The Imperial Peace in Colonial Africa and Africa's Underdevelopment

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When praised at all, imperialism is most often commended for the peace it bestowed. By demobilizing armies, deposing marauding princes and subduing war-like states, European powers fashioned a half-century of political order. The question nonetheless arises: Should they be lauded for that? In this chapter, I view Africa's history through the lens of comparative history[1] and argue that the imperial peace may have retarded Africa's development.

Those addressing the rise of the West often highlight the contribution of the state. The western state has inflicted untold misery, they acknowledge; but they also stress its importance for development. An important school of thought argues that the two faces of power – the one destructive and the other developmental – share common origin: the Western state became developmental the better to finance its wars (Roberts 1956; Gilbert 1975; Tilly 1985; Brewer 1988). Driven by insecurity abroad, states become developmental at home, these scholars argue: heads of state employ power to foster economic growth and thereby finance their militaries. If the threat of war thus rendered European states developmental, then the possibility arises that imperial peace may have

[1] As was attempted by Warner, C. (1999). "The Political-Economy of 'quasi-statehood' and the demise of 19th century African politics." Review of International Studies **25**(233-255). For a skeptical response, see Hopkins, A. (2000). "Quasi-states, weak states and the partition of Africa." Review of Interntional Sudies **26**(311-20).

contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa (but see Centano 1997). Viewed against this background, the imperial peace assumes a new guise: rather than conferring a blessing, it may have imposed a cost: it may have stilled the impulse to development that originates from the search for security in a hostile environment.

Throughout this paper, I focus on the relationship between wealth and power. Power can be used to secure wealth, either by forcefully seizing it or by safeguarding its creation (see, for example, Hirshleifer 1994). The latter promotes growth; the former, mere redistribution. In probing the political foundations of development, it thus becomes critical to understand how power is exercised and to explore the factors that shape its use. It is my argument that through intention on the one hand and extinction on the other, international insecurity selects for the developmental use of power. It is for this reason that the imperial peace may have therefore been costly.

I begin this chapter by contending that the state is essential for development, an argument I advance by recounting a recent reappraisal of the logic of Evans-Pritchard's classic study of the Nuer: a society without a state (Evans-Pritchard 1940).

Kinship Societies

Africa is attractive to scholars in part because of the diversity of its political institutions. Some polities are based on kinship; they are societies without states. In others, centralization and hierarchy shape political life. In such polities, kinship ties may remain powerful, but they now lie imbedded within political structures which they influence but

d not control: political hierarchies and bureaucratic offices which may be filled by appointment rather than succession or descent.

From the study of Africa's political forms, we learn many lessons. One of the most important is that political order can prevail even in societies that lack states. Even in the absence of centralized and hierarchical institutions, life and property can be secure. A second is that such order is fragile and, worse yet, susceptible to breakdown in response to development.

Peace in the Feud

As argued by Gluckman (1955), order in kinship societies rests upon the fear of retaliation. Should a person in one family transgress upon a member of another, then she faces the prospect of retaliation by her victim and his kin. In such societies, no third party preserves the peace, then. Rather, it is the "shadow of the future," in Axelrod's (1985) phrasing; it is the certainty of future losses at the hands of a vengeful neighbor that stays the hand of those who might be tempted to transgress. Even in the absence of formal institutions, property can therefore be secure and people safe in stateless societies.

Thus the argument of Evans-Pritchard (1940), Gluckman (1955), and others (e.g. Fallers 1966) who have studied such societies. More recently, however, political scientists and economists have revisited this argument and cautioned against its claims. In so doing, they highlight the link between the state and development.

As noted in Bates, Greif et al. (2002), Gluckman's claim -- that there can "peace in the feud" -- follows from the "folk theorem" of repeated games, which states (roughly) that the first best – here, peace – can be sustained as an equilibrium in games wherein people can adopt punishment strategies, ensuring that future losses offset the prospect of short term gains. Once the parallel to game theory is recognized, then so too are its implications. Among the most relevant is that the first best equilibrium is not robust; in particular, it is vulnerable to the temptations spawned by increased prosperity. As society becomes wealthier and riches mount, the level of temptation increases as well. As a result, punishments that once served to underpin peace may no longer deter.

No State, No Development?

