

## Chapter 31

# African Empires in the Twentieth Century: Designing Assessments at Global, Imperial, and National Levels

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Empires have come and gone for millennia. They have prospered for as briefly as a decade or as long as a few centuries, then collapsing or giving way to new dynasties. Their lingering cultural traces come to be incorporated into later waves of imperial expansion and decay. Historical debate cycles along with the fluctuation of imperium: chroniclers praise the founders of regimes, condemn the missteps of later rulers, and despair at the end of empire; critics challenge imperial chroniclers from the viewpoint of subaltern classes or conquered peoples. Overall, the question remains the old one: *cui bono*—who has benefited from empire?

### Framework and Method of Assessment

This essay focuses on twentieth-century Africa, a large and populous region for which the experiences of conquest, imperial rule, decolonization, and neocolonial marginalization were arguably the most extreme of any continent. I pose a simple question: was African empire of economic benefit? If so, to whom?

The question, in simple form, should yield a broad response. It rapidly becomes clear, however, that a broad response must be complex rather than simple. A common solution to this complexity has been for analysts to adopt arbitrary and biased perspectives, yielding partial and oversimplified results. Another response to the complexity has been simply to cease studying the question.<sup>1</sup> The approach proposed here is an introductory design for an adequately complex analysis. It aims to locate the complexities, to become familiar with them, and seeks to draw out of them some predominant explanatory factors that yield a clear interpretative response to the general question. One cannot be sure that pre-

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1. For a partial approach to the question, centered on defense of the imperial order in Africa, see L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *Burden of Empire: An Appraisal of Western Colonialism in Africa South of the Sahara* (New York: Praeger, 1967). Debate on empire in Africa generally subsided in the 1990s.

dominant explanatory factors will emerge, but study of the issue at the global level provides what is arguably the best chance to identify the most important interactions.

New frameworks of analysis have arisen that enable us to explore this ancient dynamic with a new specificity. In particular, we now have economic analysis, world-historical study, and area studies. Economic analysis provides us with theory-backed economic questions and relationships, identifies relevant data, and suggests methodological procedures.<sup>2</sup> World-historical study focuses attention on connections across space as well as connections of local and global patterns, to scrutinize the full range of empire and its implications. Area studies analysis ensures attention to the cultural and historical specificities of the African terrain. With these new frameworks and the tools of each, we are positioned to explore the economic significance of empire at greater depth and with enlarged breadth.

The principal dimensions of a comprehensive analysis of African empire in global context include the geographic loci of the analysis, the temporal changes in imperial relations, shifting patterns in various economic sectors, the logical framework of analysis (including the social perspective of the analyst), the possible alternative scenarios, and the data available for analysis.

In spatial perspective, this study outlines an assessment of the economic effects of empire in twentieth-century Africa at three different scales: global, imperial, and national or territorial. It asks, therefore, who benefited from empire at the level of the colonial territory; who benefited from empire at the level of the entire empire (or, alternatively, at the metropolitan core of empire); and, most broadly, who benefited from empire at the level of the world as a whole. To restate the last of these questions: did empires, in the aggregate, add to the wealth and economic progress of the world?

Focusing the time frame on the twentieth century complicates the analysis somewhat, as African empires grew and shrank and territories underwent annexation or gained independence during the 1900s. To simplify the complexity of temporal change, this overview distinguishes three periods in the recent history of African empire: the immediate precolonial era from 1850 to 1890; the colonial era from 1900 to 1940; and the postcolonial or neo-colonial era from 1960 to 2000. The transitional moments separating these eras are excluded from this version of the analysis; one could also identify adjoining or even overlapping periods for analysis, and this might yield somewhat different interpretations of African empire.<sup>3</sup>

The framework of analysis, in order to consider the range of possible benefits of empire, should consider empires from multiple standpoints. For this reason, three different tests of the benefits of empire are considered. First is *cost-benefit analysis*, which traces economic flows among units within the imperial system. Second is the study of *growth and welfare*, through comparing indexes of health, education, and economic output among territories. Third is *systemic analysis*, which focuses on functional relationships among units: that is, one can envision the world economy as a system with empires as subsystems, paired with an analysis of the functioning of individual imperial systems, including colonies as subsystems. These three tests of empire provide results, respectively, on the

2. The three procedures for analysis are microeconomics, macroeconomics, and political economy.

3. The 1890s were the era of conquest and establishment of African colonies; the 1940s were dominated by war and postwar reconstruction; African colonial rule of the 1950s was influenced by the postcolonial experience of Asian nations. Quite a different periodization would contrast the era of economic growth from 1947 to 1971 (accompanied by but probably not principally caused by decolonization) with the periods of relative stagnation before and after that period.

flows of resources among imperial units, the significance of those flows in influencing growth and welfare, and the functional relationships among imperial units. In addition, analytic attention to these various dynamics of empire makes it easier to consider empire from various social perspectives.<sup>4</sup>

Further, the various specific sectors of economic life deserve distinctive analysis. The effects of empire are likely to have varied in agriculture, industry, mining, commerce, transport, government, finance, money, health, and education. A later section of this study offers a preliminary exploration of these sectors and the range of their experience under imperial dominion.

So far, the plan is to ask who gained from African empire at territorial, imperial, and global levels. We have complicated matters by proposing to use three tests (cost-benefit analysis, growth and welfare, and systemic analysis) for the assessment; and we have acknowledged the additional complications of a century's transformation from colonial to neocolonial political relations as well as the range of economic activities within numerous and differing economic sectors. In total, this provides us with a prodigious number of economic variables.

