

From Poverty to Informality? The Social Question in Africa in a Historical Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Jan Breman and Marcel van der Linden argue that “the real norm or standard in global capitalism is insecurity, informality or precariousness.”¹ If this is the case, then Africa in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries could be seen as a model case for global capitalism. Much of the history of the continent during this period was characterized by poverty, precarious labor relations, and the absence of state or company welfare measures, as well as the failure or the lack of efforts to challenge precariousness. This paper analyses the social question in Africa since the colonial period with a focus on social (in)security and labor against the backdrop of a related research literature that largely ignores the continent. In the rich field of social sciences’ studies of the welfare state, Africa does not feature prominently, to say the very least. Esping-Andersen’s famous typology of welfare states completely ignores Africa.² In the index of the more recent, authoritative *Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*, Africa is only listed twice, and these references are related to trade unions and unemployment insurance. When we look at the referenced pages, we learn only that unionization rates are lowest worldwide throughout much of Africa and that Africa is the weakest area of social insurance development.³ For a long time, Africa seems to have served as the epitome of “otherness,” not only in the history of welfare and labor but also in much Western scholarship. A Europe- or West-centered perspective still often places Africa at the other end of the developmental spectrum—a clear instance of a region that simply does not fit the patterns familiar to a North Atlantic framework. However, as will be argued here, the history of the social question in Africa has a great many lessons to offer to those who are interested in tracing the historical connections between

regions and in critically engaging with the idea of the North Atlantic world as “normal” and the rest as “exceptional” and “in need of explanation.” If our historical analysis of the social question has to transcend the notion of a single telos modeled after the example of the West that is supposed to be achieved everywhere, or if we are to go beyond the conception that the non-realization of this telos represents somehow a “lack” or a “lag” in those societies to understanding their specific examples coevally—to echo Johannes Fabian’s insight⁴—with that of the West, then we must take the different social forms in Africa seriously in all their complexity and all their linkages with welfare and labor forms elsewhere.

This paper chronologically discusses the social question with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa and emphasizes a context in which capitalist production regimes have not led to employment relations typically characterized by stable and protected wage labor.⁵ While often drawing from examples from specific regions, it attempts to provide a broad historical view on larger trends and transformations of the social question in Africa, referring to a literature that tackles questions of welfare, social security, and social marginality within a wide array of topics such as labor, state, or urbanization.

WHITES ONLY: COLONIALISM AND WELFARE BEFORE WORLD WAR II

Until World War II, the colonial state and European private employers delegated the field of social security and poverty care more or less completely to what they labeled “traditional African solidarity,” occasionally also to a few private and especially church welfare institutions. There is little detailed information about related initiatives.⁶ In 1931, for instance, the Holy Ghost Fathers alone managed 132 orphanages and 176 hospitals or dispensaries in sub-Saharan Africa. During the following year, 648 people passed through the poor asylum run by the Sisters of Cluny at Walezo in Zanzibar. Missionaries also provided most of the rapidly expanding institutional care of leprosy. In some parts of Africa, mostly in the settler colonies, the Salvation Army undertook some welfare work among Africans. The Red Cross, the world’s first international secular charity and the first to establish itself in Africa, mainly worked among European communities in French and Belgian Congo. In British colonies, local governments made little provision for the poor beyond some general services such as famine control, free (but very limited) public health services, or rudimentary urban sanitation.⁷

In his influential *African Survey*, published in 1938, Lord Hailey, the great theoretician of British colonial rule, praised the practice of “externalizing” systems of social security. He stated that “it is clear that by treating the native reserves as reservoirs of man-power, there is, in effect, a saving in that outlay on social services which in other circumstances might have to be incurred on behalf of industrialized labor.”⁸ Thus it is no wonder that until World War II, the few measures in the

realm of social policy benefited Europeans almost exclusively. Programs associated with the “modern” welfare state were first and most comprehensively introduced in South Africa, where noncontributory, means-tested old-age pensions were created for elderly people classified as “white” or “colored.” For the National Party and Labor Party—partners in the coalition Pact Government of 1924–1929—noncontributory old-age pensions were a crucial pillar in the “civilized labor” policies designed to lift “poor whites” out of poverty and reestablish a clear racial hierarchy. Welfare reform was thus, in significant part, a response to the *swart gevaar*, or menace of black physical, occupational, and social mobility.⁹ Programmatic provision was extended to the disabled, poor mothers with children, and the unemployed. By the late 1930s, South Africa had a comparatively well-developed welfare state for its white and colored citizens. Similar noncontributory old-age pensions were introduced for white residents in Southwest Africa and Southern Rhodesia. The construction of welfare states in these settler societies reflected a combination of elite ideology, shaped both by racist and progressive elements, and democratic politics within the enfranchised white and colored population.

In other parts of Africa, it was only in the field of health where, after 1900, some colonies like German East Africa (which became Tanganyika after World War I) introduced decrees concerning industrial law that were relevant to a small minority of African workers.¹⁰ In 1909 the governor of German East Africa issued a “decree concerning the rights of indigenous workers” that introduced the duty of employers to guarantee medical care of their employees. However, this measure was seldom put into practice. In 1923 the British passed the Master and Servants Ordinance, which provided for small compensation to be paid by employers in the case of industrial accidents. African government clerks were initially classified into lower administrative ranks with neither pension rights nor other employers’ contribution. The Provident Fund (Government Employees) Ordinance, issued in November 1942, introduced a fund also for lower ranks that provided for at least small payments in the case of retirement or premature inability to work.¹¹

Right from the beginning of colonial rule, access to labor was crucial to European colonizers in Africa. However, before World War II, this importance was reflected neither in the administrative order nor in colonial archives. Until the mid-1930s there was hardly any African colony with a “labor department.” In its prewar heyday, colonialism, even when administered by relatively democratic governments in the home context, evaluated its African subjects essentially as primitive and ineffably “different” tribesmen with a patriarchal and rural mold. The conservation of an ossified tribal Africa coupled with the extraction of unskilled seasonal or casual labor was common wisdom. The debates of the day were about the necessity for forced labor and the extent to which Africa was becoming diseased and depopulated due to colonial labor demand. Dynamism in this system was confined to white settlers or energetic Levantine and Asian traders.¹² Against this backdrop, colonial officials found it convenient to leave agricultural

production to former slave owners and chiefs, or enlist their aid to supply the labor required for public, and even private, purposes. Moreover, desperate to make their territories economically viable, they resorted to various devices for mobilizing unfree labor themselves, including forced labor, conscription into the army or police forces, and the recruitment of contract labor by all kind of dubious means. The Portuguese colonies were particularly notorious for relying on forced labor, and parts of Portuguese-ruled Africa fell at the far end of a spectrum of brutality of labor practices. However, at least until the 1940s, institutionalized violence to extract African labor was by no means solely a Portuguese approach.¹³

After World War I, the newly founded League of Nations took up this issue. The debates culminated in the Forced Labor Convention of the International Labor Organization of 1930.¹⁴ The realities on the ground in Africa were much more complex, and the hierarchies and forms of exploitation much more subtle than what the discussions about forced labor in Geneva addressed. Moreover, neither the missionary critics who asked "Africa: Slave or Free?" nor League of Nations investigators questioned the premise of colonial rule itself; consequently, the resulting debate sought only to draw distinctions among labor policies considered acceptable and not acceptable in a European-dominated Africa. Officials in the colonies wanted to use the labor of Africans as much as they could, but at the same time, they firmly believed in the necessity of stable African communities under the control of male elders. European administrators saw mining towns or cities as sites of labor, but not of the reproduction of the labor force. Those Africans who had left this imagined traditional village life and permanently settled in the cities were labeled "detrribalized."¹⁵

During the Great Depression, the first substantial debates about the problem of unemployment emerged. According to John Iliffe, "the great novelty of the depression was tropical Africa's first serious experience of unemployment."¹⁶ In the formal sector, in branches where Africans worked under contracts, a rapid decline of working places took place during the early 1930s. Between 1930 and 1933, the copper mines in Katanga reduced their African workforce from 73,000 to 27,000.¹⁷ However, only a small portion of the African population was officially "working" and thus qualified for appearing in statistics. In French West Africa, 120,000 people were in official employment in 1933, plus 39,000 migrant peanuts laborers in Senegal, 1.1 percent of the population.¹⁸ The Inspecteur du Travail of French West Africa remarked in 1934 on the absence of unemployment but had a circular definition of it: since the African family took care of its members and had access to land, only the most detrribalized Africans, notably urban artisans, could be unemployed. Such an argument is "indeed a telling instance . . . of how belief in the peculiar nature of African society could define an entire problem out of existence."¹⁹ One example of this circular argument comes from a report of 1936: "There are no unemployed in French West Africa. Anyone who so desired could go back to the soil and any worker who does not prefers to vegetate in the

city which he only will leave at the last extremity. There is thus constituted a floating urban population of 'sans-travail' of a particular nature, seeking daily labor without enthusiasm, living most often at the expense of more favored brethren." A year later the Inspecteur du Travail indicated that he did not believe that African workers were quite like other workers. He opposed unemployment compensation, saying, "I am not a partisan of unemployment indemnities in a country where the soil can nourish those who wish to cultivate it."²⁰

DECOLONIZATION AND THE SHORT SUMMER OF THE WELFARE STATE

These assumptions began to be challenged in the 1930s, first by minority voices and then, as one approaches the 1950s, on a broader front. For this, there were various reasons, not least the realization that such policies led to semi-stagnation in a world where development became more and more an imperative.²¹ The suddenly manifest capacity of African workers to organize and throw a wrench in the works of the extractive economy was, however, also of fundamental importance.²² Arguments mounted that African workers needed to be treated as workers, not as Africans. They should be permitted to form trade unions, critically, a strategy of containment and boundedness. And they should benefit from a social welfare system. The colonial state tried to conceptualize structures that would allow for a stable detribalized urban working class in towns, focused on a European family model. "By the mid to late 1940s," Fred Cooper writes, "influential officials wanted Africa to have a working class, to separate an identifiable group of people from the backwardness of rural Africa, attach its members to particular jobs and career ladders and over time make them into a predictable and productive collectivity."²³

Over the following decade, colonial administrators and experts worked on a new labor policy that was called "stabilization." This term referred to the fact that in the eyes of the Europeans involved, the task in Africa was not to make wage labor the basic form of production, as in ideal-type capitalism, but to separate a domain of wage labor from a domain of traditional production. Above all, colonial administrations had to be insured that the reproduction of the wage-earning class would take place uncontaminated by the "backwardness" that apparently lay outside it, in the villages. In many reports, a vision of a male African appeared who was weaned from dependence or nonwage income and lived with his wife and family in an urban location, sending his children to school and, over time, becoming acculturated to industrial and urban life. The gender bias in all of this was too self-evident for much contemporary discussion. Throughout the colonial period, employment and unemployment were overwhelmingly associated with men. For long, women had entered urban centers and, with waged employment deemed appropriate for them being restricted, had made a significant contribution to sectors outside the realm of wage work. However, no one at the time commented on the fact that the

definition of the worker in the Code du Travail for French West Africa—the result of intense debates between French officials and African trade unions and accompanied by numerous strikes—placed the kind of tasks that women most often did outside the law's conception of work. That women were crucial to the commerce of West African cities or that they performed a great variety of income-generating activities did not enter into the discussion of any aspect of the code.²⁴

The rising global importance given to social security after World War II is reflected by the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which stated that “everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security.” Already four years earlier, a declaration had emerged from the ILO conference in Philadelphia that announced that “labor is not a commodity” and called for international effort for the “common welfare.” Furthermore, it sought measures “to provide a basic income to all,” for regulation of working hours, for collective bargaining, and for measures to improve public health, housing, nutrition, education, child welfare, the status of women, and public services. The last paragraph of the document emphasized that the principles listed were “fully applicable to all people everywhere”; it called specifically for “their progressive application to peoples who are still dependent, as well as to those who have already achieved self-government.”²⁵ Soon after, the ILO began to develop its “social policy in dependent territories,” which set out to globalize its “standards” on work regulations, housing, education, health, and family life. ILO resolutions were weak on supranational enforcement mechanisms and did not mandate the colonial powers in Africa to act in a particular way, but legitimized and delegitimized certain policy strategies. In some ways, Britain and France thought that the “social” direction put forward by the ILO was consistent with their reformed postwar colonialism and even celebrated the 1952 ILO convention “Minimum Standards of Social Security” as the “internationalization” of their respective social policies. However, the standards soon hit a wall. The British held the view that their African colonies should raise the revenues necessary to pay for social security themselves. Given the financial situation of their territories, the implementation of substantial social security systems was delegated to a distant future.²⁶

In 1958 the ILO published the *African Labour Survey*, which made some reflections about the state of social security as part of the stabilization project on the continent. The authors saw “evidence of the interest of the authorities in Africa in the possibility of introducing social security measures and their awareness of the urgency and growing importance of the question.” However, they also listed the factors that, according to them, militated against the successful introduction of social security, for instance “the instability of the labour force, the low level of wages, the inadequacy of population registers, polygamy, the illiteracy of workers and even of small employers in rural areas, poor communications and the difficulty of supervising migrant workers who, at times, disappear, never to be heard of again.” Still, they happily acknowledged that “it is generally accepted that one way

of stabilising labour is to give workers effective protection against occupational and other risks."²⁷

Admittedly, this new approach was often expressed in a restrained manner, as in 1952 in the *Tanganyika Standard*: "The average African labourer has sprung from generations of men content to sit under the shade of the nearest tree and do little or no work whatsoever. . . . But, the African, while inherently lazy, is by no means beyond redemption. . . . If he can adapt himself to regular employment under conditions where food, accommodation, medical and other amenities are available, he can and does become worthy of his hire."²⁸ Still, in contrast to prevailing low-wage, labor-extensive forms of employment, from the 1950s, increased skill levels were rewarded with higher salaries. Paradoxically, this increase in wages formed a prime cause of growing urban poverty. According to John Iliffe, it "attracted people into towns, encouraged employers to replace workers by machinery, and bred the unemployment, overcrowding, and ancillary problems which the authorities had intended to prevent."²⁹ A background context profoundly shaping the phenomenon was demographic change. Rapid African population growth from the mid-twentieth century, alongside a diminishing resource-to-population ratio, resulted in a shift from famine-related "epidemic starvation for all but the rich . . . to endemic undernutrition for the very poor."³⁰ One of the most prominent forms in which this "structural" poverty manifested itself was the growth of urban joblessness. In the context of rapid urbanization, the problem of a reserve army of unemployed or jobless young men observable in towns caused increasing attention.

