Version 1.0 | Last updated 04 January 2016

Post-war Economies (Africa)

By Charlotte Walker-Said

The economic development of African territories in the years following World War I was fostered by European and American capital, as well as by African societies' innovations in agricultural methods and strategies for organizing labor. African colonies in the post-war era imported greater numbers of manufactured goods, which were traded for tropical raw materials and foodstuffs as capitalist integration intensified in both rural and urban areas. Colonies expanded their civil administrations and incorporated greater numbers of African intermediaries in the form of chiefs, interpreters, clerks, tax collectors, soldiers, and police. This new professional class engaged with another rapidly expanding cohort of entrepreneurs such as farmers, traders, miners, dockworkers, and others who were salaried or compensated through harvests and exports.

Table of Contents

Introduction

African economies changed dramatically after World War I. Much of the initiative for the change came from Africans themselves, who responded to new incentives and pressures brought by

European agents in the political, economic, and religious spheres. At the end of World War I, the French government advocated that the colonies play a role in France's return to prosperity. Albert Sarraut (1872-1962) had been involved in French colonial administration for much of his career. In his 1923 treatise, *La Mise en Valeur des Colonies Francaises,* ("Enhancing the Productivity of the French Colonies") he expressed his belief in the potential of African colonies to restore French government liquidity, as well as France's duty to "rehabilitate" Africa following German exploitation.[1] Sarraut sought to increase the productivity and value of the colonies through massive public works projects and the organization of African labor, all of which necessitated exploiting and using pre-existing authority structures. Increased population control and labor recruitment would also mean increased taxation, which would be used to underwrite construction operations. In the British Empire, imports of raw materials from British colonies had been crucial to the Allied victory in World War I. Keen to continue the flow of revenues made available from farms in colonies like Kenya, Britain sought control over Germany's former African empire and hoped to expand political and land privileges with the expectation that the colonies would remain an integral part of British economic planning.[2]

European administrations and investors set objectives for economic expansion in the colonies. They found that Africans responded in a wide variety of ways to these demands and thereby determined the continent's integration into the world economy. After World War I, the global economy affected Africa more than ever, as demands for its agricultural and mineral resources emerged from all corners of the world.

Economic Expansion Under the British and French

Following the end of hostilities among European powers in 1918, colonial governments, European concessionary companies, and white settlers, traders, and investors rapidly resumed seeking financial returns on investments made in Africa. Throughout Africa, the main resource was agriculture. Economic development therefore required agricultural development. As indigenous Africans throughout the continent had been gaining expertise in local agriculture and understood the ecosystems and seasonal climate changes in their respective regions of origin, they were often best positioned to adopt and expand on the new crops and new techniques to raise yields and develop new exports.[3]

The British and the French colonial governments, which had benefitted from the transfer of German colonies to their possession, sought increased agricultural yields that would grow exports. These exports built up foreign trade balances, which were needed to pay for the costs of running the colonies. Foreign balances were also used to pay for imports such as machinery, textiles, grain, and other goods needed in the colonies.[4] By the end of the First World War, two principal methods of expanding agriculture, and thus yields and exports, had been established in Africa. The first approach depended on incorporating African individuals into the market economy, gauging their response to the price offered for the production of a certain good and allowing them to develop orientations toward the market given economic incentives. The second approach was to displace Africans from ownership of the land, bring in European enterprise, and set up plantations under European managers using African labor.[5] In many African colonies, these two systems existed simultaneously.

In the British Gold Coast (in what is today Ghana), Africans enthusiastically adopted and expanded cocoa farming. By 1920 cocoa was the leading cash crop in the colony and accounted for more than half the world's cocoa production.[6] Africans in the Gold Coast likewise contributed to the development of cotton, palm oil, kola nut, and rubber exports following the end of World War I. In nearby French Cameroon, Africans in the western highlands developed cocoa and coffee exports, but in smaller numbers relative to those in Ghana. During the First World War, Cameroon passed into French and British hands, with France taking control of the largest prortion of the former German territory and governing it first as a League of Nations mandate and later as a United Nations trust territory.[7]

Determined to render the new territory as profitable as possible as quickly as possible, licenses to coffee farms remained tightly regulated by the French administration.[8] Favoring the investments of their European settlers, district officials limited the number of coffee licenses issued to Africans as well as the land that an African coffee planter could cultivate. This guaranteed that there would be abundant field labor for white coffee farms and less competition among growers. It also meant that only a small cadre of Africans in western Cameroon acquired the rights to participate in the lucrative coffee growing and trading business. This was in contrast to Ghana, where economic development was more equally spread among a larger proportion of the forest populations.[9] Nevertheless, Africans in Cameroon who were granted coffee licenses contributed considerably to export production. The French administration estimated that 4 million coffee plants had been planted in the Mungo region of Cameroon in 1939 by African planters. By 1947, there were 6 million coffee plants cultivated by African farmers in the regions of Mungo, Dschang, and Foumban.[10]