Here is a one-paragraph sketch of a research design intended to assess the effects of African empire. The analyst is to compare the economies of precolonial informal empire (1850–1890), colonial rule (1900–1940), and neocolonial dominance (1960–2000).<sup>5</sup> These economic histories should be evaluated against the counterfactual of a world economy without empires, in which states grow no larger than national states, though the analysis should allow for transnational corporations to arise. For each of the spatial levels under consideration (African territories, metropolitan states, whole empires, and the global economy) the intention is to conduct three parallel analyses, estimating global costs and benefits; estimating global growth and welfare; and assessing alternatives in structure of the global economic system. The specifics of these analyses will include estimating flows of trade, output, and income, accounting for price changes in the various situations.

Based on this statement of the framework of analysis for empires in the world economy, the remaining four sections of this study apply various aspects of the framework. The second section explores the set of assumptions and counterfactuals associated with each of the above criteria for the analysis. The third section addresses past efforts at assessing African empire. The penultimate section assesses empire at the territorial and metropolitan levels through discussion of various sectors of African economies. The concluding section leaps to the global level and offers judgments on the significance of Africa for the world economy.

## Assumptions and Counterfactuals, Old and New

For much of the twentieth century, social-scientific analysis of Africa contended with questions of African exceptionalism. In various ways, it was assumed that the logic of

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4. These perspectives could include those in African colonies, those in the metropolises, those in colonies elsewhere, those in other empires (including non-African), and those outside empires, as well as distinctions in class or wealth in any of these.

5. The period 1900–1940 was the establishment and development of colonial rule; 1940–50 was wartime plus the beginnings of the postwar boom; 1950–60 was continued boom time and the transition to independence. Clearly, the characteristics of decades were sufficiently distinctive that the definition of periods will have a significant impact on the results of the test. To be properly global, the analysis must control for the existence of socialist states (1920–90).

human activity and economic change in Africa was sufficiently different from “modern” society to warrant separate categories and separate analyses for African affairs. The various assumptions included African genetic inferiority, inferior land quality, debilitating disease environment, target-focused economic rationality, collective rather than individual motivation, inferior levels of knowledge and education, dualistic economies, and so forth. After a century of social-scientific debate we can safely dismiss most of the old exceptionalisms. The genetic demonstration of African origins of homo sapiens and, more to the point, the short time span and extraordinary genetic unity of our species, render assertions of major differences in inherent intelligence more ludicrous than ever. Nor is productivity of African land the basic problem: the land that was good enough to start the human species on its way may be a bit worn, and its soils may be closer in fertility to those of Australia than to those of Ukraine, but they have been able, with exceptions, to feed a population that has increased sixfold in the past century. The African disease environment is indeed a difficult one, but it responds as do others to investment in medical care. The thesis that African social institutions provide an impediment to economic growth weakens every time it is tested.

We are left with a well-documented phenomenon—the persistent economic weakness of a continent with one-eighth of the world’s population—but without much in the way of essential or uniquely African characteristics on which to rely in explaining it. An obvious alternative, and one fitting the growing interest in economic interactions and systems, is to seek an explanation of African economic history in the context of the global economy. Why should a smoothly functioning world economy leave Africa at its margins?

Academic analysis long ago left this issue on the back burner rather than treat it as an important to the understanding of the world economy. Contemporary and historical African statistics are weak, as are the actual levels of production and trade, so it has been simpler to leave Africa out of the global system, as if it really were not there. Symbolic of this approach has been the statistic—bandied about in recent years—suggesting that the GDP of Belgium (with a population of 10 million) exceeds that of the African continent (with a population of 700 million and a surface area a thousand times that of Belgium). The implication is that Belgians are 70 times more productive than Africans.<sup>6</sup> If the calculation were redone in terms of caloric intake, it would show a great excess of African over Belgian consumption: that is, Africans may fall far short in production for global markets, but they do feed and reproduce themselves and more. By implication, African production of food and other goods and services is huge, as reflected in the continent’s level of reproduction, but much of the output is not measured in GDP or is valued at low domestic prices. The Belgian-African comparison is thus as much a challenge to the validity of economic accounting as it is to African productivity. But it is widely taken at face value, so that African economies are commonly treated not as part of the global economy but as having been on their own, as isolated appendages or even external to the world economy.

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6. The World Bank’s portrayal of the African economy as equivalent to that of Belgium is as follows: “Progress in regional integration is linked to progress in trade and private sector development. Regional integration is especially important for a continent whose total GDP is equivalent to the GDP of Belgium, whose median-size economies are small and fragmented (about US\$2 billion in average size), and of which fifteen countries are landlocked and dependent on trade-friendly regional mechanisms to prosper.” World Bank Group, “Africa, Regional Brief,” <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,menuPK:258652~pagePK:146732~piPK:146828~theSitePK:258644,00.html>.

This symbolic juxtaposition of Belgium and Africa, however, arises from a postcolonial discourse (over diverging recent growth rates) rather than from assessment of Africa under British, French, or Belgian rule. Such comparisons of GDP did not take place during the era of colonialism in Africa.<sup>7</sup>

These tales of the assumptions and hypothetical alternatives underlying the assessment of African economic life should be sufficient to confirm that the assumptions about normative behavior—or the expectations of what other directions history might have taken—are central to the completion of an analytic assessment. That is, given the existing historical record on Africa and empire, what alternative scenarios might reasonably have emerged?