In a number of African colonies, a set of social institutions was created for relatively small groups of formal-sector workers. One striking aspect about social welfare measures in late colonial Africa is, however, that unemployment insurances were never seriously discussed. In the 1950s, unemployment in urban Africa was recognized and discussed by contemporaries, but belittled by colonial officials.³¹ The *Code du Travail* for French Africa from 1952 contained no fewer than 241 articles and provided for a comprehensive arsenal of welfare measures. However, there was no mention at all of unemployment compensation.³² The ILO in its *African Labour Survey* observed "considerable underemployment" on the continent, but concluded that "unemployment, except in a few towns in the form known in highly industrialized countries, exists only to a limited extent; there are usually more offers of employment than applications for jobs."³³ In most late-colonial labor laws, unemployment compensation was held to be particularly undesirable, because most officials would not acknowledge that the African wage earner who was not working was, in fact, a worker. One also has to emphasize the gendered way in which the "unemployment problem" was interpreted. In the official imagination, it was once more male youth who constituted a potentially insurrectionary unemployed class, who were more visible "loitering" on urban streets. The absence

of female unemployed in surviving commentary reflects the gendered occupation of urban space. In contrast to young men, whose street presence has remained a concern up to the present, women were more restricted to the home and/or the workplace. Or they simply did not constitute a threat in the eyes of the male colonizer.³⁴

Especially in the French African colonies, the main instruments in social welfare policies were family allowances. After long and controversial debates, and due to massive pressure from African trade unions, on January 1956, family allocations went into effect in French West Africa, six months later in French Equatorial Africa. In Senegal, a family would receive 4,800 francs "allocation du foyer" for the birth of each of its first three children; each pregnancy would bring the family 3,600 francs prenatal allocation and 4,800 francs maternity allocation; in addition, 400 francs per month would be paid as the basic family allowance for each dependent child, through the end of his or her schooling. The 400 francs per month would be around 8 percent of the minimum wage; the maternity allocation, around a month's minimum pay. Such allocations would make a considerable difference to the life of a worker. The decrees provided support for the children of female workers as well as of male; there was even a special provision for benefits for wage-earning women who gave birth. But the expectations of the planners were that of the male worker and the female child-care provider. In the studies on which these cost estimates were based, the surveyed population in industry included 25,357 African males, but no females; in commerce, there were 14,045 males and 105 females. The language in which officials addressed the burdens of raising children on a worker's salary was comfortably masculinist, and officials allocated, using their workforce data, minimal funds for working mothers.

The implementation of family allowances got off to a slow start. One reason was that the administration had the utmost difficulties to put these schemes into practice, because the required information, such as documentations of birth, was difficult to obtain. Still, by 1956, family allocations had been extended to the entire wage-labor force of French West Africa, and officials now embraced them for much the same reason that they rejected them earlier—the peculiar nature of the African family. But now it was a question of weaning workers away from its debilitating effects, of creating family norms that resembled those presumed to predominate in Europe, of insuring the reproduction of a working class on the basis of workers' earnings and within the milieu of the workplace.³⁵

In many ways, the dualism imagined by the colonial administrators and experts of a small, restricted modern African working class separated from the "traditional rest" was a mere fantasy. African workers in regulated jobs did not cease to be African; they did not cut themselves off from the wider range of social and cultural relationships in their lives, including their home villages. They regularly opted to live in a family arrangement rather than that of the monogamous male

breadwinner with his dependent wife and children. They began to invest in the education of their children and to accumulate savings and pension rights toward retirement. However, they did not necessarily simply accept the notions of the European welfare state, but often used part of their wage resources to invest in social networks and rituals to foster their patriarchal authority.³⁶ African trade-union leaders were rather successful in using European officials' hopes for a productive, "modern" working class in order to make claims. They argued that if the Europeans wanted Africans to produce like a European working class, then Africans should be paid like their counterparts in Europe. Wages increased considerably, especially in key industries, in the civil service, and for vulnerable areas like railroads and ports. These increases were by no means uncontested but rather the result of protests, strikes, and negotiations.³⁷

In effect, the colonial state could not respond to demands for increased benefits and rights from organized labor—which would put its members on par with metropolitan workers—without dismantling the justification of colonialism. There is an ironic charm—but also a kind of Pyrrhic victory—in the African success in defeating European developmentalist logic. One could view the decision by Europeans to accept unionist demands that African laborers be treated on the same basis as their European counterparts as a mutual failure to comprehend the African social reality. It was a consequential failure, since the cost of providing European-scale wages and benefits under African economic conditions could not be borne by either colonial or postcolonial regimes. European governments were thus encouraged to withdraw from Africa, while their local successors co-opted some of the labor leadership but rather quickly suppressed the unions as an autonomous force. The leaders of the newly independent countries, former trade-unionists among them, were acutely aware that they lacked the resources to ensure that the demands of the citizenry would be met. Many of them build up relations of patronage with power brokers inside the nation but also clientelistic networks with former colonizers. By this, they undermined democratic processes and the kind of social movements, such as labor movements, that had helped them get into power.³⁸

HOPES AND DISILLUSION: INDEPENDENT AFRICA AND THE RISE OF THE INFORMAL

Around 1960, when many African colonies gained independence, numerous observers thought that with population growth having accelerated after 1945, and with the urban population growing faster than the rural, a class of landless manual workers would be created, and Africa would reproduce European patterns. But wage laborers made only a small percentage of the overall working population in Africa, both in colonial and postcolonial times. It was, however, exactly this small group of miners, dockworkers, factory workers, and railway workers that

constituted the focus of African labor historiography between the 1960s and 1980s. The academic focus on wage labor went hand in hand with the assumption that Africa was becoming "proletarianized"; its working class was growing and becoming better defined and more self-conscious.³⁹ From the late 1950s to the 1970s, many African countries experienced at least modest economic growth, life expectancy rose considerably, and education became more accessible. The emergence of elements of a welfare state raised considerable expectations. State employees, workers in copper mines, or railway workers, for instance, had reasonable hopes that they could get something out of participation in economic activities. But these decades proved to be not a mid-point in a natural "transition" from a nonwage-labor to a wage-labor economy in a welfare state. While it is difficult to count precisely, it is clear that the number of hired workers in sub-Saharan Africa was vastly greater by 1960 than it had been in 1900, and is much greater today than it was around the time of independence. Yet labor markets since the end of colonial rule are characterized much more by short-term hiring and a high turnover of workers than by long-term, stable employment. Precarious labor prevailed, both in the formal and in the informal sector.⁴⁰

The seemingly reasonable aspirations of millions of Africans of turning jobs—especially stable, unionized jobs, with pension funds promised at the end—into careers proved unrealizable. The mining sector in the Zambian copper belt initially promised steady material rewards—a salary and health and retirement benefits—as well as other, more ineffable rewards in terms of cultural cachet and social status. That pathway to working-class stability and respectability soon came to an end with the oil crisis, structural adjustment programs, and the fluctuating global prices of copper. What meager resources these miners kept for their old age came not so much from the formal institutions of modern welfare capitalism—social security, pensions, medical insurance—or the contractual gains won by trade unions, but from sets of personal relationships that ex-miners could draw on or forge.⁴¹ Petty trade, access to farmland through social relations in a village of origin, or support of kin-networks became necessary to survive in the context of a contracting regulated wage-labor sector. The notion of being a "big man," an element of men's self-esteem that had been given a new dimension by wage earning, increasingly had to confront the fact that women engaged in urban marketing and other activities were contributing more to the family economy and providing the stability that male wages could not. The bureaucratized world of work had not been eclipsing the world of social relations; if it had done so, the collapse would have been even more deadly than it was.

Today, young men whose social power long rested on their ability to earn wages increasingly find themselves in a more precarious position. In turn, others, notably women and pensioners, acquired new powers and possibilities. This transformation is partly due to the relative expansion of work in service industries that are more open to women than the blue-collar industrial jobs of the past.⁴² The

increasing instability of economic prospects in many African countries today has also changed migration patterns. Seasonal labor migration, which was central to African economies in the first half of the twentieth century, has been overtaken by more permanent rural-urban migration and by large-scale labor migration to Europe and beyond. Africans are more likely to travel longer distances in search of employment. In the twenty-first century, many African countries have apparently become increasingly dependent upon the productive activities and remittances of their citizens who live abroad in other African countries or in Europe, Asia, the Gulf States, or the United States.⁴³

By the 1970s, the ILO began to use the evocative but sloppy term "urban informal sector" for the urban dimension of what did not fit inside national labor legislations and a bounded, stabilized working class. The term points to the continued—indeed, growing—importance of forms of work that lie outside the form of labor legislation that African countries inherited at independence and outside the limits of the imagination of policy makers who thought they were modernizing Africa.⁴⁴ Although some Africanists insist that "African economies are the most informalized in the world," nonwaged economic activities, unregulated by law and unprotected by social regulations or services, have become increasingly visible in many parts of the world, including the North Atlantic region.⁴⁵ The discovery of the "informal" went in hand in hand with the observation that full-time wage labor with relatively good social benefits over the course of an entire career was not a global norm, but rather the exception in many parts of the world, the contingent product of a particular conjuncture in twentieth-century world history.

A critical literature seems to agree on the inadequacy of the term "informal" but has failed to produce alternative terminology.⁴⁶ I would argue for an understanding of "informal labor" not as a residue of earlier and obsolete modes of socially organizing labor. Rather, it should be understood as a contemporary and adaptable sociopolitical category that distinguishes a heterogeneous and unstable set of transformed and new "informal," mainly socially regulated labor forms from an equally diverse and malleable set of "formal," predominantly state-regulated labor forms. These two sets of labor forms are mutually constitutive and interdependent, and they have assumed diverse features and proportions over the course of historical time, as well as in different local and territorial contexts. The social content and the interrelationship of "informal" and "formal" labor is shaped and persistently transformed by economic and social policies, business strategies, and social conflicts. Accordingly, the politics of informal labor is often connected to efforts at the resolution of crises of capitalist over-accumulation, including efforts to solve such crises by way of spatial expansion and relocation. It is crucial to emphasize the political character of formal/informal divisions in the contemporary world of labor across the continents, as well as to reconstruct the historical genesis of this divide. It is not by accident that as an academic and political concept, "informal

labor" gained currency in the course of the 1970s, the middle of that decade being a crucial chronological marker for a major shift in the pattern of economic and social policies, business strategies, and social conflicts the world over. In fact, the career of the term "informal sector" may be linked to the rise of the political and ideological formation that is commonly referred to as "neoliberalism." Thus, it would be important to study more carefully the political and social processes that had rendered the informal/formal division conceivable. Finally, many activities labeled "informal" are not relatively new and exclusively spawned by neoliberal reforms and structural adjustment programs of the 1980s. Such assertions would overlook the deep roots of African productive systems and the relationships that contemporary skilled workers and craftsmen share with older services and forms of fabrication. Indeed, one of the shortcomings of studies on informality is that they often present snapshots of specific activities and processes, but they do not necessarily locate them within larger trajectories of historical change.⁴⁷

While the term "informal" might be problematic and not sufficiently differentiated as an analytical tool, it refers to processes crucial to the social question in Africa. **When the world economic recession of the 1970s hit Africa hard, most governments were forced to seek aid from the International Monetary Fund and other international institutions, which, in turn, enforced the destruction of much that could be considered "social." The right to education, medical care, and a livable wage were undermined in the name of financial rigor.** Cutbacks in the public sector and in social programs eroded the number of waged employees. Households were forced to diversify their sources of income, and people involved in informal activities increasingly suffered from their work's uncertain juridical status and the volatility of their finances. Small-scale workshops were often characterized by low surplus and strong competition and were usually not more than severely undercapitalized and unskilled businesses. Market women particularly suffered, as they faced the falling incomes of poor and working-class customers, and more and more they had to compete with men who began working as street vendors after losing their waged jobs.⁴⁸ What also could be observed was "dividing a given activity in ever-finer morsels."⁴⁹ As Fred Cooper emphasized, "a young man, who in the 1970s would have sold tiny packets of peanuts in the streets of Dakar or in the 2000s low-denomination phone top-up cards, finds a niche because his labor is worth so little that an entrepreneur can employ him to sell things to people too poor to spend a significant sum of money at a time."⁵⁰ This reality on the ground stood in stark contrast to celebratory statements of the World Bank or NGOs highlighting the energy and skill of the small-scale entrepreneur. There is the bitter irony that empowerment through informal enterprise so cherished by neoliberal commentators was undermined by neoliberal politics that drastically weakened the very institutions—such as family, education, and basic safety nets—upon which informal entrepreneurship is based.⁵¹

CONCLUSION: PRECARIOUS AFRICA?

