss their respective political administrative styles in their colonies and their economic policies and practices, and concludes with some assessment of the effect of all these factors on the political and economic evolution of African countries.

The two largest colonial powers in Africa were France and Britain, both of which controlled two-thirds of Africa before World War I and more than 70 percent after the war (see Table 4.1). The period from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s marked the zenith of imperial rule in Africa. The formalization of colonial rule was accomplished at the

TABLE 4.1**European Control of Africa**

Imperial Power	Period	
	Pre-World War I (percent)	Post-World War I (percent)
France	36	37
Britain	30	34
Belgium	8	8
Germany	8	0
Italy	7	7
Portugal	7	7
Uncolonized	4	7
<i>Total</i>	100	100

Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 when all the European powers met and partitioned Africa, recognizing each other’s share of the continent. The conference was called to reach agreement on imperial boundaries so as to avoid any future conflict among European powers. Following World War I, Germany, as a defeated power, was deprived of all her colonial possessions, which were parceled out to the victorious allies as trust territories under the League of Nations’ mandate system. Tanganyika (which is the mainland portion of Tanzania) went to Britain. Rwanda and Burundi, which together with Tanganyika formed what was then called German East Africa, went to Belgium. Cameroon was split into two, a small southwestern portion going to Britain and the remainder to France. Namibia, then known as South West Africa, was assigned to South Africa as a sort of trophy for South Africa having fought in the war on the side of the Allied powers. Togo, then called Togoland, became a French trust territory, but a small sliver along its western border went to Britain, which governed it together with Ghana.

REASONS FOR EUROPE’S INTEREST IN AFRICA

Before looking into the nature of colonialism in Africa, let’s turn our attention to the key question: Why was Europe interested in Africa in the first place? One scholar of Portuguese imperial history has suggested that the Portuguese were moved by “a crusading zeal, the desire for Guinea gold, the quest for [the mythical Christian kingdom of] Prester John, and the search of spices.”¹ Another scholar suggested Prince Henry’s penchant for hazardous travel abroad, real thirst for adventure in the name of acquir-

ing knowledge. For our purpose here, however, Ali Mazrui's three broad reasons for European exploration of the African continent, which later led to colonization, provide a good starting point.² The first reason has to do with the need to gather scientific knowledge about the unknown. Africa, then referred to as the "Dark Continent," provided just the right kind of challenge. It held a lot of mystery for European explorers, who traveled and observed and recorded what they saw. Many of the early explorers of Africa were geographers and scientists who were beckoned by the mysteries and exotic qualities of this new land. Expeditions of people like Samuel Baker, Joseph Thompson, Richard Burton, John Speke, and others in the nineteenth century, conducted in the name of science and knowledge, served to attract Europeans to Africa. They "discovered" rivers, lakes, and mountains. They studied the African people and wrote about them. Of Prince Henry's exploratory expeditions, including those to Africa, a historian has written, "While Henry directed exploratory activities, he placed high value on the collection of geographical knowledge and rewarded his captains 'in proportion to the efforts they had made to carry the boundaries of knowledge farther,' thus keeping them intent on the work of exploration."³ Without revisiting the debate as to what the Europeans meant by claiming to have "discovered" Africa's rivers and lakes, which the Africans had known and sailed and fished from all along, and without belaboring the often extremely racist and distorted descriptions of African societies that they purveyed, it will suffice to say that the writings of some of these foreign travelers increased knowledge of Africa in their own countries and ultimately helped Africans to know their continent better.

The second reason stemmed from European ethnocentrism or racism, itself rooted partly in Western Christianity. Implicit in the Christian doctrine (as well as in Islam, I might add) is the requirement that followers of the faith spread the gospel (or the Koran) to others and win converts. Since much of Africa followed their own traditional religious beliefs, Europeans felt that there was a definite need to proselytize and convert Africans to Christianity. In the early years of both Christianity and Islam, evangelical work was often carried out with military campaigns. Later, other methods of persuasion were applied. Missionaries were dispatched to Africa. They set up health clinics, schools, and social service centers. They treated the sick and taught people how to stay healthy. They taught European languages to Africans, who in turn assisted missionaries in translating the Bible into African languages to help disseminate Christian doctrines. Individuals like Dr. David Livingstone were able to combine missionary activities with extensive scientific research and geographic investigations. To this day, Africa remains a favorite destination for missionaries.

The third reason was based on imperialism, the desire by European patriots to contribute to their country's grandeur by laying claim to other countries in distant lands. Imperial Germany's Karl Peters' adventures

secured Tanganyika for his kaiser. Britain's Cecil John Rhodes' exploits yielded a huge chunk of central Africa for his king. Henry Morton Stanley's expeditions to Africa paved the way for the Belgians' King Leopold to acquire the Congo—which he ironically named “The Congo Free State.” And Portugal's Prince Henry and others who followed founded an early Portuguese empire in the Indian Ocean, *Estado da India*, “the first Portuguese global empire, upon which the sun never set.”⁴

The three reasons mentioned earlier are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they are very much interrelated. For example, scientific information collected by geographers was often evaluated by European governments to determine if a certain area was worth laying claim to. If the information collected suggested that a given area had a pleasant climate, friendly people, evidence of natural resources, or good prospects for lucrative trade, then plans were laid down for a government-financed expeditionary force. Frequently, the explorers themselves could not resist the temptation of greed and amassed large amounts of wealth or precious cargo. Often, exploratory trips were sponsored and subsidized directly by European governments or government-chartered learned organizations such as the Royal Geographical Society. In other cases, when missionaries or other explorers encountered hostility or when their lives were in danger (as happened, for instance, to Bishop Hannington, who encountered religious resistance in Uganda and was eventually murdered on orders of a local king), foreign troops were dispatched promptly either to punish the groups involved or to protect other foreign nationals. When foreign troops came in, they invariably stayed and, on short order, colonization expeditions arrived.

After colonial rule was established, the missionaries and the colonial authorities forged a very close working relationship. In most of colonial Africa, schools were staffed and run by missionaries but subsidized in varying degrees by colonial governments, whose interest in missionary education was simply to ensure that enough Africans were educated to meet the limited need for semiskilled workers in colonial bureaucracies. The missionaries had total control over the religious curriculum. Mission schools taught that the European presence in Africa was to benefit the African people and to uplift them from a state of barbarism. African customs were discouraged. African languages were banned in mission schools. African heritage was ridiculed and suppressed. The goal was to give Africans a new identity by requiring them to use new, Christian names. As I recall from my colonial school days, an African student who was proud of his African name and insisted on using it risked being severely punished or even expelled. In many ways, Western religion instilled submissiveness by stressing that life on earth was temporary and best used for preparing for eternal life. To qualify for eternal life, one was taught to exercise Christian virtues of forgiveness, submissiveness, and patience. Humiliation and suffering, such as were being endured by Africans during colonialism, were thought to be

ennobling and spiritually cleansing. The relationship between the missions and the colonial governments was truly a symbiotic one.

There is no question that Africans took to Western education with zeal. The little education that they got opened their minds and provided them with practical and intellectual skills they never had before. With some Western education, an African had a chance at a lifestyle that up to that time he or she could only read about in Western school textbooks. There was a tremendous demand for education that was far beyond the ability of the missions to provide. Despite this, colonial education very often alienated young people from their own culture and undermined traditional authority. Gradually, African people began to acquiesce to colonial rule and to surrender the elements of their culture and traditions. Moreover, missionary intentions were not entirely limited to spiritual matters. There is a saying, attributed to Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, that has been repeated quite often and carries some truth. It goes something like this: When Europeans came to Africa, they had the Bible and the African had the land. They gave the Bible to the African and told him to hold it in his hand, close his eyes, and pray. When the African opened his eyes, he had the Bible and the European had his land. In the Congo, it was the missions that undertook the campaign to transform—they used the term “civilize”—the African into an imitation black European. It is easy to see why the role of Christian missionaries in Africa has been assailed by many writers and social scientists as having abetted and aided colonial oppression and exploitation.

IMPERIALISM IN AFRICA: THE RATIONALE

Why were the Europeans so keen to acquire colonies and empires in Africa? Three reasons stand out and these can be categorized as political/strategic, cultural, and economic. The political motivation has to do with the political rivalry among European states for dominance in the international system of the eighteenth century. These states believed that colonial possessions conferred prestige and status. Even today, one can argue that possessions and wealth still bestow a great deal of status on those who have them. Large countries still compete for influence among small states. The competition between the United States and the former Soviet Union in the so-called Third World in the Cold War era rested in part on the drive for leadership and dominance in world affairs. Interventions during the past forty years in Vietnam (by the United States) and in Afghanistan (by the former Soviet Union) had as much to do with assisting an ally as projecting the interventionists' power and hoping to acquire clients in the process. The nearly unilateral invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003 against the advice of the United Nations Security Council and European allies such as Germany and France is reminiscent of imperial behavior of the past. Acquiring an empire was a short-

cut to a world power status. Just imagine the pride and the psychological self-importance felt by tiny Belgium in acquiring the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country nearly ninety times the size of Belgium. Or take the case of Britain which, at the zenith of its imperial power, controlled, in Africa alone, an area that was more than forty times its own size.

Beyond the psychological satisfaction of being a great power, acquisition of a colony also provided a large reservoir of manpower to be drawn upon in time of war. It is reported, for example, that during World War I—"the war," according to President Woodrow Wilson, "to make the world safe for democracy"—nearly 1 million soldiers of African descent fought on the side of the Allied powers. In World War II, about 2 million Africans—and 1 million African Americans—served, again, on the side of those who were fighting against tyranny and oppression. All told, the possession of huge colonies provided manpower that held out the promise of imperial powers getting richer and growing stronger by being able to wage successful military campaigns anywhere in the world.

