AHR Forum
Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History

FREDERICK COOPER

This article is part of an effort to bring historiographies of Africa, Latin America, and Asia—with their particular scholarly traditions, insights, and blind spots—into relationship with each other, avoiding the assumption that interaction simply means borrowing from apparently more "developed" historiographies. South-South intellectual exchange is not new. The earliest attempts by African intellectuals to confront the issues of colonialism and racism, beginning in the nineteenth century, entailed contacts forged with Americans of African descent and later with anticolonial leaders from Asia and the Caribbean. Later still, the limitations of anticolonial ideologies and of nationalism were analyzed in Africa with the help of arguments originating with Latin American dependency theorists.

The Subaltern Studies Group has had a particularly empowering effect on the scholarship of once-colonized regions, for it has put the process of making history into the picture. While striving to recover the lives of people forgotten in narratives of global exploitation and national mobilization, this collective of historians has called into question the very narratives themselves, indeed, the source material, theoretical frameworks, and subject position of historians. The "subalternity of non-Western histories" as much as the subalternity of social groups within those histories has been uncovered. Those histories exist in the shadow of Europe not solely because of colonization's powerful intrusion into other continents but because Europe's self-perceived movement toward state-building, capitalist development, and modernity marked and still mark a vision of historical progress against which African, Asian, or Latin American history appears as "failure"; of the "nation to come to its own," of the "bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead."1

In these pages, I will take advantage of the emphases in the essays of Gyan

I am grateful for the criticisms and advice of Shiva Balaghi, Keith Breckenridge, Jane Burbank, Catherine Burns, David William Cohen, Fernando Coronil, Mamadou Diouf, Nicholas B. Dirks, Prasenjit Duara, Dorothy Hodgson, Florencia E. Mallon, Mohamed Mbodj, Gyan Prakash, Timothy Scarnecchia, Julie Skurskie, John Soluri, Ann Stoler, Kerry Ward, and Luise White.

Prakash and Florencia Mallon to take a somewhat different tack. They have explained the contributions of Subaltern Studies to a wider historiography, and they bring out the important tension in its writings between efforts to recover the history and the agency of the subaltern and to analyze the discursive production of the subaltern, how colonial categories of knowledge flattened the multi-sided experiences of people in colonies into such a category. I want to explore the ways—with parallels and differences—in which historians of Africa have confronted the experience of colonial rule. To the African historian, the value of Indian historiography is not that our colleagues offer ready-made solutions to our problems but that all of us are engaged in different ways with closely related debates. Both historiographies wrestle with—but do not quite escape—the dichotomous vision characteristic of colonial ideologies, originating in the opposition of civilized colonizer and primitive colonized. The risk is that in exploring the colonial binarism one reproduces it, either by new variations of the dichotomy (modern versus traditional) or by inversion (the destructive imperialist versus the sustaining community of the victims). The difficulty is to confront the power behind European expansion without assuming it was all-determining and to probe the clash of different forms of social organization without treating them as self-contained and autonomous. The binaries of colonizer/colonized, Western/non-Western, and domination/resistance begin as useful devices for opening up questions of power but end up constraining the search for precise ways in which power is deployed and the ways in which power is engaged, contested, deflected, and appropriated.

With Africa’s independence, historians were strongly moved to find a domain that could be defined as both unambiguously African and resistant to imperialism. In the historiography of Subaltern Studies, the clarity of such categories is questioned, but they keep coming back in the very concept of the subaltern and in Ranajit Guha’s insistence that one can examine the “autonomous” domain of the subaltern and reveal people acting “on their own.” Guha, like many African historians, wants his subalterns to have a rich and complex consciousness, to exercise autonomous agency, and yet to remain in the category of subaltern, and he wants colonialism to remain resolutely colonial, despite the contradictions of its modernizing projects and its insistence on maintaining boundaries, despite its

2 An example of useful debate is that between Gyan Prakash—arguing for an “antifoundationalist” history of the Third World—and Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook—arguing that such an approach disabled the historian from analyzing the global process of capitalist development. Their debate is notable not only for the intelligence and civility with which it was carried out but for the fact that both sides have a point. Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World,” Gyan Prakash, “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride? A Reply to O’Hanlon and Washbrook,” Comparative Studies in Society and History, 32 (1990): 383–408; 34 (1992): 141–67, 168–84.

3 Guha, “On Some Aspects,” 39, 40. Guha admits that elite and subaltern worlds were not isolated from each other but insists that they represent “dichotomies,” p. 42. In practice, he complicates the dichotomy, and as Gyan Prakash points out in his essay in this issue, other Subaltern Studies historians, including Gyandeha Pandey and Shahid Amin, have complicated it further with subtle analyses of the relationship of elite and peasant movements, of local and national politics. See also the critical essay by Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia,” Modern Asian Studies, 22 (1988): 189–224.
interventionist power being rendered contingent by the actions of subalterns. Colonial discourse, Subaltern Studies rightly points out, has tried to contain its oppositions—whether in the form of its “liberal” ideas of self-determination or the “irrational” actions of “primitive” people—within its own categories. How far colonial discourse could actually contain its challenges and tensions remains in question.

The Subaltern Studies Group has turned what could be yet another exercise in Western self-indulgence—endless critiques of modernity, of the universalizing pretensions of Western discourse—into something more valuable because it insists that the subject positions of colonized people that European teleologies obscure should not simply be allowed to dissolve. While profiting from the insights of Subaltern Studies to reexamine work in African colonial history, I also hope to push back the dualisms that are coming in the rear door in both historiographies. African historians’ use of the concept of “resistance” is generally less subtle, less dialectic, less self-questions than Indian historians’ deployment of the idea of subaltern agency, yet both concepts risk flattening the complex lives of people living in colonies and underestimate the possibility that African or Indian action might actually alter the boundaries of subordinaion within a seemingly powerful colonial regime. The critique of modernity has its own dangers, as Dipesh Chakrabarty recognizes in warning that too simple a rejection could be “politically suicidal.”

One can agree with Guha and his colleagues that Marxist master narratives of relentless capitalist advance are yet another form of Western teleology—as are nationalist metanarratives of the triumphant takeover of the nation-state—yet historians should not deprive themselves of the analytical tools necessary to study capitalism and its effects around the world—in all their complexity, contingency, and limitations. Nor should the recognition of the violence and oppression within the generalization of the nation-state model around the world blind us to the potential for violence and oppression that lies in other social formations. I am also trying to push capital and the state back in, making them the object of an analysis more nuanced and interactive than attacks on metanarrative and modernity.

There are reasons for different emphases in the historiographies of the two continents. Subaltern Studies emerged in the 1980s, nearly forty years after India’s independence, as a critique of an established nationalist interpretation of history, as well as of “progressive” arguments, whether liberal or Marxist. Africa’s independence movements are more recent, their histories only beginning to be written. Africans’ and Africanists’ disillusionment with the fruits of independence in the 1970s took the form of an emphasis on the external determinants of economic and social problems, and hence a look toward Latin American dependency theory. Most important of all have been the obstacles to the density of debate possible in India: the catastrophic economic situation Africa faced,

4 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in Guha and Spivak, Selected Subaltern Studies, 15, questions the subject position into which the category of “subaltern” drives colonized peoples but accepts that such a concept nonetheless represents a “strategic” essentialism—a useful device to open up a politically vital question. The question is whether the essentialism might outlive the strategy.

5 Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” 23.
particularly since the 1980s, and the harsh material conditions in which African scholars and educational and cultural institutions function.  

Different experiences give rise to different initial assumptions. The category of subaltern is an intuitively attractive point of departure for South Asianists, given the widely shared perception of social distinction in India as long-lasting, coercive, and sharply delineated, even when scholars put the bases of social distinction in question. Recent generations of African scholars have witnessed—and often been part of—a moment, perhaps not to be repeated, of considerable mobility and category jumping, reflecting the sudden expansion of education systems in the 1950s, the post–World War II export boom, the precipitous Africanization of the civil service, and the rapid development by African rulers of clientage networks and distributional politics. Whereas many scholars have been trying to pull apart and examine the idea of an essential “India,” others have felt they had to put together “Africa” in the face of general perceptions of everlasting and immutable division. Subaltern Studies’ critique of ways in which a nationalist state picks up the controlling project of a colonial state gives rise to sympathetic echoes among Africans and Africanists—disillusioned with post-independence states—but also to a measure of skepticism about conceivable alternatives, given bitter experience, as in contemporary Somalia, with what “communities” can do to one another when a state loses its controlling capabilities in the age of automatic weapons.

What follows is a consideration of African historiography, stressing the connections between the “resistance” model that was crucial to its development and the new scholarship on colonialism. Both concepts, I argue, should be further scrutinized. Politics in a colony should not be reduced to anticolonial politics or to nationalism: the “imagined communities” Africans saw were both smaller and larger than the nation, sometimes in creative tension with each other, sometimes in repressive antagonism.