The terrifying leviathan “assumes more and more the traits of a milk cow,” the conservative German philosopher Arnold Gehlen stated some forty years ago in his polemic against mass democracy and the welfare state. In the meantime, we see that politicians in the industrialized countries prescribe various diets and fitness training for this milk cow. The situation is very different in Africa, however. Because of the low importance of formal, institutionalized labor markets, state-sponsored systems of social security were never widely spread south of the Sahara anyway. During the twentieth century, these state systems had only very limited and socially selective spheres of operation, which, after a peak in the 1960s and early 1970s, constantly diminished over the last decades. On the other hand, those institutions, practices, and resources of “welfare production” that were not under state management enjoyed great importance. In this context, government officials, development experts, and scholars alike usually referred to the “traditional solidarity” of African families and communities. Already in the colonial period, European administrators returned to this “solidarity,” because it was supposed to arrange what to colonial officials—despite all rhetoric—seemed far too expensive: absorbing, at least partially, the manifold risks of working life.

African independent states inherited a complex and potentially explosive combination of authoritarian governance, high expectations for improved living conditions, a limited extent of formal employment, and already fragmented trade unions. Thus, even before the devastating impact of the oil crisis, followed by structural adjustment programs, wage labor was never available as the foundation of an egalitarian and democratic society. Labor coercion and personal dependence did not disappear; it was often facilitated by poverty at all levels. The colonial discourse of development that began in the 1930s and continued after independence relabeled work that otherwise could have been classified as forced labor as “voluntary work,” “self-help,” or “human investment.” In this process, certain sections of African labor were rendered invisible as workers and instead constructed as “beneficiaries,” “participants,” and “volunteers.”⁵² The issue of forced labor continued to be debated after independence. In 1962, the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations criticized a number of recently independent African countries, such as Guinea and the Ivory Coast, for having set up new forms of forced labor in the form of compulsory labor services for young people. As Daniel Maul points out, “To be accused of a ‘classically colonial crime’ such as forced labour was particularly hard for the postcolonial nations to stomach,” and they reacted bitterly.⁵³ The problem of “un-freedom” never went away: it is diffused and can be found in many sectors or embedded in various labor relations. In 2016, the ILO estimated that “there were a total of over 9.2 million victims of modern slavery in Africa.”⁵⁴ Immigrant workers from Africa are part of this number. The question is how to label all those Africans who, by

their own initiative, cross the Mediterranean Sea to Italy or Spain, or the Atlantic to the Canary Islands, to seek wage labor? Those Africans who, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, were sent across the Atlantic to work on slave plantations in the Americas were coerced, and they were called "slaves." Today's migrants, however, are in some ways the freest of the free: "they not only agree to leave Africa for Europe, but they go to great effort and great risk to do so."⁵⁵ Often people with some means and education dare the dangerous and expensive trip, with the idea to make some money in Europe in order to support the family back home. Those Africans who make it to Europe, usually after a traumatic voyage via the desert and the Mediterranean, definitely work under conditions that deserve the label "precarious." Their ideas about a Europe full of opportunities soon vanish. They are mostly *sans papiers* and thus subject to deportation or exploitation by employers who misuse their vulnerability.⁵⁶

It would be misleading to see informal and precarious work only as a new phase in capitalism in which workers in many parts of the world, and most notably in Africa, have become unnecessary, disposable. Multinational capital might still need many workers from Africa, as long as they are cheap, particularly to reach customers of modest means.⁵⁷ Moreover, precarity could be seen as a constitutive feature of capitalist labor, inasmuch as uncertainty and instability have always been inherent characteristics of wage labor, in Africa as elsewhere.⁵⁸ Yet political mobilization of and collective bargaining for precarious and informal workers remain a challenge. In West Africa, for example, the share of informal employment ranges from 76 percent (in Senegal) to 93 percent (in Benin) of the labor force; the total unionization rate was 12.8 percent in 2007.⁵⁹ However, given the ongoing increase of "land grabs," with states helping to alienate land to both foreign and domestic capitalists, in combination with the increasing pressure of the population on land and on soil fertility, it is not unlikely that landlessness will supersede the lack of labor power as the major source of poverty in Africa.

NOTES

1. Jan Breman and Marcel Van der Linden, "Informalizing the Economy: The Return of the Social Question at a Global Level," *Development and Change* 45, no. 5 (2014): 920.

2. Gosta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

3. Francis G. Castles, Stephan Leibfried, Jane Lewis, Herbert Obinger, and Christopher Pierson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 209, 434. For some recent attempts of social scientists to look at the social question in Africa from a historical perspective, see Alex Veit, Klaus Schlichte, and Roy Karadag, "The Social Question and State Formation in British Africa: Egypt, South Africa, and Uganda in Comparison," *European Journal of Sociology* 58, no. 2 (2017): 237–64; Carina Schmitt, "Social Security Development and the Colonial Legacy," *World Development* 70 (2015): 332–42. For a recent state of the art volume on African labor history that includes numerous references to the social question, see Stefano Bellucci and Andreas

Eckert, eds., *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers, and Governments 20th–21st Centuries* (Woodbridge, England: James Currey, 2019).

4. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Objects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

5. For a useful conceptual history of the term *social question*, see Holly Case, “The ‘Social Question,’ 1820–1920,” *Modern Intellectual History* 13, no. 3 (2016): 747–75. The crucial role of the working class in twentieth-century struggles around the social question is emphasized by Breman and Van der Linden, “Informalizing the Economy.”

6. For the following examples, see John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 195–200.

7. See Ulrike Lindner, “The Transfer of European Social Policy Concepts to Tropical Africa, 1900–1950: The Example of Maternal and Child Welfare,” *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 2 (2014): 208–31. For a broad view on the British Empire, James Midgley and David Piachaud, eds., *Colonialism and Welfare: Social Policy and the British Imperial Legacy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011).

8. Lord Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 710.

9. Jeremy Seekings, “‘Not a Single While Person Should Be Allowed to Go Under.’ *Swartgevaar* and the Origins of South Africa’s Welfare State, 1924–29,” *Journal of African History* 48, no. 3 (2007): 375–94. See also the chapter by Ben Scully in this volume. The exclusion of black Africans from welfare measures went hand in hand with conceptions of native work ethics that did cast blackness as an antagonistic other, usually associated with images of indolence and work avoidance. See Franco Barchiesi, “The Violence of Work: Revisiting South Africa’s ‘Labour Question’ through Precarity and Anti-Blackness,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42, no. 5 (2016): 875–91.

10. Andreas Eckert, “Regulating the Social: Social Security, Social Welfare and the State in Late Colonial Tanzania,” *Journal of African History* 45, no. 3 (2004): 473–74.

11. John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

12. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 2.

13. Eric Allina, *Slavery By Any Other Name: African Life under Company Rule in Colonial Mozambique* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2012); Alexander Keese, “Searching for the Reluctant Hands: Obsession, Ambivalence, and the Practice of Organizing Involuntary Labour in Colonial Cuanza-Sul and Malange Districts, Angola, 1926–1945,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 238–58. For a nuanced study of the connections between migrant labor and forced labor in a later period, see Zachary Kagan Guthrie, *Labor, Mobility, and Colonial Rule in Central Mozambique, 1940–1965* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

14. See J. P. Daughton, “ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Interwar Years,” in *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, ed. Sandrine Kott and Joelle Droux, 85–97 (Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Frederick Cooper, “Conditions Analogous to Slavery: Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa,” in *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*, by Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca Scott (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), esp. 132–34. One important text voicing contemporary concerns about abuses in labor recruitment was Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, 2 vols. (New York: MacMillan, 1928). For the broader context of the rise of international organizations and most notably the role of the League of Nations during the interwar years, see Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

15. Cooper, “Conditions Analogous to Slavery,” 129. Note that in this context also women participated in migratory initiatives in order to get away from patriarchal authority. See Marie Rodet,

"Forced Labor, Resistance, and Masculinities in Kayes, French Sudan, 1919–1946," *International Labor and Working Class History* 86 (2014): 107–23.

16. Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 155. Some authors refer to the fact that in some parts of Africa, unemployed labor was already an issue at the beginning of the century. For instance, in 1905 unregulated settlements of about twenty thousand unemployed were reported in Entebbe. See Thomas Fuller, "African Labor and Training in the Uganda Colonial Economy," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (1977): 84.

17. Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "The Great Depression and the Making of the Colonial Economic System in the Belgian Congo," *African Economic History* 4 (1977): 158. More broadly on the effects of the depression on Katanga miners, see John Higginson, *A Working Class in the Making: Belgian Colonial Labor Policy, Private Enterprise, and the African Mineworker, 1907–1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), chaps. 4–6; Julia Seibert, *In die globale Wirtschaft gezwungen: Arbeit und kolonialer Kapitalismus in Kongo (1885–1960)* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2016), part 3.

18. Cooper, *Decolonization*, 43. More generally on the wage labor sector in Senegal before World War II, see Babacar Fall, *Le Travail au Sénégal au XXe Siècle* (Paris: Karthala, 2011), 71–132.

19. Cooper, *Decolonization*, 42.

20. Quotes in *ibid.*, 485, n. 67.

21. The history of the development concept and related practices have been intensely studied over the last two decades. See, among the numerous publications, Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Joseph Hodge et al., eds. *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Hubertus Büschel and Daniel Speich, eds. *Entwicklungswelten: Globalgeschichte der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2009).

22. The history of strikes and labor movements constituted an important part of African labor historiography, but it was rarely conceptualized within the paradigm of social movements. See Andreas Eckert, "Social Movements in Africa," in *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective. A Survey*, ed. Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring, 211–24 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

23. Cooper, *Decolonization*, 14.

24. Frederick Cooper, "African Labor History," in *Global Labour History: The State of the Art*, ed. Jan Lucassen, 91–116 (Berne: Peter Lang, 2006); Cooper, *Decolonization*.

25. The International Labour Organization Declaration Concerning Aims and Purposes (May 10, 1944), http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade15.asp. On the Philadelphia declaration, see Alain Supiot, *The Spirit of Philadelphia: Social Justice versus the Total Market* (New York: Verso, 2012); Frederick Cooper, "Social Rights and Human Rights in the Time of Decolonization," *Humanity* 3, no. 3 (2012): 473–92.

26. Daniel Maul, "The International Labour Organization and the Globalization of Human Rights," *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 301–20; Cooper, "Social Rights."

27. International Labour Office, *African Labour Survey* (Geneva: ILO, 1958).

28. Quoted in Andrew Burton, "Raw Youth, School-Leavers and the Emergence of Structural Unemployment in Late-Colonial Urban Tanganyika," *Journal of African History* 47, no. 3 (2006): 372–73.

29. Iliffe, *The African Poor*, 171.

30. *Ibid.*, 6.

31. The Labor Department in Tanganyika is a good example for how the problem of unemployment was downplayed by officials. In order to meet the protests of African trade unionists about growing unemployment in the country's urban centers, a government official suggested: "I can't help feeling it's a problem on which we ought to be better informed, if only to show that we know what we are talking about if we say the problem is not serious." Quoted in Burton, "Raw Youth," 375.

32. See Omar Guèye, *Sénégal: histoire du mouvement syndical—la marche vers le Code du Travail* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011); Cooper, *Decolonization*, chap. 7.

33. ILO, *African Labour Survey*, 404.

34. On gendered images of youth, see Andrew Burton and Helène Charton-Bigot, eds, *Generations Past: Youth in East African History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010). For by now classic studies on the economic roles of women in colonial urban Africa, see Claire Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl: A Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

35. Cooper, *Decolonization*, 305–20. By contrast, **the British subcommittee on wage fixing and family responsibilities rejected the concept of family allowances in 1953**, not the least on political grounds. It argued that in “British Colonial territories the amount of any family allowance would be likely to be a greater proportion of a wage-earner’s total income than in this country, and therefore, if family allowances were introduced, government would have a say in fixing a significant percentage of a man’s total income. The workers could then reasonably conclude that their interests could be better advanced by political agitation than by action in the industrial field” (quoted *ibid.*, 331).

36. Lisa Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Men, Women, and Wage Labor in Southwest Nigeria* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), shows this with the example of Nigerian railwaymen; see also Cooper, “African Labor History,” 113.

37. Cooper, *Decolonization*.

38. Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Paul Nugent, *Africa since Independence: A Comparative History* (Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

39. See Bill Freund, “Labor and Labor History in Africa: A Review of the Literature,” *African Studies Review* 27 (1984): 1–58.

40. For statistical data, see John Sender and Sheila Smith, *The Development of Capitalism in Africa* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986). Their claim that “by the end of the colonial period, capitalist labor markets had become predominant, and that a working class had emerged as a major social and political force” (129) seems difficult to sustain. For the development in South Africa after the end of Apartheid, see Franco Barchiesi, “Wage Labor and Social Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 42, no. 1 (2007): 39–72; and Scully, this volume.