One set of hypothetical alternatives is a twentieth-century Africa that was not under imperial rule. For instance, African monarchies might have gained dominion and diplomatic recognition, as was the case in Ethiopia, and as was the case for a while in Zanzibar, Asante, Dahomey, Madagascar, and Morocco. Another alternative is that African oligarchies may have gained power, as in Liberia, and as was attempted by Western-educated oligarchies in Sierra Leone, the Egba state of Abeokuta, and in Cape Province: such groups envisioned the kernel of nations that might have developed along, say, Latin American lines. Thirdly, private and semipublic companies, such as the British South Africa Company and German East Africa Company, might have lasted longer, though in practice they were systematically absorbed by European states.

A different sort of alternative is that the conquering powers might have extended rights of citizens to Africans under their rule, and might have set standards of law and public service similar to those in the metropole. Such examples of incorporation were not unknown, as they took place in some U.S. and French territories. Corporations do seem to have wanted a certain sort of legal and social framework in African territories: Belgian investment in Congo shot up once the Belgian state took over its rule from King Leopold's capital-starved personal empire.

Identifying relevant counterfactuals is just as important for the late twentieth century. At one extreme, one could imagine the continuation of colonial rule; at another, one could imagine that African political unions and economic unions had been established from the 1960s. With regard to international trade and monetary systems, one could imagine regimes that had provided African states with lower prices for imported goods, with higher prices for exports, or with protection for infant industries. The underlying conceptual point is that any analytic conclusion is advanced in comparison to an alternative and counterfactual historical outcome, and that these counterfactuals are best made explicit.

## Previous Interpretations: A Century of Empire and Economy

Assessments of empire in Africa, as these changed over the course of the twentieth century, reworked the narrative of the African past. This section provides a concise review of the literature on African empire, emphasizing how it developed, the variations in em-

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7. Of course, one may ask whether colonial-era economic life contributed to subsequent limitations on economic growth.

phases and controversies over time, and the changing picture of African empire that emerged.

In 1800 Africa was innocent of empire except for Napoléon's control of Egypt, Ottoman suzerainty over the Maghrib coastline, Portuguese enclaves at various points on the coast, and the Cape, newly seized from the Netherlands by Britain. Moroccan, Ethiopian, and Sokoto states could claim the status of modest empires. British and French interests expanded at various points along the coast. External slave trade declined to the west, expanded to the north and east, and agricultural exports expanded throughout the nineteenth century. Dramatic changes in politics, enslavement, and the rise of "legitimate commerce," few of which were closely tied to issues of empire, until 1880.

After 1880 European powers turned to aggressively claiming and annexing large tracts of African territory. By 1900 virtually all of Africa was under colonial rule. Authors of the early twentieth century expressed mixed feelings about this imperial takeover. Thus E. D. Morel, a critic of precolonial slavery in Nigeria, rapidly turned to justifying the new British regime in Northern Nigeria, though it did not free the slaves; meanwhile he put even more energy into condemning Leopold II's exploitation of the Congo.<sup>8</sup> By the time of World War I, all African subjects were expected to be loyal to the empire governing the territory in which they lived.

By the 1920s and 1930s, such social questions declined in visibility, and attention focused instead on an expanding colonial development literature. The interwar years were the high point of colonial domination of Africa; the aftermath of World War I and the disastrous Great Depression encouraged the proclamation of great campaigns for colonial development, yet constraints in colonies and metropolises alike limited those projects. Alan McPhee's study was outstanding for its detail and its optimism on the collaboration of West Africans and British rulers.<sup>9</sup> Albert Sarraut was equally optimistic but focused simply on French initiative in identifying public works that would be financed by African taxes and constructed by African labor. Raymond Leslie Buell and W. Keith Hancock wrote more problem-oriented studies of the intensification of empire. S. Herbert Frankel published an assessment of capital investment in Africa, centering on the mining industry in South Africa.<sup>10</sup> Overall, these imperial studies portrayed dramatic economic advance under European rule.

While Africa's colonial era continued through the 1940s and 1950s, I believe that global considerations, along both political and economic lines, suggest one modification of the 1900–1960 periodization of African empire: analysis should draw a sharp line at 1945. The imperial system changed greatly because the German and Japanese war efforts were ultimately unsuccessful and because almost all Asian colonies gained independence immediately after the war. Empire, from 1945 to 1960, meant Africa above all, so that comparing the post-1945 period with the pre-1945 period should show something about the changing nature of the imperial system. The fiscally expansive post-1945 policies for Africa resulted not only from Keynesian theory and the postwar economic expansion, but also because of independence for India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and other Asian colonies. In the

8. E. D. Morel, *Red Rubber: The Story of the Rubber Slave Trade Flourishing on the Congo in the Year of Grace 1906* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); and *Nigeria: Its Peoples and Its Problems* (London: Cass, 1968).

9. Alan McPhee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa*, 2nd ed., with a new introduction by Antony G. Hopkins (London: Cass, 1971).

10. Albert Sarraut, *La Mise en Valeur des Colonies françaises* (Paris: Payot, 1923); Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1928); W. Keith Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1937–1942); S. Herbert Frankel, *Capital Investment in Africa: Its Course and Effects* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).



1940s and 1950s, postwar concerns for economic recovery were mixed with concern for the welfare of the colonized. P. T. Bauer, from his Nigerian base, argued vigorously against the policies of marketing boards set up in the 1930s that held producer prices low on the pretext of providing price stability, and diverted funds to government investment on the argument that large-scale public investment would be more productive than investment by producers.<sup>11</sup> Overall, the combination of paternalistic programs of investment in infrastructure and Keynesian programs to expand employment and consumption did encourage African economic growth from 1947, though rising agricultural prices were perhaps more influential.