Note the implication: if development requires both security and wealth, then, by requiring that prosperity be sacrificed in order to secure peace, kinship societies may remain under-developed. Another implication is that while their polities might be able to protect and sustain some kinds of economic activities, such as commerce, they might not be able to protect others, such as those that require fixed investments. Commercial relations are likely to involve repeated interactions; fixed investments, by contrast, require but a single move. Unlike merchants, investors therefore lack the ability to make credible threats. A kinship economy might therefore benefit from markets and trade; but, lacking investment, it may fail to secure an industrial base. Because of the nature of their political institutions, such polities may therefore achieve but a low level of development.

It is therefore not surprising to encounter evidence that suggests that stateless societies seek to alter their political institutions, some going so far as to import political specialists

from neighboring societies. Well-known cases would include the Aro in Southern Nigeria (Northrop 1978), the Atyak in Northern Uganda (Southall 1999), and the Lunda in Congo and Zambia (Vansina 2004), each of whom exported their political services to neighboring stateless societies, thereby introducing political hierarchy into cultures that previously had been egalitarian.

Pre-Colonial Dynamics

In this section, we focus the formation – and the destruction – of states in pre-colonial Africa. Figure 1 illustrates the population of states in West Africa, 1400 (just before European states began to form empires) to 1900 (the end of the scramble for Africa). [2] While the scholars from whose work it was compiled concur in their definition of West Africa[3], they count as states a wide variety of political forms, ranging from city states to

[2] Sources include: Forde, D. and P. M. Kaberry, Eds. (1967). West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century. Oxford, Oxford University Press, Stevenson, R. F. (1968). Population and Political Systems in Africa. New York, Columbia University Press, Colson, E. (1969). African Society at the Time of the Scramble. Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960. L. H. Gann and P. Duignan. New York, Cambridge University Press, Gray, R. and D. Birmingham, Eds. (1970). Pre-colonial Trade. London, Oxford University Press, Southall, A. W. (1970). The Illusion of Tribe. The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa. P. C. W. Gutkind. Leiden, Brill: 28-51, Fage, J. D. (1974). States and Subjects in Sub-Saharan African History. Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, Ajayi, J. F. A. and M. Crowder, Eds. (1976). History of West Africa. London, Longman, Crowder, M. (1977). West Africa. London, Longman, Oliver, R., Ed. (1977). The Cambridge History of Africa. New York, Cambridge University Press, Law, R. (1978). Slaves, Trade and Taxes. Research in Economic Anthropology. G. Dalton. Greenwish CT, JAI Press, Fortes, M. and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Eds. (1987). African Political Systems. New York, KPI in association with the International African Institute, Southall, A. (1988). "Segmentary States in Africa and Asia." Comparative Studies in Society and History 30(1): 52-82, Morrison, D., R. Mitchell, et al. (1989). Black Africa: A Comparative Handbook. New York, Paragon House, Curtin, P., S. Feierman, et al. (1995). African History. Harlow, Longman, Kwamena-Poh, M., J. Tosh, et al. (1995). African History in Maps. Harlow, Longman, McIntosh, S. K. and R. McIntosh (1996). West African Savanna Kingdoms. The Oxford Companion to Archeologt. B. Fagan. New York, Oxford University Press**:** 748-750, McIntosh, S. K. (1999). Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa. New York, Cambridge University Press, Thornton, J. K. (1999). Warfare in Atlantic Africa, 1500-1800. London, UCL Press, Banton, M., Ed. ([1965] 2004). Political Systems and the Distribution of Power. London, Taylor and Francis.

[3] That it extends from the Chad basin to the Atlantic coast; and from the coast northward to the Sahel.

empires. Despite this heterogeneity, where their accounts intersect, they tend to include the same polities, which increases our confidence in inferences drawn from these data.

Prior to the 15th Century, state formation in West Africa, these sources remind us, was largely confined to the margins of the Sahel, where polities formed astride the trade routes linking West Africa's commercial centers with the in North Africa. With the arrival of Europeans along the coast, commerce shifted southward and states began to form in the interstices between the interior and the coast. The narrative accounts then portray the rise of Oyo, Bono, Nupe and the Hausa city-states. Later comes the rise of states along the coast: Wadyah, Warri, Bonny, Allada, Grand Popo and others.

More important for the argument of this chapter, however, is the demise rather than the creation of states. As shown in Figure 2, by the mid-18th Century, more states depart than enter the panel, thus making possible the process of selection. The question is: did "developmental" states prove more fit than those that were not? Did the demise of polities select for states in which power was used to promote the creation of wealth? If the response to these questions is "yes," then the imperial peace may have decoupled the search for security from the creation of wealth.

