

# Review Article

## Africa and globalization: colonialism, decolonization and the postcolonial malaise

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DOI:10.1017/S1740022806003068

Tropical Africa has not fared well either in the contemporary world order or in the globalization literature that has accompanied it. Under such labels as ‘black hole’<sup>1</sup> ‘blank space’<sup>2</sup> and ‘the hopeless continent’,<sup>3</sup> this part of the world seems hardly worthy of attention in the study of the connections and energies that define the twenty-first century.

If Africa does not seem to offer much to the positive understanding of globalization, does the concept of globalization provide a way of understanding Africa? Not at all, according to an eminent historian of modern Africa, Frederick Cooper. In his recent collection of essays<sup>4</sup> Cooper lists ‘globalization’ (along with ‘identity’ and ‘modernity’) as terms that need to be taken seriously ‘as indigenous categories ... used in today’s politics and culture’ but not ‘as tools for description and analysis’ (p. 8). In the latter context

they are mere fads which obscure the understanding of complex and uneven historical processes by attributing them to ‘agentless abstractions’ (p. 25). For Cooper the decline of Africa’s international economic position under current conditions of deregulation indicates that globalization is best understood in indigenous terms as ‘the banker’s boast’, a policy claim which sheds little light upon ‘what is actually happening in Africa’ (p. 106).

Cooper’s criticisms make some sense but they elide the main challenge of globalization to historians of Africa, which rests less upon how well it explains the current situation of the continent but, rather, in its usefulness for understanding the developments leading up to (and ultimately including) the present. Historical writing committed to the idea of globalization generally divides the past into periods marked by critical shifts in the degree of worldwide integration, thus committing another one of Cooper’s methodological sins, ‘the epochal fallacy’, i.e. ‘to assume a coherence that complex interactions rarely produce’ (p. 19). Nonetheless, Africa provides an interesting site for asserting such coherence because much of its history has been, even for Cooper, deeply involved with transformations in the rest of the world. The question, then, is how far we can effectively posit a narrative of ‘the global’ rather than the less encompassing ‘networks, social fields and diasporas’ that Cooper offers (p. 107) as an alternative?

Africa has not figured very controversially in projections of the early stages of globalization. There is certainly some argument about whether Asian-centred inter-regional regimes prior to 1500 should be considered ‘global’ but if they can, A. G. Hopkins and John Lonsdale make good cases for including African networks of trade and Islamization within them.<sup>5</sup> Likewise Africa clearly had an important

- 1 Manuel Castells, *End of millennium*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 165.
- 2 Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Peterson, *Globalization: a short history*, Dona Geyer, trans., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 148.
- 3 John Lonsdale, ‘Globalization, ethnicity and democracy: a view from “the Hopeless Continent”’, in A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in world history*, London: Pimlico, 2002.
- 4 Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005; the chapter on globalization was originally published as ‘What is the concept of globalization good for? An African historian’s perspective’, *African Affairs* 100, 2001, pp. 189–213.

5 A. G. Hopkins, ‘The history of globalization – and the globalization of history?’, in Hopkins, *Globalization in world history*, pp. 27–9; Lonsdale, ‘Globalization, ethnicity’.

role in the early-modern Atlantic world of ‘proto-’, ‘archaic’ or ‘gunpowder-maritime’ globalization.<sup>6</sup> However as Cooper himself, in a momentary concession to historical abstraction, acknowledges, African internal transformation during this period did not include the ‘primitive accumulation’ driving the core of the international capitalist economy, and Africans thus articulated with this system through ‘a very different set of structures’, an ‘insidious logic ... of slave-catching’ (pp. 102–4). Lonsdale, whose emphasis is more upon politics and moral economy than political economy, stresses the failure of Africans involved in such trade to form states which could compete with eventual European colonial invasions.<sup>7</sup>

The real controversies, involving both African and global history, emerge in the late nineteenth century with the rapid colonial partition of the continent. This is one of the few moments when Africa makes an appearance in another standard work on globalization, but only as an example of ‘military’ rather than political, economic or cultural globalization.<sup>8</sup> The ‘scramble for Africa’ occurred after the abolition of the Atlantic (and most of the Saharan and Indian Ocean) slave trade and at a time when the significance of tropical (as opposed to Southern) Africa in the international economy had considerably declined. The immediate motivations for such an abrupt appropriation of relatively low-value territory were, as Held *et al.* indicate, strategic – as tokens or, at best, potential assets – in a highly competitive system of international relations. But can the colonization of Africa also be linked to changes in the global economy?

