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Post-war Colonial Administration (Africa)

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This article argues that the shifts in the colonial administration after World War One should be analyzed from two intertwined perspectives: Firstly the new international system of the mandates and its language of development, and secondly the concrete colonial situations in Africa. While the new international system provided different norms and rationalizations, as well as alternative opportunities for African actors in the colonies, continuity was nonetheless more commonly experienced and dominated societal currents more so than the shifts. The same argument might also be put forward in case of the transferred German colonies as mandates of the League of Nations, administered by the Allied Forces Great Britain, France, Belgium and South Africa.

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1. Introduction

The interwar years have been interpreted by some as the beginning of decolonization.^[1] Others understand the era as the most typical phase of colonial rule.^[2] While idealist contemporaries tended to interpret the mandate system of the League of Nations as a decisive break in European

colonialism and often overemphasized the League's possibilities of intervention,^[3] scholars from the 1960s and 1970s pointed to the imperial continuities of international administration.^[4] Historians have discussed whether British or French administration helped the societies to better develop a national consciousness and modernization process.^[5] In this discourse, the concepts of "indirect rule" and *mise en valeur*^[6] were constructed as two contrasting ideal colonial paradigms. The recently revived interest in the League of Nations has boosted new scholarship on the mandate system. These publications tend to focus less on the differences of administration, and instead more on the international changes and the question of agency within the transnational space of the mandate system.^[7]

The end of World War One with regard to the colonial administration in Africa has generally been approached from two different angles in scholarly discussions. On the one hand, formal analyses by more classically trained scholars of colonial history have focused on international law, colonial institutions and doctrines. Their most marked point was the changed status of the former German colonies, which became mandates of the League of Nations and were administered by the allied nations. This change is mirrored by the continuity in the formal status of all other European colonies in Africa.

On the other hand, in 1974, the renowned African historians J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder cautioned: "The settled condition in which the foreign ruler could do whatever he wished with his African subjects never existed in practice".^[8] The European colonial powers had not been able to achieve complete control, neither in 1914 nor in 1920. Consequently, the shift in formal and institutional dispositions thus far has not included any nonlinear top-down processes and should therefore be confronted with the historical situations in Africa that were actually being experienced and acted out.

The objective of the article is to show how the two perspectives described above evoke diverging answers to the question of shifts and continuities in colonial administration in post-war Africa. The first section will discuss the general developments in African colonies, with a focus on the types of British and French colonial administration. These are then related to the ways that they were enacted in the mandated territories. The second section will discuss African initiatives within the existing systems of colonial administrations and argue for the continuing presence of the inherent dialectics of colonialism.

2. Overview

Control exerted by the colonial powers in Africa varied greatly and has been discussed controversially by historians. Ajayi and Crowder speak of the dominant position enacted by the British and French in their West African colonies in the 1920s, while the historian Martin Thomas has recently described this same period as one of the most extreme variations, ranging from the *quatres communes* of Senegal where the inhabitants were French citizens, over areas such as Mauritania Post-war Colonial Administration (Africa) - 1914-1918-Online

which were never integrated into the bureaucratic system, to others like former Neu-Kamerun and Oubangui-Chari (present Central African Republic) where military operations continued in the 1920s and 1930s.^[9] In the Portuguese colonies, effective colonial control had only taken hold at the outset of the First World War. In their case, 1926 marks not only the year of the military coup in Portugal (*Estado Novo*) but also that which brought on major changes in the nation's colonial trajectory.

A small number of countries on the African continent were officially not under colonial control in the post-war era. Abyssinia, independent since its military victory over Italy in 1896, became a member of the League of Nations in 1923. Liberia's black settler population had declared its independence in 1847 and in 1919 Liberia became a founding member of the League of Nations. Egypt, too, gained independence in 1922. White settler colonies within the British Empire strove for independence and self-government; South Africa is a significant example from the post-war era. The Union of South Africa had become a British Dominion in 1910. As such, it was a quasi-independent state and a major sub-regional power in Africa when it joined the First World War on the side of the Allied Forces. After the war, it consolidated its new position by getting the mandate for the former German Southwest Africa.