Colonial Cross Sections

To address this possibility, we turn our attention to the colonial period. When doing so, we make use of three cross-sections of data: The Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock 1967), the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS) (Divale 2000), and the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) (Bates 1983). Each data set exhibits major weaknesses. Both the SCCS and HRAF samples contain few African cases: 28 in the first and 36 in the latter. The Ethnographic Atlas contains data from many more polities (over 400); but its utility is reduced by the limited range of the characteristics it reports, most of which are irrelevant given our purposes. Each provides insight into the cross section of cases bequeathed to the colonial order. If our argument is correct, we should expect this cross-section to suggest a positive relationship between measures of state formation and indicators of prosperity.

When exploring this possibility, we most rely upon data gleaned from the Human Relations Area Files. While the sample of societies covered by the HRAF is small; it is nonetheless larger than that of the SCCS (see Table 1). The source also frees us from the limitations of secondary analysis; we are not constrained by the coding decisions of others. Working with a research team of undergraduates, I could search out and extract the information needed to address questions that motivate this study.

Addressing the primary question posed in this essay requires that I classify the societies according to their political institutions. Scholars such as Southall (1996), Yoffee (1993), and McIntosh (1999) have insisted that African polities cannot be crudely classified as

stateless or not; nor can they be arrayed along a scale of "state-likeness." To do the first would be to underestimate their heterogeneity, while the second opens the door to cultural triumphalism, they argue, as notions of modernity or civilization might easily inform placement on the scale. In conformity with their counsel, I therefore make but qualitative judgments, determining whether the reports indicated the existence of chiefs and whether or not there was a monarch. I also note the existence of a bureaucracy or a national army.

Table 1 Near Here

Recall the discussion of political order: Kinship societies, I argued, were vulnerable to internal disruption. Suggestive, therefore, is the relationship between markers of political centralization and incidence of feuding: it is negative and the relationship is one of the most pronounced in the data. Whereas the HRAF records attest to feuding in 89% of the societies governed by kinship, they report it in but 23% or those governed by monarchs (Table 2). The data thus suggest that polities based on rulers and bureaucracies are associated with higher level of political order. [4]

Table 2 Near Here

While enhancing the level of political order, do such institutions assure greater prosperity? Do they thereby provide a corrective to the fragility of kinship systems?

[4] Supportive are data from the SCCS, which indicate that chieftaincies and centralized states are more likely to have "enforcement specialists," such as police, than are stateless societies; the source fails to note the impact of this innovation on the level of conflict, however.

Keeping in mind the poor quality of the data, as seen in Table 3, the answer appears to be "yes." Studies of societies with chiefs and monarchs were far more likely to report the presence of market centers than were studies of societies ruled through kinship. They were also more likely to report participation in long distance trade, the production of crafts, and the presence of private investors.

Table 3 Near Here

Further evidence is contained in Table 4. Insofar as possessing a national army, as opposed to one recruited at the village or household level, provides an index of military power, the data suggest that wealth and military power co-vary.

Table 4 Near Here

Turning briefly to the Ethnographic Atlas, we note its data on craft specialists. According to this source, this kind of economic activity was observed in but a third of Africa's stateless societies but in nearly three quarters of its centralized states. Similar differences characterize the incidence of leather working, ceramics, and metal working. These data suggest that occupational specialization more frequently occurs in states than in stateless societies. The reports archived in the Human Relations Area Files also indicate (Table 5) that when ruled by chiefs, monarchs and bureaucracies, polities were more likely to contain roads, bridges, pontoons and canals. When sufficiently "state-like" to maintain a national army, African polities, once again, were more likely to invest in such public goods (Table 6).

Table 5 and 6 Near Here

In this instance, neither the Ethnographic Atlas nor SCCS provide useful information; they simply fail to record the relevant data.

While scanty and highly imperfect, the data suggest that the competition among the states in pre-colonial Africa may have given rise to a cross-section of polities in which state-formation and economic development co-varied. Either because they responded to external threats by seeking to strengthen their economic base, or because interstate competition winnowed from the sample polities that were weak and poor, we find that societies that were "state-like" also appear to have been developmental.

Before concluding this section, I turn to two additional pieces of data from the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS) (Divale 2000). While missingness reduces the sample from 28 to 16 observations, the data suggest a relationship between rates of warfare and degrees of political centralization in (Table 7)

The data also indicate that more centralized polities were more likely to attack their neighbors (Table 7). Of equal relevance are the data on increases or decreases in the size of the polities. As seen in Table 8, the data from SCCS suggest that chieftaincies and centralized states were increasing in size where most stateless societies were shrinking.