There is general agreement among historians that a general policy shift from free trade to more autarkic national economics was witnessed at some point after the mid-nineteenth century. The controversy – or at least ambiguity – here, is about whether this ‘deglobalization’ began before or after the First World War. Osterhammel and Peterson opt for ambiguity, arguing that ‘The final decades of

the “long” nineteenth century (*ca.* 1789–1914) were not only a period of globalization but also one of “territorialization”, meaning the effort to tie social relations to specifically demarcated political-territorial spaces, usually to nation-states.’ (p. 90) The colonization of Africa, which occurred precisely in this period, falls into both patterns. For Hopkins, who minimizes deglobalization in general, ‘imperialism made a significant contribution to integrating the non-Western world’.<sup>9</sup> In the revised edition of his co-authored major work on imperialism there is a new ‘Afterword: empires and globalization’, which recognizes a ‘conflict between the imperialist and globalizing, cosmopolitan strands in Britain’s development’;<sup>10</sup> however, this section makes no reference to tropical Africa, a region which (despite Hopkins’s earlier specialization) receives limited attention throughout the entire book. Osterhammel and Peterson tend rather to equate imperialism, and particularly its African manifestation, with anxieties about globalism, a ‘last minute panic’ based on a zero-sum view of available world resources (p. 91). Cooper (p. 105) argues that colonization, by forcing Africans ‘into imperial economic systems focused on a single European metropole’ might better be labeled ‘deglobalization rather than globalization’. However, he also insists that the very concept of globalization obscures the historical specificities of the ‘networks of exchange and socio-cultural interaction’ that were either disrupted by colonialism or cut across its imposed barriers.

On this last point, Hopkins and Cooper seem to agree that policy efforts to counter something like globalization did not always have the economic and social consequences that were rhetorically sought. Serious efforts at autarkic management, whether in colonial Africa or the larger world economy in general, did not begin until the Depression of the 1930s. Osterhammel and Peterson suggest that this period may mark ‘a temporary “end to globalization”?’ during which Britain and France shifted ‘from pursuing worldwide economic integration to strengthening economic ties within each of their colonial empires’ (p. 106). If there is general agreement that colonial Africa was used to construct counter-global imperial economies in the 1930s, the consequences of this conjuncture for both

6 Hopkins, *ibid.*, pp. 6–7; C. A. Bayly, ‘“Archaic” and “modern” globalization in the Asian and African arena, *ca.* 1750–1850’, in Hopkins, *Globalization in world history*; Osterhammel and Peterson, *Globalization*, pp. 42–56.

7 Lonsdale, ‘Globalization, ethnicity’, pp. 208–9.

8 David Held *et al.*, *Global transformations: politics, economics and culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 88.

9 Hopkins, ‘History of globalization’, p. 34.

10 P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British imperialism, 1688–2000*, Harlow: Longman, 2002, p. 672.

general narratives of globalization and the more specific case of France have been understood in very differing ways within recent historical literature.

The more general argument revolves around the relationship between decolonization and development policies after the Second World War. For Osterhammel and Peterson, 1945 marks the end of 'global crises' and the beginning of a 'golden age, perhaps more "transnational" than truly "global" but nonetheless marked by growing integration on a generally liberal basis, including the end of colonialism'. Other, more Marxist-influenced accounts of globalization, particularly that of David Harvey,<sup>11</sup> have stressed continuities between the inter-war (and even pre-First World War) era as a 'Fordist' stage of regulated welfare capitalism which ends (as does Osterhammel and Peterson's golden age) with the deregulation and geographical decentralization of the late 1970s. Cain and Hopkins identify the shift away from liberalism in the 1930s with Britain's defensive (rather than 'protectionist') promotion of the Sterling Area as a new form of 'financial imperialism'. This, too, comes to an end with decolonization, which is a prelude to the Thatcherite era of neo-liberal deregulation and (in the 2002 'Afterword') 'signaled the end of particular phase of globalization'.<sup>12</sup>