THE BURST OF COLONIAL LIBERATIONS that followed Ghana’s independence in 1957 led Africanists to project backward the idea of the nation. The new states of Africa needed something around which diverse peoples could build a sense of common-

---

6 In the decade after independence, Africa-based historians and social scientists made a strong effort to found journals and hold congresses. Their drive has been impossible to sustain. Besides Africa’s size and linguistic diversity, the economic crisis of the 1980s has had disastrous consequences for universities and other institutions (the Dakar-based consortium, CODESRIA, being the most notable effort to reverse this trend) and has led to considerable intellectual out-migration. Conditions worsened just when a younger generation of scholars, some of them trained in Africa itself, were injecting new ideas and questions into scholarship. The recent “structural adjustment programs” imposed on Africa by outside lending institutions—forcing governments to cut services—do not consider that a vibrant and critical intellectual life helps to distinguish a creative society from one incapable of adjusting its structures. Differential access to the resources for research, publishing, and scholarly interchange is probably the single most important way in which scholars based in Africa are distinguished from those in the United States or Europe.

7 Although Subaltern Studies is increasingly mentioned by Africanists, the only sustained effort I know of both to use and critique this body of literature is Terence Ranger, “Subaltern Studies and ‘Social History,’” Southern African Review of Books (February–May 1990): 8–10; and Terence Ranger, “Power, Religion and Community: The Matobo Case,” in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, eds., Subaltern Studies VII (Delhi, 1993), 221–46.

AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW  DECEMBER 1994
ality. Africa scholars, as one acute observer put it, acted like the "Committee of Concerned Scholars for a Free Africa." The first generation of historians of Africa, seeking to differentiate themselves from imperial historians, were eager to find a truly African history.

African resistance to European conquest and colonization both ratified the integrity of pre-colonial polities and structures (themselves a major topic) and provided a link between them and the nationalist challenge to colonial rule. Resistance was the key plot element in a continuous narrative of African history. Terence Ranger argued specifically for a connection between "primary resistance movements" in the early days of colonization and "modern mass nationalism." Early resistance implied mobilization across a wider network of affiliation than kinship units or "tribes" provided, and this enlargement of scale created a basis for subsequent movements. In a detailed study of a revolt in Southern Rhodesia, Ranger pointed to the role of spirit mediums in mobilizing rebels across a large region and providing a coherent framework for the resistance.

While analyses such as these attempted an Africa-centered perspective, they paradoxically centered European colonialism as the issue that really mattered in the twentieth century. An apparently populist rhetoric concealed the privileging of African elites—in the 1960s as much as the 1890s—by virtue of their anticolonialism and downplayed tensions and inequalities within African societies. Sensitive to these historiographical issues, Ranger himself stepped away from the linearity of his earlier argument and advocated a more multivalent and nuanced approach to African political mobilization. Nonetheless, studies within the resistance framework conclusively showed that colonial conquests and heavy-handed interventions into African life were vigorously challenged, that guerrilla warfare within decentralized polities was as important as the fielding of armies by African states, that women as well as men engaged in acts of resistance, and that individual action—moving away from the tax collector or labor recruiter, ignoring

---


For the authors of the UNESCO history of Africa (a collective series intended to reflect the first generations of post-independence African and Africanist scholarship), the key issue of the early colonial era was the defense of sovereignty. Adu Boahen, the editor of the relevant volume, saw African societies in the late nineteenth century as dynamic, moving toward a form of modernity that retained sovereignty but selectively engaged with European commerce, religion, and education. The dynamism of African societies before colonization is no longer in question, but Boahen’s conception grants Western modernity too much power—particularly in its emphasis on the strength of the state as a marker of political progress and a unit for social advancement—while it fails to address the contradictions stemming from specific social structures within Africa. Boahen has little to say about Africans who conquered other Africans or about the slaveowners in coastal Dahomey or Sahelien Sokoto or island Zanzibar who made other Africans bear the burden of expanding commerce. Sovereignty was not the only issue facing Africans, and the European invasions entered a long and complex process of state-building and oppression, of production and exploitation, as well as a history of small-scale producers and merchants for whom the overseas connection offered opportunities they did not want to give up and oppressions they wanted to contest.\footnote{A. Adu Boahen, "Africa and the Colonial Challenge," in A. Adu Boahen, ed., Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880–1935 (Berkeley, Calif., 1985), 1–18. The seven chapters that follow contain "African initiatives and resistance" in their titles. For a fuller exposition of Boahen’s views, see A. Adu Boahen, African Perspectives on Colonialism (Baltimore, Md., 1987). For an interpretation of the same era that stresses the cleavages within Africa, see John Lonsdale, "The European Scramble and Conquest in African History," in Roland Oliver and G. N. Sanderson, eds., Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 6: From 1870 to 1905 (Cambridge, 1985), 680–766.}

Here, I will break the linearity of the discussion of the historiography itself for a moment and point to another pioneering approach. In 1956, K. Onwuka Dike, generally regarded as the first African to become a professional African historian, authored Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, seeking to make a decisive break with the imperial historians who had been his mentors and to write history from an African perspective. His book is less remarkable for the new sources it used than for the matter-of-fact way in which it analyzed interaction. Africans do not appear in this text as either resistors or collaborators in the face of European involvement in the Delta; Europeans, indeed, appear as actors in the universe of different actors within the region, all trying to work with the opportunities and constraints of overseas trade and regional political structure. Dike knew what the Delta traders could not—that the European traders’ metropolitan connections would
one day break the framework of interaction—but he nonetheless provided an account of African agency intersecting with European in a crucial moment of history.\textsuperscript{14}

Resistance had a special power in the two decades after Dike’s study appeared. Scholars and journalists wanting to make the world aware of anticolonial movements in Africa—Thomas Hodgkin and Basil Davidson the most knowledgeable among them—sought to show the complex roots of political mobilization, from Africa’s own traditions of rule to memories of battles against foreign conquerors, to religious and labor movements that provided an experience of organization culminating in the development of nationalist political parties.\textsuperscript{15} Dike’s own project took on a nationalist bent as well: the “Ibadan” school emphasized the integrity of pre-colonial African societies, which sometimes appeared as precedents for independent Africa. J. F. Ade Ajayi termed colonialism an “episode in African history,” a break in the otherwise continuous exercise of African political agency.\textsuperscript{16} What was most neglected was colonial rule itself: to my cohort in graduate school (1969–74), studying pre-colonial history or resistance constituted genuine African history, but bringing a similar specificity of inquiry to that which was being resisted risked having one’s project labeled as a throwback to imperial history.

Questionings of the nationalist metanarrative came from two generations of African scholars. B. A. Ogot, the senior historian of Kenya, in an essay of 1972 on the “Loyalist crowd” in Mau Mau, pointed out that the violent conflicts of the 1950s could not be reduced to a simple morality play: both sides had their moral visions, their moral discourses. The “Loyalists” saw themselves as engaged in a defense of a way of life in which Christianity, education, and investment in small farms were the means to progress. Colonial policy could be contested within limits, but to the Loyalists the young rebels were violating Kikuyu traditions of respect for elders and threatening the community.\textsuperscript{17} Some twenty years later and across the continent, Mamadou Diaf published a book that debunked Senegal’s basic myth of resistance, the battle of Lat Diar and his Wolof kingdom against the


French. Lat Dior, Diouf argued, was defending “the privileges of the ruling class and the traditional field in which it exercised its exploitation” as much as sovereignty. His study entailed a complex engagement with how power was mobilized and contested within Africa and the extent to which the long-term French presence first made the emergence of a Lat Dior possible and then rendered the continued existence of this sort of polity impossible.18

The metanarrative of nationalist victory—and many of the tales of “resistance”—have most often been told as stories of men, with a rather macho air to the narrating of confrontation. Women’s history, to a significant extent, began by arguing that “women could do it, too” or by adding African patriarchy to the colonial object of resistance. As historians increasingly showed that economic and social activity was defined, contested, and redefined in terms of gender, the gendered nature of politics needed to be examined as well.19 The contestation of gender roles within the Mau Mau movement is being explored by Cora Ann Presley, Luise White, and Tabitha Kanogo, while Timothy Scarnecchia shows the masculinization of African politics in the 1950s in Harare. Housing regulations that effectively disallowed women access to residential space except through a man meant that women on their own were by definition outside the law, and they were driven into certain niches in the unofficial economy. For a time, such women worked with a male-led union-cum-political movement to challenge the way the state defined and constrained urban women. The movement failed; and, when nationalists later began to challenge the colonial state in other ways, their quest to balance respectability against the movement’s need to recruit migrant male laborers meant that they, too, treated such women as dangerous and disruptive. Nationalism in the 1950s explicitly constructed itself in masculine—as much as class—terms, leaving aside its own more ambiguous history.20

Apartheid in South Africa affected women in particular ways: through male-only labor compounds, the policing of migration, the feminization of rural poverty, and a complex hierarchy of residential rights that divided black workers and families. Protest was thus also shaped by gender. Women led bus boycotts and demonstrations against the application of pass laws to women. A strong and sustained series of women’s protest movements in the Herschel district of Cape


Province reflected the circumstances of women in the context of increasing male out-migration, but the more formally organized Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union largely shunted women aside.\(^{21}\)

The heroic narrative fell victim not only to wise elders and young scholars with new questions but also to continuing crises in Africa itself. African novelists were the first intellectuals to bring before a wide public inside and outside the African continent profound questions about the corruption within postcolonial governments and the extent to which external domination persisted.\(^{22}\) Growing disillusionment made increasingly attractive the theories of "underdevelopment," which located the poverty and weakness of "peripheral" societies not in the colonial situation but in the more long-term process of domination within a capitalist world system. The debate that dependency theory unleashed had the beneficial effect of legitimizing among African intellectuals the notion that theoretical propositions were not mere impositions of Western models on a unique Africa but offered ways of understanding the predicament Africa shared with other parts of what had come to be called the "Third World." The direct link in bringing dependency theory to Africa from Latin America was Walter Rodney, a Guyanese of African descent, instrumental in founding the "Dar es Salaam" school of radical African history.\(^{23}\) It may be that an engaged expatriate was better positioned than were Tanzanians to open the challenge to nationalist conventions, the tragic counterpart to this being Rodney's assassination after his return to Guyana and the detention, in their own country, of several Kenyan historians who had questioned reigning myths.