Tables 7-8 Near Here

The small size of the sample and uncertainty as to the era to which the coding applies attenuate the impact of these findings. They remain suggestive at best.

Political Restraint and Political Structure

Thus far I have focused on the external relations of African states. I now turn to their internal politics. Doing so we see that those who governed states presided over a surplus: they could have extracted the rents that lay before them. But the data also highlight the presence of internal checks. Those with power might use it to limit feuding among powerful families and groups of kin; to construct public works, to fight, and to tax; but given the institutions that encompassed them, they found it costly to use this power to seize the assets of those they governed.

The data from the HRAF suggest that states tended to form in locations that contained relatively rich soils, abundant valuable there the soils were relatively rich, water supplies abundant, and resources – gold, copper, salt, iron – relatively valuable. People found such locations attractive; more importantly, once settled in them, they were reluctant to depart. As a result, those who exercised power could extract rents from them without fear that they would defect, as did their counterparts discussed above. Differentials in productivity thus created the possibility of taxation. Thus could states exist in deserts, if located in the mountains (as were the Fur); or in the Sahel, if located in inland deltas (as were Ghana, Mail, and Songhay); or in the savannah, if located in lakes or swamplands

(as were the Lozi and Lunda). In such locations, there exerted a surplus that could be appropriated without fear of political breakdown.

If states arose in such environments, why then would not their rulers exploit their power to secure private advantages? The reports archived by the HRAF suggest that to some degree they did. Thus their possession of superior homes or clothing and their possession of larger numbers of cattle or slaves (Table 9). But the data also suggest that rulers faced political checks. Kin groups, they suggest, remained jealous of their power and kept important offices under their control: that of the "linguist," among the Akan; of the war chief and "prime minister," among the Yoruba; or of the ritualist and diviner, among the Lunda. As have others, those that were rich or powerful claimed the standing of aristocrats and dominated key councils. The monarch then had to gain their approval before introducing new policies, imposing new levies, or declaring new wars. From their position of power, commoners and aristocrats defended the independence of the courts, thus imposing yet another limit on the power of the state (Table 10).

Tables 9 and 10 Near Here

In the cross section of societies bequeathed to the colonial era by the pre-colonial state system, then, those who ruled were often limited in their ability to exercise power. Ritualists could call their legitimacy into question and threaten divine retribution should monarchs abuse their power. Councils dominated by the heads of powerful families could oppose their policies. In some, courts could limit their ability to bring the power of the judicial system to bear upon their political enemies. In settings where exit constituted a costly option, internal checks nonetheless limited the use of power.

Further Reflections

It is dangerous to invoke particular cases in support of a general argument. It is impossible to prove that the cases were not selected simply to bolster the argument; the selection, moreover, may imply that its author concurs with the argument when he may not do so. Despite these dangers, I conclude by drawing on two works by the eminent historian, Jan Vansina.

In How Societies are Born,Vansina (2004) studies the history of societies in South-Central Africa: a region that runs from the Congo in the north to Botswana in the south and from the Atlantic in the west to the Lualaba in the east. These societies, he contends, initially consisted of small aggregates of kin who foraged in order to survive. Over time, their populations increased and technologies changed. Two changes proved pivotal: the domestication of cattle and the invention of the iron hoe. Of necessity, foragers travel light; what they need, they consume. The domestication of plants and animals – i.e. the Neolithic transformation – fostered accumulation, however, and notions of private property. Cattle and cultivation, he writes, "widened the concept of individual ownership, fostered a novel notion of material wealth, and made the emergence of classes based on wealth possible (Vansina 2004, p. 99). Economic growth thus gave rise to government, Vansina argues, by creating private property. Vansina thus sketches out a causal path that, while differing from the one advanced here, but runs parallel to it. To reconcile the two, we need only add the emergence of conflict and the demand for adjudication and the termination of disputes: conditions that could lead to the demand for order and the means of enforcing it.

Also suggestive is Vansina's study of the Kuba[5], a people who dwell in Congo near the junction of the Kasai and Sankuru. His account begins with the migration of kin groups from the north, the crossing of the Sankuru, and their settlement in the lands wherein they now reside. Once again, Vansina links the growth of population and the transition to permanent cultivation to the formation of chiefdoms. Distinctive of this work, however, is his study of the emergence of a monarch, capable of collecting taxes, providing public services, and making war.