The problem with all of these narratives (except that of Harvey) for African history is that they miss the continuities between late colonialism and decolonization and do not give sufficient weight to the impact of post-1980 globalization in defining a real transformation of Africa's international (as well as internal) situation. For Africanists, the periodization of a developmentalism bridging both late-colonial and early postcolonial decades is not controversial and has been noted with particular insight by Frederick Cooper.<sup>13</sup> In the introduction to an earlier work Cooper has also acknowledged the move away from 'development' in more recent times, although he is reluctant (as in his earlier work on decolonization) to link these changes with

global economic, rather than local African/colonial, processes.<sup>14</sup>

The issues of colonialism, decolonization and globalization have been illuminated, if not always explicitly addressed, in recent literature more concerned with French rather than British relations with Africa. The central debate in this historiography is less about globalization than French national identity and its link to colonialism (as both event and memory); the focus has also been more upon culture than economics.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, globalization plays a major role in these writings. A great number of them come from the left and join arguments for the centrality of the colonial empire in modern French history with anti-globalism. As stated in the conclusion of one polemical (but not atypical) work, the target is 'profit-driven American culture' in 'common cause with the major losers of neoliberal globalization, the economically poor nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America'.<sup>16</sup>

On the other side of the barricades is an economic historian, Jacques Marseille, whose 1984 study has recently been republished in expanded form.<sup>17</sup> Marseille claims that colonies hindered France's economic development by wasting investments or, perhaps worse, providing protected markets for

11 David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

12 Cain and Hopkins, pp. 464–88, 567–92, 619–44, 672.

13 Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: the past of the present*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

14 Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *International development and the social sciences: essays on the history and politics of knowledge*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African society: the labor question in French and British Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

15 Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, eds., *Culture impériale: les colonies au coeur de la République, 1931–1961*, Paris: Autrement, 2004; Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire, eds., *La fracture coloniale: la société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005; Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the empire back home: France in the global age*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004; Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, clean bodies: decolonization and the reordering of French culture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995; Gary Wilder, *The French imperial nation-state: negritude & colonial humanism between the two world wars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

16 Herman Lebovics, *Imperialism and the corruption of democracies*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 119.

17 Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: histoire d'un divorce*, Paris: A. Michel, 2005.

established domestic industries which should have been jettisoned in favour of more globally competitive enterprises. Marseille has been denounced by Herman Lebovics (among others) as a 'neo-liberal' whose 'argument is flawed economically, politically and culturally'. Lebovics's economic counter-argument, however, appears more global than national or colonial; he offers, as the main benefit of empire to France, the immigration of 'millions of industrial and service workers from the colonies'.<sup>18</sup>

In the new edition of his book Marseille himself adds to the polemics by the very neo-liberal insistence that, while French colonial development policies were motivated by misguided self-interest, they deserve criticism only for teaching African leaders that 'the reduction of [trade and budget] imbalances does not require any special effort'.<sup>19</sup> However, in the same article where this line originally appeared, Marseille also provides useful new statistics on colonial balances of payment with France and other currency zones; the balances are not favourable to France or the franc zone, thus adding yet another item to the unrequited costs of colonialism.<sup>20</sup> A recent study of the inter-war period comes to similar conclusions about the marginality of colonialism – except as a source of exotic entertainment – to both the economy and popular consciousness in France.<sup>21</sup> Within the field of international economic history, Marseille's skeptical views of the economic value of colonialism are consistent with a current consensus,<sup>22</sup> even Cain and Hopkins, more enthusiastic historians of empire (although one more often

defined in informal than formal colonial terms), single him out for praise.<sup>23</sup>

If decolonization represents the 'divorce' from unprofitable, anti-global policies postulated by Marseille, how could the immediate postcolonial African regimes continue to practice the kind of developmentalism that had characterized late colonialism? Part of the answer to this question can be found in the published proceedings of a recent conference on the relations between Africa and unified Europe, the economic partnership which replaced colonialism for France and eventually Britain.<sup>24</sup>

This book is long, uneven, sometimes repetitious and none of its twenty-two substantive chapters deals explicitly with globalization. But, as noted in Gérard Bossuat's conclusion (pp. 466–7), globalization is the framing issue to the main narrative: first as an imagined threat to Europe of postwar American economic domination and, following the 1970s, a fully realized threat to Africa of WTO-imposed deregulation. The counter to these dilemmas was the assumption by the European Common market and its successors (European [Economic] Community, European Union) of special responsibility for African colonies and postcolonies: first by associating France's overseas territories with the founding Treaty of Rome (1957); and then by continuing and extending these aid and trade privileges up to the 1975 Lomé (Togo) Convention between Europe and the ACP (Africa, Caribbean Pacific), a group of countries which included almost all of newly-independent Africa.

