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The Politics of Citizenship in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa

Aquest article se centra en un periode crucial de la història africana, la dècada i mitja posterior a la segona guerra mundial, per tal d'entendre millor les opcions i els condicionaments de l'Àfrica postcolonial. El que està en joc en aquest periode tant a l'Àfrica anglesa com a la francesa és la força del que avui és considerat feble a l'Àfrica: una política de ciutadania, de reciprocitat entre les expectatives que estats i ciutadans tenen els uns dels altres. L'article indaga en aquestes polítiques de ciutadania en l'Àfrica dels darrers anys de la colònia, especialment en aquelles situacions en les quals els clams basats en la ciutadania anaven directament contra els imperis colonials com un tot, afirmant l'equivalència de les administracions políti-ques a les quals els colonitzats eren adscrits. L'article explica de quina manera els líders africans van acabar tement els moviments i clams que ells havien portat al poder. Al final de la guerra ni els dirigents colonials ni els moviments socials africans ni els independentismes no havien fet de la independència d'estats territorials la base de les seves polítiques, que tanmateix s'esdevingué en la dècada dels seixanta. Ambdós, colonitzadors i líders nacionals es distanciaren de les implicacions socials i econòmiques dels clams per la ciutadania que durant uns anys foren tan importants.

From the vantage point of 2005, it is all too easy to look at Africa in terms of pathology and to ask what went wrong and why. Ready explanations abound, mostly divided into two camps. One looks for something deep in African culture –ethnic divisions, anti-market culture– to find an answer to why the history of subSaharan Africa has taken a different trajectory from histories elsewhere. Another sees Africa as a victim of imperialism and global capitalism, under assault since the era of the slave trade and colonization, the extreme case of the poor getting poorer as the rich get richer. Neither type of explanation comes to grips with the dynamics of the last half century. They posit an unmediated connection between a past –whether seen as essentially African or as colonial– and a present, skipping over the possibilities that opened and closed in between. [1]

My goal in this article is to look at a crucial period in African history, the decade and a half after World War II in order to understand better the options and constraints of postcolonial Africa. What is striking about this period in both British and French Africa –the focus of my article– is the strength of what is now seen to be weak in Africa: a politics of citizenship, of reciprocity between the expectations states and citizens have of each other. We think today of African states as brittle –rulers distant from their people, afraid of organizations not directly dependent on the leadership, unwilling to entertain demands coming from below, working through patron-client ties, personal militias, and dubious connections overseas more than through accessible, transparent institutions. To focus on weaknesses of citizenship is not to condemn the state for ignoring «society» or to blame the divisions within society for the problems of the state, but to emphasize that the mechanisms which connect the state with networks, organizations, and collective sensibilities in society operate poorly –to the detriment of both state and society.

Some argue that citizenship notions are confining because they posit a one-to-one relationship between state and individual and are unable to take into account the collectivities to which people feel attached. Others claim that citizenship carries too much cultural baggage and can easily develop into a sharp division between those who are inside and those who are outside. Both arguments have merit, but both betray a certain distrust of politics: people, with whatever forms of affinity and connection they have, make compromises and reach understandings of individual and collective concerns as long as they devise an institutional mechanisms for doing so. Xenophobia –a tightly bound sense of belonging set against the rigid exclusion of outsiders– and alienation –a feeling that the state is irrelevant to the individual or community– are both dangers at opposite ends of the spectrum, but people in many cultural and political settings have learned to live with tensions. There is no such thing as a politics of pure citizenship –in the United States and Spain as well as Togo and Kenya– for personal connections are always part of politics. But as long as citizens can debate and make political choices, the tension between connectivity –a society divided into collectivities and personal networks– and individuality can be fruitful.

My argument is that a politics of citizenship has had an important place in recent African history. In both French and British Africa, the decade and a half after World War II witnessed the mobilization of a variety of political actors –trade unionists, students, farmers, ex-soldiers– who made claims on the state. These claims were often for quite concrete benefits and were not reducible to a desire for a state that called itself «African» to replace a European one. The ability of African political parties in the 1950s to mobilize was based

both on the desire for a different kind of state and on the desire to have states capable of meeting the needs of different categories of people.

One should not reduce politics in the 1950s to nationalism or even anticolonialism. The politics of claim-making were crucial to the dynamics of the period. But what sort of state was the object of claims? A territorially bounded state, a state that could represent a particular «imagined community», was one possibility, but not the only one. [2] In British Africa, claim-making was throughout the post-war era concentrated on getting away from the colonial state's desire to keep Africans in local, «tribal» units and toward the colonial state itself –on Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Kenya, Uganda, etc. such units were seen as capable of action– of organizing «development», of providing resources, of responding to the social dislocations attendant upon the expansion of wage labor and urbanization that were immediate parts of people's lives. In French Africa, however, the focus was on imperial citizenship before it was on national citizenship –on transforming the French insistence that its colonies were part of a Greater France into claims for full participation in institutions of France and on claims to social and economic equivalence for all people of France, from Brazzaville to Brest. The power of claims *within* the concept of territorial or imperial citizenship threatened French and British governments –which feared that even if they could defeat anticolonial guerilla movements, they would be faced with demands for social and economic resources in the same language with which France and Britain asserted the legitimacy of imperial rule.

They potentially threatened African political leaders themselves, who understood very well the force of the political movements they were trying to ride to power. Once those leaders were in power, citizenship became a threat to them and most leaders sought to take the vitality away from the movements that had helped them. This view of African history between 1945 and the mid-1960s is a tragic one: of a democratic opening giving way to antidemocratic closures. But it is not a story of inevitability, for neither African culture nor the trauma of colonization prevented Africans, for a time, from acting as citizens. The possibility remains.