Focusing on the most celebrated monarchs -- Syaam and his two immediate successors, MboMboosh and Mboong a Leeng – Vansina notes how they transformed the Kuba into a powerful and prosperous people. In discussing this transition, Vansina stresses that "the call for a surplus came from above, from the political authorities" (Vansina 1978, p. 184). Syaam and his royal lineage forged a central bureaucracy, consisting of supervisors of public works; judges, police, and messengers; inspectors and tax collectors; and attendants to the King, his wives, and offspring. The expansive growth of the public sector, in turn, inspired the search for the resources from which to pay for it. Taking advantage of the arrival of new crops from the Americas – maize, tubers, and tobacco, for example – the government promoted their widespread adoption.[6] In addition, they promoted multiple cropping. The government then began not only to extract wealth but also to create it. The result was the growth of public revenues and private income.

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[5] Also known by the name of their ruling clan, the Bushong. Vansina, J. (1978). The Children of Woot: A History of the Kuba Peoples. Madison WI, University of Wisconsin Press.

[6] While not made explicit in Vansina's account, it would appear that cultivation was prescribed rather than encouraged. This certainly would be the case in the slave villages that provisioned the residents of the capital.

To account for the behavior of this government, we need make use of hints that lay scattered in Vansina's account. It is clear that in "the Age of Chiefs," – as he calls the era prior to the formation of the monarchy -- the Kuba competed for territory with others who had crossed the Sankuru such as the Ngongo, the Ngoonde, the Shoowa, and the Kel. Vansina implies, but does not boldly claim, that the competition for territory lent impetus to political centralization and the formation of chieftancies. When turning to "the Age of Kings," Vansina notes that MboMboosh and Mboong a Leeng led the Kuba in wars against the Pyaang, Kote, Cwa and Luba; he never places warfare at the center of his analysis, however. A close reading of his account suggests a possible reason: so rich and powerful were the Kuba that they had little need to fight.

The Kuba established a "large kingdom that was generally peaceful contrasted with the insecurity that became more and more prevalent elsewhere," Vansina (1978) writes (p. 165). The kingdom grew, he notes, not only because its borders expanded but also because people migrated to it from elsewhere. The "ascendancy" of the Kuba, he adds, "was due in large part to the continuing process of fission in other kingdoms" (Vansina 1978, p. 164). The Pyaang did not long remain a serious threat, he notes; rather they "fell apart" (Vansina 1978, p. 162). Perhaps, one might think, the enemies of the Kuba fractured because they could not compete.

Those who held power among the Kuba thus devised strategies that proved winning in the contested terrain of Central Africa. They secured themselves politically, in part by promoting their nation's prosperity. Their polity endured while others collapsed.

While Vansina's depiction of interstate conflict is muted, his description of the internal politics of the Kuba is not. He makes clear the extent to which the monarchs faced internal checks to their use of power. Powerful lineages lay claim to the status of aristocrats, he states; and the aristocrats dominated key councils, where they could, if united, check the king's power and shape his choice of policies. The monarch, Vansina makes clear, sought to penetrate and control these councils. Through intermarriage and favoritism, he sought support from their members. But the aristocrats had interests that differed from his and were often unwilling to be suborned. The monarch's use of power was thus checked. Willing to back policies that provided security and prosperity, those who populated the state councils were abler to resist any effort by the king to use public power for private gain.

Historians of Europe have noted that interstate conflict selected for societies in which power was deployed to foster the creation of wealth. We have seen that in pre-colonial Africa, interstate conflict also led to the extinction of polities: between 1700 and 1900, the number of states in West Africa declined by over a third.. We have also seen that in post-colonial Africa, societies with states were more likely to foster markets, long distance trade, and craft production and more likely as well to create public goods, such as roads, bridges, and canals than were those that lacked centralized political institutions.

Taken together, these observations suggest that while traditional states may well have been violent, they also were developmental.

Discussion

In the 19th Century, Africa was invaded, conquered and occupied.[7] The conquerors were few in number and, to a great degree, reliant upon those whom they had conquered for information, cooperation, and resources. Whatever their theory of rule, most found it useful to rule through established elites. As in the times before the conquest, Africa's elites sought wealth and power. But now they could better satisfy those desires by providing political service than by preparing for war. In other words, they no longer had to promote development in order to survive. Following the partition of Africa, the impulse that earlier and elsewhere had driven those with power to generate growth had been stilled.