Major shifts in administration took place in the former German colonies whose status was transformed from colonies to mandated territories of the newly created League of Nations. The British, French, Belgian and South African troops that had conquered the German colonies during the war were legitimized by the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference to administer these territories- not as colonizers, however, but as mandatories. That international status was intended to secure a "civilized administration", granting the well-being and development of peoples who were alleged not to be "able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world."^[10] The status of the mandated territories was defined according to their supposed state of "civilization", divided into three categories as A-, B- or C-mandates. Except for Southwest Africa, which became a C-mandate administered by South Africa, all African mandated territories were turned into B-mandates.

Unlike the A-mandates for the former Ottoman territories in the Middle East, the B- and C-mandates were judged not to be capable or mature enough to gain independence in the foreseeable future. Instead, they were defined as "peoples [...] at such a stage that the mandatory must be responsible for the administration of the territory" in the Versailles treaty as well as in the Covenant of the League of Nations.^[11] According to this, so-called "advanced nations" were to enact tutelage over them "as mandatories on behalf of the League". These mandatory administrations were intended as temporary measures, as the system was considered the transitional state to self-determination. Moreover, the European administrators no longer enjoyed national sovereignty in the mandates. The basis of their administration was international legitimacy^[12] which had to be secured by presenting annual reports on the mandate's administration to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations (PMC). The PMC was an advisory body to the Council of the League of Nations, which was supposed to control the mandatory powers.^[13]

The Allied Forces intended to enlarge their colonial empires and started negotiating their annexations during the war. The territories of New Cameroon which Germany had obtained from France in 1911 were immediately re-integrated into French Equatorial Africa, while the rest of Cameroon as well as Togo were administered as a condominium during the war. After the war, Great Britain ceded the larger parts of Togo and Cameroon to France, France in return waived any claims on Tanganyika, the former German East Africa. However, the British ceded parts of Tanganyika to Belgium in return for their support during the military campaign. Belgium thus took over the administration of the northern areas of Rwanda-Urundi, next to their colony the Congo. While the League of Nations approved the results of the bi-national negotiations, the partitions aroused heavy criticism among the inhabitants. In Cameroon and Togo, huge parts of the respective populations had been in favor of a British administration if self-government was not possible. Moreover, the territorial partition also divided the population and cut connections between people by drawing new international frontiers. Major routes of labor migration, trade and social activities were intersected, though people managed to find ways to cross the frontier in spite of the close border controls and travel restrictions. In defiance of the explicit prohibition to integrate the mandated territories into the existing empires, Britain attempted to tie Cameroon closer to Nigeria, as well as to join Tanganyika to Kenya. Both plans were criticized by the PMC. Similarly, Belgium's annexation of Rwanda-Urundi as the fifth Province of Congo drew criticism.^[14] South Africa was officially allowed to administer its C-mandate Southwest Africa as an integral part of its own territory.

The mandatory administrations in each of these territories were accountable not only to their national parliaments, but also to an international body. While the PMC's ultimate legal power lay in the right to revoke the mandate, the growing transnational public^[15] turned out to be more influential. Transnational non-government organizations (NGOs) and an internationalizing press furnished publicity that had the power to harm the mandatory body's credibility. More than a sanctioning force, publicity was a positive incentive in order to achieve legitimacy for those actors who complied with the new international norms.^[16] Likewise, historian Ralph Austen has argued that the mandatory system had some uniforming effects on colonial discourses. A combination of public confrontation and the mutual conservatism of the mandatory powers helped shape a paternalist European consensus which bridged differences in administration policies.^[17] The colonial discourse of civilization shifted to a discourse of development which, in turn, went hand in hand with an emphasis on the "material and moral well-being and the social progress" of Africans as it entered the official agenda.^[18]