The era from 1960 to 1975 was a time of national independence, the last years of rapid economic growth, and wars of national liberation. From 1963 to 1975, the remaining African territories (Portuguese colonies plus British territories in eastern and southern Africa) struggled for independence, as the world economy slowed. Major advances in health and education characterized this era.<sup>12</sup> With the initial success of African independence, the question arose as to the inevitability and value of colonial rule. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, in a 1961 study of Victorian imperialism, concluded that British imperial ventures in Africa were determined more by accident than by ambition. As they argued, the local legal and monetary systems of the independent African governments—which had worked adequately for Africans and for visiting merchants well into the nineteenth century—ran into trouble in a late-nineteenth-century era of expanding commerce. Under these circumstances, compounded by the danger of confrontation with other imperial powers, the “official mind” of imperial power could find itself moving unexpectedly to confirm the annexation and conquest of overseas territories.<sup>13</sup>

Robinson and Gallagher launched a wider debate on African empire in Africa’s early national era. The partisans of empire defended imperial accomplishments; the critics of empire condemned imperial waste and exploitation. Lewis Gann and Peter Duignan, in *Burden of Empire*, gave the strongest defense of the resulting colonial regimes, arguing that the regimes had developed and civilized Africa at considerable cost to the metropolises. Henri Brunschwig and D. K. Fieldhouse, in more nuanced analyses of African colonialism, nonetheless emphasized the positive contributions of the European regimes.<sup>14</sup> The debate on empire spilled into the expanding political economy literature of the time—for instance, through early work by Samir Amin and Giovanni Arrighi.<sup>15</sup> Amin, in this early work, argued that European colonial policies blocked the development of their West African colonies.<sup>16</sup>

A. G. Hopkins’s 1973 *Economic History of West Africa* became arguably the most influential of these assessments of empire. In a work that presented the first long-term, comprehensive overview in African economic history, Hopkins focused the central two

11. P. T. Bauer, *West African Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

12. For a contrary view, agronomist René Dumont published a forceful critique of the initial policies and economic paths of newly independent African nations: Dumont, *L’Afrique noire est mal partie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962).

13. Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

14. Gann and Duignan, *Burden of Empire*; Henri Brunschwig, *French Colonialism, 1871–1914: Myths and Realities*, trans. William Granville Brown (New York: Praeger, 1966); D. K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire, 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

15. Samir Amin, *L’Afrique de l’Ouest bloquée: l’économie politique de la colonisation, 1880–1970* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1971); Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

16. Jacques Marsseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d’un divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984); Samir Amin, *L’Afrique de l’Ouest bloquée*.

chapters on an analysis of the rise and functioning of empire in West Africa: the first of these argued for the economic basis of imperial conquest; the second treated colonial West Africa as an “open economy,” in which the interregional flow of primary goods, guided by influences from beyond the region, set the terms of economic growth. Hopkins’s analysis ended at 1960, though he hinted that postindependence economic policies sought to establish a “closed economy” with national monetary systems and economic policies.<sup>17</sup> While this was the broadest investigation of empire to date, with its West African focus the study did not address questions of the overall contribution of empire to the world economy.

In another large-scale investigation, Boris Maldant and Maxim Haubert, relying on French bureaucracy in Africa during the period of most consistent growth, 1947–66, argued through econometric modeling that colonial capital investment was productive in expanding exports, which, in turn, were the main engine for domestic economic growth.<sup>18</sup> My impression is that these and other analysts, in focusing on colonial investment in African infrastructure, severely underestimated the contributions of forced investment—not contributions from the metropole but payments made by Africans through underpaid labor and through taxes that went to direct allocations and to paying off bonds.<sup>19</sup>

Colonial African statistical records were fairly well set up by 1900: the colonial regimes collected and published returns on taxes, other state revenue, government expenditure, and foreign (usually overseas) trade. Postcolonial economic planning, managed initially by colonial officials and soon dominated by foreign advisers, was mainly an extension of colonial-era public works projects. Data on African population and national income did not become adequate until 1960, and in some cases well after that date.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the colonial-era records on African economies contain six decades of relatively consistent data that, if energetically explored with modern databases and computational techniques, should yield a valuable record of economic life for the early and mid-twentieth century. There remains a need to link colonial and postindependence data.<sup>21</sup>

There was a moment in the 1950s and 1960s when comprehensive studies of African economies, crossing the centuries, were considered.<sup>22</sup> But disciplinary divisions triumphed, and three isolated fields of study emerged: colonial economic history, precolonial economic history, and postcolonial economic development. Economic development and economic history literatures for Africa began and have remained separate: contributors to the

17. A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973). In retrospect, it may be argued that “closed economies” in Africa had failed by 1980, and that external forces again governed African economies.

18. B. Maldant and M. Haubert, *Croissance et conjuncture dans de l’Ouest africain* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973).

19. Patrick Manning, “Analyzing the Costs and Benefits of Colonialism,” *African Economic History Review* 1, no. 2 (1974): 15–22.

20. For an authoritative study of African populations since 1950, see Dominique Tabutin and Bruno Schoumaker, “La Démographie de l’Afrique au sud du Sahara des années 1950 aux années 2000: Synthèse des changements et bilan statistique,” *Population* 59 (2004): 521–621.