Counterarguments

But then, why did Africa fail to develop? What checked the developmental impulse of the African state? Clearly, it was stilled by conquest, something that was not achieved as readily as is commonly assumed. People appear to have forgotten the defeat of the Italians by the Ethiopians in East Africa or of the British by the Zulu in South Africa. They have forgotten as well that the British held the Ashanti military in such high regard

[7] The conquest was not achieved as readily as is commonly assumed. People appear to have forgotten the defeat of the Italians by the Ethiopians in East Africa or of the British by the Zulu in South Africa. They have forgotten as well that the British held the Ashanti military in such high regard that the commanders who defeated them became known as the "Ashanti Ring," and moved rapidly into leading positions in Britain's military. As for their putative technological superiority: European forces in Africa often abandoned machine guns and artillery, rather than having to lug them through Africa's challenging terrain. Their behavior renders more intelligible the Africans decision to foreswear the use of such weapons. What weapons the Africans found useful, they adopted. They purchased and imported breach loading rifles, for example, soon after they had bee issued to armies in Europe.

that the commanders who defeated them became known as the "Ashanti Ring," and moved rapidly into leading positions in Britain's military. As for their putative technological superiority, , pace Hilaire Belloc, European forces in Africa often abandoned their Maxim guns, rather than having to lug them through Africa's challenging terrain; and Africans were able to purchase and import modern weapons – breach loading rifles; for example – soon after their adoption by armies in Europe. The closeness of the contest provides an indication of the power of indigenous states.

Other factors were clearly at play, however. One was slavery; a second was the lack of modern technology. The presence of the first made it profitable to use power to compel rather than to encourage effort while the absence of the second lowered the returns that effort would yield.

Elementary reasoning suggests that under most circumstances, slave economies will be less productive than those based on free labor.[8] Not only are the incentives to expend effort low, given that labor is highly taxed; so too are incentives to innovate, given that the majority of those engaged in production will fail to secure the benefits. Empirical confirmation comes from the work of economic historians, and, in particular, those who compare the economies of the northern portions of North America, where labor was free, and those of the Caribbean, South America and the southern states of North America, where slavery prevailed. (Engerman and Sokoloff 1997; Acemoglu, Johnson et al. 2001; Acemoglu, Robsinson et al. 2001; Nunn 2008).

[8] Where teams are more productive than isolated individuals, however, a given quantity of labor may yield greater output when closely – and coercively – supervised. Fogel, R. and S. Engerman (1974). Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery. New York, W.W.Norton.

As documented by Lovejoy (1983), Thornton (1999), Manning (1982), and others, monarchs, princes, and heads of state in Africa presided over polities that not only promoted commerce and produced public goods, but also seized and enslaved other human beings. Some they shipped abroad; others they sold domestically or settled on plantations, compelling them to feed and provision the royals, officials, soldiers, bureaucrats, and political hangers-on. Pre-colonial African states may have mobilized power to promote economic development; but, in labor markets at least, they employed it to extract and forcefully to redistribute.

Table 11 Near Here

When probing the reasons for the absence of industry, it is useful to turn to Mokyr's (2008) discussion of the institutional and cultural setting for scientific innovation in 18th Century England. In contrast to the patterns of exclusion that characterized many British institutions, those engaged in the natural sciences created societies that were open; in pursuit of knowledge, people from different social classes met to discuss, to demonstrate, and to appraise. Their efforts focused on fields that promised human improvement: botany, soil and animal sciences, navigation, medicine, and astronomy. As important as the technical innovations that they fostered, Mokyr (2008) argues, were the principals that they adopted. Knowledge, they recognized, was best pursued socially. By the 18th Century, where there were Englishmen, there were societies that held public meetings where new findings were reported and correspondence with other societies read and discussed.

In a brilliant essay, Mudimbe and Appiah (1993) probe the creation of knowledge within African societies. There they too find skepticism, interrogation, and experimentation: key steps in the verification of propositions and the testing of hypotheses. What is missing, they argue, is verification. Drawing on Goody (1986), Mudimbe and Appiah stress the significance of literacy; without writing, they argue, it is impossible to stake a claim or to record a method such that it could be verified. It is therefore impossible to prove oneself right someone else wrong. Innovation, competition, and destruction – i.e. economic progress – is therefore slowed.