There was one more geopolitical advantage to holding certain areas in Africa during armed conflict. For instance, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain decided to seize the southern tip of South Africa in order to have a tactical advantage in its war against France. By controlling the Cape of Good Hope, Britain was able to effectively conduct naval operations against France in both the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. The Strait of Gibraltar, the small entrance into the western Mediterranean Sea, was the scene of intense military campaigns in World War II as the combatants sought to control it. Whoever controlled the straits gained access to certain areas, which could influence military outcomes of conflicts taking place in those areas. There are other areas of the world that have been scenes of strategic confrontations between imperial powers, such as the Straits of Magellan at the tip of South America, the Straits of Malacca in the Indonesian Islands, the Suez Canal, and the Panama Canal. Strategic security was one of the reasons behind colonization but, after certain areas had been claimed, it became necessary to protect them not only against their rightful owners but also against other rival imperial powers.

The cultural reason for colonization was deeply rooted in the ethnocentrism and cultural arrogance of the European people, who regarded anyone different as being culturally inferior. In the case of the Africans, because they were not technologically advanced or their achievements were not written and therefore not known to the rest of the world, the Europeans felt that it was their duty to "civilize" and "uplift" the African people. In a language that was used by those who sought to cast colonization in the most favorable light, Perham asserts that this role "saw the interests of the ruled as equal, if not indeed superior, to those of the rulers."⁵ Once the decision to acquire colonies had been made, it was up to the poets, writers, and intellectuals to provide the moral and philosophical justification for

colonialism. And to the challenge they rose! The famous phrase “the white man’s burden,” used by Rudyard Kipling in his equally renowned poem of the same name, vividly captures the sense of divine mission that was to characterize Europe’s forceful entry into Africa. Kipling urges the West:

Take up the White Man’s Burden-
 Send forth the best ye breed-
 Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives’ need;
 To wait in heavy harness,
 On fluttered folk and wild-
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child.

An eloquent example of “the white man’s burden” is contained in a speech delivered in the U.S. Senate at the turn of this century by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, an exponent of U.S. expansion in the Caribbean and the Pacific. In deliberations in the U.S. Senate on the Philippines following the ouster of Spain, Senator Lodge declared,

If the arguments which have been offered against our taking the Philippine Islands because we have not the consent of the inhabitants be just, then our whole past record of expansion is a crime [*sic*]. I do not think that we violated in that record the principles of the Declaration of Independence. On the contrary, I think we spread them over regions where they were unknown...⁶

The Senator continued,

The next argument of the opponents of the Republican policy is that we are denying self-government to the Filipinos. Our reply to that is that to give independent self-government at once, as we understand it, to a people who have no just conception of it and no fitness for it, is to dower them with a curse instead of a blessing. To do this would be entirely to arrest their progress instead of advancing them on the road to the liberty and free government which we wish them to achieve and enjoy. This contention rests of course on the proposition that the Filipinos are not today in the least fitted for self-government, as we understand it.⁷

Why did Senator Lodge feel that the United States was the best equipped to carry out this role in the Philippines? The answer is contained in the following paragraph:

All our vast growth and expansion have been due to the spirit of our race, and have been guided by the instinct of the American people, which in all great crises have proved wiser than any reasoning. This mighty movement westward, building up a nation and conquering a continent as it swept along, has not been the work of chance or accident which brought us to

the Pacific and which has now carried us across the great ocean even to the shores of Asia, to the very edge of the cradle of the Aryans, whence our far distant ancestors started on the march which has since girdled the world.⁸

The British, the French, the Portuguese, and the Belgians may not have articulated their role in Africa in the same terms and perhaps not as eloquently as the American senator, but they nonetheless felt the same way when they embarked on their imperial adventure in Africa. It was their “manifest destiny” to take over Africa; not to respond to this special calling would have been a betrayal of that special, unique quality that had made them great.

The economic motivation for colonization has probably received the greatest amount of attention from scholars and thinkers. Early literature on colonization is replete with references to the vast resources and markets represented by Africa and the economic benefits that would accrue to the European powers by opening up the African continent. However, it was V. I. Lenin who, in his classic *Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism*, most systematically articulated the economic rationale for the extension of imperial rule to the Third World. Lenin and other scholars since then argued that European countries sought to colonize African states in response to the inherent demands of capitalist economies, which not only needed natural resources with which to fuel the industrial revolutions in their own countries but also sought to exploit the plentiful cheap labor. As the European economies expanded, captive markets in the Third World became necessary for disposing of surplus goods. Suffice it to say that the desire for wealth, trade, resources, and cheap labor did motivate European expansion into Africa and other parts of the Third World. Some revisionist historians have suggested that colonization was not all that economically lucrative to colonial powers. Later in this chapter, however, we explore more fully the economic practices of the major European colonizers.

RACE AND EUROPEAN COLONIZERS: “THE CIVILIZING MISSIONS”

Europe justified its colonization of Africa on grounds that it was its moral duty to “uplift” Africans from their primitive state. Ample evidence suggests that all European powers did not think much of Africans or African culture and history. Writings by Europeans who visited Africa before the actual colonization show views of individuals determined to look at Africa through their cultural prisms and conclude that Africans were backward and uncivilized. Preoccupation with skin color and other physical traits as

measures of "civilization" was strong and consistent. Europeans, therefore, felt that colonization was right and that they had a mission "to civilize" Africans. How did they conceptualize that mission? How were they going to execute it? What type of person did they expect to see once their mission in Africa was accomplished? Answers to these fundamental questions will reveal interesting contrasts among the European colonizers and, in so doing, tell us what their racial attitudes and the assumptions underlying their "civilizing mission" were, providing insights into how they defined themselves as British, French, Portuguese, or Belgian.

The British Mission

In most of the British colonies, the indigenous people and the British were segregated. Social institutions like schools, recreational facilities, and hospitals were maintained for different racial groups. In places like East Africa, principally Kenya, where significant Asian, Arabic (Islamic), and European communities settled, there were separate facilities for each of those groups, the best facilities, of course, being reserved for Europeans. There were Asian schools, European schools, African schools, and at the coast, Arab or Muslim schools. Transportation was often broken down into first class, second class, and third class. The separate schools were often racially designated, as were hospitals and bathrooms in public buildings. Transportation, for example, buses and trains, was not racially designated, but the use of higher fares and local custom made sure that Africans kept their place—in third-class coaches. Residences were segregated, with Africans in the cities confined in "African locations" with conspicuously crowded and inferior housing. As is well known, attempts were made to codify into law racial segregation in areas with substantial British settlers such as in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Grudgingly, the British would allow a well-to-do African to purchase a house in a predominantly white area or to ride a first-class compartment if he did not share it with a European, but in general, they did not envisage a situation in which an African might be "uplifted" to the level that he or she might be considered the social equal of a British. It can be conceded that in a very general sort of way, the British tried to convert Africans into British ladies and gentlemen. Indeed, the British were very pleased to point to an "uplifted African" who affected British manners, but they did not consider such an African a social equal in the same way that the French did. It was obvious that an African who could read or use mechanical tools was more productive than one who could not, but it was unthinkable that an African could be educated to a level of social equality with a British person. Governors in British colonies often spoke of Africans eventually exercising political power in their countries, but clearly not as political

partners with the British. Political power could be exercised by the Africans only over other Africans. In Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, where the whites constituted, respectively, 1 percent, 5 percent, and 15 percent of the population, the British granted a great deal of political responsibility to colonial governments, and the whites in the colonies insisted on dominating the Africans, not sharing power with them proportionately or even equally. In the course of British colonialism, not a single thought was given to the Africans (or other Third World people colonized by the British, for that matter) ever being represented in the British legislature. To have African representation in the British parliament (even under the pretext of training them in parliamentary government) would have suggested political and perhaps racial equality, an idea whose time would not come. Clearly, the only way someone could be as good as a British person was to have been born one. An African could acquire British culture, and many did, but never the ancestry to go with it. The British notion of what constituted “Britishness,” therefore, was based *both* on ancestry and on culture.

The French Mission

Similarly, the French looked down on the Africans and on African culture. They had a social policy to buttress their colonial rule in Africa, known as “the assimilation policy.” This policy was based on the very laudable revolutionary ideal of human equality, but only under French suzerainty.

Thus the French, when confronted with people they considered barbarians, believed it their mission to convert them into Frenchmen. This implied a fundamental acceptance of their potential human equality, but a total dismissal of African culture as of any value. Africans were considered to be a people without any history, without any civilization worthy of the name, constantly at war with one another and fortunate to have been put in touch with the fruits of French civilization.⁹

Obviously, the French were in Africa to “civilize” and to remake the African in their own image. The policy of assimilation required an educational system that would transform Africans into French people. A lieutenant governor of Senegal in 1902 was quoted as telling African students at a local school,

The French language is the language of the entire world, and you are not an educated or distinguished person, whatever your race, unless you know how to speak French ... To speak French, my young friends, is to think in French ... it is to be something more than an ordinary man, it is to be associated with the nobility and destiny of our country ... Love France with all your strength because she loves you well.¹⁰

Since educational opportunities were extremely limited in French colonies, only a few Africans actually qualified for full rights as French citizens. Nevertheless, after World War II, following reforms that conferred French citizenship on Africans, the acculturated Africans, living in cities in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea, and elsewhere in the French empire do not recall having to use separate bathrooms, being sent to separate schools, having to sit on the opposite side of the aisle in the church, being forced to ride in separate train compartments, having to drink from separate fountains, or even having to endure the humiliation of signs reading: "Africans Only," "Europeans Only," or "Africans and Dogs Not Allowed." This is not to say that racial indignities were completely absent in French colonies. It is merely to say that when Africans became acculturated into French culture, they were included in the French community in a manner that the British in their own colonies would not have considered doing. It is this degree of acceptance of acculturated Africans that gave rise to the view that the French were "color-blind," not racist. Moreover, after 1946, Africans could participate in French political affairs at three levels: in their own countries (such as Senegal, Guinea, Cameroon), in their federated regions (such as French West Africa or Equatorial Africa), or in the metropolitan French political system. French social practice with respect to the Africans suggests that the French considered culture rather than racial ancestry as the fundamental ingredient of "Frenchness."