41. James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life in the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Alastair Fraser and Miles Larmer, eds., *Zambia, Mining, and Neoliberalism: Boom and Bust in the Globalized Copperbelt* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jonas Kreienbaum, “Der verspätete Schock—Sambia und die erste Ölkrise 1973/74,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 4 (2017): 612–33.

42. For the South African context, see, for example, Franco Barchiesi, *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011). Among the fast-growing literature on other parts of Africa, see Aili Mari Tripp, *Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Dmitri van den Bersselaar, “Old Timers Who Still Keep Going: Retirement in Ghana,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 22, no. 3 (2011): 136–52; also James Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 52.

43. Christian Nsiah and Bichaka Fayiassa, “Remittances to Africa and Economics,” *The Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economics*, vol. 2: *Policies and Practices*, ed. Celestin Monga and Justin Yifu Lin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 711–26.

44. Keith Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (1973): 61–89; Cooper, “African Labor History.”

45. Kate Meagher, "The Scramble for Africans: Demography, Globalization and Africa's Informal Labor Markets," *Journal of Development Studies* 52 (2016): 485.
46. Franco Barchiesi, "Casual Labor and Informal Economy," *Sociology of Work: An Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, ed. Vicki Smith (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013), 74–78; Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish*. A good summary of the literature is offered by Kate Meagher, *Identity Economics: Social Networks and the Informal Economy in Nigeria* (Woodbridge, England: James Currey, 2010): 11–16. The following paragraphs profited much from discussions with Ravi Ahuja (Göttingen).
47. Emily Lynn Osborn, "Work and Migration," *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, eds. John Parker and Richard Reid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196. An illuminating case study for this context is found in Trevor H. J. Marchand, *The Masons of Djenné* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
48. Gracia Clark, *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
49. Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish*, 106.
50. Frederick Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity? The Labour Question in African History," in *The Political Economy of Everyday Life in Africa: Beyond the Margins*, ed. Wale Adebawo (Woodbridge, England: James Currey, 2017), 139.
51. Franco Barchiesi, "Precarious and Informal Labour," in *General Labour History of Africa*, Stefano Bellucci & Andreas Eckert, eds. (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer/James Currey), 45–76.
52. Benedetta Rossi, "What 'Development' Does to Work," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 92 (2017): 7.
53. Daniel Maul, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70* (Houndmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 265. For a case study that emphasizes continuities of forced labor into the period of independence, see Romain Tiquet, *Travail forcé et mobilisation de la main d'oeuvre au Sénégal, Années 1920s–1960s* (Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019).
54. International Labour Organization (ILO), *Regional Brief for Africa. 2017. Global Estimates of Modern Slavery and Child Labour*, <https://goo.gl/9MEqM7>.
55. Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity?" 140.
56. For a useful account on this complex, see Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano, *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour* (London: Hurst, 2016). In a recent book, widely acclaimed by European politicians and heavily criticized by scholars (especially demographers), the journalist Stephen Smith (*La Ruée vers l'Europe: Le jeune Afrique en route pour le Vieux Continent*, Paris: Grasset, 2018) predicts a "stampede for Europe" and argues that the scale of migratory pressure from Africa will submit Europe to a trial without precedent.
57. Meagher, "Scramble for Africans," 487.
58. Breman and Van der Linden, "Informalizing the Economy."
59. Craig Phelan, "Trade Unions, Democratic Waves, and Structural Adjustment: The Case of Francophone West Africa," *Labor History* 52, no. 4 (2011): 461–81.

‘NOT A SINGLE WHITE PERSON SHOULD BE
ALLOWED TO GO UNDER’: *SWARTGEVAAR* AND
THE ORIGINS OF SOUTH AFRICA’S WELFARE
STATE, 1924–1929

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ABSTRACT: The origins of South Africa’s distinctive welfare state lay in the late 1920s, not in the 1930s as has generally been suggested, and long predated the quite different turn to social welfare in late colonial Africa. For the National Party and Labour Party – partners in the coalition Pact Government of 1924–9 – non-contributory old-age pensions were a crucial pillar in the ‘civilized labour’ policies designed to lift ‘poor whites’ out of poverty and re-establish a clear racial hierarchy. Welfare reform was thus, in significant part, a response to the *swartgevaar* or menace of black physical, occupational and social mobility. African political elites, although distracted by other reforms at the time, were quick thereafter to protest at their exclusion from the nascent welfare system.

KEY WORDS: South Africa, apartheid, social, state.

INTRODUCTION

THE origins of the welfare state are a rich and vibrant area of scholarship in both history and comparative political economy. Research on how and why states expanded the public provision of welfare continues to boom,¹ giving rise to a vibrant debate over the relative importance of economic growth and social change, working-class mobilization and social democratic parties, state institutions and reformist elites (including employers).² Recently, scholars have begun to examine the origins of states’ concern with ‘social welfare’ in Africa in the 1940s and 1950s. Cooper includes some discussion of welfare policy in his study of late colonial attempts to ‘stabilize’ the urban African working class,³ whilst Lewis and others have examined the appointment of social welfare officers to tackle problems of troop demobilization and

¹ Recent notable comparative contributions include: E. Huber and J. Stephens, *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State* (Chicago, 2001); P. Swenson, *Capitalists against Markets: The Making of Labour Markets and Welfare States in the United States and Sweden* (Oxford, 2002); I. Mares, *The Politics of Social Risk: Business and Welfare State Development* (Cambridge, 2003); H.-J. Kwon, *The Welfare State in Korea: The Politics of Legitimation* (London, 1999); J. Wong, *Healthy Democracies: Welfare Politics in Taiwan and South Korea* (Ithaca, 2004).

² A. Hicks and G. Esping-Andersen, ‘Comparative and historical studies of public policy and the Welfare State’, in T. Janoski, R. Alford, A. Hicks and M. Schwartz (eds.), *Handbook of Political Sociology* (New York, 2005), 509–25.

³ F. Cooper, *Decolonisation and African Society* (Cambridge, 1996); A. Eckert, ‘Regulating the social: social security, social welfare and the state in late colonial Tanzania’, *Journal of African History* (*JAH*), 45 (2004), 467–89.

massive expenditure on supporting white farmers), changes within the Pact Government and, especially, a backlash against the old-age pensions – a backlash in which the Carnegie Commission played an important part.⁸¹ It took other changes – drought, the Great Depression, improved public finances and changing party politics – to put them back on the agenda in the 1930s. By the late 1930s, South Africa had a well-developed welfare state for its white and coloured citizens. As the newly appointed professor of sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand proclaimed, exaggerating somewhat, in his inaugural lecture in 1937: 'Today the provision for [the] European population ... is scarcely less complete than that of Great Britain'.⁸² Old-age pensions were the most important pillar of the welfare state, in simple financial terms. By 1938, more than £2.2 million was being spent on the almost 60,000 white and 22,000 coloured pensioners.⁸³ Like its Latin American counterparts and unlike those in Britain, Australia and New Zealand, however, this was a welfare state that provided almost nothing to the truly poor. It was only in the mid-1940s that tentative deracialization began to make the South African welfare state more deeply redistributive.

⁸¹ Seekings, 'The Carnegie Commission'.

⁸² J. L. Gray, 'The comparative sociology of South Africa', *South African Journal of Economics*, 5 (1937), 270.

⁸³ *Year Book of the Union of South Africa*, 1941.



Social Security Development and the Colonial Legacy

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Summary. — In recent times, social security has been one of the most popular instruments for promoting human development worldwide. Nearly all countries of the world have implemented some kind of social security legislation. While the emergence of social security in the OECD-world has been extensively analyzed, we know very little about the origins of social security beyond the OECD-world. By analyzing 91 Spanish, French, and British colonies, and former colonies from 1820 until the present time, this paper demonstrates that the colonial heritage is a crucial factor in explaining the adoption and form of social security programs in countries outside OECD-world.

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Key words — colonialism, social policy, social security, developing countries

1. INTRODUCTION

Social security “is a key element of national strategies to promote human development, political stability and inclusive growth” (Collier & Messick, 1975; ILO, 2014, p. xvi). Since the late 19th century, nearly all the countries of the world have implemented some kind of social security legislation even in the poorest regions of the globe. **The global importance of social security is reflected by the UN declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which states that “[e]veryone, as a member of society, has the right to social security”** (UN, 1948 Article 22).¹ To date, around 170 countries of the world have implemented pension systems, 160 have introduced work injury schemes, 130 countries provide benefits in case of sickness, 70 family allowances, and 60 unemployment relief (Schmitt, Lierse, Obinger, & Seelkopf, 2014). Social protection is of particular importance in low- and middle-income countries where more than 20% of the population has an income below the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day. Securing minimum standards of welfare and well-being for these people is arguably the key challenge in worldwide social policy making. However, while the need for social protection for people living in developing countries is obvious enough, we know very little about its origins and characteristics Appendix A.

The roots of social security systems in many developing countries can be traced back to colonial times. Half of all social security programs in former colonies were introduced before those countries gained independence. Surprisingly, the colonial heritage of social security has been a blind spot in comparative social policy research (Midgley, 2011).² When explaining social security legislation, existing research has focused on domestic conditions such as the level of industrialization and socioeconomic development or international factors such as globalization. However, social security schemes in former colonies were often implemented during colonial times before nation-building and without encompassing industrialization processes. Copying theories on welfare state emergence in Western democracies therefore only help us to understand the pathways of social security formation in former colonies to a limited extent. It cannot, for instance, assist us in understanding why neighboring countries like Ghana and Cote D’Ivoire implemented highly different social security systems despite similar economic, cultural, and social

national preconditions and similar external pressures (MacLean, 2002, p. 64)?

This paper argues that the colonial heritage is one crucial factor when explaining the adoption of social security beyond the OECD-world. Colonialism has shaped the institutional arrangements of the state and the power and preferences of actors. Even after their country’s independence, policy-makers often followed the strategy of the former colonial powers within an institutional setting created during colonial times (Eckert, 2004; Kangas, 2012). Here, I test the influence of the colonial heritage on the formation of social security systems in the former colonies of the three largest European Empires, namely Spain, Great Britain, and France. All other European colonial powers had either only a very few colonies or maintained their colonies for a much shorter duration. By analyzing information provided by the US Social Security Administration (USSSA, 2011–2013), a new data set for 91 territories and independent nation states has been compiled (Schmitt *et al.*, 2014) that contains information on the adoption and type of social security programs from the early 19th century until today.³ Descriptive figures and probit models are used to analyze the colonial legacy of these social security systems.

The empirical results show that each of the three former colonial powers influenced the pathway and configuration of social security systems in their former colonies in a specific way. For example, due to the decentralized imperial strategy applied by the British Empire, social security programs are more heterogeneous across British colonies than among French colonies. Furthermore, the level of economic development of the colonies fueled social security adoption in British colonies but not French ones reflecting the view of British officials that colonies had to finance social security systems from their own resources. In Spanish colonies, especially retirement schemes have been highly shaped by the colonial legacy since most colonies established a pension system according to the Spanish model of the early 19th century. The findings demonstrate that the interplay between the characteristics of the colonies and the imperial strategy of the colonial powers is crucial for explaining different pathways of social security legislation in former colonies.

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The paper is structured as follows: in the next section, I briefly illustrate why colonial powers became involved into social affairs and how colonialism shaped the emergence and form of social security. In Section 3, the pathways of social security legislation in the former colonies are described based on data on the adoption of social security programs as well as on qualitative information on the type of program introduced. In Section 4, probit models are estimated to test the main arguments of Section 2 followed by a discussion of the main findings. The final section offers concluding remarks.

2. COLONIALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL SECURITY – ARGUMENTS AND HYPOTHESES

When explaining the formation of the welfare state, existing research has focused primarily on the Western welfare state, emphasizing domestic factors such as industrialization and urbanization that shaped the development of social policy. The increase in productivity induced by industrialization provided governments with fiscal resources which allowed them to respond to growing social needs. Economic modernization and its impact on the social structure and demographics are assumed to play a key role in welfare state formation (Flora & Heidenheimer, 1981; Wilensky, 1975). This development has been fostered by strong labor unions and left-wing parties with their working-class background (Esping-Andersen, 1991; Korpi & Palme, 2003). Some studies argue that international factors have a significant impact on welfare policy-making (Garrett & Mitchell, 2001; Rudra, 2008). In particular, they suggest that economic integration and international organizations account for the timing of program adoption. Studies analyzing developing countries additionally focus on the development strategy (Wibbels & Ahlquist, 2011) and the regime type (Rudra & Haggard, 2005). Surprisingly, the colonial legacy of social security has been left almost entirely out of the equation.