As Mudimbe and Appiah note, some artisans in Africa in fact achieved high levels of technical proficiency. Among them numbered the iron workers, who refined and smelted ores to a degree that matched or exceeded what had been achieved in the west prior to the industrial revolution. Rather than publicly exhibiting their technologies and subjecting them to investigation, however, the iron workers jealously hoarded their knowledge. Ritually, they set themselves apart; often, they married endogamously, forming a separate caste. Rather than broadcasting their knowledge, they clothed it in mystery. Theirs was the code of the guild rather than of the scientific society.

When the Europeans conquered Africa, then, they encountered societies that, while willing and able to fight, lacked an industrial base and the cultural practices that would foster its creation.

Conclusion

The two counterarguments resonate with many of the standard accounts of Africa's underdevelopment. There is truth in both of them, of course. But here I have advanced a new claim. The imperial peace is commonly viewed as offering a respite from the misery of warfare and slavery. It is held to be one of Europe's principal contributions to Africa's development. I have argued the contrary. The imperial peace dismantled relationships that in other times and places tempered the use of power, rendering those who possessed it economically productive. Imperial rule left ample opportunities in place for political elites to employ power for self-aggrandizement. If power can be employed to protect or prey upon the creation of wealth, then the imperial peace may have tipped the balance in favor of the latter. When security does not depend on prosperity, the developmental impulse is stilled among those who rule.

Figure 1

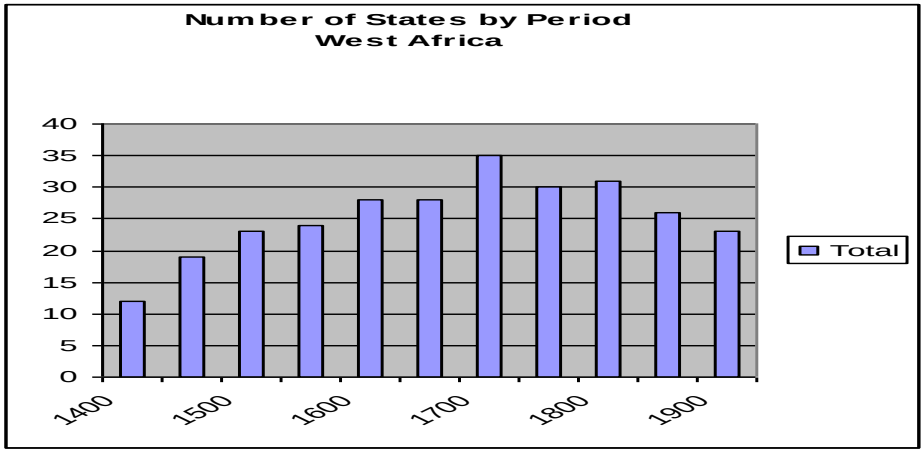
Number of States by Period
West Africa
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1400
1500
1600
1700
1800
1900
Total

Figure 2

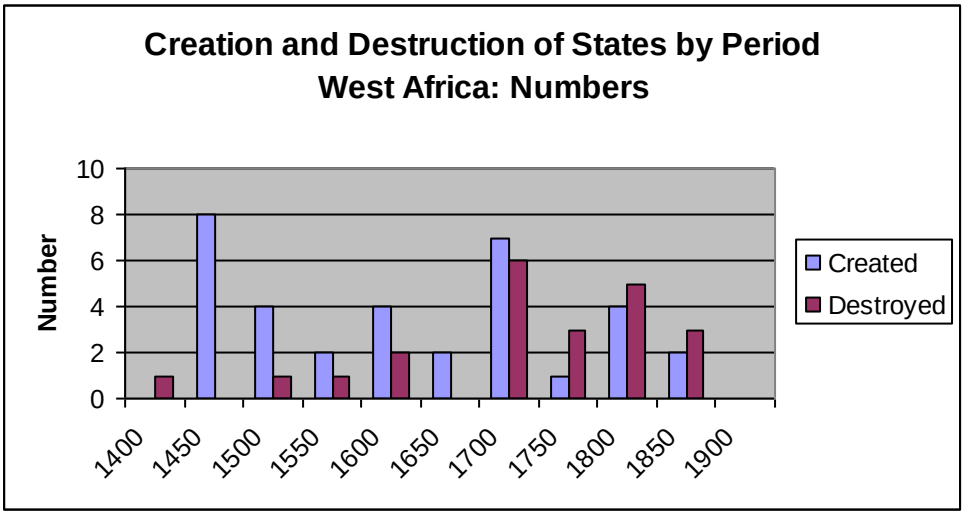
Creation and Destruction of States by Period
West Africa: Numbers
Number
10
8
6
4
2
0
1400
1450
1500
1550
1600
1650
1700
1750
1800
1850
1900
Created
Destroyed