The issues opened by dependency theorists prompted an increasing interest in Marxist theory among Africanists and Africans in the 1970s and opened the possibility of a dialogue across the continents.\(^{24}\) Ironically, dependency theory emphasized common subordination and gave little place to African or Latin American agency. Certain Marxist approaches assumed the dominance of capitalism, although a useful contribution of African history to Marxist theory would be to point to the limits capital encountered in trying to tame Africa's labor power.\(^{25}\) More recently, poststructuralist theory has turned toward an examina-


\(^{25}\) The power of the capitalist world system has not so much been its capacity to call into being new structures that maximize the extraction of commodities or surplus value as its global flexibility in finding alternatives to areas it could not rigorously exploit and, ideologically, to marginalize and
tion of discourse and modes of representation—including the scholar's own—but often at the cost of surrendering the tools with which to undertake studies of global power and exploitation. For all the critique and countercritique among these approaches, there has been a certain facility with which historians outside the African continent have slid from one paradigm to another, post-Marxism and poststructuralism embodying this tendency in their very labels. To many American or European scholars, insisting that Africa had a history—irrespective of what one said about it—was evidence of a progressive bent; African history was subaltern studies by default.26

The notable exception to this observation comes from the part of Africa that did not fit into the 1960s narrative of liberation from white rule, South Africa. My cohort of graduate students in the United States felt that the history of South Africa was not African enough.27 South African expatriates contributed the most in the 1970s to the focus on that region, and as they did one of the sharpest theoretical divides opened up: a "liberal" view that stressed African initiative and Afro-European interaction stymied by the rigid racism of Afrikaners versus a "radical" paradigm that saw South African racism as itself a consequence of the way in which capitalism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Within the "radical" approach, one branch tended toward a structuralist conception of an unfolding logic of capital determining South African history, but another looked directly to the inspiration of European and American social historians to uncover the ways in which Africans carried out their struggles and forged community as well as class.28 South African historians shared some of the "history from the bottom up" concerns with Subaltern Studies but generally not their conception of the subaltern's autonomy. Charles van Onselen has most sharply described the element of shared culture across racial divisions and antagonisms within poor farming communities, and likewise the efforts of diverse and changing groups of blacks and whites to make their way in the rough world of urbanizing Johannesburg.29 The most interesting autonomist argument—

demean the people it could not incorporate. This theme is explored in Frederick Cooper, "Africa and the World Economy," in Cooper, et al., Confronting Historical Paradigms, 84–204.


independent of Subaltern Studies—comes from Keletso Atkins' analysis of a distinctly African work culture, although her point is that this work culture influenced and constrained the apparently dominant work culture of developing capitalism. South African history in the 1970s and 1980s was thus distinguished by a focused debate—only occasionally engaging the historiography of the rest of Africa—over race, class, and capital. In the 1990s, poststructuralist questionings of the categories and narratives of Marxist history have been strongly resisted in South Africa by those who insist that here, at least, the lines of power and exploitation are clear. This is a useful debate and another instance of the "irresolvable and fertile tensions" between different conceptions of history, theory, and political activism that Florencia Mallon stresses in her contribution to the Forum. It also opens opportunities for engagement with the issues being raised by Subaltern Studies.

Over the past several years, a new colonial history has emerged, in dialogue with anthropology and literary studies and ranging over many areas of the world. Anthropologists questioned past and current modes of ethnographic inquiry, suggesting the need for a more contextual and historical examination of the apparatus that collected and classified knowledge of Africa or Asia. Literary critics began to study the politics of representation and the process by which the assertion within European discourse of a sense of national or Continental identity depended on inscribing "otherness" on non-European populations. Both scholarly traditions encouraged an examination of the categories and tropes through which the Africa of explorers, missionaries, settlers, scientists, doctors, and officials was symbolically ordered into the grid of "tribe" and "tradition." Historians explored how censuses defined or reified such categories as caste, how medicine defined susceptibility to disease in racial or cultural terms, how colonial architecture inscribed modernity onto the built environment while appropriating a distilled traditionalism to its own purposes, and how missionaries sought to "colonize minds" by forging an individual capable of thinking about his or her

---


31 I witnessed the debate at the June 1993 symposium of the Johannesburg History Workshop, whose title, "Work, Class, and Culture," specifies the categories in contention. For a history influenced by poststructuralism, see Clifton Crais, White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape, 1770–1865 (Cambridge, 1992).


34 The pioneering text is Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York, 1978); and a more recent example is Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London, 1992).
personal salvation, separated from the collective ethos of the community. The Subaltern Studies Group took the further step of asking whether categories of colonial knowledge set the terms in which oppositional movements could function and in which colonialism itself could be critiqued.

This trend has opened up possibilities of seeing how deeply colonies were woven into what it meant to be European and how elusive—and difficult to police—was the boundary between colonizers and colonized. It is nonetheless open to the danger of reading a generalized “coloniality” from particular texts, abstracting what went on in colonies from local contexts and contradictory and conflictual global processes. Even as subtle and interactive an argument as Homi Bhabha’s treatment of mimicry, in which the colonized person’s acting as if “white but not quite” destabilizes the colonizer’s view of boundaries and control, relies on detaching the dyad of colonizer/colonized from anything either subject might be engaged in except their mutual confrontation.

It is far from clear what Africans thought about the symbolic structure of colonial power or the identities being inscribed on them. The cultural edifice of the West could be taken apart brick by brick and parts of it used to shape quite different cultural visions. Piecing together such processes is one of the most


58 Literary scholars, among whom the terms postcolonial moment, postcolonial discourse, postcolonialism, and postcoloniality arose, are not unaware of the problems with them, as one can see in the papers “On ‘Post-Colonial Discourse’,” edited by Tejumola Olaniyan and published in Calaloo, 16 (1993): 743–1033, or the telling critique of Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” Social Text, 31–32 (1990): 84–98. How “post” the “postcolonial” world is is one question; another is whether the histories of all parts of the world that experienced colonial rule can be reduced to that one essence. The adjective “colonial,” minus “isms” or “itys,” has the virtue of being a native category, a term by which Europeans described what they were about. It described a project that was simultaneously incorporative and differentiating: the extension of power to areas whose people were regarded as distinct in such a manner that distinction was reproduced. The “ism” makes “colonial” an explicitly political issue, and in the twentieth century “colonialism” was most often used by critics to demarcate a set of ideologies and practices they wanted to remove from the body politic; the word has the value and the inadequacies of most polarizing terms. What the “ity” gives in return for its homogenizing and essentializing quality is not so clear.


60 The growth of messianic Christian cults, with the message of missionaries turned upside down, is only one example of this process. When Jean-Pierre Chrétien uses the words “mutations,” “adaptations,” “reinterpretations,” “reconstructions,” “crystallizations,” and “inventions” to describe the dynamics of African religions and their interactions with Christianity and Islam, he at least makes clear that there is a complex problem of analysis here. Chrétien, “Introduction,” L’invention religieuse
promising endeavors being undertaken by innovative scholars. A scholarly trend that began from the opposition of "self" and "other" has thus ended up confronting the artificiality of such dichotomies and the complex *bricolage* with which Africans in colonies put together practices and beliefs.  

The problem of recovering such histories while understanding how colonial documents construct their own versions of them has been the focus of thoughtful reflections by Ranajit Guha. At first glance, these contributions may appear to the African historian more as sound practice than a methodological breakthrough. African historians cut their teeth in the 1960s on the assertion that colonial sources distorted history, and they saw the use of oral sources—as well as reading colonial documents against the grain—as putting themselves on the path to people's history. But Africa scholars put more emphasis on showing that Africans had a history than on asking how Africans' history-making was implicated in establishing or contesting power. Guha and his colleagues, facing the rich but problematic corpus of Indian colonial documents, have provoked a useful discussion over the conceptual difficulties in the attempt to recover consciousness and memory outside of a literate elite—and the ultimate impossibility of true knowledge across the barriers of class and colonialism—while African historians have tried to see how far one could push with nondocumentary sources. There is room here for exchange across differing perspectives, although Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's rhetorical question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" may tempt the historian struggling for his or her modest insights to ask in return, "Can the theorist listen?"