In this article, the influence of colonialism on social security legislation is analyzed in the former colonies of the three main colonial powers in the 19th and 20th century: Spain, France, and Great Britain. All other European colonial powers either had just a few colonies or maintained their colonies for a much shorter duration. Moreover, I follow Lange (2004) and Lange *et al.* (2006) in excluding colonies that experienced large-scale European settlement and “where permanent residents implemented a broad range of institutions from Britain into the colonies without preserving precolonial arrangements” (Lange *et al.*, 2006, p. 1427). These colonies are not comparable to those where Great Britain occupied territories without large-scale settlement.⁴ The colonial era differs as between Spain on the one hand and France and Great Britain on the other. Spain started its imperial expansion very early and colonized the Latin American territories mainly during the 16th century. Most of the former Spanish colonies became independent in the course of the 19th century. In contrast, France and Great Britain embarked on the colonial project largely in the late 19th century. Most of the French and British colonies did not become independent until after World War II.⁵

(a) *Why did colonial powers become engaged in social policies in their colonies?*

In the late 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, the question of how to deal with social risks in the case of income loss was mainly restricted to the Western world. During much of this period, colonial powers typically aimed at

exploiting labor in their colonies and did not pay much attention on how workers in the colonies could be protected in the case of work injury and sickness (Furnivall, 2001). Hence, colonial powers did not become involved in the provision of social services in their colonies until the first decades of the 20th century (Midgley, 2011). Attempts to offer protection against risks associated with work such as injuries were rather perfunctory in the first decades of the past century. However, from the 1930s and 1940s onward the labor question and how to tackle problems of social risks became increasingly important (Eckert, 2004).

One reason for this is that labor movements gained in importance in many of the colonies. For example, a number of African colonies experienced massive strikes particularly during World War II and, in the post-war period, this put colonial powers under pressure. The labor movement was mobilized to protest against the labor conditions (Orr, 1966). In British colonies, the principal cities affected were port cities such as Mombasa and Zanzibar. Further examples are Nigeria, where workers initiated a great railway strike in 1945 that lasted more than a month and the Gold Coast that was affected by waves of strikes from 1947 to 1950. In the French colonies, the labor unions also strongly fought for the protection of workers from income losses due to illnesses and accidents. For example, in French West Africa in 1947–48, there was a major series of railway workers’ strikes, with Senegal particularly affected by labor protests (Cooper, 1996).

Moreover, social security in the dependent territories increasingly became a topic of debate for international organizations, particularly the International Labour Organization (ILO), which included the spread of social security among its major objectives. While focus of attention in the first years after the foundation of the ILO had been mainly on independent states, the ILO more and more promoted the extension of social security to the workers in dependent territories. In 1944, and in greater detail in 1947, the ILO member states agreed that the basic standards of labor policy defined by the ILO should guide colonial policy and should also be applied to non-metropolitan areas. The “key document” here is the declaration ratified by a conference of the ILO in Philadelphia in 1944 that declared the right to social security and a basic income for “people who are still dependent as well as to those who have already achieved self-government” (ILO, 1994). In 1947, the ILO began to provide greater detail of what social security in dependent territories should look like. ILO conventions on social security like earlier standards on forced labor **did not mandate the colonial powers to act in a particular way, but legitimized and delegitimized certain policy strategies** (Kott & Droux, 2013; Maul, 2012).

In addition, the human rights declarations of the victorious allies of World War II were an implicit challenge to the imperial systems of European states. The colonial powers could no longer wholly ignore increasing demands for social security and they began participating in international meetings on labor questions from 1948 onward. This general process was further fostered by regional conferences such as the Inter-African Labor conference in 1950 and 1953 (CCTA, 1955). Moreover, social security in the post-war period can also be seen as an attempt to legitimize the colonial authority. Competition between capitalist and communist regimes for the loyalties of the common people fueled the expansion of the welfare state in the European home ground of the colonial powers (Obinger & Schmitt, 2011), but also had a spillover effect on the social policies of colonial powers in their dependent territories.

In sum, by midway through the 20th century, not only was there pressure on the colonial powers from inside the colonies in the form of rising demands for social security but also from outside in the form of soft pressure by international organizations. Combined with the increase in their ideological and human rights vulnerability after World War II and their need to maintain regime legitimation, colonial powers became more and more engaged in social policies in their colonies (Porter, 1975).

(b) *Differences in the colonial legacy across the Empires*

The influence of the different colonial powers was anything but homogenous. Rather, it varied depending on the different notions, concepts, and strategies pursued by the imperial powers (Midgley, 2011). But what did French, British, and Spanish colonial influence concretely look like and in which ways did these empires shape social security formation?

In general, France followed a pro-active colonial policy, emphasizing the decisive role of the state in enhancing social and economic prosperity (Cooper, 1996). The French officials held the view that the colonies could not develop themselves but rather needed the initiative of the French Administrative Authority (MacLean, 2002). The French debate on social security systems was forced by the expansion of social security systems at home. Additionally, after World War II France broadened the rights for African workers to create and join associations, with the consequence of a pluralism of trade unions, with no less than 175 of them in the French colonies by 1945 (ILO, 2010; Orr, 1966). The organization and formation of strong labor unions, such as the West African CGT, pushed the discussion in Paris of a labor code for the overseas territories. From 1946 onward, a committee within the Ministry of Overseas was working on a plan to extend social security to the workers in the colonial states. In 1952, the French Code du Travail was passed as the keystone for social security legislation in the French colonies. The Code contains many specific regulations regarding social security systems. For example, it explicitly states that family allowances and (more indirectly) systems to protect workers from illness and accident should be introduced in the colonies (Code du Travail, 1952). "The code was assertion of control as much as it was a concession to demands" (Cooper, 1996, p. 305). Surprisingly, the Code did not mention pensions, and the problem of old age was left to individual trade unions. It also did not contain any regulations on unemployment insurance since the French officials assumed that African societies provide alternatives to wage employment. Overall, the theoretical expectation would be that the francophone colonies would have rather similar social security systems as a consequence of France's active engagement in social affairs, particularly after the adoption of the Code du Travail (Iliffe, 1987).

Great Britain, in contrast, followed a decentralized and less universal approach. Even though similar problems fueled the debate around social security and the welfare of workers, the response of British officials was very different. Britain never systematically and uniformly regulated social affairs in overseas territories. One of very few general reactions of the British government to the social problems in their colonies was the enactment of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in 1940. However, within this Act, there was only a limited allocation of resources for different infrastructural, economic, and social projects.¹⁵ The allocation of resources did not directly induce colonies to introduce social security programs. In 1942, the debate was intensified by the Beveridge report. The

Beveridge report was the subject of much debate across the entire British Empire and led to the formation of commissions in several territories to discuss what government intervention in social affairs might look like (Seekings, 2008; Surender, 2013). However, the debate was highly controversial and did not result in any systematic handling of this issue. Rather than actively fostering social security systems, Britain aimed at supporting workers so that they were able to help themselves. Colonial documentation shows that British officials emphasized that developing social security systems had to correspond with existing structures (Eckert, 2004; Porter, 1975). **The British colonial powers held the view that the colonies should raise the revenues necessary to pay for social security themselves** (MacLean, 2002). Under British rule, "the colonies were required to meet the costs of their domestic programs, and resource constraints often precluded the introduction of services even when the need for these services was accepted" (Midgley, 2011, p. 39). Overall, the British Empire adopted a more decentralized and passive view of the role of the state with regard to social security systems in their colonies. The expectation, therefore, is that British colonies should have fewer and more heterogeneous social security programs.

The history of the Spanish colonies differs from that of French and British dependencies. First, Spanish colonized regions were highly developed before colonization while France and Britain colonized mostly sparsely populated and underdeveloped territories (Lange *et al.*, 2006, p. 1412). Furthermore, the former Spanish colonies had been colonized long before Great Britain and France extended their empires. However, this does not mean that the colonial period did not influence the social security systems of Latin American states. "They inherited from the colonies several protective institutions, some of which disappeared or declined, but others persisted throughout the 19th century and were transformed in the 20th century, becoming the backbone of the modern social security system" (Mesa-Lago, 1978, p. 17). For example, in most of the Spanish colonies the so-called *montepíos* were introduced during colonial times granting basic pensions for retirement and survivors, copying the Spanish model of the late 18th century. The colonial *montepíos* still exist in many Latin American countries even though often in a modified form (Mesa-Lago, 1978, p. 20). This colonial legacy suggests that in the former Spanish colonies old age programs would have been introduced earlier than other social security programs.

3. THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN FORMER COLONIES – DESCRIPTIVE EVIDENCE

What does the timing and the configuration of social security look like in the former colonies? Which programs have been introduced and which colony-specific patterns exist? Figure 1 shows the spread of social security schemes in the former colonies. It includes information on the introduction of social security programs in 19 Spanish, 24 French, and 48 British colonies (i.e., 91 territories in total). Note that, for the most part, program adoption at the central state level is considered without applying minimum criteria for coverage and independent of the generosity of the scheme. While the central government's decision to adopt a certain program does not say much about the implementation, coverage, or generosity of the legislation, it nevertheless involves a very important political signal – both internally and externally. Policy-makers not only use social policy to enhance their legitimacy in the eyes of the international community but also to secure mass compliance

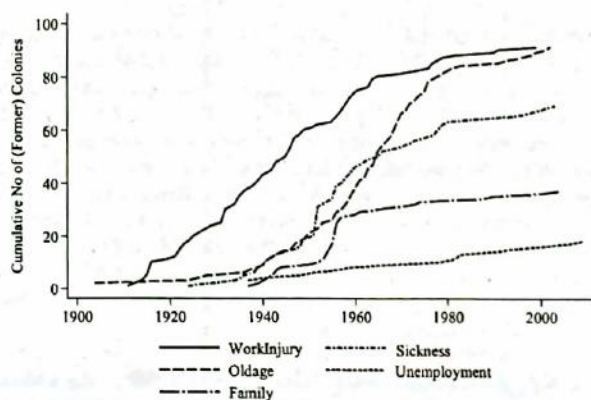


Figure 1. Emergence of social security in former colonies.

of citizens. A look at welfare state consolidation in Europe illustrates that early programs were very limited in size and scope, similar to many pioneering programs enacted in developing countries. Yet, these first programs often had a budgetary impact and raised political expectations of later enhancement of the generosity and coverage of welfare benefits.

Overall, the most widespread programs across former colonial territories are work injury and old-age programs. All 91 former colonies introduced work injury and retirement schemes. In 69 territories, sickness programs were adopted and in 37 family allowances. Only 18 countries have implemented unemployment insurance. The average years of introduction show that social security in the colonies and former colonies is a phenomenon of the mid-20th century.

Despite this overall trend, remarkable differences between colonial spheres and programs are observable when looking at the configurations of social security in greater detail. Figure 2 shows the program- and colonial power-specific trajectories. The y-axis indicates the percentage of countries introducing a specific program in each colonial arena. The x-axis represents the time line.

The figure reveals a fascinating heterogeneity. The program specific pathways differ widely depending on the former colonial power. Interestingly, family allowances have only been introduced in former French colonies. The *Code du Travail* of 1952 which fostered the notion of the nuclear family containing parents and children initiated the debate on how best to protect families. This led to the institutionalization of family allowances in almost all French overseas territories. In contrast, family allowances are very uncommon in Spanish and British ex-colonies. For example, the British subcommittee on wage fixing and family responsibilities clearly rejected the concept of family allowances (CO, 1953). Rather, they argued "if family allowances were introduced, government would have a say in fixing a significant percentage of a man's total income. The workers could then reasonably conclude that their interests could be better advanced by political agitation than by action in the industrial field" (Cooper, 1996, p. 331). Moreover, British colonies and former colonies tended to adopt programs successively, whereas, in the French colonies, the process of program initiation was much more compressed. For example, 15 French colonies out of 22 introduced sickness programs within 4 years and 13 out of 20 French colonies implemented family allowances within 2 years.

Moreover, the French colonies largely introduced work injury, sickness, and family allowances programs in the colonial era, with retirement schemes largely introduced after independence. In contrast, in the British sphere, around half the programs were introduced after independence, reflecting the more decentralized conception of colonial power imbuing the British imperial project. British colonies typically introduced work injury programs first and then old-age benefits. Sickness insurance was far less common. Figure 2 also demonstrates that Spanish colonies introduced old-age programs very early in comparison to British and French colonies. Interestingly, in some Spanish colonies such as Uruguay, pension systems were established as early as the beginning of the 19th century, and therefore much earlier than in Western European states which are often regarded as the birthplace of social security. It is reasonable to see this as the legacy of the *montepíos* implemented during colonial times granting pensions for retirement. The first republican governments in Chile and Peru, for example, maintained the colonial *montepíos* system, only slightly modifying this colonial institutional heritage in the first decades after gaining independence.

Overall, the evidence provided in Figures 1 and 2 reveals that, in general, British colonies and former colonies were latecomers with respect to all four programs (see for a more differentiated discussion of this issue Section 4) and form the most heterogeneous group. French colonies focused on family allowances and introduced social security programs in a very short time period in comparison to British and Spanish colonies. In Spanish colonies, retirement schemes were established first, while territories in the British and French spheres of influence started out with work injury programs. Table 1 summarizes the main descriptive evidence on the emergence of social security legislation separated by program.

Qualitative information on the type of program introduced supports this descriptive evidence. Figure 3, identifying the specific retirement schemes introduced under the aegis of each colonial power, demonstrates that the French colonies are not only homogenous with respect to the timing of social security legislation but also with regard to the structure and design of programs. The x-axis denotes the type of old-age program while the y-axis represents the number of countries that have introduced the respective scheme. I differentiate between earnings-related programs, flat-rate benefits, provident funds, and means-tested allowances. It can be observed that all French colonies have introduced social insurance systems. Spanish colonies and former colonies also mostly introduced earnings-related programs.⁷ In contrast, heterogeneity is relatively high among the British colonies, where many different types of retirement schemes are represented. For example, while provident funds have been implemented in India, Singapore, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Ghana (Kaseke, Midgley, & Piachaud, 2011), in Botswana, Seychelles, and Jamaica flat-rate pensions and in Zambia and the Yemen earnings-related schemes were established (USSSA, 2011–2013). Provident funds have only been introduced in British colonies. "A provident fund is at the simplest level a fund into which individual contributions are made, which accumulates, and which is paid out typically on retirement" (Kaseke *et al.*, 2011, p. 144). Provident funds typically do not entail redistribution because every individual accumulates his own retirement payments. Since provident funds do not require large financial resources from the state, their introduction in British colonies was strongly supported by the British Ministry of Overseas Development.