21. D. Houghton Hobart, *The South African Economy* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1964). For an attempt to show the feasibility of quantitative economic history linking precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras, see Patrick Manning Manning, “African Economic Growth and the Public Sector: Lessons from Historical Statistics of Cameroon,” *African Economic History* 19 (1990–91): 135–70.

22. Polly Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa Framers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Hill, *Population, Prosperity, and Poverty: Rural Kano, 1900 and 1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Ester Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth; the Economics of Agrarian Change Under Population Pressure* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1966); Boserup, *Woman’s Role in Economic Development* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970).



macroeconomic development literature assumed that history before 1960 was of no relevance to planning; contributions to the economic history literature were microeconomic, descriptive, and institutional, and restricted to the period before 1960. Nor did African empire play a significant part in the thriving field of economic development—that literature, focused on modernization, agricultural development, and vent-for-surplus, treated colonial Africa as prehistory.

The beginnings of African national income accounting came in the 1950s, and only rarely were retrospective estimates calculated. There were significant early efforts at national-income analysis of colonial African territories by Phyllis Deane, Robert Szeszewska, Gerald Helleiner, D. Hobart Houghton, and Maldant and Haubert.<sup>23</sup> These efforts were not pursued systematically; and as a result, African economic policy analysis remains based strictly on the period since 1960, giving no allowance for the possibility that there might exist long-term economic trends. In addition, it is remarkable to consider the list of major scholars in economic history who began their work on Africa, but moved beyond Africa for their later work. In addition to Deane and Helleiner, this list includes Hopkins, Amin, and Arrighi, as well as Immanuel Wallerstein, Robert Baldwin, A. J. H. Latham, and others.<sup>24</sup> This may mean that the African experience is of wider importance in global economic analysis than is often realized, but it may also mean that the study of African economic life, while of great interest, has been systematically difficult to carry out.

In the economically disastrous 1970s and 1980s, postindependence Africa ended up with weak money systems, low prices for exports and high prices for imports, huge debts facilitated by bank clubs and international advisers tied to even greater interest payments after 1973, followed by structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that cut back public services.<sup>25</sup> Economic unions were able to proceed elsewhere; those in Africa were frustrated by internal and especially external pressures. From 1975 to 2000 African economic growth stagnated. Neoliberal ideology came to dominate banks and international organizations, and SAPs limited and reversed public-sector investments.

Especially for African territories, one may argue that while the returns from conquest were not high, the cost of conquest was low. Daniel Headrick's studies of the late pre-colonial era emphasized the shifting balance of technology and its impact in expanding European empire.<sup>26</sup> Cain and Hopkins linked such technological arguments to the economic arguments that Hopkins had earlier made for West Africa, and developed a broad analysis of the expansion of British Empire to 1914.<sup>27</sup> In the study that comes closest to

23. Phyllis Deane, *Colonial Social Accounting* [addressing Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Robert Szeszewska, *Structural Changes in the Economy of Ghana, 1891–1911* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965); Gerald K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government, and Economic Growth in Nigeria* (Homewood, IL: R. D. Irwin, 1966); D. Hobart Houghton, *The South African Economy* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1964); Boris Maldant and Maxim Haubert, *Croissance et conjoncture dans l'Ouest africain* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973). See also Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

24. Szeszewska produced promising work, but died at an early age. R. Szeszewska, *Structural Change in the Economy of Ghana, 1891–1911* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965).

25. Gerald K. Helleiner, *International Economic Disorder: Essays in North-South Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

26. Daniel Headrick, *Tools of Empire: Technology and Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); and *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

27. P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "The Political Economy of British Expansion Overseas, 1750–1914," *Economic History Review*, n.s., 33 (1980): 463–90; Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2002).

the research design proposed here, Jacques Marseille argued that the French Empire—in Africa and elsewhere—served as a drag on the national economy of France despite widespread claims to the contrary.<sup>28</sup> My own contribution to this literature advanced the argument that both the precolonial slave trade and the colonial state were detrimental to the economy of Dahomey.<sup>29</sup> African empire did not become significant in the cliometric literature, which was also expanding at the same time—perhaps because empire was a macroeconomic issue debated at a time when most hypothesis-testing focused on microeconomic questions.

Another analysis of empire developed with a focus on Kenya, especially in the light of land struggles and the Mau Mau Rebellion. These studies, which centered on the colonial era, were the most thorough applications of the underdevelopment framework to Africa.<sup>30</sup> In any case, after about 1985 scholars of all viewpoints wandered away from this discussion without specifying or analyzing clearer questions.<sup>31</sup>

28. Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d'un divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984).

29. In *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960*, I offered the following perplexed assessment of the early French regime in Dahomey:

In whose interests did the French state rule? In the interest of humanity, claimed those who celebrated the new limits on capital punishment and slavery under the French; yet the *indigénat* continued. In the interest of economic development, read the government tracts; but a third of the taxes were collected only to be sent out of the country. The question becomes more specific, however, if it is rephrased to refer to the constituency of the state rather than to its ideals. At whose command did the colonial state act? Certainly not at the command of its Dahomean subjects. At the command of the French merchants, perhaps? Victor Régis would sadly replay in the negative: his firm had sought French control of Dahomey beginning in the 1840s, but collapsed after a decade of colonial rule. Three possibilities remain. First, the state in Paris and Dakar was an obvious reference point. Yet to have one state act as sole constituency for another state seems incomplete. Second, the French bourgeoisie: that the leading class in France should set policy for its colonies is a sound premise, yet it remains to be shown what specific requests it would have of Dahomey. Third, if these avenues fail, one must conclude that the colonial state had no principal constituency, and acted on its own in response to the interests of individual officials, or in an eclectic reaction to varying pressures from many sources. (162–63)