3. Systems of Administration

The post-World War One era brought on a new need to rationalize colonial administration which had mostly functioned on an ad hoc-basis prior to the war. The two dominant paradigms were indirect rule (Great Britain) and *mise en valeur* (France). "Indirect rule" became the dominant albeit contested catchphrase in British justification rhetoric. Its main feature was to maintain existing African political

institutions and to delegate colonial administrative orders, most notably tax collection, to these institutions. The proposition of indirect rule was in line with the principle of trusteeship for the mandates of the League of Nations in that it claimed to lead the way for "primitive" peoples on the path to self-determination.^[19] In the 1920s and 1930s, Britain tried to export this method of administration from Northern Nigeria to other colonial territories. The political system in Northern Nigeria was characterized by the strength of its central political institutions which had developed within the Caliphate of Sokoto.

In other parts of Africa, such central institutions were absent. It was in these areas that British administrators invented new traditions and created so-called "native authorities" and "native courts".^[20] While a number of responsibilities thus rested in the hands of African communities, they were heavily restricted by the colonial administration that approved the appointment of its members, as well as supervising and instructing them. Indirect rule also caused changes in the system of administration practiced by the British in what is today Ghana, the former Gold-Coast and Southern Nigeria in the 19th century, where a Western-educated African elite became part of the administration and had been claiming political equality with the British. Although the new system of indirect rule favored traditional African leaders, it declared formal colonial administration as a privilege reserved for the white British colonialists. Although contact between administrators and local elites was intensified under the doctrine of indirect rule, segregation was also on the rise.^[21] The small but significant group of educated Africans who had worked within the colonial administration since the 19th century, at times even as District Commissioners, was excluded by the principle of indirect rule. It soon became clear that the supposed ethics and politics of self-determination were actually nothing but veiled practices of exclusion from political participation.^[22]

However, the new African elites were among the strongest political campaigners for selfgovernment, and not only in British administered areas. Educated urban populations throughout Africa campaigned for participation and were mostly successful: the inhabitants of the *quatres communes* even sent a delegate to the French parliament; and elected town councils were introduced in the most prominent British towns. In the British Cape Colony, the existing self-governed system was not endowed according to color of skin or legal status but to wealth. Consequently the majority of the black population was excluded, while a small, largely urban "Coloured" minority where eligible to vote and run for office.^[23] In the former Boer republics, on the other hand, the right to vote was exclusively granted to Whites. The situation in the Union of South Africa as formed in 1910 remained unchanged into the 1920s, which brought about tendencies to curtail voting rights of People of Color even more, as well as the ferocious yet peaceful resistance against these measures.

France did not propose a coherent ideology of colonial rule. The idea of "*mise en valeur*" first and foremost focused on the imperial needs. The colonies were expected to contribute to the post-war economic reconstruction of the French economy; as a consequence, their economic output would be increased. On the political level, the goal of cultural assimilation, the aim of which was to turn the

colonial subjects into French citizens eventually, was generally replaced by a looser conception of cultural association rather than assimilation in the 1920s, though the latter project was also not abandoned completely. The administrative structure was hierarchical, with the legislative power resting in Paris, centralized and uniform. Segregation continued to be a pillar of the administrative systems and was further developed when the institutions became more complex. A constituting aspect of French administration in all its African colonies and also in its mandates was the legal system of indigénat, meaning a dual legal system based on a radicalized difference of citizen and subject. Following the logic of assimilationist argumentation, racial differences would not be considered unchangeable. In the scope of the French "civilizing mission", the subjects were able to evolve and become citizens, as their level of "civilization" was raised through education or European employment. The political bodies in the French territories remained segregated. While most political and administrative questions were dealt with by the white administration which consisted of a commissaire de la République, several chefs de circonscription and a conseil d'administration for budgetary questions, Africans were represented through newly created institutions which were considered as traditional bodies, the conseil des notables and the chefferies (indigenous chieftainships), both of which were kept separate. Participation was thus open to traditional authorities and in some cases even for the so-called *évolués* - men who were considered to be "appropriately civilized".