In German Tanganyika (today Tanzania), indigenous farmers broadly expanded coffee cultivation in Kilimanjaro alongside German-controlled plantations. By the start of World War I, these local and foreign enterprises had established a strong export market for the product. However, following the transfer of the territory to British control, German estate companies were expelled and only allowed to return in 1925, when only about half did so. During the decade following 1918, the foreign coffee estates were mismanaged. By the 1930s, nearly all coffee plantings had been abandoned.[11] Some of the former German estates were converted into forest reserves, largely out of a concern for environmental degradation following forest clearance. Tea plantations were developed later during the interwar period, leading to renewed forest clearance.[12] However, African farmers shifted toward the cultivation of new export crops after World War I, growing maize, beans, sesame seeds and rice. So great were the exports of rice from Tanganyika to Zanzibar during the 1920s that the British colonial government referred to the Rufigi River valley in Tanganyika as Calcutta Mdogo or "Little

Calcutta.”[13]

While African agriculturalists demonstrated their capacity to embrace market forces and expand agricultural production, European investors and colonial administrations largely remained unconvinced of African’s ability to innovate agrarian techniques or incorporate new modes of technology. Africans throughout the continent often had less access to scientific and technical knowledge and lacked capital for major investments like tractors, fertilizers, and irrigation systems. Thus, many Europeans believed that plantations under foreign control were more likely to yield exportable produce.[14]

In nearly all colonies, however, African chiefs and indigenous colonial agents carried out taxation and regulated export production via bureaucratic procedures while African colonial police and assistants to British district commissioners enforced property rights and commercial law.[15] Africans also comprised the vast majority of the agricultural workforce, whether as entrepreneurs, smallholder farmers, large plantation owners, or as salaried or forced manual laborers.

West and East African Economic Development

Throughout West Africa, with the exception of Liberia, the final outcome of the war favored peasant agriculture in African hands. In West Africa, European investment was limited to government infrastructure such as roads, railroads, and ports.[16] One exception to this was the construction of the Office du Niger, a large-scale irrigation scheme launched in 1930 by the French in colonial Mali (Soudan Français), which involved flooding the Niger River to promote cotton production and was largely managed by Africans.[17] Africans had a competitive advantage in West Africa in part because they had been trading with Europeans since the 17th century and had developed the logistical networks and trading centers required to develop and expand market networks in the 20th century.[18] For example, after the First World War, peanut production in French Senegal was organized by the Muslim brotherhood of the *Muridiya*, which had become a formidable economic unit through commerce and war over many decades. Producers and traders in West Africa, such as the *Muridiya*, tended to work in long distance and specialized trade and had developed trade routes, forms of taxation and regulation, and modes of security in the region.[19]

In East Africa, colonial governments favored a European planting class. In colonies and regions like Kenya, Rhodesia, the Kivu region of Belgian Congo, and South Africa, large tracts of the most fertile land were taken from Africans and reserved for European management and ownership. There, as in western Cameroon, certain crops like coffee were reserved by law to farms under European ownership. As a result, by the early 1950s, European production accounted for 95 percent of Kenya’s agricultural exports, even though it constituted only a third of total farm production.[20] Africans in the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Mozambique were among the most forcibly recruited populations for agricultural expansion in the decades following World War I. Cotton production in

Belgian Congo increased rapidly from twelve tons in 1917 to 30,000 tons in 1920 due to the introduction of mass forced labor. Belgian officials collaborated with Portuguese plantation owners to develop efficient networks of African labor impressment, which allowed for significantly higher levels of production.[21] The Portuguese government in Mozambique established the economic model between 1918 and 1930 known as the "Cotton Regime," which endorsed the forcible recruitment of African men, women, and children for extended periods of time to cotton plantations. This caused widespread famine and disease as a result of Africans' forced abandonment of their own farms.[22]

Major economic transitions radically changed Africans' relationships with the land in the 20th century. In British Tanganyika, the granting of major timber concessions to Europeans denied Africans access to forest areas that had long been vital to their strategies of production and survival. British agricultural officers surveyed the boundaries of forest reserves in the West Usambara region and relocated families whose herds and fields lay inside the border. As a result of this relocation, Africans who were formerly mixed herders and used the forest and savanna to feed their crops became exclusively agriculturalists outside of the forest zones.[23] In Belgian Congo, the introduction of European cord netting into rural marketplaces after World War I made net fishing practical for the first time in riverine communities that had previously fished by building dams and ponds using traditional methods. By 1930, the use of long nets by river fisherman rivaled the production of dams and ponds in Congo's swamplands. The use of net fishing also grew after World War I because there was increased demand for fish from the colonial capitals of Brazzaville and Leopoldville, which made commercial fishing even more lucrative along the western bend of the Zaire River (today the Congo River) near those two cities.[24] The introduction of this new technology, and its wide availability in the growing rural markets throughout Congo in the interwar years meant Africans abandoned rural areas devoted to pond and dam fishing to pursue net fishing and fish trading. Old models of socio-economic survival and expansion were replaced with new ones, spurring new kinds of competition over boats, motors, and fishing zones.