RAW YOUTH, SCHOOL-LEAVERS AND THE EMERGENCE OF STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT IN LATE-COLONIAL URBAN TANGANYIKA*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the historical origins of one of urban Africa's most visible contemporary problems, using Tanzania as a case study. The middle decades of the twentieth century are identified as a time when a pivotal shift occurred as labour scarcity gave way to over-supply, resulting in the emergence of enduring 'structural' unemployment. This was influenced by a combination of phenomena arising from the deepening impact of colonialism: including demographic growth leading to an increasingly youthful population, commoditisation and heightened African expectations influenced by socio-cultural and ideological factors. These were compounded by a shift in late-colonial labour policy towards stabilisation, which had the unintended effect of stymieing job creation. The latter part of the article describes the panicked response of the incoming African regime, faced with what they initially interpreted as a potentially insurrectionary class of urban unemployed. Closing remarks speculate on whether, in the *longue durée*, one may interpret unemployment in a more positive light as part of an ongoing wider historical transformation.

KEY WORDS: Tanzania, labour, urban, youth.

MASS unemployment has been an important and enduring feature of post-colonial urban Africa. African towns attained independence with growing populations of 'surplus' labour, reported unemployment rates in the 1960s ranging from 12 to 22 per cent. They appear to have since expanded numerically and proportionately.¹ The phenomenon is a relatively recent one, with the 1950s identified as a crucial decade in which socio-economic change and administrative reform combined to influence an emerging problem. As Kitching observes, pre-1950 East African economies were characterised by a large *potential* reserve army of workers residing in rural areas, that might be induced into waged labour. In the 1950s the situation

* I am indebted to Jim Brennan, Tom Cadogan, Richard Waller and two *JAH* readers for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

¹ John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, 1987), 241. It should be noted that, partly due to shifting definitions of the term 'unemployment', such statistics are often unreliable. In Dar es Salaam unemployment has grown from around 11 per cent at independence to an estimated 46 per cent in 2000–1 (Note on unemployment in Tanganyika, Labour Department, 24 Feb. 1960, Tanzania National Archive (TNA)/460/1049; *Economic Survey 2002*, www.tanzania.go.tz). The accuracy of these figures is, of course, open to question. The 1960 figure was probably a considerable underestimate (see below), while the latter figure probably fails to account for (at least some) informal sector activity. For a recent regional discussion of unemployment, see Afrobarometer, 'Africa's Unemployment Crisis', www.afrobarometer.org.

changed, with an *actual* reserve army of unemployed observable in towns by the end of the decade.² Frederick Cooper stresses the manner in which political calculations impacted upon growing joblessness in the 1950s.³ A desire to mould 'more productive and orderly' colonies after the war, alongside an increasingly demanding African workforce, and urban centres growing beyond colonial control, induced a shift in labour policy that emphasised stabilisation. In contrast to prevailing low-wage, labour-extensive forms of employment, from the 1950s increased skill levels were rewarded by higher salaries. Paradoxically, this increase in wages formed a prime cause of growing urban poverty. According to John Iliffe, it 'attracted people into towns, encouraged employers to replace workers by machinery, and bred the unemployment, overcrowding, and ancillary problems which the authorities had intended to prevent'.⁴ A background context profoundly shaping the phenomenon was demographic change. Rapid African population growth from the mid twentieth century, alongside a diminishing resource-population ratio resulted in a shift from famine-related 'epidemic starvation for all but the rich ... to endemic undernutrition for the very poor'.⁵ One of the most prominent forms in which this 'structural' poverty manifested itself was the growth of urban joblessness.

This article provides a detailed account of structural causes that led to the emergence of unemployment in Tanganyika, and the official response to this situation.⁶ A combination of factors resulted in widespread joblessness emerging in mid-1950s Dar es Salaam that spread to other towns, growing more acute as independence approached. Here, an economic solution – increased wages – to the political problems arising from the growing demands of African labour, and to rapid urbanisation, had dramatic repercussions. To offset the new cost of labour, local employers responded by reducing workforces and attempting to increase productivity. Unemployment was also fundamentally influenced by intertwined aspects of social and demographic change. By the 1940s, shifts in cash requirements, in consumption patterns, and in African expectations of 'modern' lives blessed by greater affluence, stimulation and convenience, all contributed to an increase in numbers seeking waged employment. Most significantly, the post-war decades witnessed accelerated population growth, of which young Africans constituted an expanding proportion. This increasingly youthful population benefited

² Gavin Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie* (New Haven, 1980), 379.

³ Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven, 1987); *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁴ Iliffe, *African Poor*, 171.

⁵ *Ibid.* 6. Iliffe (utilising Gutton) outlines two forms of poverty that have emerged in the history of sub-Saharan Africa: structural, long-term poverty arising from individuals' 'personal or social circumstances'; and conjunctural, 'temporary poverty into which ordinarily self-sufficient people may be thrown by crisis'. Thanks to 'increases in wealth, diversified sources of income, more effective government, better transport, wider markets, and improved hygiene and medicine', the latter has declined substantially over the past century. Structural poverty, on the other hand, has persisted if not deepened.

⁶ For associated phenomena in Kenya and Uganda, see A. G. Dalgleish, *Survey of Unemployment* (Nairobi, 1960); Caroline Hutton, *Reluctant Farmers?* (Nairobi, 1973).

class, who were more visible 'loitering' on urban streets. The absence of female unemployed in surviving commentary reflects the gendered occupation of urban space. By contrast to young men, whose street presence has remained a concern up to the present,¹³ women were more restricted to the home and/or the workplace. Nevertheless, in light of post-independence trends, when female urbanisation and participation in the workforce increased,¹⁴ it seems likely that the 1950s were a pivotal period for both young men and women, and that female unemployment increased at this time.¹⁵ However, lack of consideration of this subject in extant sources allows only these speculative remarks: in the period under discussion, unemployment was conceived as a problem of male youth.

WORK AND WORKLESSNESS IN URBAN TANGANYIKA BEFORE 1950

Urban labour in Tanganyika arose within a broader historical context of work in predominantly agrarian societies. Nineteenth-century travellers to the region remarked upon the time adult male Africans were able to devote to leisure. Juhani Koponen refutes the crude 'idle native' stereotype presented in such accounts, whilst agreeing with the broader assertion that in many precolonial societies prolonged work routines were simply unnecessary. Local conditions allowed relatively short, and productive, periods of labour thanks to the climate, abundance of land, limited requirements of local peoples and absence of any significant market for surplus.¹⁶ In particular, work was marked by its seasonality. Such characteristics of agrarian societies were maintained in the early-colonial period. While European administrators sought to promote rural industriousness through cash-crop cultivation or minimum acreage laws, earlier cycles of life persisted. Other forms of

¹³ For colonial *wahuni* ('the undesirables'), see *ibid.*; for 'jobless corners' in the 1970s, Abel G. M. Ishumi, *The Urban Jobless in East Africa: A Study of the Unemployed in the Growing Urban Centres, with Special Reference to Dar es Salaam* (Uppsala, 1984); and for *wamachinga* in contemporary Dar es Salaam, Eileen Moyer, 'In the shadow of the Sheraton: imagining localities in global spaces in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania', Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam (2003).

¹⁴ Andrew M. Ivaska, 'In the age of minis: women, work and masculinity downtown', in James R. Brennan, Andrew Burton and Yusufu Lawi (eds.), *Dar es Salaam in the Twentieth Century: The History of an Emerging East African Metropolis* (in prep.).

¹⁵ In the 1967 census, in the six main towns of mainland Tanzania, 3,500 women over 15 (2.8 per cent) identified themselves as unemployed: United Republic of Tanzania, *1967 Population Census Vol. II: Statistics for Urban Areas* (Dar es Salaam, 1970)

¹⁶ Juhani Koponen, *People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania: History and Structures* (Helsinki, 1988), 60, 292–5, 301–4. In the case of the Nyamwezi, through whose country the slave and ivory routes passed, trading activity actually resulted in early engagement in waged labour. Nyamwezi porters' 'marching songs ridiculed those who preferred to stay at home "to be idle with the women"': Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, NH, 1994), 59, quoting Mtoro bin Mwinyi Bakari. Nevertheless, on arrival at coastal destinations such as Bagamoyo or Pangani, they usually spent several months unoccupied waiting for an opportunity to join a caravan bound upcountry. On Nyamwezi labour see Stephen J. Rockel, 'A nation of porters: the Nyamwezi and the labour market in nineteenth-century Tanzania', *JAH* 41, 2 (2000), 173–95. For portage and wage-labour in nineteenth-century sub-Saharan Africa, see John Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism* (London, 1983), 14–17.

vaal affairs, granted by a compliant government. Kruger's government clearly was unwilling to grant such leeway, but most British statesmen, including the energetic Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, were convinced that the threat of military force would elicit desired concessions. They misjudged both the fatalism of Kruger and the determination of the British High Commissioner, Lord Milner, a self-described "British Race Patriot," who disdained his Boer opponent as an obstacle to the inevitable consolidation of a Greater Britain.

Milner's attitudes and machinations come across clearly enough in this study, although the role of public opinion in Britain and of political influence in the Transvaal (other than that of Kruger himself) remain shadowy. Moreover, Smith's restrictive definition of economic interest enables him to demolish exaggerated claims of capitalist conspiracy and the omnipotence of the mining companies, but it arguably deters him from considering the interplay of less tangible, but no less significant, material and political considerations (the "unspoken assumptions," to recall James Joll's telling description). Despite its many virtues, this book falls betwixt and between: it includes too much detail for students and too much familiar material for specialists, while its ambitions to provide a novel perspective on the relevant historiography are sometimes submerged in a more traditional narrative.

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FREDERICK COOPER. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. (African Studies Series, number 89.) New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvii, 677. Cloth \$69.95, paper \$27.95.

For those familiar with recent Africanist historiography, the main title of this book reads as somewhat of an oxymoron. Decolonization was clearly an important event but one that, in retrospect, seems quite distant (except in its disappointing consequences) from the grass roots concerns of African society. Conversely, the kind of social history that has become so prominent in recent scholarship on the African past (with Frederick Cooper as one of its most distinguished practitioners) has tended to restrict its canvas to the struggles of local communities against various forms of economic and political hegemony rather than analyzing changes in the institutions of domination themselves.

The power and problems of Cooper's very important book derive from this dilemma. For the most part, this is more a macrohistory of colonial thought and decision-making (covering a very wide range of both British and French territories) than a close study of any particular groups of Africans. The author's stated goal is to look at "political projects and social projects" [emphasis added] in a manner that "lays the groundwork for understanding how Africa ended up with the

kind of independence which it for the most part got" (p. 5), i.e. those regimes that have so sadly failed to live up to the promises of liberation from European rule.

The major agents in the ensuing narrative are European administrators and planners, and their principal characteristic is a persistent inability to understand the processes over which they presumably presided. At the start of the period under discussion, their view of Africans as "primitive" or "traditional" populations blinded them to the new social formations created by the urban economy. The "modernization discourse" of the 1940s and 1950s proved to be equally unrealistic. When this approach failed, Africa was abandoned to indigenous rulers who are little more than "gatekeepers" between whatever remains of external "development" resources and internal patronage networks.

The social history in this book, as its subtitle suggests, derives from a focus on labor, although even here, Cooper mainly examines how European authorities and African union or party leaders understood the situation of African workers rather than the actual lives of these laboring communities. For both the actors in the decolonization era and subsequent historians, the definition of an African "working class" and its relationship to nationalist politics has been a matter of great controversy, and Cooper very effectively transforms the terms of this debate. He views the decision by Europeans to accept unionist demands that African laborers be treated on the same basis as their European counterparts as a mutual failure to comprehend African social reality. It was a very consequential failure, since the cost of providing European-scale wages and benefits under African economic conditions could not be borne by either colonial or postcolonial regimes. European governments were thus encouraged to withdraw from Africa, while their local successors coopted some of the labor leadership but rather quickly suppressed the unions as an autonomous force. An important segment of African society, as represented by labor movements, thus does play an important role in Cooper's story, but less as a positive shaper of its outcome than as a dilemma of both colonial definition and indigenous self-definition.

Given its emphasis on decision-making at the top, the primary documents for this study come from colonial archives and provide direct insight into how responsible Europeans perceived—or misperceived—their tasks. This approach allows Cooper to spell out his claims about the colonial origin of Africa's current difficulties, but it also raises some historiographic, or at least narrative, problems of its own. The power of Cooper's analysis comes from his characteristically sober, thorough, and yet engagingly written account of the colonialists' endeavors. This is no small accomplishment in a field where much of the scholarship fails to place colonial thinking in its historical context, either identifying with the self-contained world view of European rulers or endowing them with exaggerated hegemony over their African subjects.