The French and the British Contrasted: Senghor and Khama

The British and the French can perhaps most vividly be contrasted by looking at the way they treated two Africans from their respective colonies: Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906–2001) of Senegal, a French colony in West Africa and Seretse Khama (1921–1980) of Botswana, a British colony in southern Africa. Senghor was the product of the best circumstances that French colonial rule had to offer. He was born into a well-to-do African Catholic merchant family, went to good French mission schools in Senegal, and proceeded to the Sorbonne in France where he graduated in philosophy and literature. Senghor lived in France for many years and later joined politics as a member of France's Socialist Party, rising to become a member of the National Assembly representing Senegal. Senghor also represented France for a year at UNESCO and served as a minister in a couple of French governments in the late 1940s. When Senghor retired from the presidency of Senegal in 1980, he chose to live in France until his death in 2001. Senghor's experience, as you will soon see, was quite different from that of his counterpart in a British colony. Seretse Khama, on the other hand, was the son of the king—Sekgoma II—of the Bamangwato people, the largest subgroup of the Tswana people in what used to

be called Bechuanaland (now Botswana). His father died when Khama was less than five years of age. Khama's uncle, Tshekedi Khama, became a regent until Khama could assume the throne later. The young Khama went to mission schools in Botswana, then on to a black college at Fort Hare, and to a segregated University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. Later, he proceeded to Oxford University in England to study law, politics, and economics and became a lawyer.

In a real sense, both Senghor and Khama were deeply acculturated with European values of their respective colonial powers, and both were products of the finest institutions of higher learning in their respective metropolises. Senghor wrote a great deal in his essays and poems about his dual identity as a Frenchman and an African. France, however, was not devoid of racism. Indeed, his experience in France led him to articulate a philosophy of negritude, by which he and his fellow black intellectuals asserted the inherent worth of "blackness." In any event, both Senghor and Khama met and fell in love with and decided to marry white women. Senghor's marriage to a white woman caused no ripple, no negative excitement at all in France. His fellow deputies in the French National Assembly and the French public reacted to his marriage positively. It was as though the French had expected all along that Senghor, as a fine self-respecting Frenchman, albeit with African ancestry, would marry a French woman. It is striking that in most of Senghor's biographies, no special point is made of his marriage to a white French woman.

On the other hand, Khama's marriage to an English woman was received with utter dismay by the British government. His uncle, the regent, also objected vigorously and had, in fact, tried unsuccessfully to stop the marriage from taking place in the first place. Paraphrasing the reasons for Tshekedi Khama's refusal to accept his nephew's marriage, Michael Dutfield writes,

Seretse was turning his back on the duties and obligations to which he had been born. In Bamangwato custom, to marry without your father's permission was a serious offense. If you were the chief-to-be, to marry without the tribe's permission struck at the foundations of government. In the hotbed of tribal politics, the marriage of the chief was a principal instrument in forging alliances, breaking up power blocs and helping to ensure the future of the tribe. The Bamangwato had a right to decide who their future queen would be. European monarchs had never been able to marry just as they pleased.¹¹

The British public was both intrigued by the very vociferous opposition to the marriage displayed by Seretse's uncle in Botswana and put off by the unusual nature of the marriage. As Dutfield explains, "Blacks, in 1948, were, in most people's eyes, both inferior and slightly mysterious. They were certainly not the sort of people that white girls should marry."¹² Seretse

returned to Botswana where, in a specially convened traditional assembly, his people voted to accept him as their leader and to welcome his white wife into the community as their future queen. The British government would not allow Seretse to be installed on the throne. Dutfield vividly describes the strong opposition expressed to the marriage by the governments of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe)—both countries then committed to racial segregation and white supremacy—which saw this mixed marriage between a future black leader of a neighboring country and a white woman as a dangerous precedent. The British government acquiesced to these two countries to protect its highly valued relationship with them and planned to do so in a manner that would not look racial. In actual fact, Britain's official attitude to the marriage went beyond a simple act of disapproval by one government in solidarity with its allies. The British set up a commission ostensibly to investigate whether Khama was fit to be a leader of his people (but really to raise questions about his sanity for marrying a white woman). They enticed him to London, where he was told he would not be allowed to return to Botswana, but would, instead, be sent into exile in order to prevent him from assuming his traditional role as king. The official reason given was that the best interests of his people would not be served by his assumption of office. The interests were never defined. The government publicly—but rather disingenuously—denied that his marriage to a white woman had anything to do with the ignominious manner in which he was being treated. He was allowed back into Botswana six years later, in 1956, only after he renounced his right to "the throne." Returning to Botswana with his wife as "private persons," Khama founded the Bechuanaland Democratic Party, which won elections that were held when Botswana was granted independence by Britain. Khama became the first president of Botswana in 1966 and was shortly thereafter knighted by the Queen of England. Nevertheless, it is fair to conclude that even though Khama was of "royal" blood and had an Oxford University education, the British could never accept him as a social equal. His marriage to a white woman had been regarded as an act of racial impudence on his part. The contrast in the way Senghor and Khama were treated illustrates the perceptual difference on race between the French and the British. The French were prepared to and did accept Senghor as a black Frenchman, whereas the British, through their government, could not bring themselves to think of Khama as a social equal, let alone a black Briton.

Fanon's Theory of French Racism

It is clear to see why the French were always considered the most enlightened of imperial masters. But were they? A further look as to how truly enlightened the French were is provided by Frantz Fanon, a black psychiatrist, who was born on the West Indian island of Martinique. Fanon

says that as a product of rather comfortable family circumstances in Martinique, he grew up thinking and believing that he was French until he went to France to study medicine specializing in psychiatry. France was in the process of putting down an Algerian armed struggle for independence. Fanon was extremely curious as to why French people, whom he believed to be so enlightened, would be so violently opposed to the demand of the Algerian people for freedom and for their own self-government. The outright disdain and racism shown by French people toward the Algerians shocked him. There was also a lot of hatred toward African and Arab people living in France. Some of the antagonism toward Arabs undoubtedly must have had some relationship to the rising death toll inflicted on French troops by Algerian rebels. The French people were also frustrated that the Algerian war was dragging on for so long. In any event, as evidence of French racism became more obvious, many black people began to assert their identity as people of color and to affirm their worth as human beings.

Fanon seems to have been shocked by the very strong French reaction to declarations by prominent literary figures like Aime Cesaire that they were proud of their black heritage. The French wondered how anyone could be proud of being black.¹³ Nevertheless, Fanon's observations led him to theorize that the French were in fact just as racist as the other European powers in accepting colonized people, people of color, only when they gave up their cultural identity—when, as it were, they committed cultural suicide. He felt that the French had shown no racial tolerance at all toward Africans or Arabs who chose to retain their culture and heritage. He argued that what had been characterized as French tolerance was really nothing but a form of French self-love. The French, he concluded, accepted the colonized people only to the degree that the latter reflected French culture, values, and traditions. In that sense, then, the French were as contemptuous and destructive of the traditional ways of the African people as the British, the Portuguese, or the Belgians. Additional evidence that the French were not as color-blind as widely believed can be found in Ousmane Sembene's classic novel *God's Bits of Wood*, based on the building of the railroad across the vast expanse of what was known as French West Africa. The attitudes of the French foremen toward the African railroad workers were laced with racism, brutality, and callousness found among other colonial masters.

The Portuguese Mission

The Portuguese were ethnocentric, some would say racist, toward Africans. They too had a "civilizing mission" in Africa. However, their concept of what constituted a Portuguese was a combination of the ideas of both the French and the English. It included both ancestry and culture. A key element of the Portuguese social policy in Africa (as elsewhere in their

empire such as in Brazil) was the condoning and promotion of the mingling of cultures and races through marriage and cohabitation. This process was mostly one-way, involving Portuguese men and African women. There was much abuse in this system, especially as far as African women were concerned. Most of the unions were never made legal. Without the force of law, most Portuguese fathers refused to accept responsibility for their biracial children. The consequence was that these children of interracial liaisons did not have the strong identification with Portuguese society that this practice was supposed to instill. As one would imagine, marriages between African men and Portuguese women were rare and, indeed, very much frowned upon.

This image of "racial toleration" was carefully cultivated and elevated to a philosophy of "lusotropicalism," whose main themes are summarized by Gerald Bender as follows:

Given the unique cultural and racial background of metropolitan Portugal, Portuguese explorers and colonizers demonstrated a special ability—found among no other people in the world—to adapt to tropical lands and peoples. The Portuguese colonizer, basically poor and humble, did not have the exploitative motivations of his counter-part from the more industrialized countries in Europe. Consequently, he immediately entered into cordial relations with the non-European populations he met in the tropics. . . . The ultimate proof of the absence of racism among the Portuguese, however, is found in Brazil, whose large and socially prominent mestizo population is living testimony to the freedom of social and sexual inter-course between Portuguese and non-Europeans. Portuguese non-racism is also evidenced by the absence in Portuguese law of the racist legislation in South Africa and until recently in the United States barring non-whites from specific occupations, facilities, etc. Finally, any prejudice or discrimination in territories formerly or presently governed by Portugal can be traced to class but never color, prejudice.¹⁴

This was the ideology of Portuguese colonialism on paper as espoused by those who favored it. Historical evidence, however, suggests that the Portuguese saw themselves clearly as being superior to Africans. A Portuguese colonial administrator in the 1890s is reported to have referred to an African, whom he called the Negro, as "this big child—instinctively bad like all children—though docile and sincere," while the same colonial official argued in favor of Portugal instituting forced labor in its far-flung worldwide empire by saying that it was right for the state to force "these rude Negroes in Africa, these ignorant Pariahs in Asia, these half-witted savages from Oceania to work. . . ."¹⁵

The consequence of this Portuguese social policy, over a period of time, was the emergence of a highly stratified social pyramid consisting of full-blooded Portuguese at the top, enjoying all the privileges and rights

of Portuguese citizenship; a very tiny stratum of mestizos (mixed-race people) in the middle, who were entitled to only a few rights; and full-blooded African people at the bottom, who were extensively exploited and were subjected to all kinds of indignities and abuses. In Portuguese colonies, an African could be considered civilized only if he “could speak Portuguese, had divested himself of all tribal customs, and was regularly and gainfully employed.”¹⁶ Moreover, the African population was divided into two subgroups: *assimilados* (assimilated ones), who had basically adopted a Portuguese way of life as defined by Portuguese law, and *indigenas* (natives), the vast majority who had not given up all their culture, language, and way of life. If you happened to be an *indigena*, you were required to carry a pass at all times, you were likely to be drafted into labor camps either in the colonies or in South African mines, you or your children were excluded from attending government schools, you were subject to curfew hours after dark in certain towns and areas of the country, and you were segregated in many social facilities such as theaters and comfort amenities. In some parts of colonial Mozambique, the *indigenas* could open accounts in post office banks (government banks) but they could not withdraw their money without the permission of the local Portuguese colonial administrator. As more Portuguese immigrants arrived to take up residence in the colonies, the authorities found it harder and harder to distinguish between *assimilados* and Africans. Full-blown segregation became the order of the day. The *assimilados* found themselves subjected to the same indignities as the Africans.