The empirical record on colonial Dahomey leaves one with unanswered questions about the logic of empire. Taxes rose by a factor of eight from 1893 to 1910, while expenditures rose by a factor of four. A federal government for French West Africa was established in 1905 in Dakar: it confiscated customs duties from the colonies and also sold bond issues. It spent on further military conquest, bought out private railroads, and invested in other public works. In 1910 40 percent of state revenue from Dahomey was spent inside the colony; the rest went to Dakar and France. Fiscal policy in Dahomey remained highly contractive to 1945 and slightly contractive thereafter. Government collected surplus at an estimated 2 percent of GDP in 1893, up to 9 percent in 1903, and exported 2–3 percent of GDP per year to Dakar. In a remarkable episode, export prices fell to one-fifth their previous level from 1928 to 1934, but head taxes, payable in cash, remained unchanged in nominal francs: the result was to denude the population of currency for three years. *Ibid.*, 162–63.

30. Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-colonialism, 1964–1971* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Richard D. Wolff, *The Economics of Colonialism: Britain and Kenya, 1870–1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); G. N. Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite Bourgeoisie, 1905–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Steven Langdon, *Multinational Corporations in the Political Economy of Kenya* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

31. See the following reviews of literature in African economic history: David W. Cohen, "Agenda for African Economic History," *Journal of Economic History* 31 (1971): 208–21; Edward A. Alpers, "Rethinking African Economic History," *Ufahamu* 3 (1973): 97–129; Patrick Manning, "The Prospects for African Economic History: Is Today Included in the Long Run?" *African Studies Review* 30, no. 2 (1988): 49–62.

During Africa's postindependence era as a whole, there were remarkable social transformations and advances: education and literacy expanded dramatically, major urban centers expanded at a remarkable rate, and mortality rates declined rapidly from the 1950s until about 1990. So while weak, corrupt governments and fragmented political communities were central to Africa's difficulties, there was more to economic stagnation than poor government and bad weather. In the late-twentieth-century era of massive, global restructuring of corporations, capital markets, communications, technology, and political communities, African states and communities were consistently weak in the bargaining over prices, regulations, and terms of investments. The formal recognition of African sovereignty eventually allowed Africans to become participants in the governance of the United Nations, the World Bank, and some major corporations. Yet the beginning of the twenty-first century finds Africa with only the most minimal levels of electronic communication and with populations declining in several countries because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.<sup>32</sup>

## Empire at Territorial and Metropolitan Levels: Sectoral Approaches

We turn now to conceptualizing the design for updating previous assessments of empire by pointing toward better-documented and more rigorous approaches at the levels of individual African territories and their metropolitan overlords. At the level of the territory, the aggregate costs and returns of empire, as measured in the colony, include those of the colonial government, the various private firms, and the general population.<sup>33</sup> The fiscal side of territorial government includes tax revenue, government expense, domestic and external transfer payments, and borrowing and repayment; the colonial monetary system included official and unofficial currencies, exchange rates, and the banking system. Private firms include those based in the metropole (their marketing and investment in the colonies), settler firms based in the colonies (their investment, access to land, subsidies received, and their output and profitability), firms active in the colony but based in other colonies or in territories beyond the empire, and native firms (their investment, subsidies received, output and profitability). The immense portion of economic activity beyond that of "firms" includes that of wage-earners (their wages and employment levels), peasants (their access to land and market opportunities), and those providing goods and services in the informal sector—although details in these categories are likely to be poorly documented.

The parallel variables, at the level of the metropole, include the aggregate costs and returns to empire measured within the metropolitan economy (presumably on an an-

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General works in African economic history include the following: McPhee, *Economic Revolution*; Hopkins, *Economic History of West Africa*; J. Forbes Munro, *Africa and the International Economy, 1800–1960* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976); Ralph Austen, *African Economic History* (London: Heinemann, 1987); and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, *A Modern Economic History of Africa* (Dakar: Codesria, 1993). The latter work is restricted to the nineteenth century.

32. This era did bring about some detailed studies of health conditions. See, e.g., Philip D. Curtin, *Disease and Empire: The Health of European Troops in the Conquest of Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

33. The governing elites in the colony, because of both their prestige and their relatively high incomes, had substantial economic influence beyond that noted in the activities of firms.

nual basis), the net costs of imperial government (military cost of conquest, administrative cost of annexation and administration), the costs and returns for private metropolitan business interests, and the costs and returns for the general metropolitan population.

Then, assuming that it becomes possible to measure the above flows of resources between colony and metropole, we have to consider how to measure growth and welfare for colony and metropole, and how to assess the systemic relations among them. For the metropolitan economies, measures have already been developed for national income, economic growth, and welfare in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What remains is to disaggregate these national figures and see the degree to which they depended on flows to and from the colonies. For the colonies, measures of national income and growth have been developed for the period since 1960, but equivalent figures for the period 1900–1960 are incomplete, and few national-income estimates have been constructed for the years before 1900.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, although I argue that a systematic test of imperial balance sheets is feasible, once estimates are developed for the variables identified above, such a test can only be discussed rather than executed here. Instead, in anticipation of a full test, I discuss the research framework for assessing empire with an eclectic review of a range of colonial economic issues. For this review, we seek hints and guidelines for further analytic focus especially through comparison of the three periods proposed above (1850–90, 1900–1940, and 1960–2000), through a comparison of regions that fell within the British and French empires, and with discussion of land, commerce, money, public finance, industry, mining, education, and health.