---


42 Guha, "Prose of Counter-Insurgency."

43 Such questions as what made narratives credible, what was remembered and what forgotten, how written and oral texts derived authority from each other have been receiving increasing attention. The starting point for rigorous analysis of African oral sources was Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, H. M. Wright, trans. (Chicago, 1965); and an important example of analyzing the implications of the production of history is David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago, 1994).

Recognition of the much greater power of the Europeans in the colonial encounter does not negate the importance of African agency in determining the shape the encounter took. While the conquerors could concentrate military force to defeat African armies, "pacify" villages, or slaughter rebels, the routinization of power demanded alliances with local authority figures, be they lineage heads or recently defeated kings. A careful reading of colonial narratives suggests a certain pathos: the civilizing mission did not end up with the conversion of Africa to Christianity or the generalization of market relations throughout the continent, and colonial writing instead celebrated victories against "barbarous practices" and "mad mullahs." Colonial violence, in such a situation, became "acts of trespass," vivid and often brutal demonstrations distinguishable for what they could violate more than what they could transform.45

The economic geography of colonization is as uneven as the geography of power. Colonial powers established islands of cash crop production and mining surrounded by vast labor catchment areas in which coercion and, as time went on, lack of alternatives were necessary to extract laborers. To a significant extent, the wage labor force that capital could use—whatever the wishes of employers—was largely male and transitory, in large measure because Africans were seeking to incorporate periods of wage labor into their lives even as capital was trying to subordinate African economies.46 It took the wealth and power of South Africa—where a racialized version of "primitive accumulation" took place through the relative density of white settlement, the impetus of gold mining after the 1880s, and the agency of the state—for labor power to be detached from its social roots. Even in South Africa, the struggle over how, where, and under what conditions Africans could actually be made to work never quite ended.47 Elsewhere, some of the greatest success stories of colonial economies came about through African agency: the vast expansion of cocoa production in the Gold Coast at the turn of the century, Nigeria from the 1920s, and the Ivory Coast from the 1940s was the

Likewise, Mallon, in this issue, wants to restore plural voices and multiple subject positions to the subaltern. All these scholars want to complicate and enrich their subalterns but keep them subaltern.

45 I am following the insightful argument of David Edwards, "Mad Mullahs and Englishmen: Discourse in the Colonial Encounter," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 31 (1989): 649–70. The colonial assault on "barbarous practices" has been most fully explored in the case of slavery, where colonial regimes focused on the symbol of African backwardness and often shrank before the complexities of what slavery actually meant in its context. See Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers, eds., The End of Slavery in Africa (Madison, Wis., 1988); Frederick Cooper, From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925 (New Haven, Conn., 1980); and Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936 (Cambridge, 1993). Gyan Prakash shows how a British government effort to focus narrowly on slavery in India avoided more difficult questions of how inequality and exploitation were constituted; Prakash, Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India (Cambridge, 1990).


work of smallholders and did not depend on colonial initiatives. Cash cropping was neither a colonial imposition nor an unmediated African response to price incentives; it gave rise, in certain places, to accumulation without producing a bourgeoisie. This is the kind of history that Subaltern Studies scholars want to have told, a history that breaks out of the molds of European modernity and Afro-Asiatic stasis, yet these farmers’ experience cannot easily be contained within a notion of subalternity.48

The juxtaposition of a disruptive but concentrated colonizing presence and a large and unevenly controlled “bush” had paradoxical consequences: fostering episodic exercises of collective punishment or direct coercion against unwilling workers or cultivators on whom the effects of routinized discipline had not been successfully projected;49 making the boundaries of African communities more rigid and their “customary law” more categorical than in days before colonial “progress”;50 marginalizing educated and Christian Africans as the colonizing apparatus assumed control and established alliances with “traditional” leaders;51 fostering commercial linkages that enabled Africans who adapted to them to acquire collective resources that later enabled them to resist pressures to enter wage labor;52 expanding an ill-controlled urban economy that offered opportunities for casual laborers, itinerant hawkers, criminal entrepreneurs, and providers of service to a migrant, largely male African working class, thus creating alternatives (for women as well as men) to the roles into which colonial regimes wished to cast people;53 and creating space for missionary-educated Africans to reject mission communities in favor of secular roles in a colonial bureaucracy or to transform Christian teaching into critiques of colonial rule.54

This is not just an argument about African “adaptation” or “resistance” to

48 Some scholars have tried to preserve monolithic views of a colonial economy or peripheral capitalism by confining these experiences to categories such as “coerced cash crop producers” (which is simply wrong) or “disguised proletarians” (which devalues the concept of proletarian of any meaning). See critical surveys in Cooper, “Africa and the World Economy”; Isaacman, “Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa.” David Ludden argues that in India, capitalism also had a varied impact, and examples of mobility and accumulation among relatively poor or middling cultivators need to be set alongside sharply exploitative systems of labor and tenancy, a process he believes makes the category of subaltern overly rigid. Ludden, “Subalterns and Others, or Competing Colonial Histories of Agrarian India,” paper for Workshop on “Historicizing Development,” Emory University, December 10–12, 1993.

49 Colonial violence—the most obvious feature of colonial rule—is inadequately studied, largely because anticolonial intellectuals portrayed it as ubiquitous while apologists saw it as incidental, whereas it was above all located and often all the more brutal for its limitations. See William Beinart, “Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography,” Journal of Southern African Studies, 18 (1992): 453–86.


52 For bibliography on labor history, see Bill Freund, The African Worker (Cambridge, 1988).

53 Luise White, The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi (Chicago, 1990); Claire Robertson, Sharing the Same Bowl?: A Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana (Bloomington, Ind., 1984).

54 Beideman, Colonial Evangelism; Comaroff and Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution.
colonial initiatives. Rather, it is an argument that policy and ideology also reflected European adaptation (and resistance) to the initiatives of the colonized. This notion extends to the periodization of colonial history: Imperial conquerors began by thinking they could remake African society and rationalize the exploitation of the continent; by World War I, they were largely frustrated in such endeavors and began to make—through policies of "indirect rule" and "association"—their failures sound like a policy of conserving African society and culture; by the late 1930s, the imagined Africa of "tribes" was proving unable to contain the tensions unleashed by the much more complex patterns of economic change; in the late 1930s and 1940s, Great Britain and France tried to re-seize the initiative through a program of economic and social development; African political parties, trade unions, and rural organizers turned the development initiative into a claim for social and political rights, effective enough for the abdication of power and responsibility to become increasingly attractive in London and Paris; most recently, the tendency of Western powers to write off Africa as a continent of disasters and bad government is a sign that the development framework still has not pushed Africans into the role of a quiet and productive junior partner in the world market.55

Ranajit Guha has characterized colonization as dominance without hegemony, a direct contradiction of the trends in metropoles to envelop the exercise of power under universal social practices and norms.56 The claim of a colonial government to rule a distinct people denied the universality of market relations, revealed the limits to capitalism's progressive thrust, and led colonial regimes to seek legitimacy by hitching themselves to indigenous notions of authority and obedience. Nationalists, seeking to displace colonial rulers without undermining their own authority, continued to practice dominance without hegemony.

The distinction between capitalist universality and colonial particularism is a compelling one, but Guha does not get to the bottom of it. He misses the implications of the limits of coercion, and he underplays the dynamic possibilities stemming from the partial and contradictory hegemonic projects that colonial rulers attempted: the disputes within colonizing populations and metropolitan elites over different visions of colonial rule and the space that efforts to articulate hegemony opened up for contestation among the colonized. He implicitly draws a contrast between colonial dominance and metropolitan hegemony that the exclusions and violations of twentieth-century Europe belie. Guha's insight, however, offers an opportunity to explore the tensions of particularism and

55 The early periodization of colonial policy given here emerges in the case of British and French West Africa as described by Anne Phillips, The Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa (London, 1989); and Alice Conklin, "A Mission to Civilize: Ideology and Imperialism in French West Africa 1895-1930" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1989); while I have argued along these lines for East Africa in From Slaves to Squatters; and On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa (New Haven, Conn., 1987); and in current research on the colonial development initiative.

56 Ranajit Guha, "Dominance without Hegemony and Its Historiography," in Ranajit Guha, ed., Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society (Delhi, 1989), 210–309. For a quite different perspective on the contradictions of imperialism in a bourgeois world, see Bernard Semmel, The Liberal Ideal and the Demons of Empire: Theories of Imperialism from Adam Smith to Lenin (Baltimore, Md., 1993).
Universality within colonies themselves and in a dynamic interconnection of colony and metropole. As I will argue below, the inability of colonial regimes to establish and maintain "dominance" amid the uneven effects of capitalism led them to deploy the "universalistic" conceptions of social engineering developed in Europe, only to find that their own hopes for the success of such technologies required giving up the beliefs about Africa on which a sense of "dominance" depended.  