The Africa which became independent beginning in 1957 was an Africa of nation-states, small, economically weak, but with the institutions and the international status of sovereignty. Yet that was not the Africa which most African leaders looked to in 1945. Their scope was broader than that. Even before elites in British focused on the concrete possibilities which the colonial state offered them, many of them took a strong interest in pan-Africanism, looking toward the liberation of people of color throughout the world, not necessarily with a clear idea of what kind of institutions that would entail. Francophone Africans in late 1945 were preparing to bring pressure on French legislators to rewrite the constitution of the new Fourth Republic in a way that provided meaningful citizenship in a Greater France to the people of the colonies. In both francophone and anglophone Africa, people were involved in all sorts of political activities with a more immediate focus –politics of chieftaincies and other localized communities in some cases, labor issues in others, attempts to change the terms of trade of exports in still others.

British and French officials in 1945 were also not thinking of dissolving empire into territorial nation-states, certainly not in the span of less than a generation. The empire was in some ways more essential than ever. Damaged economically by World War II, both powers saw in their colonies the only real hope of earning hard currency, via the sale of tropical products for dollars. Both powers recognized that the legitimacy of empire was now in question in ways that it had not been before.

I wish to emphasize the importance of the struggles which took place at the imperial level. France and Britain both faced the danger that the very ideological constructions by which empire, in the aftermath of World War II, was being reaffirmed could be turned by social and political movements in Africa into claims upon the empire. These claims were not just for autonomy, although they certainly were for political voice. They were also quite material –about wages, benefits, access to public services on a non-racial basis, for education and health services equivalent to that available in the metropole. If empire were to be reformed and made into be a meaningful unit of participation, then workers, farmers, students, and others might pose claims on the resources of the empire as a whole. For Britain and France, devolving power to nation-states would become an acceptable alternative to their other real choice: making empire into a unit in which citizenship and development were credible notions, hence exposing the voting publics of the metropoles to demands for political equality and equivalent standard of living.

Imperial Citizenship in French Africa

The institutional structure of French empire made issues of citizenship quite explicit in the years after the war. As the leaders of the Free French began to contemplate around 1944 what France would look like after German and Vichy rule, they insisted that France should both keep and reform its empire. Leaders agreed that France had to demonstrate –in the wake of a war fought against conquest and racism– that its rule was just and progressive. Political leaders began to think that the term «colony» was obsolete, and by 1945 the Empire was being called the French Union. [3]

Henri Laurentie, a colonial specialist in the Free French leadership, claimed in 1944 that policy toward overseas France was «the exact application of the principle of equality, that is for the suppression of the colonial concept, properly speaking.» The French Union was to be «a more or less federal ensemble in which each French country, morally equal to each other, including the metropole, will be capable of following its distinct vocation, while sharing in the rights and obligations of the same human society.» Charles de Gaulle looked in 1946 to a French state constituted out of both «national unity» and «imperial unity» –that is out of a metropolitan France and an overseas France– together «110 million men and women who live under our flag and in an organization of federal form.» [4] The state consisted of what de Gaulle called alternatively the Republic, the nation, and la *patrie*, plus la France d'Outre-Mer: colonies, renamed overseas territories after the war;

overseas «departments,» namely the «old colonies» of the Caribbean promoted by a post-war law to the same administrative status as the departments of main-land France; and associated states (formerly protectora-tes, like Morocco and parts of Indochina). Algeria was considered part of the French Republic, but it was its soil and some of its people who were treated as equi-valent –not its Muslim majority.

Between 1946 and 1962, French leaders tried a series of organizational initiatives to preserve the polity as a unitary but differentiated entity. Just what institutions would regulate the distribution of power in the French Union (1946) and the French Community (1958) were debated at great length, and Algeria, of course, was the case that could not be resolved. From 1946, the French legislature proclaimed that everybody in the Empire would be a citizen, not necessarily the same as a citizen of the French Republic but with equivalent rights. The imperial entity was also crucial to the people and movements who challenged the French go-vernment in this period, and making citizenship.

Whether a European French nation or an empire the crossed the oceans would be the unit in which politics was conducted had been a question since the French revolution. French plantation owners, property owners of mixed origins, and slaves from the crucial colony of Saint Domingue had each claimed that the ideals of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen applied to them, and at a critical moment times the revolutionary government had freed slaves and hoped that black citizens would join in the defense of the Republic against royalists and rival empires. The Saint Domingue revolution, Napoleon's reinstatement of slavery in 1802, and his failure to regain control over Saint Domingue set out possibilities that would echo for the ensuing century and a half: a liberation struggle within empire, attempts to generalize citizenship throughout the empire, secession from empire, and reinforcement of distinction and discrimination in colo-nies. [5]

The distinction between citizens, who had political voice, and subjects, who did not was, developed in Algeria between 1830 and the 1860s: Muslim Alge-rians could aspire to French citizenship, but only if they gave up their use of Islamic law in regulating marriage, property, and inheritance and came under the French civil code. Few chose to give up something so impor-tant, and even fewer were accepted into citizenship. Yet the neat distinction between subject and citizen did not work so neatly in practice. Citizenship was theoreti-cally available but in practice withheld. In 1848, when France finally abolished slavery in its colonies, slaves became citizens rather than members of an interme-diate category. In the Four Communes of Senegal, the «originaires» had the «qualities» of citizenship. When France needed more from the people of its empire in times of war, it held out the possibility of a fuller citi-zenship, as it did in Saint Domingue and Guadeloupe in 1793-94 and in West Africa in 1914. In Senegal during World War I, African political leaders used French needs for soldiers to get France to concede a fuller citizenship to the originaires.