In the mandated areas, despite the international norms and treaties, the broad guidelines for mandate administration stemmed from the respective national colonial doctrines. Although the European colonial governments tried to make their imperial administrations uniform, and the fact that these reforms were laid down in the doctrines of British indirect rule and French *mise en valeur*, the colonial concepts were based on colonial experience from prewar times and were a feature of continuity rather than of a break. While the British strengthened traditional authorities by integrating institutions for Africans such as the villages "headmen" and the "district heads" into the white British administration, the French forced the traditional authorities to amalgamate with others in the *conseils des notables*, and weakened their position.

Even Belgium maintained aspects of the German *Residentur*, a system which was similar to indirect rule, in its mandated territories Rwanda and Urundi. In Togo, a few African-Brazilian traders, for example Octaviano Olympio (1860-1940), became members of the *conseil des notables* and of the *conseil administrative du territoire*. In Southwest Africa, only the white male population was entitled to participation. German became recognized as the administrative language, and in 1923 the German population was granted South African citizenship which allowed them to stand for political offices. From 1925 onwards, white men were represented in the Legislative Assembly, the Executive Committee and the Advisory council.^[24]

4. African Initiatives

In the years following the First World War, the complex array of African initiatives continued, while

simultaneously undergoing changes informed by the realities of colonial rule even in the mandated territories. The majority of Africans accepted the reality of the colonial situation and worked within it. The colonies remained in what was termed a "state of emergency" throughout the era.^[25] The Africans' strategy varied greatly with regard to their position within the colonial situation. The vast majority preferred a minimum of contact with the colonial institutions.

In cash crop and plantation areas, the involvement of the local population with the colonial state was generally higher, though even in these cases most of the social and economic activities were organized by the Africans among themselves. A small but growing number of new elites who had received formal education and worked in colonial administration gained increasingly more influence. Some groups, like the Duala in Cameroon and the African-Brazilians in Togo, represent a continued tradition of political autonomy and agency long predating the colonial presence.

Despite the recent international norms and newly defined colonial doctrines, competences and legal orders were blurred for a long time and became the object of dispute in the mandated territories. German laws from prewar times continued to be in force, and the new administrators needed to familiarize themselves with them.^[26] Likewise, the introduction of the international norms for the mandates remained a contested process among the mandatories and the PMC. Laborers in Southwest Africa abandoned their workplaces because the breakdown of the German system of control coincided with white settlers stopping to pay their laborers. In Cameroon and Tanganyika, migrant labor and adjoining villages squatted abandoned plantations.^[27]

A feature that made the situation more complicated in the mandates was the German presence.^[28] During the 1920s, all mandates were faced with the situation that a considerable number of the former colonizers returned, while others had never even left the territory. Whereas the British and the French had evacuated all German subjects after their defeat in Cameroon, Togo and German East Africa (later British Tanganyika and Belgian Rwanda-Urundi) between 1915 and 1916, the South African war administration had only repatriated half of the German community.^[29] In all the mandated territories, Germans remained major employers and land owners and were consequently able to retain a good deal of their power.^[30] This opened up scopes of maneuver for Africans as well as for German settlers, whose formal position had been dramatically changed by the Versailles Conference.

While petitions, arguments and tribunals were being used by Africans throughout the continent, the mandate system seemed to provide opportunities on a different level. The inhabitants of the mandated territories had the right to petition the League of Nations and so refer to a third party. In Togo and Cameroon, the partition of the colony arouse criticism which would later lead to claims for independence. Post-1919, the Ewe (a strong community in Togo) was divided more or less evenly between British and French rule and developed a political identity which nurtured national discontent over the split between Togo and the Gold Coast. When the colonial border started being effected after 1930, this discontent also found expression in form of the demand for the return of the

Germans.^[31]