The Belgian Mission

The king of tiny Belgium, Leopold II, managed to outmaneuver Portugal, France, Britain, and Germany (as well as the United States) into recognizing his claim to a huge chunk of Africa nearly ninety times the size of his own kingdom. His mission was to “civilize” the Africans. Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, summarizes Belgium’s colonial code number 29 as follows:

Belgium’s mission in the Congo is essentially a civilizing one. It has a two-fold aim. On the moral plane, it is to ensure the well-being of the native population and their development by the broadening of individual liberty, the steady relinquishment of polygamy, the development of private property and the support of institutions and undertakings promoting native education and giving the natives an understanding and appreciation of the advantages of civilisation. On the economic plane, Belgium’s mission is to achieve the development of the colony for the benefit of the natives and, to this end, to work towards an increasingly complete organisation of the country which will strengthen order and peace and guarantee the protection and expansion of the various branches of economic activity: agriculture, commerce and industry.¹⁷

Indeed, those Africans in the Congo who had been educated in the mission schools were referred to as the *évolués*—"those who had 'evolved' from savagery to civilization."¹⁸ To qualify as an *évolué*, an African had to have gone to school, exhibit good behavior, and be firmly opposed to such uncivilized practices as polygamy and witchcraft. These conditions were so vague and so indeterminate that when the scheme was introduced between 1948 and 1953, only 500 Congolese could be deemed to have risen to Belgian cultural standards.¹⁹

Despite the small number of Africans qualifying, the resident whites were still furiously opposed to any possibility of social equality with the Africans. The Belgian authorities then introduced yet another system, this time calling it *immatriculation*. Patrice Lumumba says that this second system entailed even more rigorous "standards" than the first one.²⁰ An applicant for the civilized status had to be "sufficiently educated and penetrated with European civilization and conform with it." To ascertain this, relatives and friends had to be interviewed and the applicant's house inspected. Lumumba says, "Every room in the house, from the living room, bedroom and kitchen to the bathroom, are explored from top to bottom, in order to uncover anything which is incompatible with the requirements of civilised life."²¹

Civilizing the African was just a pretext and a subterfuge. The real motive was profits and wealth. This is how Bill Freund describes the situation on the ground in the Congo:

Nowhere in Africa was the regime of force so raw and dramatic as in the Congo Free State of Leopold II. King though he was, Leopold ran the Free state like a capitalist of the robber-baron era. The Leopoldine system had its roots in the king's pursuit of quick profits to create a capital base needed for large-scale investment, especially in transport. The forests of the Congo basin were rich in low-grade rubber, conveniently excluded from the free-trade provisions of the Berlin Conference, and rubber found a buoyant market in the West as the use of bicycles and then automobiles developed. It was rubber which, from the middle 1890s, made the Free State pay.²²

The Democratic Republic of Congo provides a perfect example of a partnership involving the Catholic Church, the local colonial administration, and the mining companies exploiting the country's resources. There was virtually no accountability to anyone in Brussels for what was happening to the Africans. Social segregation was the norm, even for Africans presumably meeting European standards. Africans in employment were paid a fraction of what resident Belgians were earning. According to John Reader, "In 1955, for instance, more than one million Congolese were in paid employment, but their total remuneration barely exceeded the total paid to the 20,000 Belgians then working in the country—an average black- to-white wage ratio of 1 to 40."²³

King Leopold's companies hired armed militia to go into the countryside and forcefully recruit workers for the rubber plantations. Africans who resisted were whipped or had their limbs chopped off. Severed hands were then brought to the recruiters' bosses as proof of their diligence in the recruitment exercise.²⁴

What emerges from the foregoing discussion of the colonial mission as reflected in racial attitudes among the British, the French, the Portuguese, and the Belgians is that the colonizers had nothing but disdain for the African people and their culture and values. They all went to Africa with the avowed goal of transforming African people into imitation Europeans as they helped themselves to the resources in Africa. The French offered the promise of full membership in the French community if the African assented to complete acculturation. The British sought to "uplift" the African but without the promise of social equality with the British. The Portuguese went a step further in condoning or perhaps encouraging one-way miscegenation in the belief that to "change" an African required infusion of Portuguese ancestry, and thus an African with some Portuguese blood was inherently superior to one without, but obviously still not the social equal of a full-blooded Portuguese person. As for the Belgians, "despite fulfilling the conditions which had promised integration, the évolués were still denied access to the social and economic world of the Europeans. In the eyes of the Belgians, they were still Africans—black and inferior."²⁵

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATIVE STYLES

To compare and contrast the styles of administration employed by colonial authorities in Africa makes it possible to see how each European power tried to tailor their style to their overall objectives in the colony. We have already discussed, broadly speaking, the political, cultural, and economic reasons for colonization. We now know that the French intended to turn Africans into French people once the process of colonization was completed. The acculturated Africans would then become part of the larger French community. The British wanted to "civilize" the African, but not to the point where the African might claim equality with the British (since that was impossible). The Portuguese envisioned a new society that would include assimilated Africans who preferably had Portuguese ancestry. Therefore, it would appear that the end product of these colonial experiences would be that Africans under French and Portuguese rule would become an integral part of the European communities. The Africans in the British areas would ultimately be left alone to run their own governments using ideas learned from the British. The Belgians really did not have a vision of what they wanted the Africans to look like, or what type of relationship they expected to have with them. The promise of integration made to the évolués, meaning the acculturated Africans, was never fulfilled. The Belgians seem to have counted on an indefinite stay.

When the Congolese people began to demand independence, the Belgians had no exit plan. Things disintegrated rather quickly. The handover to the Africans was done in haste. Within thirty days, the new government collapsed following an army mutiny, in which the soldiers were demanding better wages and to be led (commanded) by Congolese officers instead of Belgian officers. The U.S. involvement in the political chaos and Lumumba's murder are widely considered to have been based on American belief that Lumumba was a communist. The United States, therefore, provided extensive support to Lumumba's successor, General Mobutu Sese-Seko, who turned out to be one of Africa's most brutal and corrupt autocrats.

There is yet another vision for the colonized people, which was to see Africans as permanently inferior requiring the long-term tutelage of the European powers. This is the vision concretized by the white settlers of South Africa under the system of *apartheid*. Perhaps if the Germans had been in Africa longer, given what they did to others in Europe during the Third Reich, and considering the brutal manner in which they responded to anticolonial uprisings in South West Africa (now Namibia) and Tanganyika (now Tanzania), it is reasonable to surmise that they may have elected to confine Africans to permanent subjugation.

In any event, one can identify four administrative styles or approaches that were used by the colonial powers in Africa: indirect rule, long associated with the British; direct rule associated with France, Germany, and Portugal; company rule, closely linked to the Belgians; and finally, a hybrid approach which I'll call, indirect company rule, linked to Cecil John Rhodes' imperial efforts in southern Africa.

Indirect Rule

The British have always boasted that they went into Africa not to create black Britons, but rather to share their skills, their values, and their culture with a hope that someday African people would be able to run their own communities using the tools learned and acquired from the British. The British administrative style was more systematically formulated by an eminent colonial governor named Lord Frederick Lugard, who implemented it when he was governor-general of Nigeria at the turn of the century. Lugard called this style "indirect rule." Succinctly put, the approach involved identifying the local power structure: the kings, chiefs, or headmen so identified would then be invited, coerced, or bribed to become part of the colonial administrative structure while retaining considerable political power over the people in their own areas. In areas where "tribes" and "tribal" chiefs did not exist, the British created them. In fact in Tanganyika, where the Germans preceded the British, entirely new "chiefs" and "tribes" were created where none existed before. This is how "warrant chiefs" came to exist among the Ibos of Nigeria. In exchange for becoming part of the colonial

structure, a chief was often given protection, a salary, a house, and numerous gifts. The chief was expected to enforce local ordinances, to collect taxes, to provide cheap labor if required, and to be accountable directly to the white (British) district officer or commissioner. The colony was governed by a governor who was appointed by the British government and reported to the British Colonial Office (headed by the colonial secretary, a member of the British Cabinet).²⁶

The British always maintained that indirect rule was designed to protect and preserve African political systems, traditions, and cultures. But colonial powers found out rather early in the colonial game that the areas they seized were simply too large to be governed directly without the assistance of the indigenous people themselves. An African chief or king was certainly an important link between the African people and the colonial authorities. He understood his people's language and culture and could be counted on to transmit orders and directives. He was told that he could protect his own people's interests better by cooperating in this restricted power relationship. Moreover, in a place like Nigeria where there were powerful local rulers such as the emirs of the Muslim north, some accommodation had to be made to avoid protracted conflicts. Also by recognizing and offering to work with local leaders, not only did the cost of running the colonies remain low, it also became possible to raise revenue locally. It has been suggested that "indirect rule" was simply a necessity that the British somehow managed to turn into a virtue.