African agricultural exports—especially palm products, peanuts, and cocoa—expanded at a rapid rate in the late nineteenth century, produced on land held by African producers. Even in the early colonial era, African landowners held on to most of the best agricultural lands, except in South Africa, British East and Central Africa, and Portuguese territories. Imperial campaigns to produce export crops—especially cotton—were poorly designed and had only minimal effect. In the era after 1960, independent African governments appropriated additional lands, though again without great success. The post-1960 expansion of coffee exports relied mostly on peasant producers.

Commerce in the hands of both European merchants and African merchants grew in the nineteenth-century era of “legitimate commerce.” Formal colonialism, however, did more to undermine than to strengthen African commercial elites. After independence, African governments attempted to set up protectionist regimes, but found that the colonial-era firms remained powerful, and that other great commercial powers—notably Japan and the United States—gained important roles in African economies.

Money systems began to change before the establishment of formal colonial rule: Britain’s sterling coin became very important in Africa’s international trade. From 1900, each imperial power imposed its own money, one way or another. Tax receipts (customs duties, head taxes, and fees) rose by at least a factor of four in just over a decade at the start of the twentieth century, and they were payable in imperial currency; thus, African taxpayers were forced to exchange currencies at unfavorable rates. Colonial African government sectors generally comprised a larger portion of the domestic economy than was the case in the metropolises. Nonetheless, a number of French territories collected far more

34. For 1850–90, we have almost no estimates for national income. For 1900–1940, elements of estimates exist for many British territories, for Belgian Congo, and for Benin. For 1960–2000, estimates are those prepared through development agencies.

in tax revenues than they spent within the colony. During the postcolonial era from 1960, former French territories retained the CFA franc, in effect the imperial currency; former British territories set up independent and usually unstable currencies. Postcolonial fiscal policy was expansive during the 1960s: this high-revenue, high-expenditure regime was a continuation of late-colonial development efforts. Economic and ecological crises in the 1970s halted such expansion, and by the 1980s public expenditures were sharply restricted through the intervention of the World Bank and the IMF, which imposed restrictions in the form of structural adjustment programs.

The late nineteenth century, while an era of expanding African commerce, saw little in the way of expanded transportation infrastructure, mining, or industry, with the important exception of diamond and gold mining in South Africa. From 1900 to 1940 the majority of the continent's transportation infrastructure was put into place: ports, narrow-gauge railroads, and a network of trucks and river steamers. Similarly, this era brought substantial investment in mining for gold, copper, and tin. Additional investment took place after World War II under Britain's Colonial Development and Welfare campaign and the French FIDES, supported by the U.S. Marshall Plan.<sup>35</sup> These investments were rarely grants, however: they were loans, to be repaid through African tax payments to colonial governments. In the era after 1960 little international investment came to Africa, except for the productive expansion in the petroleum sector and again in diamonds.

Educational efforts expanded from a low base in nineteenth-century Africa through the efforts of some African communities and through overseas missionary work. In the early twentieth century, colonial states invested modest amounts to prepare a small African elite with basic but not advanced education. Elementary health services were set up for urban areas and in mission stations, but almost no serious investment in tropical medicine took place on the African continent until after 1950. With independence and greater political influence for African constituencies, governments expanded investment in elementary and secondary education and in basic health services. Both health and education services suffered greatly in the African economic downturn from the 1970s; some advanced hospitals and universities were developed, but levels of general health and education remained low.

Comparison of the colonial experience with that of neocolonialism is much easier to conduct now than in earlier years, since the neocolonial situation has now been in existence almost as long as the colonial era, and since we can also compare Africa's colonial situation to the decades of informal empire preceding formal colonialism. In the colonial era, African economic links to Latin American and Indian Ocean trading partners were cut back, as trade became focused on Europe. On the one hand, for the colonial era, especially as measured by official or market prices, the colonies had relatively larger public sectors than did the metropolises, yet they were governed without any political consensus. On the other hand, a comparison of British and French colonies suggests that a smaller European administration may have correlated with better economic performance. Colonial governments, in their agricultural and commercial policies, tended to focus on commodities selected for reasons of imperial policy rather than for profitability or marketability. Thus administrations in British Eastern Nigeria and French Sudan pressed for export of cotton, when the most profitable crop was palm oil and rice, respectively. Colonial administrations held investment in education and health at low levels, and kept wages low

35. The French program of postwar colonial investment, *Fonds pour l'Investissement dans le Développement Economique et Social*, was usually known by its acronym, FIDES, which invoked the Latin term for "faith."



as well—notably the wages of forced or recruited laborers. In a recurring structural link, new policies (e.g., public railways) could be tried out first in the colonies and then in the metropole. With independence, large or federated colonies commonly broke up, thereby posing important historical questions: Why do aggregated empires disaggregate as the colonies gain independence? Why have white settlement colonies been the main exceptions? What have been the economic consequences of the breakup of Indochina, the British Raj, and the French federations in Africa? Exploring these questions will be a significant aspect of imperial historical studies to come.