The problem with this approach lies in the limitations, one might say mediocrity, of most colonial thought. Cooper is well aware of this situation, and its revelation is one of the main points of the book. However, the very decision to commit so much effort to digging up old colonialist debates makes Cooper somewhat their prisoner: he has to replay them for us at much greater length than they deserve (or at least than the attention of most readers will bear).

From my own perspective as a sometime economic historian of this era, such an account also tends to exaggerate the significance of both colonial authorities and African subjects in determining the stages and outcomes of the decolonization process. The decisive power over African affairs ultimately lay at higher levels of European public and private sectors, reacting to their own perceptions of Africa's role in the international economy. It was the crises of the Depression and post-World War II eras, rather than colonialist understandings of what were still very small African urban populations, that drove the modernization and development policies analyzed by Cooper. It was likewise recognition, by the mid-1950s, of Africa's irrelevance to the reinvigorated European and global economies that made the cost of misconceptions about managing newly growing African cities so unacceptable. Cooper draws some very insightful comparisons between tropical and South African developments during his period but fails to consider whether the white regimes to the north of this divide might also have held on a good deal longer, with different post-colonial results, if their stakes had been higher.

It would be very wrong to conclude this review on a negative note, since even the problems raised by Cooper's attempt to link macrohistory and social history are instructive and his accounts of the issues which he addresses directly are both authoritative and valuable. Indeed, it is far easier to understand the global economic basis for African malaise than to trace its internal roots in the kind of colonial dialectic that Cooper delineates. Cooper is also right to see contemporary attempts to subject bankrupt African states to global market discipline via structural adjustment programs as a replay of late-colonial modernization errors. He is further justified in insisting on recognition of colonialism as the crucial, if often impotent, intermediary between Africa and the larger world into which it is so imperfectly integrated. His book provides a monumental account of a major stage in this mediation, even if, as Cooper himself recognizes, other forms of analysis are needed to round out the picture of decolonization, let alone deal positively with its results.

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ROBERT MALLEY. *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1996. Pp. x, 323. Cloth \$48.00, paper \$18.00.

This book is primarily a work of intellectual history that, to provide necessary contextualization, moves frequently in and out of socioeconomic, political, and institutional history as well. It traces the gestation, apogee, and decline of third worldism, the term Robert Malley uses to define the ideology that dominated elite discourse in much of the developing world between the 1950s and the early 1980s. Malley provides a chapter of global overview of each of these phases, followed by separate chapters detailing the experience of Algeria during the same phase. As the author admits, using Algeria as the main case study does not in every case provide a perfect fit with other third world experiences, but it does so sufficiently often to justify the choice of methodology and add substance to the more abstract chapters. This is the most detailed and compelling overview I have seen of the emergence, spread, and disappearance of a discourse that underlay the ideologies of a number of developing countries and that, for about a quarter of a century, dominated much of the North-South dialogue.

Although most of the material Malley deals with is accessible to the scholarly world, he uses and recasts it in ways that are often highly original and that bring refreshingly new insights to old issues and problems. The term "third world" is the 1952 invention of French economist Alfred Sauvy, and third worldist ideology was greatly influenced by the European left. Malley nevertheless rejects the contention of many scholars that it was an artificial graft imposed by the left on the countries of the southern hemisphere. Third worldism was, in his view, the product of fecund encounters among three seemingly incompatible ideological attitudes: assimilationist, traditionalist, and socialist. At the heart of the process lies the frustration of Western-educated elites seeking acceptance and upward promotion within colonial systems structurally incapable of granting them. These elites were often in contact, directly or indirectly, with Europe's leftist intelligentsia; and that experience blended with elements of native history and culture and from the traditionalist discourse propounded by many of their less Europeanized compatriots. The most unlikely component in the mix is the third, which blends French revolutionary ideology of the awakening of the *tiers état* with Marxian paradigms of class conflict to create the oppressed, revolutionary *classe/peuple* of the south.

During its apogee, third-worldist ideology postulated the notion of historical inevitability and its link to human agency, in this case a united "people" with a single will, which is expressed by the state. Related to the latter is an image of power, which the north had previously used to oppress, but which the people's state now uses for purposes of liberation and progress. Associated with the notion of a cohesive people within each state is the concept of third-world solidarity as it seeks to reverse the power balance between north and south.

The discussion of decline addresses the questions of the validity of the underlying theses of third worldism

African leaders make their appearance, but their actions, opinions, and words are nearly always transmitted through external sources, usually some member of the UAC management staff. Although, for example, Fieldhouse devotes considerable attention to Nigerian industrialization, he does not exploit Nigerian sources in his analysis.

The problem is that the descriptions and analyses are not subject to checks from non-imperial sources. Fieldhouse, for instance, argues that the firms adopted a defensive posture toward the rising nationalist groups and then the new independent governments, seeking to curry the favor of the African leadership. But this view is based entirely on the board minutes of the UAC: we do not learn whether the nationalists shared this view.

Occasionally Fieldhouse's generalizations propel him far beyond his world of evidence. In discussing the tensions involving the company and its critics during the depression era, Fieldhouse observes that 'generally speaking the company was not disliked by most Africans who regarded it as an inevitable and useful feature of their lives' (p. 82). From whence comes this unfootnoted statement in the absence of African source materials? Why should the small cultivator in West Africa have adopted the UAC perspective, however sensible it might have been, over the anti-UAC views of local traders, large cocoa farmers, nationalist critics, and even to judge by Fieldhouse's account, most colonial officials?

Moreover, by confining himself to the imperial archive Fieldhouse runs the risk of completely ignoring matters that were of crucial importance to West African actors. Two such matters riled the West African communities, yet receive no attention here: conditional sales and royalty payments to the United Africa Company in Nigeria. These two issues disturbed the relationships among the UAC, the colonial state, and nationalists. Yet, they find no echo in *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*. Whether these matters never made it into the board room or whether Fieldhouse did not regard them as meaningful is impossible to know. But the neglect of issues that were aired repeatedly in the West African press and parliaments underscores the problems of taking one's interpretative agenda solely from metropolitan records.

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AFRICAN LABOUR HISTORY

Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa. By FREDERICK COOPER. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvii+677; £55 (ISBN 0-521-52651-1); £19.95, paperback (ISBN 0-521-56600-2).

This extensive and ambitious new study is the culmination of a decade of research and thought. At one level, it examines the era of worker militancy and trade union formation in Africa during the 1940s and early 1950s which fed into the pressures for national independence. As such, it carries forth directly Frederick Cooper's earlier studies of labour and society in coastal Kenya, particularly *On The African Waterfront*. At the same time, this era is contextualised within a broader sweep: changing colonial policy and attitudes which, dissolving into their contradictions, led directly to African independence. To do this, while Cooper reiterates his main ideas on Kenya, he has enormously widened his palette by including material on British West and Central Africa, and especially by major new research on French West Africa, on which this book deserves to be considered a major new assessment in its own right. This sweep necessarily lends conviction to his approach and ideas.

Perhaps the most fundamental of them is that colonial policy is best assessed by the place in it of African labour. From this flow key issues through their presence or absence: class, the changing economy, race and gender as socially defining categories. In its pre-war heyday, Cooper argues that colonialism, even when administered by relatively democratic governments in the home context, evaluated its African subjects essentially as primitive and ineffably 'different' tribesmen within a patriarchal and rural mould. The conservation of an ossified tribal Africa coupled with the extraction of unskilled seasonal or casual labour was common wisdom. The debates of the day were about the necessity for forced labour and the extent to which Africa was becoming diseased and depopulated due to colonial labour demand. Dynamism in this system was confined to white settlers or energetic Levantine and Asian traders.

These assumptions began to be challenged in the 1930s, first by minority voices and then as one approaches the 1950s, on a broad front. For this there were various reasons, not least the realisation that such policies led to semi-stagnation in a world where development was more and more an imperative. The suddenly manifest capacity of African workers to organise and throw a spanner in the works of the extractive economy was, however, also of fundamental importance. Arguments mounted that African workers needed to be treated as workers, not as Africans. They could be permitted to form trade unions, critically, a strategy of containment and boundedness. The colonial state also tried to conceptualise structures that would allow for a stable, 'detrribalised' urban working class in towns focused on a European family model. 'By the mid to late 1940s, influential officials wanted Africa to have a working class, to separate an identifiable group of people from the backwardness of rural Africa, attach its members to particular jobs and career ladders and over time make them into a predictable and productive collectivity' (p. 14). Cooper devotes much time to the careful analysis of particular strikes, conflicts and policy watersheds where these issues get repeatedly hammered out.

The author convincingly shows that this early component of modernisation theory applied to Africa was even more of a fantasy in the realm of real possibilities than the game park approach of the pre-war system. Such change was not affordable and not politically manageable. Dualist policies which tried to draw a ring around a section of modernisable Africans broke down rapidly. To some extent, African labour organisers turned the new discourse to their own advantage by making claims desired by their followers while African politicians found the resulting impotence of colonial administration opportune. Colonial rulers decided that the contradictions that were increasingly apparent would best be resolved by African politicians rather than by themselves; the expenditures entailed by reform strategies were not worth engendering. Cooper therefore places the labour question squarely at the heart of the explanation for the precipitate character of the decolonization of Africa. He argues that major shifts in approach are especially dramatic and clear in French West Africa where elements of destructive compulsion were still firmly in place into the 1930s but where the impulse towards modernization and assimilation quickly became so much stronger.

There is an ironic charm – but I would argue a kind of Pyrrhic victory – in the African success in defeating European developmentalist logic. African politicians continued, of course, to pursue this logic after independence. In this respect, Cooper's consideration of the contradictions of African modernization is sobering in present light. Cooper sees the coming of independence as a sort of closure, but in crucial respects the battle joined continues, as witness Mahmood Mamdani's recent *Citizen and Subject*, with results that could illuminate the past as well as vice versa.

For the material underpinnings of his approach, Cooper owes something to the work of Jacques Marseille on French colonialism. One can argue that Marseille, in

his brilliant assessment of the *économie de traité* and its relative stagnation past the 1950s, oversimplifies the story. Decolonization was actually often accompanied by economic expansion at first. While the *économie de traité* largely stagnated, the 1950s witnessed new prosperity in the expansion of base-metals mining in many parts of Africa as well as in the increasing realisation of the possibilities of capitalist forms of agricultural exploitation, depending on the injection of new technology and equipment; in Nigeria, and more dramatically Algeria, decolonization was accompanied by dramatic oil discoveries of strategic and economic significance. Moreover, there does remain a striking difference between how Britain and France structured decolonization in Africa, and planned (or failed to plan) its aftermath, which may be obscured by too much emphasis on labour as is sometimes very apparent in this book.

While this complicates the picture, it is not intended to take away from the value of what Cooper has illuminated so forcefully, however. Frederick Cooper is an historian who has in the past concentrated on *mentalité* and written impressively on African opinion and consciousness. This book does so to a much lesser degree. It is based on a very wide and impressive reading of primary archival material and in most respects belongs with the major studies of colonial policy in Africa rather than with African social history. Cooper innovates by exploring colonial values as 'discourse'. For Cooper, discourse consists of a melding of language and practise. I am not entirely clear that a discrete melding in this way, observably distinct from alternative discourses pursued at the same or another time, is not too self-contained and detached from material pressures to be methodologically convincing. Moreover, as Cooper notes, the Foucaultian notion of modern forms of control through surveillance is hardly a key to understanding late colonial society in Africa; Africans were very successful at moulding their own lives in defiance or even ignorance of attempts in this direction. If one is going to attempt Foucault, I suspect one must let that approach be pervasive rather than definitional. Far more noteworthy to me is Cooper's grasp of men and motives and politics, more old-fashioned but still incisive as a means of carving an interpretative path through the past.

Few writers these days are producing volumes of this scope and scholarship. While this is a long book, it reads quite easily. A review of this length cannot begin to note, or debate, dozens of specific illuminating points and arguments that deserve consideration along the way. There are very numerous and memorable incisive comments on both well-known and obscure individuals, organisations and events of the time. Some 150 pages of footnotes provide invaluable nuances and sidelights for future research students of this period.

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DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Development Planning and Decolonization in Nigeria. By TOYIN FALOLA. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996. Pp. xxiv + 215. £45 (ISBN 0-8130-1422-0).

As we come to the end of the century, developmentalism, one of the century's most enduring discourses and endearing dreams, has lost its seductive paradigmatic and political power, challenged as a 'meta-narrative' in the western academy by the postulations of post-something scholarship, and as practical policy by the fetish priests of free-market capitalism, and in the real world by the continuing ravages of global poverty and intensifying popular struggles against it. Times like these encourage retrospection, attempts to 'deconstruct' development as a discursive

might have alternatives to the wages that employers would be willing to offer. Beyond this lies another elusive aspect of this long history: the abolition of slavery did not break the association between race and labour, but in some ways deepened the racialization of the labour question in the British Empire.

Before emancipation it was an open question as to whether blacks were capable of responding to market incentives and working like other people. The myth of the lazy black, and the idea that a special regime of regulation and control of black labour was needed, would be operative until the final decade of British rule in Africa. However, the eventual recognition that African workers could be thought of in the same way as other workers entailed an even firmer view of the dangerous and primitive nature of those Africans who did not make the transition to such a 'modern' framework.