One significant political consequence of indirect rule was that it reinforced separate ethnic identities and stunted the development of a national or colonywide political consciousness. Indeed, the style served British colonial interests very well, permitting them to play ethnic groups against each other. Interethnic interaction through traditional trade unions or political organizations was severely restricted and discouraged. The British feared that national activities might lead to countrywide resistance against colonial rule. For obvious reasons, ethnic welfare societies were allowed and in some cases actively encouraged in urban areas. Welfare societies provided social services that colonial authorities were either unable or unwilling to provide. For example, these organizations helped settle down country folks who had migrated into cities to look for work and provided critical support networks for them. Social clubs also existed to provide opportunities for low-level African civil servants to meet, have (English) tea, and establish contacts and talk about things affecting them in a nice civil manner as the British would want. The Tanganyika African Association, the precursor of the nationalist movement the Tanganyika African National Union, began in this way. Meaningful political participation was not allowed; political discourse, so vital in any system but perhaps more so in one that was evolving, was not nurtured. It was, therefore, unrealistic for anyone to expect ethnic

groups that had been played one against the other for so long to know suddenly how to forge one nation overnight when independence came. Incidences of interethnic political violence in former British colonies can be partly traced to indirect rule.

Belgium occupied Rwanda and Burundi in 1916. After World War I, the two colonies became a trust territory named Rwanda–Urundi under the League of Nations’ mandate system. The Belgians found a strong kingdom politically dominated by the Tutsi people but consisting of the Hutu, who were a numerical majority, and the tiny community of the Twa people. The Tutsi and the Hutu shared the same culture and language. The arrangement was such that it was possible for the Hutu to rise within this society even to leadership positions. The Belgians coopted the Tutsi, convincing them that they were not only superior to the Hutus but actually different. This was an application of indirect rule at its worst. This cooptation led to the Hutus being openly discriminated against and created the animosity and hatred which manifested itself in horrific massacres in 1959, 1972, and 1984, and in the infamous genocide of 1994.

Direct Rule

The French, the Portuguese, the Germans, and the Belgians (in the Congo) exercised a highly centralized type of administration called “direct rule.” This meant that European rule was imposed on the Africans regardless of the existing political relationships among the African people. The French empire was governed directly from Paris through the governor. The French did use African chiefs but, unlike in the British empire, these chiefs were appointed by French authorities, in large measure because of their support for French rule. They did not come from ruling families and, upon appointment, were not posted to their native regions. They did not hold power over any unit of the government; their powers were greatly diminished. The French, with few exceptions, did not attempt to preserve the uniqueness of the various African political institutions. Therefore, Africans were not Balkanized into “tribal” chiefdoms as those in the British areas had been.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the French federalized their empire, not politically but structurally. There were two federations: French West Africa and Equatorial Africa, each administered by a governor-general. French West Africa, based at Dakar (Senegal), consisted of eight colonies, officially called territories. These were Dahomey (now Benin), Mauritania, French Soudan (now Mali), Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), and Niger. Each territory had a territorial assembly and was under the responsibility of a governor. Each territory was further divided into *cercles* (circles), each one being under an administrator, also

called *Commandant de Cercle*. Some cercles were further broken down into subdivisions under a *Chef de Subdivision*. Equatorial Africa had four territories: Gabon, Middle Congo (now The Republic of Congo), Oubangi Chari (now Central African Republic), and Chad. The two federations had parallel structures except that in Equatorial Africa the territories became regions and the cercles became districts. After World War I, Togo and Cameroon had separate identities as (League of Nations) trust territories governed by French High Commissioners. All these officials were civil servants appointed by the French government. All laws emanated from Paris; measures enacted by the territorial assemblies had to be approved by the French national legislature in Paris. French direct rule had the effect of giving Africans from the empire the opportunity to work together across regions and ethnic groups. The long view was that the colonies would eventually become integral parts of France. Indeed, beginning from 1848, for a period of about eight years, one commune in Senegal was given the right to elect a representative to the French National Assembly. In the late 1880s, this “qualified franchise” was extended to another three communes. Few Africans elsewhere in the French empire enjoyed these many rights, and the serious implementation of the French assimilation policy flowed with the vagaries of French politics, with national debates raging as to whether this was the right thing to do. In fact the right to vote was always restricted to those Africans who were considered assimilated into French culture. Direct rule was not implemented uniformly across the empire. In the regions governed by more powerful rulers, like in Upper Volta where the Mossi people had strong chiefs or in northern Cameroon where the Moslem emirs were quite powerful, the French had to make serious political concessions and govern through the traditional rulers.

Interestingly, the result of this centralized administration was that the Africans were governed without any regard to existing ethnic stratification. The French imposed forced interaction and equal subjugation. Reinforcement of ethnic fragmentation did not occur. This is not to say that ethnic conflict did not or does not exist in French or Portuguese Africa. It is simply to suggest that it is less pronounced in former French colonies, but quite salient in former Portuguese-ruled ones.

Portugal’s centralized administration was much harsher and stricter than that of the French. When Africans began to agitate for self-determination, the Portuguese response was to declare their colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and the islands of Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe as “Overseas Portugal,” as integral provinces of Portugal that just happened to be separated geographically from Portugal itself. The Portuguese had no intention of granting self-rule to their colonies. Like the French, they, too, at one time made a few Africans citizens of Portugal but the experiment did not last long and had to be refined. The Portuguese dictator Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, who ruled Portugal from 1932 to

1968, declared that Portugal and her colonies constituted “only one state, one territory, one population, one citizenship, and one government.” As the previous discussion of Portuguese colonial policy clearly demonstrates, the impact of Portuguese colonialism alienated the majority of Africans and led them to reject Salazar’s romantic view of Portugal’s colonies.

German rule in Africa was the briefest of all colonial regimes, having begun in the late 1880s and terminated with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, following the defeat of Germany in World War I. However, the German presence did not go unnoticed. Their colonial administration was highly centralized, with the German governors assisted by African subordinates and officers who had been handpicked without any regard to the traditional power relationships that may have existed in the area at the time. As already pointed out, the Germans created their own African assistants even in places where the Africans were not used to being governed by chiefs. The Germans, as latecomers into Africa, went into their colonies with the idea of economically exploiting the areas and maximizing their economic power as fast as possible. Military officers and private entrepreneurs were given power and responsibility, but their political ineptitude soon became evident when they encountered local resistance, which they suppressed harshly. In Tanzania, for instance, huge farms were set up in areas suitable for farming important cash crops like sisal, tea, coffee, and cotton. Forced labor was instituted to provide workers for these farms. Discontent, bitterness, and resistance ensued. A major uprising occurred in Tanganyika, which was put down with customary German precision, but at great cost in human lives. Other uprisings took place in another large German colonial holding in South West Africa, which were suppressed ruthlessly as well. Following the uprising in Tanganyika called the “Maji Maji Rebellion” (1905–1908), in which approximately 120,000 Africans were reported to have lost their lives, the Germans decided to introduce some reforms under a colonial policy they called “scientific colonialism.” This fancy term referred to a policy that called for the setting up of a special colonial office in the German chancellor’s office and promoting the idea that German colonization could be made acceptable to the Africans if German colonial administrators convinced the African people that they had something to gain from German colonization. To this end, the German government undertook several capital projects such as road and railroad building and trading centers. It was during this period of “scientific colonialism” that the main railroad was built running from Dar-es-Salaam (on the Indian Ocean coast) to Kigoma (along the shores of Lake Tanganyika). Urban settlements began to appear. Roads were laid. Brutality subsided; Africans were beginning to feel that the Germans meant well and that perhaps they (the Africans) should work with them. In 1914, World War I broke out in Europe and Germany was defeated. In losing that war, Germany also lost her colonial empire in Africa.

Company Rule

The Belgians are associated with probably the most brutal kind of colonial rule. Initially, the Congo Free State was established as a personal and private fief of King Leopold II of Belgium and not as an official colony. It had the glamorous name of the Congo Free State, but it was neither free nor a state in the real sense of the world. The king gave free rein to the Belgium businessmen to go in and exploit it. They had wide latitude in running the colony, with no accountability to anyone except the king, whose only interest seems to have been timely royalty payments. Exploitation was extensive and brutal; forced labor was rampant. Virtual slavery existed, as Africans who resisted being drafted to work or who did not work hard enough were flogged in public or had their hands and ears cut off. The treatment of Africans was so harsh that imperial powers themselves were forced to appeal to King Leopold to do something about the situation. As Lord Hailey put it, "If Belgium was to avoid further international pressure and the possibility of intervention by more powerful neighbouring powers, then clearly it was necessary for her to establish an administrative and judicial regime in the Congo which would obviate occurrences such as those which had brought the Free State under such hostile criticism."²⁷ African Americans, under the leadership of W. E. B. DuBois, also responded to reports of this brutality by raising the issue at the first Pan-African conference in 1919 and submitting petitions to Belgium urging that Africans be treated humanely.

A commission was appointed in 1904 to investigate conditions in the Congo and as a result of its findings, the Congo was annexed as a formal colony in 1908. Even then, the Belgians did not appear to have a coherent colonial policy. This lack of colonial vision, if you will, is attributable to the fact that the Belgians had not had the experience of governing colonies that the British or the French had. By 1919, the other colonial powers appeared to have been sufficiently impressed by what Belgium was doing to add Rwanda and Burundi to the Belgian empire as the League of Nations trust territories. What seems to have been put together was an administrative system involving a coalition of Belgian businessmen, administrators, and the clergy from the Catholic Church. The church ran the school system, which put major emphasis on religious education, rather than the kind of education that would have permitted Africans to play a greater role in the political affairs of their country in the future. The businessmen held sway in the administration of the colony even as they continued to mine Congo's plentiful minerals. This is the kind of rule that was given the term "company rule."

Belgian colonial rule saw massive transfers of wealth from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Belgium. Africans received only limited education, which would allow them to read the Bible, take orders efficiently

from the missionaries, and function, at best, as clerks in the colonial bureaucracy. The Congolese were not prepared to assume control of their country once the Belgians left. When independence was granted in 1960, the Democratic Republic of Congo represented an interesting irony: it had a high literacy rate (in terms of the ability to read and write) due to missionary education, and yet the country had only one college graduate. The Democratic Republic of Congo exemplifies evangelical success for the missionaries; it enjoys the honor of being the most Roman Catholic country in Africa. The first Congolese priest was ordained in 1917 and the first bishop was consecrated in 1956. By the time the Belgians left in 1960, the Congolese boasted more than 600 priests throughout the country. The Democratic Republic of Congo also exemplifies colonial ineptitude; it was the least prepared for self-rule and continues to be among the worst governed and the poorest despite having one of the largest reserves of precious minerals on the continent.