Table 1

Human Relation Area Files

Society	Pages of Documentation	Society	Pages of Documentation
Bambara	1127	Chagga	1986
Dogon	1132	Ngondo	1474
Mossi	942	Pygmies	1350
Mande	605	Azande	3264
Tallensi	964	Mongo	773
Ashanti	3523	Rundi	1314
Katab	352	Mbundu	847
Nupe	856	Bemba	830
Tiv	2891	Ila	998
Yoruba	1637	Lozi	1635
Fang	1117	Tonga	1616
Nuer	1541	Ngoni	1123
Shilluck	1073	Thonga	1231
Ganda	2261	Yao	555
Dorobo	354	Bushmen	1259
Kikuyu	1950	Hottentot	1339
Luo	463	Lovedu	455
Masai	2085	Tanala	354

Note: The names are those chosen by the Human Relations Area Files.

Source: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 57.

Table 2

Table 2: Feuding and Political Structure (Percent "Yes")					
	Kinship	Chiefs	Monarch	Central Bureaucracy	
				Present	Absent
Report of Feuds?	89	78	23	27	72

Note: N = 28.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 45.

Table 3: Economic Activity and Political Structure (Percent "Yes")					
	Kinship	Chiefs	Monarch	Central Bureaucracy	
Presence of:				Present	Absent
Market Centers?	15	31	54	58	42
Long Distance Trade?	0	45	55	56	44
Craft Specialists?	21	25	54	57	60
Private Investors?	0	33	67	50	48

Note: N = 31-33.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 44, 46..

Table 4

	Table 4	
	Military Forces	
	Local	National
Presence of:		
Market Centers?		
% Yes	15	31
Long Distance Trade?		
% Yes	13	40
Craft Specialists?		
% Yes	12	42
Private Investors?		
% Yes	15	46
Roads?		
% Yes	27	50
Bridges?		
% Yes	0	20
Pontoons?		
% Yes	7	33
Canals?		
% Yes	13	20

Note: N = 31-33.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 44, 46..

Table 5

Table 5: Public Goods and Political Structure (Percent "Yes")					
	Kinship	Chiefs	Monarch	Central Bureaucracy	
Presence of:				Present	Absent
Roads?	0	20	75	88	14
Bridges?	0	0	22	40	0
Pontoons?	0	0	50	50	10
Canals?	0	11	33	40	5

Note: N = 26 - 30.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 50.

Table 6

	Table 6	
	Military Forces	
	Local	National
Presence of:		
Roads?		
% Yes	27	50
Bridges?		
% Yes	0	20
Pontoons?		
% Yes	7	33
Canals?		
% Yes	13	20

Note: N = 29 - 30.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 44.

Table 7

Table 7: Political Structures and Warfare (Percent)			
External Warfare	Stateless	Chieftaincies	Centralized States
Yearly	33	60	60
Common/Occasional	33	40	40
Rare	33	0	0
N	5	5	5

Source: Standard Cross-Cultural Sample

Table 8

Table 8: Political Structures and Political Trajectory (Percent)			
Boundaries and Population	Stateless	Chieftaincies	Centralized States
Expanding	20	56	60
Stable	20	11	20
Decreasing	60	33	20
N	10	9	5

Source: Standard Cross-Cultural Sample

Table 9

Table 9: Economic Inequality and Political Structure (Percent "Yes")			
Do Monarchs or chiefs possess			
Superior		More Numerous	
Houses?	Clothing?	Livestock?	Slaves
66	59	58	59

Note: N = 32 – 35.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 56.

Table 10

	Table 10: Political Checks and Political Structure (Percent)		
Are there:		Is there an Aristocracy?	
Policy Councils?		Yes	No
	Yes	60	15
	No	40	15
Independent Courts?			
	Yes	93	31
	No	7	69

Note: N = 28.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 57.

Table 11

Table 11: Slave Trading and Political Structure (Percent "Yes")					
	Kinship	Chiefs	Monarch	Central Bureaucracy	
				Present	Absent
Engaged in slave trade?	0	22	78	75	17

Note: N = 31 – 34.

Source: Data from Human Relation Area Files: Bates, R. (1983). Essays on the Political Economy of Rural Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 51.

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