The expansion of claim making in Senegal, in North Africa, in Indochina, and among colonial students and workers in France was threatening. In the 1920s, the

French government tried to limit the citizenship pro-cess and propagate an alternative myth: the empire as the gathering together of different cultures and natio-nalities, under an imperial umbrella that guaranteed peace and the ability to preserve distinct cultures and traditions. In Africa, chiefs were given official blessing as the embodiments of authentic authority. [6]

The situation changed again after World War II. Faced with the need for more effective use of imperial resour-ces yet facing an international climate where «self-determination» was becoming an important principle and where anticolonial movements in North Africa and Indochina were already threatening, the French state took a firm position favoring inclusion: extending representation, in one form or another, within gover-ning institutions to all inhabitants of overseas territories, overseas departments, mandated territories, and asso-ciated states, hoping to make these French institutions the focus of all political action. From the very start in 1944 of debates within the post-war political establish-ment, the idea that different parts of the empire might have different relations to the French state, but that all would have political voice within it, was central. The controversy was about how this could be accomplis-hed while still preserving the leaders' sense of what France was. [7]

When the committees charged with drafting a new constitution for the post-war Republic got to work in early 1946 on provisions for the French Union, they –and their number included delegates from Africa– proposed that inhabitants of overseas territories should have «the same rights as inhabitants of the metropo-le…. It is necessary to dispense with a conscious or unconscious racism; it is necessary to create a´new climate so that people from these territories no longer can have the sentiment that they are considered our inferiors.» The early draft contained the provision that «all members of the Union have the quality of citizen and enjoy the totality of rights attached to that status.» [8] Just what this would mean was debated over long months and in regard to specific institutions. The early draft, relatively favorable to colonial people, was voted down in a referendum in May 1946, and the new draft was more conservative, but on the crucial provisions regarding citizenship, there was no turning back without depriving the new Republic of any legitimacy overseas. [9]

Worried about the status of the constitution, the Sene-galese deputy Lamine Guèye had already proposed in law to fulfill the primary objective: to declare all subjects to be citizens, regardless of civil status regime. Muslims could be citizens and still regulate marriage and property in Islamic courts. Passed unanimously and later enshrined in the Constitution, this law –known in Africa as the loi Lamine Guèye– was a sign that in theory Fran-ce had become an empire of citizens and the question was how that would affect people's lives. Meanwhile, the legislature attacked some of the most hated features of the French colonial system. The special and invidious judicial system for subjects was abolished. Forced labor was declared illegal. Ambitious programs of economic development and education –refused funding in the 1920s and 1930s– were at last put in place.

The legislative and constitutional provisions which set up the administration of the French Union, as the

empire was now called, made clear that different parts of this complex political entity would be governed differently, but that their relation was subject to change in the give and take of politics. But all colonial citizens would have equivalent rights and participate in some ways –but not necessarily as equals– in legislative processes in France. The Constitution –to the disappointment of African deputies who had helped to write it– gave relatively weak power to legislative bodies in individual territories and federations of territories, with the ultimate power lying in the French legislature in Paris in which colonial deputies were a minority. [10]

Nevertheless, the French state was now claiming to be both egalitarian and multicultural. The Overseas Ministry's political bureau told officials in Africa about the significance of the new imperial citizenship: «the legislature wanted to mark the perfect equality of all in public life, but not the perfect identity of the French of the metropole and the overseas French.» [11]

The state's attempt to maintain the French Union as a single but differentiated polity was too little, too late in Algeria –where settlers also continued to use their own citizenship rights to prevent Muslims from exercising theirs– but in sub-Saharan Africa political mobilization within the framework of French citizenship proved just as dangerous as national liberation movements. In Subsaharan Africa, the French state was able to put down violent anticolonial movements, as in the Cameroons, just as the British put down the rebellion in Kenya, but containing disorder was not the only cost of maintaining empire. [12] What is interesting about the moment is less what the Union and the generalization of citizenship were than the possibilities they opened up for making claims on the French state. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the logic of imperial citizenship –of the legal equivalence of all citizens regardless of their status regimes and cultural practices– became the basis for claims to equivalence of an economic and social nature: for equal wages, equal benefits, equal education, equal social services, for an equal standard of living.

My past research concentrated on how the labor movement used this framework to make quite material advances. The demand for «equal pay for equal work» emerged in 1946 as the key slogan of the labor movement in the Senegalese general strike. Strikers did not get equal wages, but they did force officials to apply the metropolitan system of negotiations and wage setting and the basic French framework of collective bargaining agreements to Africa. The 1948-49 railroad strike –20,000 workers on strike for up to 5 months– both challenged French officials and led them to think that their experience of class conflict in Europe at least helped them channel demands, making them into solvable problems. [13] The labor officers agreed with the unions that France needed a Code du Travail in order both to guarantee workers certain rights and to specify rules of bargaining, but given that any labor code could not be racially discriminatory, the stakes were so high that the debate took 6 years to resolve, and a West Africa wide general strike of workers influenced the legislature to act.

In one of the many legislative debates on the code, Léopold Senghor remarked, «As you know, Africans now have a mystique of equality. In this domain, as in others, they want the same principles to be applied from the first in the overseas territories as in the metropole.» [14] Senghor's words had quite material significance –workers were demanding equivalent conditions to those of workers from European France. The labor movement won the 40 hour week, collective bargaining rights, and paid vacations for regularly employed wage workers. They turned their attention to claiming family allowances –already won in the public sector– and got them extended to wage workers in the private sector in 1956. One can make similar arguments about demands for education and veterans' pensions. [15]

The French state was caught between the radicalism of anticolonial revolutions and the demands of labor unions and political organizations. Officials were, by the mid-1950s, thoroughly fed up with the demands being made upon them in the language of citizenship. The costs of modernizing imperialism in subSaharan Africa were high, and the promised transformation of the African economy was proving a more difficult goal than expected. An influential report on the modernization of colonial territories in 1953 warned of the danger that the process might result in the «exhaustion of the Metropole.» [16] A French minister in 1956 put it bluntly in front of the legislature: citizenship had come to mean «equality in wages, equality in labor legislation, in social security benefits, equality in family allowances, in brief, equality in standard of living.» [17] But if the costs of modernizing imperialism in sub-Saharan Africa were high, in Algeria the costs of not modernizing imperialism were even higher. In sub-Saharan Africa, French officials were by 1956 looking for a way to back out of the endless demands of an inclusive imperialism without running into a stone wall that could become a second Algeria.