Indirect Company Rule

Cecil John Rhodes, a British entrepreneur, after whom the famous scholarships to Oxford University are named, went to South Africa in the late 1800s. He had a long list of different personal and public goals to accomplish, the most ambitious of which was to extend British colonial rule from Cape Town to Cairo. He just about succeeded. Besides making a fortune by acquiring control over most of the world's diamonds and gold, Rhodes, in a period of just ten years from 1885 to 1895, had

acquired two countries, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), that bore his name. He gave British protection to Botswana and Malawi, almost took Mozambique from the Portuguese and Shaba [a province of the Democratic Republic of Congo] from King Leopold of the Belgians, kept Lesotho independent, and prevented Paul Kruger's Afrikaner-dominated Transvaal from expanding far beyond its traditional borders.²⁸

On arrival in southern Africa, after a brief and less-rewarding dalliance with growing cotton as a commercial crop, Rhodes got into mining, becoming extremely wealthy and acquiring enormous political power as prime minister of the Cape Province. In 1888, he decided to expand the British empire with hopes of duplicating the economic success that he had just had in South Africa. He sent several aides, led by his business partner, Charles Rudd, north to negotiate for some mineral rights with an African king by the name of Lobengula of the Ndebele people. There was a sense of urgency to this trip. There were other mining concession seekers in the area. Lobengula was a very powerful king. Rhodes felt that

if he could get there first and obtain the mineral rights, the rest of that region would be easy to add to the British empire. Through trickery—by assuring the king that Rhodes and his associates were not interested in land but only in digging for gold—against an African king who could neither read nor write and who decided to trust his advisers, who included a prominent missionary, Rhodes' aides obtained an agreement, the Rudd Concession, granting him the right to mine in present-day Zimbabwe. This is what Rhodes promised to the Ndebele king and what he got in the Rudd Concession:

The Rudd Concession begins with a promise to pay Lobengula £100 in British currency a month and to provide 1,000 Martini Henry breech loading rifles, together with 100,000 rounds of suitable ammunition. The first 500 of the rifles and 40,000 of the cartridges were to be delivered with reasonable dispatch, the remainder to be conveyed “so soon as the ... grantees shall have commenced to work mining machinery” within Lobengula's domain. Rudd also promised to place an armed steamboat on the Zambezi (or if Lobengula wanted it instead, £500). In exchange, the king assigned Rudd and company “the complete and exclusive charge over all metals and minerals situated and contained in my Kingdoms Principalities and dominions together with full power to do all things that they may deem necessary to win and procure the same and to hold and collect and enjoy the profits and revenue ... from ... metals and minerals.” Lobengula also gave Rudd and his partners authority to exclude all others seeking land or prospecting privileges from his kingdom.²⁹

Armed with the agreement, Rhodes set up a private company, the British South Africa Company, and applied for a royal charter. The charter gave him the right to administer the area comprising modern-day Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi. In 1890, Rhodes' men set off for the area and on September 12, 1890, they hoisted the Union Jack in a town they named Salisbury (now Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe). Lobengula soon realized what had been done to him and to his country as white settlers started streaming in and seizing African lands to settle on. He attacked the new settlers in 1893 but was beaten badly. A bloodier and more widespread rebellion followed in 1896–1897, involving both the Ndebele people and the Shona (from whom the Ndebele had conquered the territory), but it, too, was crushed savagely. From about 1890 to 1923, the British South Africa Company set up a colonial administration—bureaucracy, police, and tax collection under his company but used the British model of indirect rule that has been discussed. There were powerful kingdoms, such as the Barotse in what is now Zambia, which were recognized as indigenous authorities by Rhodes and later given separate colonial identities as British protectorates. Political functionaries in the employ of the private company reported to the British Colonial Office as though they were government

appointees. In 1923, the company colony of Rhodesia became a de facto self-governing colony, allowing the local white residents to run the colony without any interference from the Colonial Office in London. Local white settlers expected ultimately to be granted independence by the British in the same way that the whites in South Africa had been. It was even envisaged that a federal arrangement with South Africa might come about to include the other British colonies in the area, namely, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. Failing that, the white leaders in Zimbabwe certainly expected to rule over Malawi and Zambia. In the mid-1950s, a short-lived federation—called the Central African Federation—composed of Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe was inaugurated, dominated by white authorities based in Zimbabwe. That development prompted the African nationalist movement in the federation to change their tactics, break up, and begin pressing for African rule for each country separately rather than for the whole federation.

THE ECONOMICS OF COLONIALISM

The specific economic policies and practices of the colonial powers lend strong credence to the economic theory of imperialism, namely, that colonization had everything to do with greed and very little, if at all, to do with race or religion. What we have tried to show is that there were other important dimensions to the phenomenon of colonialism, and that, moreover, there was a dynamic intercorrelation among the factors involved. The seven specific economic policies and practices that we are going to discuss are the following:

1. expropriation of land
2. exploitation of labor
3. the introduction of cash crops and the one-crop economy
4. unfair taxation
5. the introduction of immigrant labor from India
6. transfer of mineral wealth from Africa to Europe, and
7. the lack of industrialization.

Expropriation of Land

No one said it better than Lord Hailey when describing the importance of land to African people:

It is not easy for those who know only the industrialized countries of the Western world to realize the significance of the position occupied by the land in the eyes of most of the peoples of Africa. Anthropologists have described the mystic bond which unites the African to the home of those ancestral spirits who continue, as he believes, to play an active part in

his daily life. Jurists point out that the tribal Chief derives his authority largely from the fact that he is in war the traditional defender of the lands of the tribe and in peace the arbiter of the differences which arise regarding their use.³⁰

As already described in Chapter 2, land was communally owned. People exercised the right to use it and *not* to own it or dispose of it as they saw fit. It is this custom of communal ownership of land and the belief that land was not a commodity, or simply an economic factor of production that could be bought and sold, which made African people extremely sensitive to what the Europeans did once they gained control. What colonizers did was to determine the choicest land available and take it. The rationalization for taking the land was often based on the Western juridical idea that government has the right to take any land it wishes in the public interest. The government was not representative of the Africans and had not been set up by them; the colonial government simply took it upon itself that it was acting in the best interests of the “natives,” whether the Africans knew it or not. Another reason given for taking African land was that the Africans had given it away through agreements or treaties. The interpretation of such treaties was the prerogative of the colonial government, regardless of what the African chiefs thought. In most of these cases, the chief thought he was granting the newcomers the right to use the land, *not* to own it or dispose of it. The third reason for grabbing African land was that it belonged to no one because when the colonizers arrived, no one was occupying it at the time. This interpretation was clearly unacceptable to Africans who, in most cases, may have used the land before and simply moved to another location to give the land time to renew itself. Whatever the official reason might have been, European appropriation of African land was ultimately based on the climate and the quality of the soil and on future prospects for farming the area.

In West Africa, due largely to an inhospitable climate, European immigration was not encouraged. For that reason, very little land was taken away from the Africans. In general, less than 0.5 percent of the land was taken away compared to much more in other parts of Africa. In Ghana, about 5 percent of land was taken from the African people due to the mining concessions. In Nigeria, the Royal Niger Company established large farms to produce coffee and palm oil. In east, central, and southern Africa, where some climates were more pleasant, some soils more fertile, and some environments more suitable for European settlement, colonial authorities encouraged white immigration. Incentives were provided in the form of free ninety-nine-year leases and low interest loans. Land acquired by colonial settlers ranged from a few hundred acres to hundreds of thousands of acres. Among the wealthiest entrepreneurs and British settlers with the largest landholdings in colonial Kenya, for instance, were Lord Delamere and Captain E. S. Grogan. Lord Delamere had been lured

to Africa with an initial offer of 100,000 acres of land (ten times over the limit that had been set by the colonial administration) and Captain Grogan with 64,000 acres. Africans who had occupied those lands before the Europeans arrived were no longer allowed to hunt or fish on those lands, even if they were not being worked at the time. Trespassing ordinances were strictly enforced. Complaints sent to the colonial authorities in Europe by the affected Africans were ignored. Kenyatta was one of the Africans sent by his people to press the British government personally for the return of land to their rightful African (Kikuyu) owners. He lived in Britain from 1929 to 1946 during which time he married a British woman, studied at the London School of Economics, and lectured to British audiences on conditions in colonial Kenya, winning a lot of sympathy for the African cause among British liberals in the Labour Party and the Fabian Society. Nevertheless, he was totally unsuccessful in his mission to have the British government address the land issue. Upon returning to Kenya, despite his acknowledged position as the leader of the Kenyan people, he never was able to impose the moderate tone that had hitherto characterized the African movement in Kenya. As calls for African freedom increased and the nationalist movement grew in strength, the loss of land became the most serious grievance of the Kenyan people against colonial authorities.

Exploitation of Labor

It soon became clear that the settlers did not have adequate manpower to work the land and would have to decide on measures to generate the needed labor. Some Africans, realizing that they could not live off their land anymore, signed up to work for the white farmers; others moved into the burgeoning towns and trading centers to look for other types of work; yet others migrated elsewhere. Working conditions were horrendous. A publication in 1931 in Kenya reported that it was “accepted as a matter of course that farmers, planters and estate managers shall on occasion inflict corporal punishment, usually with a whip made of rhino hide ... for insolence, theft, desertion, laziness, breakages, or what not.”³¹ It was not uncommon for white farmers to guard their workers with rifles, firing in the air occasionally or at the workers’ feet to terrorize them into working harder. Wages were extremely low, insufficient to make much difference in the lives of the Africans. Wages were determined exclusively by the farmers, later by the colonial governments completely dominated by the settlers themselves, and were based on the amount of work done. In patterns repeated by farm laborers everywhere, it often took a male worker, his wife, and children to complete the day’s allotment of work. Only the male worker got paid. The payment was partly in cash and partly in food rations. Farmwork was not

that attractive and shortages of labor persisted. Something had to be done. A labor policy was badly needed.