The incompleteness of capitalist transformation in a colonial context has been a major theme of Subaltern Studies, but the tensions of colonialism in a capitalist context are equally important to analyze. Just as elusive are the conceptual categories with which scholars try to understand the movements that have challenged colonial and capitalist power in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

At one level, the concept of resistance is generally accepted and unproblematic. In the clash of African and colonial armies, individual acts of disobedience or flight, and the elaboration of powerful arguments for liberation, colonial rule has been continually and severely challenged. But much of the resistance literature is written as if the "R" were capitalized. What is being resisted is not necessarily clear, and "colonialism" sometimes appears as a force whose nature and implications do not have to be unpacked. The concept of resistance can be expanded so broadly that it denies any other kind of life to the people doing the resisting. Significant as resistance might be, Resistance is a concept that may narrow our understanding of African history rather than expand it.

Scholars have their reasons for taking an expansive view. Little actions can add up to something big: desertion from labor contracts, petty acts of defiance of white officials or their African subalterns, illegal enterprises in colonial cities, alternative religious communities—all these may subvert a regime that proclaimed both its power and its righteousness, raise the confidence of people in the idea that colonial power can be countered, and forge a general spirit conducive to mobilization across a variety of social differences. The problem is to link the potential with the dynamics of a political process, and this problem requires careful analysis rather than teleology. It is facile to make causal generalizations across diverse circumstances, as Donald Crummey does in proclaiming, "Most popular violence is a response to state or ruling-class violence," and it is questionable to link all acts of assertion with a military metaphor, as James Scott does in terming them "weapons of the weak."  

57 Similarly, the failure of French efforts to contain colonial challenges in the 1940s by extending to colonial subjects a form of citizenship in Greater France eventually led—as many of those ex-citizens migrated from colony to metropole—to pressures that threaten the definition of citizenship in France itself and the universalistic logic of French political ideology. Rogers Brubaker, Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). For the case that the structure of power and the forms of exclusions in modern metropolitan societies were shaped in relation to colonization, see Ann Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire: A Colonial Reading of Foucault's History of Sexuality (Durham, N.C., forthcoming).

Foucault saw resistance as constitutive of power and power of resistance; he denied that there was a "single locus of great Refusal." He found "mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shifts about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings." Although "strategic codification" of those points can make for revolution, such a process cannot be assumed, and his stress was on the continual reconfiguration of both power and resistance. In the current atmosphere of postcolonial pessimism, such an idea resonates: even the counterhegemonic discourses of the colonial era and the subversions of European notions of modernity become enmeshed in concepts—the nation-state most prominent among them—that redeploy ideas of surveillance, control, and development within post-independence politics, fracturing and producing unities and reconfiguring resistances. In such a light, Subaltern Studies scholars have scrutinized the reconfiguration of power-resistance at the moment of nationalist victory. The difficulty with the Foucauldian pairing of power and resistance lies in Foucault's treatment of power as "capillary," as diffused throughout society. However much surveillance, control, and the narrowing of the boundaries of political discourse were a part of Europe in its supposedly democratizing era, power in colonial societies was more arterial than capillary—concentrated spatially and socially, not very nourishing beyond such domains, and in need of a pump to push it from moment to moment and place to place. This should be a theoretical rallying point for historians: they have the tools (and often the inclination) to analyze in specific situations how power is constituted, aggregated, contested, and limited, going beyond the poststructuralist tendency to find power diffused in "modernity," "the post-enlightenment era," or "Western discourse."

The resistance concept suffers from the diffuseness with which the object of resistance is analyzed, as well as from what Sherry Ortner calls "thinness." The dyad of resistor/oppressor is isolated from its context; struggle within the colonized population—over class, age, gender, or other inequalities—is "sanitized"; the texture of people's lives is lost; and complex strategies of coping, of seizing niches within changing economies, of multi-sided engagement with forces inside and outside the community, are narrowed into a single framework.

---


61 Megan Vaughan points out that surveillance and control in metropolitan societies addressed the individual, whereas colonial power tended to address collectivities. Her latter point has some validity (less in relation to the developmentalism of the 1940s than the control mechanisms of "indirect rule" in the 1920s and 1930s), but the Euro-African dichotomy is too stark. Vaughan, Curing Their Ills, 8–12. Even after formal decolonization, global power remains arterial—even aortic—rather than capillary, given the immense power of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund over decision making by African states.

62 Sherry Ortner, "Resistance: Some Theoretical Problems in Anthropological History and
Some of the best recent work in African history discards the categories of resisters and collaborators and starts with the question of how "rural people saw their circumstances, made their choices, and constructed their ideas about the larger society." 63 The relationship of gender issues and colonization, for example, emerges in a complex way from the studies of Elias Mandala and Elizabeth Schmidt. Before the conquest, women had once exercised considerable control over farming and the crops they produced, but the expanding slave trade made women vulnerable to kidnapping or to the control of their would-be protectors. Colonial rule—the decline of warfare and increased possibilities for cash cropping—for a time gave women space to reassert power within domestic economies, but the subsequent decline of village agriculture and the increasing importance of labor migration made women increasingly dependent on men's fortunes. 64 Luise White, meanwhile, has shown that women sometimes seized niches in the expanding and ill-organized urban economy, as prostitutes and landlords, providing cheap services to male migrant laborers. White's study points up the basic ambiguity in colonial relationships: her women were both subverting the cultural project of colonialism and subsidizing the economic one. Officials were indeed confused, in some contexts willing to let women furnish low-cost services, in others afraid that women's knowledge of urban society and their social networks were reproducing the wrong kind of African working class. 65

The complexities of engagement and autonomy surface again and again. Karen Fields' analysis of Watchtower in Central Africa reveals a substantial refashioning of Christian doctrines in relation to the local power structure and labor migration. What made Watchtower subversive in official eyes was not that it encouraged active "resistance" but that it defined a moral community in which the structures, notably chieftaincy, painfully elaborated by the colonial regime became irrelevant. 66 Did such processes contribute in the long run—as the secular Africanists of the 1960s thought they would—to a coming together of diverse strands of African thought and practice that rejected colonial rule in its entirety? Or did such movements go off in their own direction, as likely to clash with secular nationalism as to assist their assault on the colonial state?

I am arguing here for the complexity of engagement of Africans with imported institutions and constructs, as opposed to James Scott's emphasis on a "hidden transcript" among colonized people that develops among them only to burst forth into a "public transcript" in moments of confrontation. 67 My approach also differs from Ranjit Guha's quest to explore the "autonomous" domain of the subaltern,

---

63 Beinart and Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa, 31.
64 Mandala, Work and Control; Schmidt, Peasants, Traders, and Wives.
65 White, Comforts of Home.
67 James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, Conn., 1990). Scott is vague in specifying the domain to which his arguments apply, eliding slavery and colonialism and taking examples from a wide array of cases as if the particular structures of power in each were of little consequence.
although the complex and varied practice of historians in the Subaltern Studies collective, more so than the manifestos, is filled with stories of engagement.68

In discussing labor, as Dipesh Chakrabarty points out, the historian can usefully invoke general theories about "abstract labor," a set of relationships characteristic of capitalism, while preserving a notion of "real labor," located in his case in the systems of authority and clientage of Bengali villages and the power structure of colonial India.69 In my own research on Africa in the era of decolonization, I examine both the tensions between African labor movements whose demands are shared around the capitalist world—wages, family welfare, security, and working conditions—and whose rhetoric invoked the universality of wage labor through a demand for equal pay for equal work, and a political movement focusing on self-determination for all Africans.70 Ironically, the wave of strikes and general strikes in French and British Africa from the mid-1930s into the 1950s drew on the integration of workers into a wider population—which provided food to sustain strikers and at times brought about generalized urban mobilization—yet the workers' demands distanced them from that population.

Colonial regimes sought to regain the initiative through "stabilization," to form the poorly differentiated, ill-paid population that moved in and out of urban jobs into a compact body of men attached to their employment. They wanted employers to pay workers enough to bring families to the city so that the new generation of workers would be properly socialized to industrial life and separated from the perceived backwardness of village Africa. The dynamic of the situation lay in the fact that trade unions were able to capitalize on this yearning for predictability, order, and productivity—on officials' hope that Western models of the workplace and industrial relations might actually function in Africa—to pose their demands in ways officials found difficult to reject out of hand. Unions seized the developmentalist rhetoric of postwar imperialism and turned it into claims to entitlements, even as officials began to concede that a unionized work force might aid stabilization.71

68 Subaltern Studies historians have, for example, studied communalism as a colonial category of description, as a nationalist category to be used as a foil against the Indian nation, and as a shifting, manipulated, and contested category of popular action; wage labor appears as a universal construct and as particular lived experience; and Gandhi is shown to imply very different meanings within the Indian National Congress and local contexts. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1990); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940* (Princeton, N.J., 1989); Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma," in Guha and Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 288–350. See also the discussion of these issues in O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject."