Meanwhile, political leaders in French Africa were mobilizing more diverse constituencies, especially as more people could vote. The rhetoric of citizenship and equality resonated less with people for whom comparison with French citizens was a remote issue, and assertions of «African unity» against the humiliations of French colonialism counted for more. The labor movement was itself divided between «class» and «African unity,» and the top leaders –more and more interested in electoral office– took the movement toward African unity despite dissent from the rank and file. [18]

French officials were now willing to make considerable concessions to self-government as long as it stopped the cycle of demands. They called their new approach «territorialization.» The new law of 1956 conceded something to the demands of African deputies in Paris: universal suffrage and a structure that gave some recognition to federalism. But the reality was a Faustian bargain. The first elections under the new law, in 1957, indeed resulted in victories for African political parties in each of the subsaharan territories, and those governments had real power over the budget and real patronage to dispense. They offered tangible power and rewards to a political elite. But they also meant that claims on the resources of the empire as a whole were no longer enabled as they had been before. Each government was responsible to its taxpaying electorate. France might provide a narrower range of services and, if it so chose, aid, but the claims of citizens on
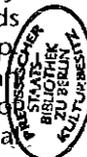
their state now had to be focused on territorial entities.

Civil servants' unions realized that the territorial treasury would be much less able to meet their pay claims than the French one, while Senghor lamented the «balkanization» of West Africa –the division of Africa into units too small to challenge European states. But it was a losing struggle, for the resources which the law devolved on the territories were real, and in each case –Senghor's Senegal included– the first generation of elected politicians quickly adapted themselves to the possibilities which this sort of access gave them.[19] The reality of territorialization, however, was that it destroyed what the French Union was intended to make invincible: the idea that France was the only unit in which real power was vested and toward which aspirations could be directed. Territorialization was –although no official admitted this– the decisive step toward decolonization. An empire of citizens –when citizenship entailed claims on social economic resources– had proven too demanding for France to sustain.

If imperial citizenship was too much citizenship for France, it was too imperial for many Africans, a humiliation for some who saw the French reference point held up before them. Such issues produced vigorous debate. Sékou Touré, most dramatically, shifted from a position of demanding equality with a Greater France to one which specifically repudiated such demands in favor of national assertion. Youth groups were particular active in radicalizing African politics and putting the possibility of independence –rather than autonomy within the French Union– on the table. Such mobilization put pressure on leaders like Senghor to claim increasing degrees of autonomy, while trying to preserve a federalism that would keep African territories tied to each other and to France.[20]

But it was the French government that was trying to break apart the unity of the French empire, making individual territories into the unit of political possibility. If in 1946, the idea of national independence was to French leaders anathema and the politics of citizenship a game they were willing to play, by 1956 the costs of social and economic equivalence had become so threatening that the alternative of claims to national autonomy was greeted by French officials with relief.

The interests which the first generation of African rulers had in the territorial units turned over to them were so strong and the fear of another politician with another base poaching on this territory were so great that the possibility of alternative modes of political organization were lost. French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa, the two federations through which France had administered Africa, were marginalized and disappeared before the coming of independence in 1960. Senghor's fears of «balkanization» came true –including in the failure of his own brief attempt to unite Senegal and Mali into a federal state.[21] The new states of francophone Africa would remain divided and would have great difficulty in putting together resources to transform their economies or respond to the demands of workers and peasants. They would be fragile states, whose rulers were well aware of how few resources they commanded and the dangers that social movements would put demands on them which they could not meet.

From Self-Government to Independence in British Africa

The fictions of rulers are important. If the French state portrayed its empire as more unified than it was, Britain portrayed its empire as more decentralized than it was. The myth was that each colony would progress through stages of increasing self-government, following Canada, New Zealand, and other members of the Commonwealth. But the timetable was not specified, and most officials thought self-government was decades away at least, while the actual politicians and labor leaders with whom officials had to deal were almost invariably treated as demagogues or students who had to be taught politics. The transition that was proposed in 1947 was much more limited: from indirect rule to «local government.»[22] That meant bringing educated people, not just «traditional» elites into the picture, but keeping the focus on local communities. Just as the fiction of a unitary French empire in which Africans participated at the center had unintended affects on claim-making in Africa, the British fiction of a road to self-government within the Commonwealth enabled other kinds of claims and set in motion a process which London could not control.

Post-war Britain shared with France a need to demonstrate to its own public, to its colonial subjects, and to the rest of the world that its rule was progressive. It finally had to take seriously a word with which British elites had flirted for decades without giving it much substance –development. After years of refusing to allocate metropolitan funds for projects intended to improve social welfare and provide an infrastructure for economic growth, British policy-makers responded to a wave of strikes and riots in the West Indies and Central Africa in the late 1930s by passing the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. Funding would be directed not just to projects of immediate economic utility but to infrastructure and services. The war delayed implementation of the act, but as it ended the government moved quickly to fund projects to jump-start production in key domains, to provide housing and other vital urban services, and to expand education. Each colony was ordered to plan for the systematic development of services and production.[23]

But the problem would not fit entirely into the development framework, for labor in the key communications nodes and in mines posed a specific set of problems. By the late 1940s, British officials were rejecting their old policy of encouraging back-and-forth migration between workplace and village and their insistence that Africans might work but could not truly be workers. The new policy went under the name of «stabilization» although in some places, such as the Copperbelt, it was less a policy than acceptance of the fact that Africans had come to live as well as work, that women as well as men were living in cities and rural chiefs and elders could no longer control gender relations.[24] The colonial state was becoming the architect of an African working class, paid enough to live with families in the city, encouraged to separate from a rural Africa now seen as backward, giving rise to a new generation of workers and homemakers acculturated to urban life, organized into trade unions that could provide coherence and predictability to industrial relations.[25] As recent work in social history has shown, the

vision of a neatly bounded working class –and the notion of male-breadwinner/female homemaker– could not be realized in practice, but even the attempt contributed to the division of African economies into sectors each of which had its own political and social requirements. [26]

The attempt to contain political change within the imperial system –through policies of self-government, development, and stabilization– quickly proved impossible. The riots that shook the Gold Coast in 1948 signaled that the basic demand for political voice would be directed at the central authority of each colony and at Britain itself. And the demands would not simply be for voice, but for higher wages for workers, higher crop prices for farmers, less restricted commercial opportunities for businessmen, better education, better health services. [27]