The historical approach of the contributors here is political and intellectual rather than economic, and thoroughly Eurocentric. Nonetheless, they do provide some useful insights into how a middle way between colonialism and globalization was constructed. The concept of 'Eurafrica' remains ambiguous. Before the Second World War, as shown in chapters by Karis Muller, Antoine Fleury, Chantal Metzger and Yves Montarsolo, it was largely a concept for maintaining peace among Europeans (particularly Germany and France) by sharing the hoped-for benefits of African colonization. In the 1940s Eurafrica was briefly embraced by the British Labour Party but, as Anne Deighton and Anthony Adamthwaite indicate, dropped in favour of established Sterling Area

18 Lebovics, *Imperialism*, pp. 81–82

19 Marseille, *Imperialisme*, pp. 13–14.

20 Marseille, *Imperialisme*, pp. 537–62; originally published as 'La balance des paiements de l'outre-mer sur un siècle: problèmes méthodologiques', in *La France et l'outre-mer: un siècle de relations monétaires et financières*, Paris: Comité Pour L'Histoire Économique et Financière de la France, 1998, pp. 3–25.

21 Martin Thomas, *The French empire between the wars: imperialism, politics and society*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005.

22 Paul Bairoch, *Economics and world history: myths and paradoxes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; Patrick Karl O'Brien and Leandro Prados de la Escosura, 'Balance sheets for the acquisition, retention and loss of European empires overseas', *Itinerario*, 23, 3–4, 1999, pp. 25–52.

23 Cain and Hopkins, pp. 658–9.

24 Marie-Thérèse Bitsch and Gérard Bossuat, eds., *L'Europe unie et l'Afrique: de l'idée de l'Eurafricque à la Convention de Lomé*, Brussels: Bruylant, 2005.

policies, especially after it became clear that the United States cared more about the Cold War than immediate decolonization.

In the actual realization of a new collective partnership the central player was France. Frédéric Turpin labels the 1957 Treaty of Rome agreements *une bonne affaire* (a great deal) because France was allowed 'to share the cost of the development (*mis en valeur*) of African territories while still maintaining this traditional sphere of influence' (p. 352). Marseille is not evoked and none of the authors here analyses the basis for France's continuing interest in Africa, but 1957 was a moment when the negative balance of colonial investments was already well recognized and political steps had been taken (the Loi Cadre of 1956) which made eventual independence very likely.

The key European partner in this transaction was West Germany which, as Guido Thieme and Andreas Wilkens note, had little economic interest in Africa (especially its Francophone regions) and feared involvement with France's ongoing war in Algeria. The Germans only agreed to include responsibility for the French territories in the Treaty of Rome (and pay the lion's share of the aid costs) because this was the price France demanded for movement towards European unification. It is also interesting to observe, from the chapter by Anjo G. Harryvan and Jan van der Harst, that the most significant opposition to these conditions among the six original Common Market members was The Netherlands, whose prosperity after losing Indonesia had been evoked in French neo-liberal decolonization discourse as 'the Dutch complex'.

The few chapters of the Bitsch-Bossuat book that deal with developments between 1957 and the Lomé Convention are informative but rather narrow. This is unfortunate for present purposes because Lomé I (other less generous versions followed) was not only the high point of a somewhat egalitarian Eurafica but also coincided with a broader 1970s 'Third World/Global South' campaign to promote a 'New International Economic Order'. The effort eventually gave way to its antithesis, the deregulated (except for Europe, Japan and the United States) regime we live under today; but if we are to fully understand Africa's historical relationship to globalization, this failed counter-movement deserves fuller scholarly examination than it appears to have received so far.