70 Labor was a numerically small category but an extremely influential one, because the very narrowness of colonial commerical, mining, and industrial channels meant that a small group—in a position to use face-to-face relations to organize—could disrupt the entire import-export economy; in the post–World War II era, rising prices for African commodities and the colonial development initiative (combined with inflationary pressures on workers) shaped a favorable conjuncture for labor activism. This section is based on Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*, forthcoming.

71 The leaders of African political parties were not necessarily sympathetic to strikers or labor movements. In the strike that contributed most to the myth of labor as the spearhead of nationalism—the great French West African railway strike of 1947–1948—the region's leading politicians were notably deficient about taking up the workers' cause, and some of them worked to
By the mid-1950s, colonial regimes feared that their development initiatives were being undermined by rising labor costs, and they began to pull back from their own universalizing stance. They realized that conceding African politicians a modest measure of power in colonial governments would force them to weigh the cost of labor against the territorial budget. A national reference point now seemed less threatening economically than a universalistic one. This time, colonial officials guessed right, for nationalist leaders, granted limited territorial authority, quickly set about disciplining African labor movements in the name of a single-minded focus on a national unity defined by the political party.

One can read the actions of labor movements in French and British Africa as one example among many of African militance or as an instance of the universal struggle of the working class or as the successful cooptation of an unquiet section of the African population into a set of structures and normalizing practices derived from Europe. All three readings have some truth, but the important point is their dynamic relationship: labor movements both brought material benefits to a specific class of people and opened new possibilities for other sorts of actions, which themselves might have mobilizing or normalizing consequences. In this period, labor had a window of opportunity it lacked before and lost afterward, facing a colonial regime invested in a tenuous development initiative and fearing the mobilization of an unpredictable mass. The tension between the demands of labor and efforts to forge unity against the colonial state was often a creative one—except in the too-common instance in which party elites fearful of organized challenges and insistent on the supremacy of the national struggle moved to deny the tension and suppress such movements.

Rural mobilization, which was sometimes led by “organic intellectuals” emerging from a peasant milieu, also developed in alliance and tension with movements led by Western-educated people from towns and constituted a challenge to the tyranny of colonial agricultural officers with their ideas of scientific agriculture. Rural political discourse sometimes focused on the integrity and health of the local community, and it also deployed the transcendent languages of self-determination, Christianity, or Garveyism. But, as Norma Kriger has shown, the connections of cultivators with the commercial economy and the state were so varied and complex that “polarizing society along racial lines” was difficult for radical movements to accomplish.72

Whether nationalist movements by themselves were strong enough to overthrow colonial rule is unclear, but a variety of social movements from labor unions to anticonservation movements disrupted the economic project of postwar colonialism while discrediting its hegemonic project. Unable to get the Africa they

---

wanted, European powers began to think more seriously about the Africa they had. Empire became vulnerable to another of bourgeois Europe's contradictory tendencies: the calculation of economic interest. By the mid-1950s, France and Great Britain were adding up the costs and benefits of colonial rule more carefully than ever before and coming up with negative numbers.73

To the extent—never complete—that issue-specific or localized movements came together in the 1940s and 1950s, the threads also came apart, leaving the unsolved problems of the colonial era to new governments and a tenuously constituted political arena. It is to the problem of framing the national question in relation to other political questions that I now turn.

FROM THE CAULDRON OF POLITICS in the 1950s and 1960s, nation-states emerged across the African continent. Benedict Anderson's conception of the nation as an imagined community should be set against two related notions: the nation was not the only unit that people imagined,74 and the predominance of the nation-state in post-1960 Africa resulted not from the exclusive focus of African imaginations on the nation but from the fact that the nation was imaginable to colonial rulers as well.75 Pan-Africanism—embracing the diaspora as well as the continent—had once been the focus of imagination more than the units that eventually became states, but pan-Africanist possibilities were written out of the decolonization bargains.76 Regional federation, though once a basis of French administration and of the mobilization of trade unions and political parties, fell victim to a French program of "territorialization" and to the interests in territorial institutions that

73 The most persuasive account so far of the calculations that ended a colonial empire is Jacques Marseille, Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d'un divorce (Paris, 1984), but his resolutely metropolitan focus does not allow him to explain the factors within colonies that raised the costs and diminished the benefits. In the British case, see Prime Minister Macmillan's call for an explicit cost-benefit analysis of each colony, in Prime Minister's Minute, January 28, 1957, CAB 134/155, Public Record Office, London. Portugal, economically weaker, fell back on its empire and sought to extract more from it, exacerbating conflict even as the international climate turned Portugal from a laggard but acceptable colonial partner to a pariah. Settler colonists fought even longer.

74 A notorious instance of scholarly hubris is Fredric Jameson's insistence that the literature of Third World people—oppressed as they were by imperialism—was supposed to consist of "national allegories." He was duly rebuked for the presumption of his telling oppressed people that they could only write about their oppression and could only feel themselves oppressed in national terms. Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Social Text, 15 (1986): 65–88, 69 quoted; Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" Social Text, 17 (1987): 3–25.


76 J. Ayodele Langley, Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900–1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes (Oxford, 1973). An intriguing but vain attempt by a leading intellectual at the moment of independence to turn an argument about the historical unity of Africa into a case for a continent-wide federal system is Cheikh Anta Diop, Les fondements culturels, techniques et industriels d'un futur état fédéral d'Afrique noire (Paris, 1960). The concept of "Africa" itself is a tricky one, and as Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, seeing Africa as an entity risked engaging in the kind of racial essentializing that leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois were intent on combating. He insists that "Africa" should be defined not by some kind of racial or cultural authenticity but by looking at the history of struggle itself: how slavery and colonization defined Africans and how Africans turned this imposed definition into something positive. Appiah, In My Father's House. See also Mudimbe, Invention of Africa, and, for an Indian parallel, Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India," in Chatterjee and Pandey, Subaltern Studies VII, 1–39.
the partial devolution of power to individual colonies gave African politicians. At the same time, linguistic and ethnic groups were denied a legitimate place in politics—which did not prevent them from becoming even more salient and more sharply demarcated in postcolonial politics—and the menace of “tribalism” was used by governing elites to try to eliminate many sorts of subnational politics. In the confrontations of the 1950s, colonial states used violence to exclude certain options, for example, the explicit leftism and the premature (in official eyes) claims to independence of the Union des Populations du Camaroun or the antimodern radicalism of Mau Mau rebels in Kenya. Imperial bureaucrats, however, gave up aspects of their own imaginings: the idea that social and economic change could be directly controlled by those who claimed already to have arrived was lost in the struggles over decolonization. Where the imagination of anticolonial intellectuals in Africa and imperial bureaucrats overlapped was in the formal apparatus of the nation-state, the institutions and symbols contained within territorial borders.

Pan-Africanism actually predated nationalism—defined, as it should be, as a

77 Territorialization was more than a divide-and-rule strategy aimed at African political movements. It was also an attempt to break away from the notion, much invoked by African unions, that government wages and benefits throughout Greater France should be equalized across the races. By giving African politicians authority over budgets at the territorial level, the policy made government wage policy beholden to the territorial taxpayer. Territorialization in 1956 had powerful incentives attached to it—a genuine devolution of power to elected officials within each colony. Although some officials tried to revise federation, each had to look first to his own electoral base—and the wealthiest territory, the Ivory Coast, stood to gain the most by keeping its resources within its borders. Federation became politically impossible to revive. William J. Foltz, From French West Africa to the Mali Federation (New Haven, Conn., 1965). A post-independence attempt to build federation in former British East Africa also failed. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Pan-Africanism and East African Integration (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

78 Pandey’s study, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India, has echoes in colonial and postcolonial Africa: nationalists took over from colonial officials the idea that religious and communal movements were “irrational” and legitimized only “the mass of the people mobilized into a new national community.” (p. 254). Some of the same rhetoric was also used to delegitimize movements, including labor, that were secular and “modern” yet limited to particular segments of the national community.


80 I do not accept the argument made by Ronald Robinson and others that in the British case, a clear plan to devolve power was developed prior to the rise of nationalist movements and that these movements—the consequence rather than the cause of British policy—did no more than speed up a previously conceived policy. This “Whig” interpretation, as John Darwin calls it, misses the extent to which urban and rural movements—not specifically nationalist—destabilized colonial regimes’ sense of control, pushed them to emphasize their own developmentalist objectives while trying to play down what was “colonial” about colonial authority, and later helped to reveal that the developmental initiatives would themselves generate conflict more than alleviate it. Ronald Robinson, “Andrew Cohen and the Transfer of Power in Tropical Africa, 1940–1951,” in W. H. Morris-Jones and Georges Fischer, eds., Decolonisation and After: The British and French Experience (London, 1980), 50–72; John Darwin, “British Decolonization since 1945: A Pattern or a Puzzle?” Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies, 12 (1984): 187–209.