Where Britain seemed to differ most clearly from France was in regard to the notion of citizenship: indeed, the citizenship construct was weak in Britain, for all were subjects of the King or Queen. But after the war, a reinvigorated sense of the need to insure continued relations of Commonwealth and Great Britain led to the passage of nationality legislation in 1948 which gave people from the dominions rights, such as that of being able to enter the British Isles, that partook of imperial citizenship. Fearing charges that such legislation might be thought to privilege the «white» dominions, Parliament took care to specify that it applied to the people of the colonies. This caused considerable unease when non-whites began arriving in the British Isles, but officials could not find grounds to deny them access, given the imperial logic which defined them as British. [28]

What the British did not do was create institutions like those of the French Union, which provided representation in Parliament or in a special, empire-wide body, the Assemblée de l'Union Française. The British institutional structure pushed African politicians to concentrate more on the individual territory. Before the war, the cross-territorial connections among African elites, particularly those from West Africa, and above all the presence in London of students and militants from all the colonies had given a pan-Empire orientation to anti-colonial politics. But these movements, like pan-Africanist organizations that embraced West Indians and African Americans as well as Africans, had trouble translating this brought sense of identification among oppressed people of color into concrete institutional demands, especially the kind of politics that provided institutional rewards to followers.

After the war, the British attempt to expand political participation but confine it to local arenas quickly failed, as national political parties organized themselves in each territory and began to demand that legislative councils have a majority of elected members and that they be given real power. The pioneering movement was that of the Gold Coast, where leading politicians, including Kwame Nkrumah, used the occasion of the 1948 riots to claim that only an African government could address the problems of people of the territory and only it could hope to contain the potential for disorder. The roots of politics in the Gold Coast were varied, from a relatively well-organized labor movement, to moderately prosperous cocoa farmers, to

urban» youth available for mobilization. Nkrumah was able to straddle a fine line of mobilizing diverse supporters, posing a radical demand for independence, and yet positioning himself as the only possible way of finding a constitutional, peaceful solution to the tension he had helped to channel. The British government staked its hopes on finding a moderate alternative to Nkrumah, thereby committing itself to the kinds of reforms that an educated, professional elite wanted, focused on elections. But the mythic moderates had little support in the Gold Coast. Although Nkrumah was jailed for trying to mobilize a colony-wide strike movement that would paralyze the economy and the state, his party, the Convention People's Party, was the only one with broad support among a diverse segment of the population. When the Party won a legislative election in 1951, with Nkrumah in prison, the British government had to admit it was outmaneuvered, that its attempt to find a manipulable middle had failed, and that Nkrumah was indeed the only alternative to disorder. The political experts in the Gold Coast made this explicit to the governor and to official in London:

In the present political circumstances it is not expedient to keep in jail the leader of a party which commands the enthusiastic support of such a large section of the electorate and who has himself had an overwhelming victory in Accra.... His Excellency would have been faced with an ultimatum and widespread agitation if he refused to accept it. There would not of course have been the remotest chance of securing C.P.P. co-operation in the working of the new Constitution in the latter circumstances, and it is obviously desirable to avoid if possible a situation in which the Governor is faced with either yielding to an ultimatum or jeopardising the working of the Constitution and evoking widespread agitation. [29]

Nkrumah would soon learn that the quest of diverse people for improvements in their daily lives was ónly contingently hitched to his *national* cause. As leader of a self-governing territory moving toward independence, he repressed the kinds of social movements, from labor unions, farmers' organizations, and regional power-brokers, that he had ridden to his party's victory in 1951. When the Gold Coast became independent in 1957 –changing its name to Ghana– national independence could be celebrated, but its basis was already in question. [30] But those were now Nkrumah's problems, and one reads in the colonial archives that British officials had a kind of grudging admiration for Nkrumah's success in repressing the labor movement –they wished they could have done such a good job themselves. Nkrumah was being reconstructed in British ideology from the dangerous demagogue to the Man of Moderation and Modernization. [31]

Such a pattern became the model for other colonies: fear of radicals made once radical alternatives look more moderate. As the experience of Ghana –and the earlier one of India– made the possibility of the peaceful devolution of power imaginable, the costs of maintaining empire in the face of demands for development and equality within it had to be weighed against alternatives. In 1957, Prime Minister MacMillan commissioned a cost-benefit analysis that would «estimate of the balance of advantage, taking all these considerations into account, of losing or keeping each particular territory.» [32] The conclusions of the study were mixed:

Although damage could certainly be done by the premature grant of independence, the economic dangers to the United Kingdom of deferring the grant of independence for her own selfish interests after the country is politically and economi-

cally ripe for independence would be far greater than any dangers resulting from an act of independence negotiated in an atmosphere of goodwill such as has been the case with Ghana and the Federation of Malaya. Meanwhile, during the period when we can still exercise control in any territory, it is most important to take every step open to us to ensure, as far as we can, that British standards and methods of business and administration permeate the whole life of the territory. [33]

The goal now was no longer to keep colonies in the empire, but to keep them tied to a British way of life –something British colonial policy before the war had been intent on keeping Africans away from. The once great empire could not risk offending the sensibilities of its one-time subjects, whose goodwill would hopefully keep ex-colonies in the Commonwealth and the Sterling Area. Officials could only hope that British discourse and practice had framed the question of governance and that ex-colonies would become Western-style nations.