Even more important, the free labour idea itself was quite inadequate to accommodate the mixtures of incentives and constraints that motivated people, in the diverse situations in which they lived. It could not explain why people would agree to work for wages, and even less so for how long, with what degree of assiduity, or with what forms of individual and collective efforts to alter or subvert the work regime. In much of the century of 'free' labour, British humanitarians arguing for the elimination of all forms of labour coercion shared with apologists for administrative or judicial sanctions against 'lazy' workers an unwillingness to ask what labour in an African or West Indian context actually meant. They did not want to think that work might be considered a social act, part of the solidarity and tensions within a family or within a village, and not just an individual response to wage incentives. They did not want to acknowledge the social and political embeddedness of labour in a capitalist society either. Both opponents of and apologists for administrative intervention in labour recruitment could easily become enmeshed in a moralistic dialogue, one assuming that an African who refused to become a regular, disciplined wage labourer did so because of his moral failings, the other that a state which forced people to work was immoral. Only near the end of the British Empire did debates over labour policy enter tentatively at least the realm of the social, and focus on the conditions that determined when and why someone might seek wage labour and how the conditions in the workplace shaped the way people worked and patterns of conflict over labour.

The story of Africans and labour in the British Empire, throughout the entire period from the 1830s to the 1950s, is one that connects to, but diverges from, the story of labour in the British Isles, for the particularity of the

African Workers and Imperial Designs

FREDERICK COOPER

The decision of Parliament in 1833 to abolish slavery in its colonies marked the British Empire as the Empire of free labour. Such a formulation would, for over a century, remain central to how decision-makers thought of their own role; how they justified further colonization to the British public; and how Great Britain defined itself vis-à-vis other colonizing powers and pressured them into co-operating in suppressing slavery throughout the world. Free labour principles were also vital to the critics of British policy, and no charge rang louder than that which at times came from missionary or humanitarian circles, that the government was tolerating slavery 'under the British flag'.¹

The relationship of Empire and coerced labour would, however, persist until nearly the final phase of the colonial system. In 1840 the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord [John] Russell, wrote of a 'new system of slavery'—indentured labour—that he feared was leading to death and misery across the British Empire.² In the 1940s forced labour was revived in several colonies of British Africa, most intensely in Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland, as wartime demand for African exports mounted while the commodities that might have induced Africans into wage labour were in ever scarcer supply.³ In the intervening years came a reality that not all defenders of free labour were willing to acknowledge: in the complex spatial system of an Empire, potential workers would not necessarily be living near the sites where they were required, and elsewhere, workers

¹ For examples of this, see Frederick Lugard, 'Slavery under the British Flag', *Nineteenth Century* (February) 1896, pp. 335–55; Joseph Pense, *How We Countenance Slavery* (London [British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society], 1895); and the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (London) throughout the 1890s and 1900s.

² Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830–1920* (London, 1974), ironúspiece.

³ Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 125.

an armed insurrection, some of whose leaders were former trade unionists from Nairobi who had been marginalized by the state's repression of trade union radicalism. The insurrection became known as Mau Mau, and after the declaration of an Emergency in 1952, it was brutally suppressed.³⁷

While the British public was treated to propaganda about the alleged brutality of primitive rebels, the union movement finally was allowed to take root in Kenya, under the aegis of Tom Mboya. He skillfully portrayed effective unions as an alternative to mass disorder and won concrete gains for union members. Mboya rode the trade union federation to a position of influence in the nationalist movement for independence, whose earlier leaders, including Jomo Kenyatta, had been jailed. He was a key figure in the negotiations that led to independence in 1963. Mboya, and the Kenyan labour movement generally, was thus emblematic of a wider process of political positioning, making possible a kind of decolonization that Africanized political leadership without sharply breaking with the development-oriented social policies and export-oriented economic policies of late colonialism.³⁸

Conclusion

In the 1830s British policy-makers briefly opened a window to thinking of the worker of African descent as potentially just like any other worker, capable of responding to the incentives of a free market in labour. Soon, however, the ex-slave of the British West Indian colonies was reclassified as a racial exception to a universal economic rule. It was only in the 1940s that the African (and West Indian) worker began to emerge from this vision of immutable distinctiveness, and this time he, and it was indeed a male figure that occupied the scene, appeared not so much as economic man but as social man. He was like any other worker, part of a collectivity of people who sold their labour and who had certain needs as a result of that fact. He needed not just to survive, but to be socialized into a milieu where the key

³⁷ Frederick Cooper, 'Mau Mau and the Discourses of Decolonization', *JAH*, XXIX (1988), pp. 313–20. See also David Thrupp, *The Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau, 1945–53* (London, 1987); Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–63* (London, 1987); Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (London, 1989); Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, 2 vols. (London, 1992).

³⁸ Cooper, *On the African Waterfront*, pp. 203–19; and David Goldsworthy, *Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget* (London, 1982).

distinctions were those of income and occupation, a differentiated social structure. To produce such a working class, a class separated not just from the property-owners for whom they worked but from those engaged in traditional forms of economic activity, required more than one generation, and therefore the worker's wife, who would raise the children, was a key figure in the new social vision. She should not be left behind in a village, where her traditionalist outlook and ignorance of modern health care, childrearing, and education would hold back her children. Family wages and family housing were thus crucial components of the new imperial design. Trade unions would be part of the picture too, for they embraced the worker in a predictable set of structures, far better than leaving them to mingle with other elements of the urban masses or be subject to politicians perceived to be populist demagogues.

On the surface, the reformulation of labour policy during and after the war took consideration of labour out of the racialized framework in which it had been stuck for the previous century. The potential of an African wage-worker to become a worker in the fullest sense of the term was acknowledged and supported, but race kept creeping into the world of work—in officials' promoting trade unionism in theory but not finding an African trade unionist who was quite suitable. Even more important was the way distinctions were made between a world of work, whose norms were seen as acultural and universal even if they derived from the social history of Europe, and an African world outside which was still defined by its cultural particularity. The very possibility opened to the African to become 'modern' cast in an even harsher light on the African who chose not to do so. That the new labour policy was called stabilization underscored that the task in Africa was not to make wage labour the basic form of production, as in ideal-typical capitalism, but to separate a domain of wage labour from a domain of traditional production and above all to insure that the reproduction of the wage earning class would take place uncontaminated by the primitiveness that lay outside it.

The dualistic vision so evident in the reports of labour officers and the various Commissions that studied different aspects of the labour question in the 1950s was unrealizable; in many ways it was a fantasy. African workers did not cease to be African; they did not cut themselves off from a wide range of social and cultural relationships. They might choose to live in a family arrangement other than that of the monogamous male breadwinner with his dependent wife and children. They might use their earnings to escape

Afterword:
Social Rights and Human Rights in the
Time of Decolonization

The Universal Declaration of 1948 was written in the shadow of war and mass murder, and its authors hoped to see the violence of imperial conquest give way to mutual respect among nations, for the violence of states against entire categories of their own citizens to yield to acknowledgment of the rights of all humans, and for the misery and degradation that were thought to be a cause of war—and which had certainly been a consequence of it—to turn into efforts to ensure freedom from want. They deliberated in a time when workers and peasants—in African and Asian colonies as well as European states—were organizing and striking to demand that their living conditions reach a minimum of decency, when tensions between socialist and capitalist paths to prosperity were becoming acute, and when the legitimacy of the existing international order was in question. Whether a narrow set of “human” rights—amenable to judicial sanctions—a wider set of social and economic rights, or the primacy of national sovereignty (allowing each nation to decide what rights to recognize and enforce) would take precedence was the focus of intense debate. If we want to examine the trajectory of arguments over rights, social protections, and sovereignty over the past several decades, we should remember the acute uncertainty after the war. The essays collected in this dossier make clear the extent of conflict in the postwar era over which rights to recognize and where to locate their application and enforcement. The issues raised then continued to shape thinking about the relationship of individual, state, and humanity.

Of the contending constructs of the late 1940s, the one that clearly took root in global political practice is the national one: we now live in a world of nearly two hundred sovereign nation-states, each with its seat in the United Nations, each jealous of its prerogatives, each, in principle, capable of guaranteeing—or abusing—the rights it chooses to recognize in the name of “its” people. If the generalization of the nation-state form with the collapse of the colonial empires gave way by the 1970s to recognition that the new sovereignty regime left issues of human rights unresolved, no consensus has emerged on what those rights are and how to enforce them. Leaders of the new states were among the first to assert that one principle trumped another: for an outsider to question what a newly independent state did to its citizens was tantamount in such an argument to neocolonialism. But from another point of view, sovereignty could become a shield behind which human rights were violated with impunity.

provide a basis for a future peace. What relationship did these elements have to one another?

At the international level, the key document is the declaration that emerged from the ILO conference in Philadelphia in 1944, a text more explicit than the reference to “improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security” in the Atlantic Charter. The jurist Alain Supiot has recently underscored the breakthrough of this declaration. He sees in it a model that shaped social policy in and beyond Europe for some forty years—one in which human dignity was seen as a value to be protected and enhanced—only to be gradually eclipsed since the 1980s by economic, political, and juridical doctrines that erect a regime of market dominance.²³ The breakthrough of Philadelphia, he argues, was not in seeing a set of rights as “natural” but as coming out of relationships, of people trying to live with one another and seeing the tragic results when some ignore the humanity of others. “Labor is not a commodity,” announced the preface of the ILO text. It called for a “war against want . . . to be carried on with unrelenting vigor within each nation,” and for international effort for the “common welfare.” It sought measures “to provide a basic income to all,” for regulation of working hours, for collective bargaining, and for measures to improve public health, housing, nutrition, education, child welfare, the status of women, and public services. While the items mentioned seem to describe the welfare state and industrial relations regime toward which Europe was moving, the last paragraph affirmed that its principles “are fully applicable to all people everywhere,” and it called specifically for “their progressive application to peoples who are still dependent, as well as to those who have already achieved self-government.”²⁴

In 1947, the ILO began to develop its “social policy in dependent territories,” applying its notion of “standards” to workers in colonial mines, factories, and fields, focusing on housing, education, health, and family life in similar terms to those applied to independent states. Social complexity had to be addressed; labor experts began to speak of the “community of experience” of miners or dockworkers from South Africa to France. The ILO began to enunciate what would become one of its major themes: economic and social development as a responsibility of governing powers in dependent territories.²⁵

The Universal Declaration of 1948 picked up these themes. It referred to the right to social security and an adequate standard of living, to old age and disability insurance, to the right to form a family, to the protection and education of children. It used the word “dignity.” The Universal Declaration, like ILO resolutions, was weak on supranational enforcement mechanisms. Roland Burke brings to our attention debates around 1951 over the question of whether social rights had to be thought of differently from rights that were legally enforceable in a court. Was a claim to having piped water at home enforceable in the same way as action against imprisonment without due process?

Why did France and Britain want to engage in such debates? They thought they might actually look good under ILO criteria, that the “social” direction was consistent with their reformed colonialism. Let me comment briefly on the French case. Having been conquered by Germany in Europe and lost Indochina to Japan in Asia, French leaders knew they had to find a new basis for empire as they moved to create the

teachers' strike was harshly repressed and its leaders imprisoned. In Senegal, civil servants were fired after going on strike; in Dahomey, a trade unionist ruefully remarked that one could get better satisfaction from a European labor inspector than an African minister. In most of French Africa, political rights were compromised several years after independence by the institution of single-party regimes, except where military coups brought in the no-party regime. Social rights remained formally on the books in many cases, but they were eroded in practice. The Senegalese labor code resembled the French, but trade unions were undermined, family allowances eaten away by inflation, and social services eroded by government incapacity and indifference.³⁵

When the world economic recession of the 1970s hit Africa hard and forced governments to seek aid from the IMF and other international institutions, those institutions enforced the destruction of much that could be considered "social." The "right" of finance to cross frontiers was guaranteed by international organizations; the right to education, medical care, a livable wage undermined in the name of financial rigor.

Such policies were one phase in a debate dating to 1944 over the relationship of social rights and "development." After independence, there were assertions from ex-colonial states that the right to develop trumped other rights. Such arguments—made at the 1968 Teheran conference for example—suggest a certain pessimism on the part of leaders: that they could not expect to fulfill expectations that social demands would be met. And it makes clear that they wanted *carte blanche* to bring about modernization from the top down—the shah of Iran was after all the host—and they did not want to be held accountable for actually meeting their own goals.³⁶ In such terms, the move to place development objectives ahead of political rights does not so much reflect a contradiction between the two as their mutual constitution: what worried rulers most in the 1960s, as it had French leaders in the 1950s, was that social rights would be *claimed*. In both cases, the language of social rights and the process of political mobilization put pressure on states. The shah of Iran could claim that he would bring development and modernization to his people, but that they would not have the political right to claim resources, and the prime minister of France could declare that his government would provide aid to former colonies, whose citizens no longer had a claim to French resources. Both were trying to remove from the realm of politics what had been so important earlier on: political mobilization to claim social rights. In international discourse, the rights of imperial citizens have become the needs of the world's poor, a problem for experts in poverty relief, and within many states, claims to rights were often turned into the quest for a powerful patron who could distribute the crumbs of the world economy.

The generalization of sovereignty around the world could thus shelter the rulers of ex-colonial states from scrutiny of their denial of political and social rights and also shelter rich states, former colonizers and otherwise, from responsibility for the extremes of inequality to which they had contributed. The real winners were corporations that asserted certain kinds of economic rights, for example, to the free movement of capital, to the expatriation of profits, to intellectual property, to taking advantage of the most lax of labor laws or enforcement of environmental standards. Any violation