However, many Europeans settled in Africa were not enough to maximize the wealth extraction that the colonial authorities wanted. In a number of places, the British were able to use the existing indigenous landlords. Freund says,

Where they appeared as obvious alternatives to settlers in certain parts of Africa, the colonial regimes dreamt of transforming native aristocracies into capitalist farmers and improving landlords. Such landlords had often been able to command tribute, tax and labour from a dominated population in the past.³²

Zanzibar and Buganda provide good examples of such attempts by the British to coopt African landlords. At one time, for example, there were nearly 4,000 estates in the kingdom of Buganda owned by the Africans themselves, producing cotton for export. The export crop in Zanzibar was cloves.

Hut and Poll Tax

There were actually two reasons for introducing taxes in colonial Africa. One was to raise revenue to pay for the cost of running a government in the colonies and also for rudimentary services for the small settler communities. It was the policy of colonial powers that the colonies should shoulder an increasing share of the financial burden of running colonies, instead of having to rely on appropriations from the metropole. The need to generate local revenue grew even stronger following World War II, when European countries were nearly bankrupt from the war. The second reason was to coerce more Africans into the labor market. Even though colonial authorities argued that the imposition of taxes had nothing to do with trying to exploit African labor, that it was only for raising revenue, and that Africans had ample opportunity to refuse to work, the relationship between tax and the demands for labor cannot be denied. The tax had to be paid in European currency, and the only way one could obtain the currency was by joining the colonial labor force, either as a laborer on a European farm or as a worker for a business in town. The first type of tax to be introduced was the hut tax, levied on each hut found in a typical African homestead. In Kenya, the hut tax was introduced in 1901, about the same time in other parts of Africa. The hut tax yielded more workers, but not enough. There was quite a bit of resistance to the tax. It inflicted hardship on the Africans and was disruptive to their traditional way of life, depleting their traditional means of livelihood. The Maasai people in East Africa, who had a tremendous amount of wealth in their cattle, were forced to sell their livestock to obtain the cash to pay their taxes. Since the Africans knew that the money collected was not being used for their own

benefit, in some communities, as a way of demonstrating their opposition to taxes, the people determined how much tax they had been assessed and sent only enough workers to earn the amount required to pay the tax and then quit. In response to this kind of resistance, the colonial authorities passed (in 1910, in Kenya) a poll tax, which was levied on each African male aged sixteen and older. There was much abuse in the collection of these taxes, as young men not older than sixteen, but judged so by African recruitment agents and unable to pay, would be hauled off to work camps for failure to pay the tax. The elders of homesteads were responsible for both the hut tax and poll tax. In Zaire and Portuguese colonies, the colonial authorities levied extra charges in an effort to use taxes to discourage men from having extra wives, but this disincentive seems not to have been successful. In any event, the net impact of the extra taxes was that more Africans signed up for work.

Labor Conscription

The labor shortage continued to plague the colonies from the turn of the century onward and especially between the two world wars. In East Africa, the end of World War I coincided with an increase in European immigrants. Many of the new arrivals were war veterans encouraged to settle in the colonies and awarded choice land for their sacrifices in the war. The new immigrants needed farm laborers. Existing industries and businesses needed workers to restart their operations after the war. The colonial government also wanted laborers to work on railroads, harbors, and other capital projects. Forced labor conscription, therefore, was initiated as government policy. Africans would be signed up by government labor bureaus that would send trucks into villages and towns. Labor recruits would then be transported many miles from their homes for periods ranging from a few months to a couple of years. Moreover, African chiefs and village headmen were enlisted to produce assigned quotas of workers. Thousands upon thousands of laborers were recruited in this way. For instance, every year between the 1920s and the 1950s, over 40,000 workers were forcibly recruited to work in Rhodesian mines. Conditions of work, as already described, were terrible, the pay was extremely poor, and many of the workers died from either work-related accidents or diseases contracted in the work camps. Davidson estimates that in the space of thirty three years between 1900 and 1933, about 30,000 African workers died in the Rhodesian mines.³³ All the European colonial powers employed forced labor, although there were laws on the books prohibiting it and from time to time questions would be raised about the issue of forcing Africans to work against their will. In the French empire, forced labor did not stop until after World War II. In the Portuguese empire, it continued right up to the time the Africans began to fight for their independence in the early 1960s.

Both in the case of tax and forced conscription, it was virtually impossible for the Africans to resist. If you did not pay your tax, you were picked up by the administrative police (who roamed villages looking for tax evaders), speedily convicted, and sentenced to hard labor, which meant that you would end up working on the same projects as those who had signed up. As convict labor, you did not get paid. If you tried evading conscription, you were harassed and hunted down by the labor bureau or the chief's police, determined to make sure that their chief's quota of conscript labor was met. When you were caught, your situation was that much worse for having tried to resist the order to sign up. Either way, you ended up providing the labor that was sought.

Again, there were all kinds of reasons adduced for forcing people to sign up for work. The rationalization was that Africans, deemed traditionally lazy, were being taught the value of hard work (even though the work did not benefit them directly), that it was right for the government to compel people to work on projects that were in the public interest such as roads, railroads, and other capital projects (again even though the people did not directly benefit). The chiefs played an important role in the forced labor draft. Labor conscription accelerated the African people's perception that the chiefs were part and parcel of the colonial establishment. Many of them were, more than ever before, alienated from their own people.

There were four main consequences of labor conscription that deserve mention. One was the disruption that the practice caused to Africans and their way of life. Able-bodied men were separated from their families for long periods of time. This was psychologically stressful, especially to the old men, women, and children left behind. Second, the draft meant that the most healthy of the workers in the village were often the ones taken to the labor camps. The result was a lack of productive manpower in the villages. Food production declined significantly. Famine resulted. Third, the conscripts were men. That meant that the camps were invariably all-men facilities much like the South African mine workers' hostels still are today. When many men were separated from their families for long periods of time, activities like prostitution and male homosexuality flourished. Prostitution near the labor camps meant that the little money that the workers made sometimes ended up being spent on beer or procuring the sexual favors of the women. Last, the labor draft served to alienate the chiefs from their own people, a development that eroded their authority, undermined traditional institutions and relationships, and proved problematical in later political development.

Cash Crops and One-Crop Economies

Because the whites were mainly interested in commercial crops to meet the industrial needs of their home countries, they introduced cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, sisal, tea, and cotton. West African countries like Ghana,

Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Cameroon, which were suitable for growing coffee and cocoa, specialized in those crops. Uganda and Kenya grew coffee and cotton; Tanzania grew sisal and cotton. Countries like Ghana, Zaire, and the Rhodesias (i.e., Zambia and Zimbabwe) that had minerals were mined extensively. Vast amounts of land were devoted to cash crops. Two main points are worth noting here. First, cash crops were not food crops and food crops were neglected, with the result that famine began to occur in areas that had been previously self-sufficient in food production. Second, the specialization in cash crops meant that the colonial economy came to be based on a single crop or two crops, with serious consequences for the economy of Africa after colonization formally ended. To accentuate the exploitation, the Africans who wanted to join in the growing of the cash crops to benefit themselves found that they could not because they were not allowed to compete against the colonial settlers. Africans in Kenya, for instance, were not allowed to grow tea or coffee until the 1950s, when it had become obvious that the days of colonial rule were numbered. In West Africa, African farmers grew cash crops. Some prospered, especially those able to use laborers from the weaker and more fragmented ethnic groups. Many did not, particularly if they did not fill the quotas assigned. If one's quota for a current year could not be filled, one had a bigger quota to fill the following year. Some farmers used their own resources to buy crops from others in order to meet their assigned quota. They also encountered another obstacle: lack of credit. As Davidson says,

... even the most successful farmers often got into debt because their costs of production were not covered by the prices they were paid. Their debt was made worse by the general lack of any proper facilities for borrowing money from banks. Even the Gold Coast's (Ghana's) cocoa farmers, though producing most of the world's cocoa in those times, were often in debt, largely because they had no access to cheap credit.³⁴

Finally, all the cash crops grown had to be exported to the "mother country," at a price that was set by the parastatal monopoly of the colonial government.

Prohibition of Inter-African Trade and Communications

Before colonization, Africans had been trading and bartering with each other. All inter-African trade came to an abrupt stop with the advent of the colonial era. Any trade was to be carried out only with the European powers. French colonies traded with France. British colonies with Britain; Portuguese colonies with Portugal, and so on. As we have already seen, African countries became producers of cash crops or minerals destined for European markets and factories. The skeletal infrastructure that was set up to service this trade was oriented toward Europe. All communications and

banking facilities were integrated into those of the colonial power. It was impossible for two Africans who lived in two African towns separated by a colonial border to speak with each other directly on the phone. A phone call from Kilembe, Uganda, would have to go to London, England, then to Brussels, Belgium, and then to Kilembe in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And it would be prohibitively expensive. Money used was in European currencies and therefore not easily obtainable or exchangeable. The long-term consequence of this arrangement was that African countries and communities were cut off from each other. Even today, it is still easier to fly from Africa to Europe than between African countries. African economies were so intertwined with the economies of European colonial powers that, after independence, African states could not really trade with each other. All were producing primary products and not what other African countries needed. They could not trade with one another when they were producing the same agricultural products or mining minerals that they did not have the technology or the knowledge to process. It has taken more than thirty years for African states to begin to diversify their economies as well as their trading partners and to begin to change the communication facilities so that they can communicate directly with each other. The setting up of this dependent economic relationship may not have been a deliberate conspiracy to undermine the economic viability of independent African states, but the results show clearly that Europe did not have the Africans' interests in mind when they colonized them.