What Britain was not prepared to do was pay the economic and political costs which such a transformation implied. Officials had long feared that the Colonial Development and Welfare Act would become a colonial «dole,» and by the mid-1950s they had come to grips with the limits of the transformations which were economically possible: African colonies lacked the physical facilities –transportation and skilled labor– to absorb very much development spending even if Britain were willing to provide it. The labor problem was not solved under the stabilization doctrine, and labor costs moved upward. The Colonial Office admitted that the supposed mission of «preparing» Africans to live a British-style life had not succeeded in the first half-century of African colonization and was not succeeding in its final phase. The Colonial Secretary said of Nigeria in 1957 that there was danger of «the country disintegrating», of «administrative chaos», of «corrupt, inept and opportunist rule». But the British could not prolong their supposed tutelage: «This is the dilemma with which we are faced: either give independence too soon and risk disintegration and a breakdown of administration; or to hang on too long, risk ill-feeling and disturbances, and eventually to leave bitterness behind.» [34]

East Africa –where the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya had been put down only a few years earlier– was considered in worse shape, but the same course was eventually followed. [35] With Nigeria gaining independence in 1960, Tanganyika followed in 1961, Uganda in 1962, Kenya in 1963. Kenyatta, like Nkrumah, had to be made over from violent rebel to the great hope for peace.

The pessimism of the Cabinet reports from 1957-59 overlook clear evidence of growth in exports and marketed output, of improved infrastructure and much expanded schools systems, of better paid workers and newly functioning systems of industrial relations in at least some sectors of some colonies –all of which British officials boasted of in other contexts. But the sense of failure has much to do with the way the problem was framed in the first place: a single idea of «development.» When British officials were forced to take stock of their progress in the late 1950s, they did not find what they meant by modern society and they tended to interpret its absence as chaos and as danger.

But African politicians –by virtue of the very insistence of British officials that they had to prove their popular

mandates– made connections with African society as it actually was, with all its particularisms and conflicting forms of affinity. Top officials often read this as demagogery, corruption, and divisiveness. Such observations were not without basis –some of the social and political breakdowns that occurred in the 1960s in Nigeria and elsewhere resemble the predictions of 1957-59– but the expectations which Africa had failed to fulfill were those of a fantasy of imperial modernization of the 1940s.

The imperial system which collapsed in the late 1950s and 1960s was imperialism at its most interventionist. Development had been put forward after the African and West Indian disturbances as an antidote to disorder. Instead, the increased tempo of change in an era of expanding markets and social engineering –from the intensified production at the expense of squatters on farms in Central Kenya to the heavy-handed interventions of agricultural experts in soil conservation projects– helped to bring about conflicts which strained the ability of the forces of order to contain. If the British government had ever hoped that its development policy of he 1940s would make independence seem less desirable, by the 1950s the government itself was balking at the costs of developing the empire. The perceptions of some officials about the preparedness of colonies for independence or the priority that should be given to economic development became irrelevant: sovereignty was what African political movements were going to get, and responsibility for whatever went wrong.

Decolonization as Process

Let us return to the basic question of this article: how and why did decolonization –as a process– shape postcolonial futures? I see colonialism itself as unstable and uncertain, always caught between strategies of incorporating people more fully into an empire or marking the differentiation and subordination of conquered people. [36] Routine administration required that elites, at least, be given some kind of stake in the imperial system –otherwise bureaucratic and military cost would make colonies a drain on metropolitan resources– but as economic and social situations changed, the need to coopt different categories of people and different kinds of leaders shifted as well. In the 1940s and 1950s, France and Britain found that the development of an African working class was becoming a reality, that the narrow nodes of colonial economies were easily disrupted by social movements, and that colonial stability required recognizing that the «African worker» really did exist and had to be incorporated into some kind of social order. They thought they knew how to do such things –given the experience of European elites in managing social tensions, but in the late 1940s and 1950s, Britain and France faced the escalation of demands within a new, but still colonial, framework that they had themselves put forward. It was the dynamic element that proved the most vulnerable part of empire, not its most rigid element. It is no surprise that the breakdown of empire occurred first in the «development» oriented regimes of France and Britain and not in the empire of Portugal.

My second point is that the attempt at «modernizing» colonialism did not systematically modernize the social

order, but reframed struggles in unintended ways, for both colonial powers and the social and political movements which challenged them. For colonial officials, the development drive made it possible to imagine Africans as «modern» people, acting in institutions like legislatures and labor unions –something which made no sense in the «tribal» conception of Africa that predominated before the war. At first, development seemed like an excuse to stay around longer. But the costs of development, investment, and the containment of disorder or revolution turned out to be something neither France nor Great Britain wanted to pay. The mo-dernization argument instead proved useful in convincing enough of the political elite at home that African territories could become self-governing, that they could be brought enough into the world economy and international institutions, that they would have an interest in further interaction and cooperation, and that European norms really were universalistic aspirations that Africans themselves would seek to emulate. The development process went from something which had to be directly controlled to something whose painful implementation could be passed on to African elites, who would bear the responsibility.

For the leaders of trade unions and other social movements and for the leaders of political parties who were so skillful in turning European fear of disorderly masses into their own quest for power, the experience of the labor and economic contestations of the 1940s and 1950s was also a powerful one. The terrain on which these struggles were conducted privileged certain kinds of institutions and certain attitudes toward them: the idea that society could be managed and engineered, that a strong state should enter into the realm of family life and social organization, was one side. The other was that demands put forward in the name of citizenship and development could be powerful. The first generation of African rulers, Kwame Nkrumah leading the way in Ghana and Sékou Touré in Guinea, knew from having profited from labor mobilization just how potentially challenging organized labor could be. They turned out to be the pioneers in destroying the autonomy of trade unions –likewise with independent farmers' organizations, with students' organizations, and so on. The closing off of debate and political action in so many newly independent African states cannot simply be attributed to a legacy of authoritarianism from colonial rule, but also to its opposite –to direct experience with the mobilization of civil society, which however partial it had been, was enough to challenge states with many more resources than the new ones of Africa. African states soon turned out to be brittle states: assertive of their power over society and dismissive of civil action that attempted to influence power. [37]

Among Africans who were involved in the politics of decolonization there are memories of citizenship: of acting with fellow citizens to advance a cause, of making claims on the state, and of expecting the state to respond. [38] Such memories may well feed democracy movements in countries like Nigeria, Kenya, or Zambia, where disillusionment with corrupt and self-serving governments has met activism among trade unionists and professionals most notably in favor of a state accountable to its citizens. Other scholars have

found the basis for challenges to African regimes in a «moral economy» rooted in the transformed ethnicities of Africa –a rather different set of expectations of rulership that people within communities feel to have been violated. [39] The two notions may not be nearly as incompatible as some assertions that African states are «bifurcated» imply. [40] Just as there is no pure citizenship independent of other forms of affinity and patronage, oppositional politics can move around within different but overlapping repertoires. Most important, citizenship can provide the space and the guarantees for other kinds of affinities to express themselves –supporting a notion of limited, rights-bound state authority– while moral communities can provide a fervor and a set of networks for mobilization.