Overall, Africans' complex and interdependent relationships with technology, land law, capitalism and colonialism in the period following the end of World War I allowed for a rapidly transforming and transformative agricultural economic sphere on the African continent.

Industrialization and Exports

While the agricultural sector throughout Africa was heavily developed by African and European agents after World War I, the mineral sector was also of great interest to European private investors. Before the war, British financial interests had invested considerable sums in the diamond mines of the South African Witwatersrand. Following the end of conflict, new diamond mines in Katanga in Belgian Congo and in the Orange Free State of South Africa opened.[25] Coal was first discovered in Enugu in British Nigeria in 1909 and African miners extracted their first tons in 1916. By 1920, coal production in Nigeria had reached nearly 200,000 tons.[26] British surveyors and prospectors also heavily developed gold mining in the Gold Coast after World War I, but South Africa held a dominant place in British investors' imaginations.

Railroads were critical to the development of the mineral sector in the African colonies. Although enormously costly, railroads were required in order to export minerals and import the heavy machinery required for mineral extraction. South Africa developed a linked system comparable to those of Europe or North America. Likewise, the French government in the Maghreb developed an extensive network. Railroads largely served the major centers of mineral extraction in British and French Africa, whose metropolitan governments financed them through a combination of taxation and private investment. The Uganda Railway, from Mombasa on the Kenyan coast to Lake Victoria, served the development of critical mineral sectors along the circuit. The French launched the construction of the Congo-Océan Railroad in 1921, which ran through the French West and Equatorial African territories. After World War I, the Belgian colonial administration rebuilt the railway line from Matadi to Kinshasa to increase is capacity tenfold to accommodate growing mineral exports.[27]

The development of the mineral sector had a marked impact on South Africa. The term "Mineral Revolution" is used to describe the rapid industrialization and economic transformation of South Africa that began in the late 19th century and gained steam after World War I. The Mineral Revolution created a permanent black manual labor class that staffed the mines and laid the railroad tracks that serviced them. Dramatic migrations of Africans from villages and rural zones to rapidly urbanizing centers characterized the decades between the wars. Agrarian lifestyles were abandoned for salaried work in mines, roads, or work camps, which was required in order to pay colonial taxes as well as bride prices for wives.[28]

Industrial development and particularly railroad expansion and mineral extraction also had a dramatic effect on Africans' relationships to land and their own labor. In this arena of economic development, stark inequalities of wealth, health, education, and access grew sharper and more punishing. Rural areas in South Africa became desperately impoverished; populations in such areas were deprived of male laborers to build structures, cultivate food crops, or hunt, and were also isolated from cities and towns where markets and employment allowed for better communication, public health, and nourishment. In West Africa, people flowed from the savanna into the forest belt, which supported cash crop agriculture, and the coastal cities. For all of West Africa west of Nigeria, the forest and coastal region had about a third of the total population before 1920; by 1970, it had half the total population. This shift meant the permanent displacement of about 3 million people.[29] Competition over increasingly scarce resources in depopulated zones caused social and political conflicts to break out in the remaining rural societies after World War I in South Africa, as well as in other regions undergoing rapid industrial development.[30] Violence among and within African societies only served to solidify European presumptions of African irrationality and aggression. Stricter laws against vagrancy, theft, and rape characterized legal evolutions in African colonies in the interwar years.[31]

Conclusion

Throughout Africa, mining and railroad expansion allowed for labor recruitment to become more systematic. New technologies of organizing human collectives were introduced to the colonies, including demographic surveys, identity cards, and village censuses. The mass migration of Africans across the continent to new zones of development and urban centers had political, cultural, and epidemiological implications, which further necessitated new technologies to manage them.[32] New economic forces redistributed resources and opened access to scientific advancements as part of a response to industrial demands.