Immigrant Labor

As was alluded to earlier, European colonial powers continued to experience difficulties with African labor. Europeans thought that Africans were averse to hard work and that they were unable to adapt to the new social and economic order being introduced by the colonial powers. The British and the French did not fully realize the political significance of the African resistance to colonial labor policies. African behavior had nothing to do with sheer laziness. Indeed African people who were given opportunities to benefit significantly from the colonial economy, such as West African cocoa farmers, coffee growers in northern Tanzania, or cotton producers in Uganda, worked very hard and prospered. At any rate, the British, who controlled such a vast worldwide empire, decided to alleviate their labor problems in Africa by inviting contract laborers from the Asian subcontinent. Indians by the thousands were shipped into East Africa and southern Africa on contracts of up to ten years. Others came in on their own, sensing better times overseas than in their crowded homelands. They had heard of the successes of Indian merchants who had first come to the East African coast, around Mombasa and on the island of Zanzibar, from

the early 1800s. Many of the Indians worked on construction jobs, as bus and train drivers, policemen, and civil servants.

When their contracts expired, some went back to India, but many elected to stay, and over the next forty to fifty years became beneficiaries of British favoritism. Economic incentives were provided in the form of loans. Because many of them were literate and skilled in business when they came, Indians found opportunities in Africa that they did not have back in their own country. They undoubtedly worked hard, but drew heavily upon cheap labor provided by Africans who, at the turn of the century, were beginning to flock to towns and trading centers. There was plenty of room for business expansion, and they did expand, setting up distribution centers and retail outlets in remote villages of the African countryside. Moreover, as migrant workers, Indians gave little trouble to the British. By being willing to perform some of the more unpleasant official tasks of running the colonies, the Indians helped insulate the British from direct contact with the Africans. The Indians' inward-looking cultural tendency to keep to themselves and to interact with Africans only in impersonal capacities as traders, employers, or government officials, their racist attitudes toward Africans (which were fed to them by Europeans), and their eventual control of the local economies in African countries tended to increase African resentment toward them. Later, when Africans began to agitate for independence, many Indians wavered when asked to join in the struggle. Those who joined, underwriting African publications in Kenya such as *Sauti ya Mwafrika* (The African Voice) and *Habari za Dunia* (World News)—so important in the mobilization of African opinion against colonial rule—were fully embraced by the African people.³⁵ Some Indians seemed openly to favor the status quo under British rule rather than submit to what they perceived as an uncertain future under untested African leadership.

The shipping of Indians to Africa had two important long-term effects that continue to reverberate across the African landscape. One is that Indians came to dominate the African countries' local economies to the extent that it was virtually impossible for Africans to break in. The Indians dominated the external and internal retail trade, they were favored by banks insofar as credit was concerned, and they enjoyed the support of the colonial government. In addition, most of their businesses were family-owned and, therefore, difficult to police or regulate. A very strong impression was created that the Indians did not care about the African people and were out only to exploit them as much as possible. Secondly, because many Indians did so well commercially under British rule and prospered, they seemed to equivocate on the issue of the struggle for independence. Africans accused Indians of being anti-African, of having favored colonialism, and of not having the African countries interests' at heart. The fact that many Indians opted for British (paper) citizenship, while continuing to reside in African countries,

confirmed the Africans' worst suspicions about Indians. This simmering misunderstanding and mistrust between the two groups broke out into the open when, in the early 1970s, Idi Amin Dada (the former Ugandan dictator) chose to expel all Asians from Uganda, including those who had taken up Ugandan citizenship. Amin was wildly cheered by the African people for that decision. Tension persists between Indians and Africans to this day in countries like Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In recent years, Indian Kenyans have become more active politically by running for parliament and gone into business partnerships with wealthy African Kenyans.

Lack of Industrialization

Finally, of the many plans that the colonial powers had for civilizing and modernizing Africa, none of them seem to have included modernization. Indeed, in light of our discussion of colonial practice, it would have been a contradiction in terms if industrialization had been actively pursued by the Europeans in Africa. Raw materials like coffee, cotton, and cocoa were badly needed for processing in the factories of Europe. This pattern of Africa producing raw materials to be processed in Europe, and then re-exporting finished products to Africa at prices that Africans could ill afford, has continued to characterize a substantial proportion of economic relations between Africa and Europe to this very day.

However, when it became clear following the end of World War II that colonial rule might be nearing its end, colonial powers began to think of ways to revitalize the economies of the colonies. Some African scholars have argued that this limited economic development was undertaken to persuade the new emerging leaders that colonization had benefited Africans and somehow to allow an amicable departure from Africa that would preserve colonial interests. This point will be discussed at some length in the subsequent chapter on decolonization and the struggle for independence.

COLONIAL RULE: DID THE AFRICANS BENEFIT?

As to whether colonization hurt or helped the African people is a subject both Africans and Europeans have very strong feelings about. It is an issue that will continue to engage the intellectual passions of scholars and may never be resolved fully. Much of the foregoing discussion on colonization focused on the negative side of the ledger. Let us summarize these points and then note in conclusion some of the positive contributions that colonization made to Africa.

On the negative side, the following points are salient and worth noting. There was massive exploitation of Africa in terms of resource depletion, labor exploitation, unfair taxation, lack of industrialization,

the prohibition of inter-African trade, and the introduction of fragile dependent one-crop or one-mineral economies. The exacerbation of ethnic rivalries, which the British, especially, through the implementation of the colonial policy of “indirect rule,” exploited in furthering colonial control, has continued to echo in post-independence conflicts in Africa. The alienation and undermining of traditional African authority patterns through the use of chiefs for colonial duties made the task of nation-building much more difficult. The creation of artificial boundaries has been the basis of much suffering in African states as political conflicts have flared up from time to time on account of territorial claims and counter-claims. The destruction of African culture and values through the imposition of alien religions and the relentless attack on African values mounted by mission schools contributed to a mentality of ennui and dependency and to the loss of confidence in themselves, their institutions, and their heritage. (The long-term consequence of self-hate is reflected and discussed in Franz Fanon’s writings.) The denial of political participation to colonized Africans has retarded postcolonial political development, as the excessive use of force in addressing political problems has been carried over to the postcolonial period.

There are some political leaders who feel that on balance the Africans benefited from colonial experience. Interestingly, leaders of the two countries that were never formally colonized by Europe—the late Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and the late President William V. S. Tubman of Liberia—tried to explain away their countries’ economic poverty by saying that they never benefited from colonization like other African countries. There are other leaders, notable among them, Ivory Coast’s founding president, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, who feel that Africans ought to be grateful for having been colonized, because without colonization, Africa would still be backward in many areas of human endeavor.

Broadly speaking, there are five benefits of colonization that many scholars are likely to agree on. First is the introduction of Western medicine, which has made an incredible difference in the survival rates of the African population. In fact, the rapid growth of the African population began during the colonial era. Second, the introduction of formal education, anti-African as it might have been in so many countries, deserves mention in helping to broaden the Africans’ outlook and to unlock the hidden potential of the African people. Both education and health care were provided by missionaries. Nearly all leaders who emerged after World War II to lead African colonies toward independence acquired their rhetorical and organizational skills from colonial education. Young political activists were able to challenge the status quo and to make demands for the restoration of African dignity and freedom by using political and moral ideas deeply rooted in Western education. Third, the small infrastructure

that colonial authorities established became the foundation upon which new African leaders built their new national institutions. Roads, railroads, harbors, telephones, electric power, and water and sewerage systems were all built initially to service the white colonial community or to support the very small urban settlements. Africans acquired important skills by working for colonial bureaucracies. Later, their experience was important in helping to maintain these services during the often tumultuous period of political transition and afterwards. Fourth, the introduction of Islam and Christianity to African people greatly simplified African spirituality and created a new basis for Africans with diverse backgrounds to come together. Africans are a very spiritual people who believed in God and in life after death with ancestral spirits. It was unclear, however, what one needed to do in order to find salvation (defined as being one with God or being completely at peace after one died and passed on into the spirit world). The role of ancestral spirits was extremely significant and called for continual, elaborate rituals to pacify or supplicate them. This kind of spiritual heritage, while satisfying emotionally and spiritually, did, in many ways, stunt the development of rational thought and science.

Modern Christianity, despite its residual mysticism, was presented as a complete and self-contained package of rules and procedures. It defined in simple terms why human beings were created, the existence of eternal life after death, and how to live one's life on earth in such a way as to be assured of a wonderful life after death. Embracing one of these Christian denominations, in exchange for giving up their spiritual heritage and practice, the Africans freed themselves substantially from the uncertainties of daily sacrifices, rituals, and cleansing ceremonies that were traditionally required. The African was liberated from the belief that everything that happened to one in life was due entirely to the intervention of the spirits, a belief that required frequent consultation of the mediums in order to determine what one had to do to pacify those spirits and was also exceedingly fatalistic. Inherent in this liberation was the notion of individual salvation. Although these foreign religions required their adherents to evangelize and win more converts to their beliefs, ultimately the individual was saved or damned on the basis of what he or she did or did not do in following the doctrines of the various faiths. This individualism, of course, undermined the collective ethos and the social fabric of the African traditional community, yet it also made individual progress and personal growth possible. Christianity and Islam also created a new basis for community organization and networking. And these religious organizations worked to improve living conditions of people in many areas. They promoted literacy, health care, and self-help. They created a new basis for Africans to come together and assist one another as they had traditionally done.

Fifth, by imposing arbitrary boundaries on the African people, countries were created with the stroke of a pen. Colonization may have shortened considerably the process of state formation in some areas. In past eras, states were formed slowly and painfully, as powerful leaders waged wars and annexed their weaker neighbors. There is ample evidence of military annexations having occurred in Africa and certainly elsewhere in the world. Since independence, some African states—Somalia and Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, Libya and Chad, Morocco and Algeria—have fought with each other over inherited borders. There have been brutal civil wars in Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Côte d'Ivoire, to name a few. African leaders hesitate to put the issue of colonial borders on the agenda. It would open a Pandora's box. If further flare-ups do not occur—which does not seem likely at the moment (2008), given the escalating crises in Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Darfur, and Chad—thereby saving the African people more pain, suffering, and death, colonialism can claim some credit.

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