81 Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that “what European imperialism and third-world nationalisms have achieved together” is “universalization of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community.” Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” 19. Some argue that, given the internal weakness of Third World states, it is their insertion into international relations that preserves them. Robert H. Jackson, Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World (Cambridge, 1990).
movement to claim the nation-state. Leading intellectuals, notably Léopold Senghor, navigated the perspectives of Pan-Africanism, nationalism, and a desire for social and economic reform in complex ways: Senghor’s “négritude” embraced essentialist notions of African culture yet inverted the valuation placed on them, erasing difference and eliminating conflict within an idealized Africa. Senghor was just as brilliant at analyzing and working through the specific social structures of his own Senegal: a Christian politician with a political machine based on Muslim brotherhoods, a poet who expressed his ideas of Africa through the French language, a man who defended Africa from a seat in the French legislature, a romantic defender of African village life who after independence sought to use trade and aid to transform an African nation. Living these complexities entailed pain and difficulty, but there is no indication that Senghor—or the many others navigating similar currents—experienced them as personally destabilizing, as intellectually contradictory, or as threatening to his sense of cultural integrity: in between is as much a place to be at home as any other. The implications for the historian are crucial: we must analyze the culture of politics and the politics of culture by constantly shifting the scale of analysis from the most spatially specific (the politics of the clan or the village) to the most spatially diffuse (transatlantic racial politics) and examine the originality and power of political thought by what it appropriated and transformed from its entire range of influences and connections.

The triumph of nationalist movements appears less as a linear progression than as a conjuncture, and the success of African political parties less a question of a singular mobilization in the name of the nation than of coalition building, the forging of clientage networks, and machine politics. For a time, nationalist parties made the colonial state appear to be the central obstacle facing diverse sorts of social movements, from labor to anti-conservation to regional movements. Coalition politics may not have been the stuff of revolutionary drama, but it was often conducted with enthusiasm and idealism. The give-and-take of this era forced—and allowed—colonial governments to make a necessary imaginative leap themselves. They came to envision a world that they no longer ruled but that they thought could function along principles they understood: through state institutions, by Western-educated elites, in the interest of progress and modernity, through integration with global markets and international organizations. British archives, notably, disclose that top echelons of government wanted to believe all this but were not quite convinced. A non-hostile postcolonial relationship was the

---

82 Such definitions have been controversial for decades, since James Coleman insisted on limiting “nationalist” to movements specifically directed at assuming power within a nation-state. Thomas Hodgkin wanted nationalism to include all anticolonial protests and ideologies. Hodgkin’s notion is really a definition of political action and barely allows a political movement in a colony to be anything but nationalist. The words mean more if nationalism is viewed as only one of many possibilities for politics. James S. Coleman, “Nationalism in Tropical Africa,” American Political Science Review, 48 (1954): 404–26; Hodgkin, Nationalism, 28.

83 Janet C. Vaillant, Black, French, and African: A Life of Léopold Sédar Senghor (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); Appiah, In My Father’s House; Mudimbe, Invention of Africa; Miller, Theories of Africans.

84 On this last point, see Edward Said’s impassioned defense of colonial and ex-colonial intellectuals’ engagement with European literature and culture as well as his critique of nationalist thought; Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York, 1993).
best they thought they could achieve. In the process, they could eliminate some enemies, but in other cases the one-time Apostles of Disorder—Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Nnamdi Azikiwe—were remade in the colonial imagination into the Men of Moderation and Modernity.

Some of the best recent studies of post–World War II politics focus not on the parties that took over the state but on Asante nationalism in the Gold Coast (thrust aside by Nkrumah's quest for a unitary Ghana), on the guerrilla movement of the Cameroon, which the French successfully marginalized and destroyed, on the rural people who were caught in the middle of guerrilla-government warfare in Zimbabwe, and on the squatters who fought the hardest, suffered the most, and won the least in the violent decolonization of Kenya. The nationalist parties paid a price for their conjunctural coalitions: the social struggles they tried to attach to their cause remained unresolved. As Aristide Zolberg first showed in 1966, the public's nationalist sentiment was actually quite thin. Attempts at building national institutions were inevitably read as building up particularistic interests: for the leader's tribe, for his class, for his clientele, for himself. New states, taking on a transformative project at which European powers had failed, were politically fragile and ideologically brittle, their insistence on unity for the nation and development denying legitimacy to the social movements out of which political mobilization had often been achieved.

The idea of the nation, as Benedict Anderson stressed, emerged in a particular historical context, when the circuits along which creole elites (starting in Latin America) moved and built their careers began to exclude the metropole and focus on the colonial capital and when print capitalism provided a medium to establish a bounded identity. Europe learned to imagine the nation from the tensions that emerged within its old empires and passed the imaginative possibility along to its new colonial conquests. Partha Chatterjee reluctantly grants Anderson a point: the kind of politics that eventually took over colonial states was this nation-centered one, focused on the European-defined boundaries and institutions, on notions of progress shaped by capitalism and European social thought. The idea of "reason" through which nationalists critiqued colonialism arrived in the colonies wed to capitalism and colonialism. In making claims on colonial powers, nationalists became caught up in the colonial regimes' categories; nationalism was

---


86 Joseph, Radical Nationalism; Mmbembe, Naissance du maquis. Such remaking of political figures is not unique to Africa: Yasser Arafat seems to be the latest beneficiary.


89 There is a problem in Anderson's argument about creole nationalism that is related to the issue raised here: the claim of elites to transcend social divisions. As Julie Skurskie argues, the politics of the creole elite were not so much inclusive—trying to cut across, coopt, and minimize conflict in the name of the nation—as exclusive, violently defining racial and cultural groups out of the nation. Skurskie, "The Ambiguities of Authenticity in Latin America: Dona Barbara and the Construction of National Identity," Poetics Today, 15 (1994).
a “derivative discourse.” Chatterjee finds possibilities for “a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not Western” but locates them in a spiritual domain set outside economy and statecraft.90 The Indian elite, drawing its power both from notions of caste and communalism rigidified by British rule and from its immersion in colonial commerce, was willing neither to undertake a drastic assault on the Indian past nor to repudiate those elements of the colonial present from which it benefited. Chatterjee, following Antonio Gramsci, identifies elite nationalism as a “war of position,” an effort to change society bit by bit, rather than a more radical “war of movement.” At some moments, more radical appeals—nationally those of Mohandas Gandhi himself—were necessary to widen the mobilization of the Indian National Congress; but, as victory came into sight, the Congress leadership’s immersion in the economic, political, and ideological structures of the Indian state marginalized alternative visions. The institutions of state and the goal of state-directed development were only a part of Indian politics in the twentieth century, but they were the politics that triumphed.91

Both Anderson and Chatterjee do more than take the nation and nationalism from the realm of “natural” sentiment to social construct;92 they do so in a way grounded in material conditions and aspirations of certain social groups, in the life trajectories of those who imagined the nation, in the networks of intellectuals and political leaders, in the ways in which ideas were circulated. The “state” should be examined with the same care as the “nation”—its institutions and rhetorics carefully scrutinized.93 One can agree up to a point with Anthony D. Smith that particular qualities of the colonial state—“gubernatorial, territorial, bureaucratic, paternalist-educational, caste-like”—were carried over to postcolonial states, yet African rulers gave their own meanings to institutions they took over, adapting them to patrimonial social structures and complex modes of representing power.94

To historicize the nation-state is not, however, to postulate that it is Africa’s “curse,” as Basil Davidson called it. One should not assume the innocence or

91 See also David Ludden, “The Development Regime in India,” in Dirks, Culture and Colonialism, 247–88.
92 The construction argument is often made. See, for example, Homi K. Bhabha, ed., Nation and Narration (London, 1990).
93 One subject into which this kind of inquiry has begun is health. A Subaltern Studies historian (Arnold, Colonizing the Body) has done a pioneering study on India, and state and health have been studied perceptively by Vaughan, Curing Their Ills, and Packard, “‘Healthy Reserve’ and the ‘Dressed Native’.”
94 Anthony D. Smith, State and Nation in the Third World: The Western State and African Nationalism (Brighton, 1983), 56. As in my study of labor, one can examine in many domains how institutions (trade unions, industrial relations boards) of specifically European origin—but discussed by officials of the universalism—were used by Africans in particular ways, while they, too, made claims to universality to serve their ends. On modes of exercising and representing power in Africa, see Jean-François Bayart, L’état en Afrique: La politique du ventre (Paris, 1989); and the controversy unleashed in Public Culture, 5, no. 1 (1992), by an article by Achille Mbembe, “The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony,” Public Culture, 4, no. 2 (1992): 1–30.
autonomy of community or "civil society" any more than that of the nation, and
the articulation between state and social units within and beyond it is where
analysis should focus. The "national order of things" should neither be taken as
natural nor dismissed as an artificial imposition on Africa. State and nation need
to be examined in relation to diasporic communities, to the migratory circuits
around which many people organize their lives, to the structures and rules—from
market transactions to factory discipline—that also cross borders, and to the
clavages that exist within borders and at times both destroy and remake the
nation-state.\textsuperscript{95}

In concluding this discussion, I turn to a view of colonialism and resistance
that in the recent past would have been a likely starting point: Frantz Fanon. The
West Indian psychiatrist and intellectual who devoted much of his life to Algeria
and was read as a voice of the "African Revolution" epitomizes the anti-imperialist
who crosses borders. His view of violence negating the psychological power of
colonialism captured the imagination of other African intellectuals and, above
all, those in the West who did not have to face the consequences of that violence.\textsuperscript{96}

Fanon was no nationalist. For him, nationalism was a bourgeois ideology,
espoused by those who wanted to step into the colonial structure rather than turn
that structure upside down. Nor was Fanon a racialist: he criticized "négritude"
and saw no solace in the sharing of a mythic black identity, opposing a
universalistic notion of liberation to arguments about authenticity or cultural
autonomy. Fanon's future came out of the struggle itself: "The last shall be first
and the first last." Decolonisation is the putting into practice of this sentence.\textsuperscript{97}

Yet Fanon was also denying colonized people any history but that of oppres-
sion, any ambiguity to the ways they might confront and appropriate the
intrusions of colonizers. Instead, he provided a sociological determinism: the
petty bourgeoisie was absorbed in mimicking the culture of the colonizer and was
best understood in terms of psychopathology;\textsuperscript{98} the working class had become a

\textsuperscript{95} Basil Davidson, \textit{The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State} (New York, 1993); Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, "Cursing the Nation-State," \textit{Transition}, 61 (1993): 114–21; Liisa Malikki,
"National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among
the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism," \textit{ibid.},
68–79.