The Duala from Cameroon had petitioned the Versailles conference, requesting that Cameroon should be "considered as a neutral country"; if not, they claimed that "the right of choosing such a power may be conceded to us". They further requested "the right of citizenship, individual freedom and freedom of property and commerce".^[32] Later petitions to the PMC aimed at changing the mandate status of Cameroon.^[33] However, the Duala's petitions were not taken seriously by the PMC. In Togo, the African-Brazilian elite, as well as members of the ex-German elite were most active in the politics of petitions.^[34] Some Africans, very often members of the former German colonial elite, used and articulated their memories of German governance as a strategy to criticize the ongoing alien domination of their country.^[35] Similarly, the Rehoboter of Southwest Africa petitioned the League extensively. They claimed an end to the South African restrictions on their autonomy and land rights that they had gained under the German colonial administration. Their protest was repeatedly debated within the PMC.^[36]

These examples notwithstanding, the inhabitants of the mandated territories made little use of their right to directly petition the League of Nations. This was due primarily to the complicated procedure of submission: The petitions had to be sent to Geneva through the mandatories that were generally unwilling to transfer critical information to the PMC in order to deliver it to the general public. These complications were not helped by the powerful racist discourses still supported by most European actors of the mandate system. The PMC for example granted France their rights when they attempted to delegitimize petitions from Africans, purporting that they had abused the petitions for selfish purposes. Some petitioners therefore sent copies of their petitions to British NGOs and international journalists to bypass the mandatory.^[37]

5. Conclusion

Post-war colonial administration is best described as a vast array of multiplying heterogeneous actors and norms: the League of Nations and its Permanent Mandates Commission issued and observed international norms, the mandatory powers formulated rules in accordance with their interests and longstanding colonial traditions, the former German laws were still in force during the 1920s in the mandated territories, and African demands, concepts and strategies on how to organize the mandates all existed side by side. The rationalized systems (indirect rule and *mise en valeur*) as perceived and understood from the perspective of international rhetoric should therefore not be confused with actual historical situations. Especially in the immediate post-war years, when European administrative structures were to be (re)established, African initiatives had more possibilities to maneuver.

General accounts tend to subsume the post-war era, especially in the British and French colonies, as the "developmental colonial state". From this perspective, the First World War denotes the

termination of colonial conquest. While it is true that the mandate system officially initiated the paradigm of the "material and moral well-being and the social progress of its inhabitants"^[38], the principle of self-determination as proposed by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson (1865-1924) stood in opposition to the agenda of the colonial powers. It introduced a new rhetoric into the context of colonialism and necessitated new justification strategies for colonialism, especially for the transferred former German colonies. These new institutional discourses and strategies also opened up opportunities for colonial subjects, especially in the mandated territories, where many Africans worked within the colonial system to support, use and subvert it. Theirs were not, however, unprecedented strategic choices but rather ones that dated back well into the 19th century. It might therefore be argued that decolonization consistently coexisted with colonization, rather than it being a process which started in 1919, the 1940s or 1960s: The system of colonial administration was dialectic from its beginning.

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Notes

- Albertini, Rudolf von: Dekolonisation. Die Diskussion über Verwaltung und Zukunft der Kolonien 1919-1960 (Beiträge zur Übersee- und Kolonialgeschichte 1), Cologne 1966, p. 13; Henri Grimal situates the start of decolonization in the 1920s because of the formation of the international pan-African movement. Grimal, Henri: Decolonization, London 1978, pp. 45-47.
- 2. ↑ Cf. Ajayi, Ade/Crowder, Michael: West Africa 1919-1939. The Colonial Situation, in: Ajayi, Ade/Crowder, Michael (eds.): History of West Africa, vol. 2, Essex 1987, pp. 578-607.
- 3. † Wright, Quincy: Mandates under the League of Nations, Chicago 1930, p. 23.
- 4. ↑ Louis, William Roger: African Origins of the Mandates Idea, in: International Organization 9/1 (1965), pp. 20–36.
- 5. ↑ See for example Austen, Ralph: Varieties of Trusteeship. African Territories under British and French Mandate, 1919-1939, in: Gifford, Prosser/ Louis, William Roger: France and Britain in Africa. Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule, London 1971, pp. 515–542. Similarly Susan Pedersen comments on the effect of African participation in political councils for the formation of national movements. Pedersen, Susan: The Meaning of the Mandates System. An Argument, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 32/4 (2006), p. 539.
- 6. ↑ Lugard, Frederick: The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa, online: http://archive.org/details/cu31924028741175 and mise en valeur: Sarraut, Albert: La Mise en Valeurs des Colonies Francaises, online: http://archive.org/details/lamiseenvaleurde00sarr