## African Empire from a Global Standpoint

Africa's continuing poverty and slow economic growth contrast sharply with the experience of other large regions. The task here, however, is not that of finding someone to blame for Africa's economic weakness. We ask what role African colonies played in the imperial system and the larger world economy during three periods from 1850 to 2000 on the assumption that the inherent productivity of Africa's land and population and its potential for growth are not much different than for other regions. The present investigation into research design, I argue, has already moved us ahead by posing the assessment of African empire in more precise detail at the territorial and metropolitan levels. In this section, the approach is extended to emphasize the relevance of two additional levels of assessment: empire as a whole and, especially, the world economy.

While the assessment of whole empires is a relatively straightforward extension of the analyses described above, it is worth emphasizing that it is distinct from and encompassing of the study of the imperial metropole. The Belgian case is interesting, in that the Congo was the entirety of the Belgium's African empire; similarly, African territories were virtually the entirety of the twentieth-century Portuguese empire. But British handling of African territories depended substantially on policies and developments in India and in the dominions. France had a parallel hierarchy in its attention to African territories, with North Africa at the top and Equatorial Africa at the bottom. At a more local level, South African considerations dominated colonial rule for all of southern Africa, as concerns for Côte d'Ivoire governed French policy for much of West Africa. In the early twentieth century, African economies had few global links other than direct ties to Europe. Yet the postcolonial era, with more opening to other markets, did not bring rapid growth for Africa. In general, the analysis of empire one colonial territory or one metropole at a time is likely to miss important interactions among the various units of an empire.

The next step—a big one—is to pose relevant questions on the place of empire in the world economy, to model them appropriately, and to set up a feasible research design for answering them. Modeling should review all the relevant factors, put them in the context of the global economy, and analyze them from several relevant points of view. While this is a tall order, I argue that a global framework may help to resolve two major interpretative riddles: the place of Africa in the world economy, and the place of empires in the world economy. Linking the two questions may draw more attention to each of them, and may provide new insights for exploring them both. Questions on the specific experience and role of the immense, populous, and economically backward continent of Africa may be worked out in tandem with an effort to theorize and analyze all the parts of the global economic system, and get beyond the tendency—still powerful—to analyze the economic high spots and assume that the rest can be safely neglected.



What was the impact of empire in the world economy? Did empires reallocate resources efficiently? Did they speed technological change and economic growth in the imperial centers? Did they contribute positively to the growth and transformation of the world's economic system? Did they engender destructive wars, expropriation, and wasteful concentration of resources, thereby fostering unproductive inequities and slowing economic growth? What were the structures and processes of the global economic system? How did the various parts of the system fit—effectively or ineffectively—into the whole? Was colonial and neocolonial Africa held as some sort of reserve (of labor, land and its resources, or even consumers)? Was there some global systemic malfunction that set artificially high barriers to entry for African producers?

It is actually feasible, I argue, to develop answers to these global questions. Such large-scale historical estimates can be developed out of the conceptual tools of economic history, the mass of available historical data, and the practical skills of economic historians in estimating missing data. Nevertheless, implementing research and analysis at this scale is complex. With four spatial levels, three temporal segments, and three types of test, the analyst has to deal with up to 36 analytic boxes, with numerous territories and empires and economic sectors for each. To these must be added the relevant counterfactuals against which each of these cases is tested. This complexity might make it appear too daunting for us to answer the question of the place of African empire in the global economy. And not every variable can have global significance. Of the many analytic boxes identified above, it is likely that the variance within most of them is quite small, and that most of the overall variance resides within a few relationships. The trick is to locate the imperial interrelationships that have made the biggest difference. Perhaps there are shortcuts, but the most systematic approach is to consider every possible imperial interaction, expecting to find that most of them are of only modest importance. Such research, while laborious, would provide the basis for a global assessment of the effects of empire.

This overview has argued for the feasibility and the relevance of rigorous economic assessments of the role of empire in the twentieth-century history of Africa and of the world. Such analysis would bring to light important new knowledge. We have lacked a literature on comprehensive assessment of empire at the global level. The principal large-scale interpretations of empire have focused on individual empires, working from the perspective of supporters or critics of imperial regimes.<sup>36</sup> Such studies, while commonly addressing the concerns of particular colonial territories, focus most consistently on the economy of the metropolitan country. They give little systematic attention to whole empires, and little attention to the place of empires at the global level: they tend to substitute the perspective of imperial rulers and great powers for these broader concerns.<sup>37</sup> Overall, these studies have resulted in the portrayal of empires as a progressive, if sometimes unfortunately oppressive, force in human history. Crudely put, despite the widespread rise of anti-imperial sentiments, we still view the experience of empires through the perspective of imperial leaders.

A final reason to support the construction of global measures of the effects of empire is the need to document economic welfare at the global level. The problem of global eco-

36. The broadest recent overview of empire is John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Allen Lane, 2007). This work traces the progressive unification of the politics of Eurasia over the past six centuries, a related yet distinct question from the economic effects of empires.

37. Note that for China, Russia, and later the Soviet Union, since virtually the whole of the empire was formally included in the homeland, the nature of statistics makes it easier to analyze imperial interactions than for other cases.

conomic inequality has become more and more severe. Policymakers, spurred by threats of ecological crisis and economic crisis, have begun to pay explicit attention to trade-offs among the haves, the have-nots, and their shared environment. Yet no adequate plans can be made for managing global economic welfare in the future without clear indications of the course of global economic welfare in the past. Studies of African empire and empire worldwide, I argue, provide a balance that would go a long way toward clarifying a major concern with respect to global economic welfare. It would help us clarify whether empires have been good not just for the rulers or the ruled, but for humanity in general.

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