There is no shortage of works dealing with contemporary globalization and Africa, although few of them have much historical perspective. Three recent efforts are worth citing here because they at

least respond to Cooper's challenge by indicating that globalization means more to Africa, both substantively and analytically, than a 'banker's boast', i.e. structural adjustment policies which have dismantled the (already failing) postcolonial developmental states while leaving little in their place. John Lonsdale discusses the 'second postcolonial era' in the concluding pages of a general, although brief (twenty-four pages) historical survey. The central theme of his entire argument is that the dominance of ethnic rather than national identities in Africa is not a residual of isolation and backwardness but rather the product of a long-term and active but particular engagement with various stages of globalization, Lonsdale is particularly hard on colonialism, for emphasizing and hardening ethnic boundaries rather than investing in more unifying state institutions, and also on postcolonial regimes, most of which either sought to suppress ethnicity through corrupt one-party rule or incited inter-ethnic violence. In his earlier writings on Kenya Lonsdale has drawn a distinction between politicized 'tribalism' and 'moral ethnicity', which he translates here into 'principled fragmentations, all of them outward looking'.<sup>25</sup>

Jean-François Bayart, in an article actually published before that of Cooper in the same journal,<sup>26</sup> uses the concept of globalization to argue for the active, as opposed to marginalized, role of post-1980 Africa. In some respects this essay vindicates 'Cooper's cautions' since it evokes 'globalization' to characterize almost any connection between Africa and the wider world throughout history. However Bayart's notion of extraversion remains useful since it indicates how even the pathologies of state decay, crime and corruption (which have been the main themes of his best-known writings) involve connections to major international forces. Whether such perverse and (at least as presented here) self-destructive tendencies make Africa a 'player' on the global scene, as Bayart now asserts, can be questioned. One might be more inclined to both honour and refute Bayart's argument by combining his two antitheses and speaking of 'marginalized extraversion'.

Such a paradox lies at the centre of James Ferguson's recent collection of essays.<sup>27</sup> Most of the

25 Lonsdale, 'Globalization, ethnicity', p. 217.

26 Jean-François Bayart, 'Africa in the world: a history of extraversion', *African Affairs*, 99, 2000, pp. 217–67.

27 James Ferguson, *Global shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

chapters in this book have been published previously so there is some overlap and no fully developed argument linking them all. However, Ferguson does have a consistent point of view and his book includes several original pieces which pull together a vision of Africa as very much, and largely negatively, caught up in forces identified as 'global' or 'neoliberal'. Ferguson is an anthropologist rather than an historian or even a political scientist like Bayart, and so (as he warns us) instinctively sees Africa from the narrow base of his own field research. Fortunately, that research has been relatively wide and includes witnessing the transformation of a Zambian mining economy, which provides helpful clues to interpreting material only gathered at second hand from other portions on the continent. Moreover, Ferguson strongly eschews the anthropological tendency to see African responses to the contemporary situation in relativist, localized terms as 'alternate modernities'. Instead, he insists that the continent has been seriously marginalized, both objectively, in terms of economic statistics, and subjectively, in the sense among its inhabitants that they experience only the 'shadow', the weak and even false image, of a reality whose more 'real' forms reside elsewhere.

In his economic analysis, Ferguson seizes upon what is often regarded as a self-evident datum of marginalization: the fact that most foreign private investment in Africa is directed towards extractive industries, mainly mining and petroleum drilling. Rather than viewing such enterprise as simply less developmental than its alternatives, Ferguson shows how it has intensified in the global era, involving on the one hand closer links to external markets, capital and technology and on the other greater isolation from surrounding African economies and

communities. This is not an entirely new idea. Not only have other scholars (including Cooper) noted the 'narrowly extractive' character of undertakings such as petroleum drilling, but there is a longstanding view of even smallholder export agriculture in Africa as 'growth without development'. The unique global aspect of the foreign investment Ferguson cites is that it is located in places like Angola, Congo/Zaire, Equatorial Guinea and Sudan, regions with highly damaged regimes, often embattled by civil war. Cooper argues that many African resources remain unexploited because of the absence of 'institutions and networks capable of getting there' (p. 106). One of the specificities of globalization indicated here by Ferguson is that its extractive entrepreneurs appear not to require or perhaps even desire such infrastructure.

Ferguson's book is the most recent under review but its pessimism about all connections between the local and the global in Africa makes for a very painful way to conclude. Lonsdale is more hopeful, even providing examples indicating 'that moral ethnic thought may protect local understandings against the divisive urgings of the state' (p. 219). From a more global perspective, one can find something positive in the linkages to the outside world that Africans have made for themselves through non-governmental organizations and emigrant diasporas, as well as the appropriation of extra-territorial technologies such as cellular phones. For historians of globalization, the journey may be more important than the momentary end point, and even Ferguson suggests that there are distinctive characteristics to its current form that we can both trace and distinguish from the past. But the task of writing Africa into this history remains to be undertaken.