- Michael Callahan locates agency mainly in the mandatory's representatives in the metropoleis as well as in the mandated territories, Callahan, p.4/6; whereas Susan Pedersen locates agency primarily within the international system, Pedersen, Mandates System 2006, p. 567.
- 8. † Ajayi, Ade, Crowder, Michael: West Africa 1919-1939. The Colonial Situation, in: Ajayi, Ade, Crowder, Michael (eds.): History of West Africa, vol. 2, Essex 1987, pp. 578-607, here p. 579.
- 9. ↑ Cf. Ajayi, Crowder, West Africa 1919-1939; Thomas, Martin: The French Empire between the Wars. Imperialism, Politics and Society, Manchester 2005.
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- 11. † Ibid.
- 12. ↑ Callahan, Michael: Mandates and Empire. The League of Nations and Africa, 1914-1931, Brighton 2008, p. 3.
- 13. ↑ Pedersen, Mandates System 2006, p. 561.
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- 15. ↑ On the role of the transnational public for the post-war international order cf. Herren, Madeleine: Internationale Organisationen seit 1865, Darmstadt 2009, p. 57 and Sluga, Glenda: Internationalism in the age of nationalism (Pennsylvania studies in human rights), Philadelphia 2013, pp. 45-78.
- 16. ↑ Pedersen, Mandates System 2006, p. 560.
- 17. ↑ Austen, Trusteeship 1971, p. 526.
- 18. † Kunkel, Sönke/Meyer, Christoph (eds.): Aufbruch ins postkoloniale Zeitalter. Globalisierung und die außereuropäische Welt in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren, Frankfurt 2012, p. 24.
- 19. ↑ Cf. this argument already: Albertini, Rudolf von: Europäische Kolonialherrschaft 1880-1940, Zürich and Freiburg i.Br. 1976, p. 252. Translated into British rhetoric "politics of conquest" shifted to "politics of consent", cf. McCracken, John: A history of Malawi, 1859-1966, Woodbridge et al. 2012, p. 217.
- 20. † Iliffe, John: A Modern History of Tanganyika, in: African Studies Series 25 , Cambridge 1979.
- 21. ↑ McCracken, Malawi 2012, p. 218.
- 22. ↑ Cf. Albertini, Europäische Kolonialherrschaft, p. 253 and Bickford-Smith, Vivian: The Betrayal of Creole Elites, 1880-1920, in: Morgan, Philipp, Hawkins, Sean (eds.): Black Experience and the Empire, Oxford 2004, pp. 166-194.
- 23. ↑ In the Apartheid era, four distinct official categories were established: Blacks, Whites, Coloured and Indians. Nowadays, they are capitalized in order to underline their historical and not their analytical value.
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- 25. † Bhaba, Homi: The Location of Culture, New York 1994.
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- 29. ↑ Eberhardt, Martin: Zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Apartheid. Die deutsche Bevölkerungsgruppe Südwestafrikas 1915-1965, in Periplus Studien 10, Berlin 2007, p. 61.
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- 31. ↑ Webster, J.B.: African Political Activity in British West Africa, 1900-1940, in: Ajayi, Ade, Crowder, Michael (eds.): West Africa 1919-1939, pp. 635-664.
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- 33. † Eckert, Andreas: Grundbesitz, Landkonflikte und Kolonialer Wandel. Douala 1880 bis 1960, Stuttgart 1999, p. 58.
- 34. ↑ Callahan, Mandates, p. 117-120.
- 35. † Joseph, Richard: The German Question in French Cameroon 1919-1939, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 17 (1975), p.65–90.
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- 37. † Ibid., pp. 117/153.
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