\textsuperscript{96} Recent entries on Fanon—commenting on the other entries—are Cedric Robinson, "The
Fanonism," \textit{Critical Inquiry}, 17 (1991): 457–70; and a particularly critical discussion in Miller, \textit{Theories
of Africans}, 45–62.

\textsuperscript{97} Frantz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, Constance Farrington, trans. (New York, 1966), 30. See
also Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, Charles Lam Markmann, trans. (New York, 1967),
Fanon did not seek to build a "true Algeria" embodying some national essence but rather a society
emancipated of its colonial oppression. Yet, in his own way, Fanon isolates the "true anticolonialist"
from history and experience, turning impure categories into criteria for exclusion from the liberation
project. I use the word "true" in the ironic sense applied to the other side of the colonial divide by

\textsuperscript{98} Fanon's psychologizing of the colonial situation—and other versions of this enterprise—strike
me as deeply flawed, a too-easy transposition of issues of state sovereignty to personal autonomy,
labor aristocracy intent only on capturing the privileges of white workers; the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat, by contrast, were the true liberationists, the last who would become first. The categories were actually colonial ones, and the irony of Fanon’s fervent argument was that it allowed—by its inversionary logic—France to define the present and future of people in colonies.99

Fanon’s reduction of ideology and political strategy to traits of social groups in effect created purge categories: the organized worker or the petty bourgeois, like the kulak of the Stalinist Soviet Union, was a traitor by definition. And the singularity with which the “anticolonial” eclipsed all other notions of affiliation or common interest implied postcolonial uniformity as much as anticolonial unity.

Some African leaders were saying exactly that. Sékou Touré, one of Africa’s most notable radical nationalists, himself once a trade unionist, spoke on the eve of his assuming power in Guinea of the new imperatives of African rule. Trade unions were “a tool” that should be changed when it got dull; striking against the “organisms of colonialism” had been a legitimate action, but a strike “directed against an African Government” was now “historically unthinkable,” and the labor movement was “obligated to reconvert itself to remain in the same line of emancipation” as the government.100 Sékou Touré was to practice what he preached by destroying the autonomy of the trade union movement and jailing much of its leadership. Other once-autonomous, once-activist organizations were similarly destroyed, coopted, or marginalized in many African countries.101 There were, of course, complex questions to be faced about the role of unions, of regionally or ethnically based associations, of representatives of farmers, traders, and other economic interests in postcolonial polities, as well as questions of allocating more resources to groups that had fared well or badly under colonial rule. But Sékou Touré was not issuing an invitation to a debate. Nor were his fellow leaders who made the national ideal compulsory, via such devices as one-party states and such ideological constructs as Mobutu’s authenticité or

99 “The colonial world is a Manichean world,” wrote Fanon (Wretched, 33), apparently not realizing how much deeper he was in that world than the people about whom and in whose cause he wrote.
Kenyatta's *harambee* (pulling together). The last were now declared to be first. The others deserved to be last.

This is not to deny Fanon's critique of the self-serving nationalists of his day or the appeal of his call for a liberation that overrode national or racial chauvinisms. The issue is one of facing consequences. The casting out of all but the True Anticolonialist from the political arena and the reduction of entire categories of people to class enemies gave an exhilarating legitimacy to state projects, which were often deflected into less liberationist goals than Fanon had in mind. Enthusiasms for projects of state-building, modernization, and development, in the name of the market or of socialism or of good governance, have consequences, too. Those who find in notions of "community" or "new social movements" a welcome antidote to one sort of oppression need to worry about the other forms of oppression that lie within them. For the historian, searching for those historical actors who found the true path is a less fruitful task than studying different paths into engagement with colonization as well as the tensions between different sorts of liberations, between local mobilization and state institutions, between cultural assertion and cultural interaction.

For the historian who seeks to learn what can be learned about the lives that African workers or market women lived day by day, the Manichean world of Frantz Fanon is no more revealing than a colonial bureaucrat's insistence that such people stood at the divide between African backwardness and Western modernity or a nationalist's dichotomy between an authentic community and an imposed westernization. The Guinean port worker was not just seeking European wages or fighting colonialism: he may also have used his job for a colonial firm to seek autonomy from his father, just as his wife may well have been acting within the urban commercial sector to attain a measure of autonomy from him. As a trade unionist, he drew on organizational forms and institutional legitimacy from the French model of industrial relations, but union and political activities also drew on and contributed to webs of affiliation, languages of solidarity, and a range of cultural institutions that colonial officials did not understand and could not adequately monitor. The worker and the market seller were remaking institutions and their meanings even as they used them.

The concept of subalternity also does not categorize the lived experience of such people, but Subaltern Studies historians are not saying that it should. Their emphasis is on the tension between such experiences and the historical process that generates the categories of knowledge themselves. The tension defines a valuable entry point for probing colonial experiences and an essential reminder of the scholar's inability to escape the implications of the material and cultural power that Europe exercised overseas. Yet, as we look ever more deeply into the

---

102 One should not assume that postcolonial African states were uniformly authoritarian or that an authoritarian state could not in many ways be a weak state. For one of the first critiques of the brittleness of African regimes and the ideological moves by which contestation was delegitimized, see Zolberg, *Creating Political Order*. My argument parallels Chatterjee's view of the "plural development of social identities" emerging from struggles with the colonial state "that were violently disrupted by the political history of the postcolonial state seeking to replicate the modular forms of the modern nation-state." Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 156.

103 On the dualism of late colonial conceptions of society, see Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*. 
contested spaces of colonial politics, we would do well to look beyond the notion of subalternity—and conceptions of colonialism that assume its ability to coerce, coopt, and categorize challenges into its own structure of power and ideology—in order to pry apart further the ways in which power was constituted and contested. The violence of colonizers was no less violent for the narrowness of its range and the limits of its transformative efficacy, and the totalizing arrogance of modernizing ideologies is not diminished by the fact that Africans often disassembled them and created something else. But if “subalterns” are to be seen as vital parts of history, the possibility, at least, that the very meanings of domination and subalternity could be undermined should be kept open. And if, at the same time, we are to follow the call of Chatterjee and Chakrabarty to “provincialize” European history—to subject its universalizing claims to historical examination rather than use them as measures of other people’s histories—we should move beyond treating modernity, liberalism, citizenship, or bourgeois equality as if they were fixed and self-contained doctrines unaffected by the appropriations and reformulations given to them by processes of political mobilization in Asia, Africa, or Europe itself.¹⁰⁴

Nationalism, meanwhile, can be explored in tension with a range of social movements, and, as with the colonization process, the ability of nationalist parties to subsume other sorts of mobilizations under its roof should be seen as contingent and partial. The forms of power in Africa after decolonization—the institutions through which it is exercised and the idioms in which it is represented—reflect not so much the all-consuming thrust of the national order of things but the fragilities, the compromises, and the violences of insecure leaders that emerged in the process of ending colonial rule.

In Africa, the encounters of the past are very much part of the present. Africa still faces the problems of building networks and institutions capable of permitting wide dialogue and common action among people with diverse pasts, of struggling against and engaging with the structures of power in the world today. Africa’s crisis derives from a complex history that demands a complex analysis: a simultaneous awareness of how colonial regimes exercised power and the limits of that power, an appreciation of the intensity with which that power was confronted and the diversity of futures that people sought for themselves, an understanding of how and why some of those futures were excluded from the realm of the politically feasible, and an openness to possibilities for the future that can be imagined today.

¹⁰⁴ Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, 237–38; Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” 20. The “provincializing” argument is a very good one, but it implies a detailed and nuanced engagement with the vagaries of European history. The argument is weakened when it slips into blanket dismissals of liberalism or assumptions that bourgeois equality is an unchanging construct. See Chakrabarty, 20–21; Chatterjee, 198.