To say this is not to deny that citizenship overlapping with a strong –or deliberately cultivated– sense of belonging can degenerate into xenophobia, as it has in the assertion of «ivoirité» by politicians and groups associated with the state in Côte d'Ivoire against people whose origins or ancestors are outside the territory, or that particular moral communities can foment conflict with other, similarly constituted communities. Most important, the regimes which currently dominate African states –far from being «weak» states– are powerful in their own way. Elsewhere, I have referred to postcolonial African countries as gatekeeper states, with weak ability to shape the world economy, poor control over the productive and social resources inside their borders, but a strong presence at the intersection between the outside world and the national economy. The leaders are in a position to collect money– rents as the economists call them– at this point. The oil state is the most extreme, but so is the state dependent on foreign aid, on tightly controlled import-export markets or currency regimes. Gatekeeper states are vulnerable to internal conflict, because the gate is often the only place worth controlling. In other kinds of states, one can lose power and still be rich. [41]

The pioneers of building gatekeeper states were colonial regimes, which themselves were distant from the populations they ruled, depended heavily on import-export tariffs for revenue, and concentrated their resources in a few ports, railways, mines, and export production areas. The late 1940s and 1950s witnessed an attempt by colonial states to be something more than gatekeepers –that was what development was supposed to accomplish– but also an attempt by African political and social movements to use their presence near the gate, in ports, railways, mines, urban centers to make claims. They simultaneously used their strategic presence and a set of concepts much broader than gatekeeping –especially the notion of citizenship– in challenge colonial regimes on the terms of development, inclusion, and equality. They exposed the vulnerability of the colonial version of the gatekeeper state and the possibilities its ideology gave to those who could make legitimate claims on the state.

Some African leaders, like Nkrumah and Sékou Touré, learned their lessons all too well: they understood the weaknesses of the state institutions they would take over and they had captured the imagination of their populace with appeals to an active, mobilized citizenry. They could not easily overcome the structural weaknesses they inherited form colonial rulers, but they soon set about closing the opening they had helped to crea-

te. Post-colonial states encouraged a passive vision of national unity –a celebration of state and ruler– instead of the citizen activism they had ridden to power.

I have told the story of these years not as a heroic struggle for national independence that led to triumph but as a story of overlapping struggles, heroic and mundane, that did not so much turn the power of colonial regimes upside down as open the cracks within them. The decolonization era did indeed erase colonial empires from the repertoire of legitimate political organization and they brought into debate a range of international fora issues that remain there. The inequality between workers and farmers in different parts of the world and the crying need for access to basic resources faced by people in former colonies are no nearer an end than they were in the 1950s; perhaps they are farther away. But the issues have not disappeared into formally independent sovereignties. For a time, the raising of issues of poverty and inequality shook the foundation of two of the world's most powerful colonial empires. The way that they did so and the ways in which imperial powers responded to them shaped a particular sort of decolonization –one which generalized sovereignty but refocused claims for vital economic and social resources on national institutions. But we should remember this history of claims to equality beyond the nation-state. The hopes behind the political mobilizations of the late colonial period have not been realized. But the hopes have not disappeared.

1. I have elsewhere referred to this methodological problem as the fallacy of the «leapfrogging legacy,» an explanation of something that happened at time C by reference to time A, without asking what happened at time B, which lies in between. On this and other methodological and theoretical issues in the study of colonial situations, see Frederick COOPER, *Colonialism in Question: Essays on Colonial Worlds and Academic Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). My critique is addressed in particular to Mahmood MAMDANI, *Subject and Citizen: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

2. Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

3. As Charles de Gaulle told a press conference in Washington on 10 July 1944: «France is sure that she will repossess intact all of what belonged to her, but France is certain that after this war, with all the human experiences of the war, the form of French organization in the world and especially in regard to Indochina will never be the same as before the drama we have gone through.» Extract in AP 3655, Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence.

4. Henri LAURENTIE, «Pour ou contre le colonialism? Les colonies françaises devant le monde nouveau,» *Renaissances* October 1945, 10; Charles de Gaulle, speech at Bayeux, June 16, 1946, reprinted in Comité National chargé de la publication des travaux préparatoires des institutions de la Ve République, *Documents pour servir à l'élaboration de la constitution du 4 octobre 1958* (Paris: Documentation Française, 1987), 1: 3-7.

5. Laurent DUBOIS, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); C. L. R. JAMES, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage, 1963; orig. pub. 1938).

6. Alice CONKLIN, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Herman LEBOVICS, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Elizabeth THOMPSON, *Colonial Citizens : Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2000).

7. Early thinking can be followed in the Commission chargée de l'étude des mesures propres à assurer aux Colonies leur juste place dans la nouvelle constitution française, under the chairmanship of René Pleven, de Gaulle's leading colonial spokesman. The transcripts of meetings, starting May 1, 1944, are in AP 214, Archives d'Outre-Mer.

8. Commission de la Constitution, Assemblée Nationale Constituante, *Comptes Rendus Analytiques*: statement of Marius Moutet, head of committee on overseas territories, 25 January 1946; presentation by Gabriel d'Arboussier of draft of Article 1 by committee on overseas territories, 25 January 1946; intervention of M. Boisdon, 5 February 1946, pp. 259, 261, 328.

9. Lamine GUEYE, *Itinéraire africaine* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1966), 161-62. See also Marshall, 286-89. The debates can be followed in the printed transcripts of the Constitutional Commission, cited in the last note, and of the assembly as a whole (Assemblée Nationale Constituante, *Débats* (1st and 2nd sessions, 1945-46), as well in the typed transcripts of the Commission de la France d'Outre-Mer, 1945-46, available in Archives Nationales, Paris, cartons C//15293 and 15313.

10. See the *Journal Officiel* of the Assemblée Nationale Constituante, April-May, August-September 1946, for exhaustive discussions on the constitution.

11. AOF, Directeur Général des Affaires Politiques, Administratives et Sociales (Berlan), note, July 46, Archives of Senegal, 17G 152. The preamble to the Constitution stated, «France forms, with the overseas peoples, a Union founded on equality of rights and duties, without distinction of race or religion. The French Union is composed of nations and people who make common and coordinate their resources and their efforts to develop their respective civilizations, to improve their well being and assure their security.»

12. Even in Algeria, the French state was more successfulBusing highly brutal methods--in the military dimension of containing insurgency than it was in the political and diplomatic ones. Matthew CONNELLY, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

13. See my «The Senegalese General Strike of 1946 and the Labor Question in Post-War French Africa», *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 24 (1990): 165-215, and «'Our Strike': Equality, Anticolonial Politics and the 1947-48 Railway Strike in French West Africa,» *Journal of African History* 37 (1996): 81-118.

14. Assemblée Nationale, *Débats* 22 November 1952, 5502-5.

15. Tony CHAFER, *The End of Empire in French West Africa* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Gregory MANN, «Immigrants and Arguments in France and West Africa», *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003): 375.

16. Commission de modernisation et d'équipement des Territoires d'Outre-Mer, «Rapport général de la sous-Commission de l'intégration métropole Outre-Mer,» 1953, PA 19/3/38, Archives d'Outre-Mer.

17. Pierre-Henri Teitgen, Assemblée Nationale, *Débats*, 20 March 1956, 1072-73.

18. These debates are discussed at length in COOPER, *Decolonization*, chapter 11. The French government tolerated a range of opposition, but it drew the line in the most important instance of a party combining social radicalism with a demand for independenceBthe Union des Populations des Cameroons. It was driven underground and then repressed. See Richard JOSEPH, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

19. William J. FOLTZ, *From French West Africa to the Mali Federation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).

20. See notes prepared for the President of the French Republic by his advisors on the French Union, 9 October and 23 November 1956, National Archives, Paris, 4AG 543, France, Archives Nationales.

21. Senghor's colleague Mamadou Dia expressed, in regard to the 1956 law, his «profound and sad conviction of committing one of those major historical errors that can inflect the destiny of a people.... In spite of us, West Africa was balkanized, cut into fragments.» Discours d'ouverture du President Mamadou Dia au premier seminaire national d'études pour les responsables politiques, parlementaires, gouvernementaux, 26 Oct. 1959, «sur la construction nationale,» Archives du Sénégal, VP 93. The recent opening of records of the Mali Federation (Fond FM, Archives du Sénégal) will give a new picture of the attempt at federation.

22. R. D. PEARCE, *The Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial*

Policy, 1938-1948 (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1982) is useful here, although he overestimates the importance of new colonial office thinking. A more skeptical view is outlined in COOPER, *Decolonization*.

23. COOPER, *Decolonization*.

24. James FERGUSON, *Expectations of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

25. This is a central theme of COOPER, *Decolonization*.

26. Lisa LINDSAY, *Working with Gender: Men, Women, and Wage Labor in Southwest Nigeria* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).

27. The multiple causes of the Gold Coast «disturbances» are evident in the official investigation into them, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast, 1948*, Colonial No. 231 (1948).

28. Kathleen PAUL, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

29. Gold Coast, Political Intelligence Reports, 12 February 1951, CO 537/7233, Public Record Office, London.

30. Dennis AUSTIN, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Jean Marie ALLMAN, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Bjorn BECKMAN, *Organizing the Farmers: Cocoa Politics and National Development in Ghana* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1976).

31. Minute by A. B. Cohen on future policy toward the Gold Coast, 11 June 1951, CO 537/7181, reprinted in Ronald HYAM (ed.), *British Documents on the End of Empire: Series A, Volume 2: The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951, Part 2* (London: HMSO, 1992), 74. Governor Arden-Clark, although he was to develop a positive relationship with Nkrumah, was more cynical: «We have only one dog in our kennel.» Letter to Cohen, quoted by HYAM in *ibid.*, 73.

32. Prime Minister's Minute, 28 January 1957, CAB 134/1555, PRO.

33. «Future Constitutional Development in the Colonies,» Report by the Chairman of the Official Committee on Colonial Policy (Norman Brook), 6 September 1957, CPC (57) 30, CAB 134/1556, 5-6, PRO.

34. Memorandum by Secretary of State, «Nigeria,» C 57 (120), 14 May 1957, CAB 129/87, PRO. Lennox-Boyd wanted to postpone Nigerian demands for independence as far as possible, but not resist «overtly» should Nigerian politicians demand independence in 1959.

35. But only after a period of brutal repression which is hard to explain —given the negotiated decolonization of the Gold Coast in the same period— except in relation not simply to the racism fostered by Kenya's white settlers, but also to the bitterness which British leaders felt toward a rebellion that explicitly rejected the entire package of development and progress with which the colonial regime was now identified. On the repression, see David ANDERSON, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War and the End of Empire* (New York: Norton, 2005), and Caroline ELKINS, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of the End of Empire in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005).

36. On this theme, see Frederick COOPER and Ann STOLER, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

37. See the pioneering study of Aristide ZOLBERG, *Creating Political Order: The Party States of West Africa* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966).

38. I have encountered some of these memories in interviews done in 1994 of activists from the 1940s and 1950s in Senegal. Some of this material is described in «'Our Strike'.» See also FERGUSON, *Expectations of Modernity*.

39. The moral economy notion has been applied with particular insight by Bruce BERMAN and John LONSDALE, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa. Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity* (London: James Currey, 1992).

40. As for instance in MAMDANI, *Subjects and Citizens*.

41. Frederick COOPER, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).