Charlotte Walker-Said, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Section Editors: Melvin E. Page; Richard Fogarty

Notes

1. ↑ Sarraut, Albert: La Mise en Valeur des Colonies Francaises, Paris 1923. See also: Manning, Patrick: Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1985, Cambridge et al. 1988, p. 78.
2. ↑ Hall, A.D.: Agriculture After the War, London 1916; Lawrence, J.C.: The World's Struggle with Rubber, 1905-1931, New York 1931.
3. ↑ Feierman, Steven: Peasant Intellectuals. Anthropology and History in Tanzania, Madison 1990.
4. ↑ Schwarz, Leonard John: Cocoa in the Cameroons under French Mandate and in Fernando Po, United States. Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. Trade Promotion Series, no. 148, Washington 1933.
5. ↑ Curtin, Philip, et al.: African History. From Earliest Times to Independence, London 1978, pp. 503–504.
6. ↑ Salm, Steven J./Falola, Toyin: Culture and Customs of Ghana, Santa Barbara 2002, p. 15.
7. ↑ Le Vine, Victor T.: The Cameroons from Mandate to Independence, Berkeley 1964.
8. ↑ Guernier, Eugène/Briat, René: Cameroun, Togo, Encyclopédie de l'Afrique Française, Paris 1951, pp. 202–203.
9. ↑ Dongmo, Odette Djoumessi/Nguimzang, Antoine/Mathias, Djoumessi: 1900-1966. Un Exemple de Chef Traditionnel Chrétien, Yaoundé 1991, p. 41. Darge, Philippe: Le Cafe Au Cameroun, in: Mémoire, Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer, 1958.
10. ↑ Guernier/Briat, Cameroun, Togo 1951, pp. 202–203.
11. ↑ Hamilton, Alan Charles/Mwasha, I.V.: History of Resource Utilization and Management under the British, in: Hamilton, Alan Charles/Bensted-Smith, R. (eds.): Forest Conservation in the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania, Boston 1989, p. 41.
12. ↑ Kjekshus, Helge: Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History. The Case of Tanganyika, 1850-1950, London et al. 1996, pp. 63–70.
13. ↑ Ibid., p. 32.

14. ↑ Curtin et al., African History 1978, p. 503.
15. ↑ Salm/Falola, Culture and Customs of Ghana 2002, p. 22.
16. ↑ Curtin et al., African History 1978, p. 503.
17. ↑ Van Beusekom, Monica: Negotiating Development. African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office Du Niger, 1920-1960, Portsmouth 2001.
18. ↑ Barry, Boubacar: Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade, Cambridge 1997; Searing, James F.: West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce. The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860, Cambridge 2003.
19. ↑ Hopkins, Anthony G.: An Economic History of West Africa, New York 1973, pp. 58–59.
20. ↑ Curtin et al., African History 1978, p. 504.
21. ↑ Fortuna, Carlos: O Fio Da Meada. O Algodão de Moçambique, Portugal et a Economia-Mundo, 1860-1960 [Threads of Yarn: Cotton in Mozambique, Portugal, and the World Economy, 1960-1960], Porto 1993, pp. 56–60; Frankel, Herbert S.: Capital Investment in Africa. Its Course and Effects, Oxford 1967, pp. 20–25.
22. ↑ Isaacman, Allen: Cotton Is the Mother of Poverty. Peasants, Work, and Rural Struggle in Colonial Mozambique, 1938-1961, Portsmouth 1995.
23. ↑ Conte, Christopher A.: Highland Sanctuary. Environmental History in Tanzanias Usambara Mountains, Athens, Ohio 2004.
24. ↑ Harms, Robert: Games Against Nature. An Eco-Cultural History of the Nunu of Equatorial Africa, Cambridge 1999.
25. ↑ Curtin et al., African History 1978, p. 513.
26. ↑ Brown, Carolyn Anderson: We Are All Slaves. African Miners, Culture, and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery, Nigeria, Portsmouth et al 2002.
27. ↑ Curtin et al., African History 1978, p. 517.
28. ↑ Moodie, T. Dunbar/Ndatshe, Vivienne: Going for Gold. Men, Mines, and Migration, Berkeley 1994; Crais, Clifton/McClendon, Thomas V. (eds.): The South Africa Reader. History, Culture, Politics, Durham 2013.
29. ↑ Curtin et al., African History 1978, p. 520.
30. ↑ Crais, Clifton: Poverty, War, and Violence in South Africa, Cambridge et al. 2011.
31. ↑ Roberts, Richard L./Mann, Kristin (eds.): Law in Colonial Africa, Portsmouth et al. 1991; Burrill, Emily S./Roberts, Richard L./Thornberry, Elizabeth: Domestic Violence and the Law in Colonial and Postcolonial, Athens, Ohio 2010.
32. ↑ Tilley, Helen: Africa as a Living Laboratory. Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950, Chicago 2011.

Selected Bibliography

Barry, Boubacar: **Senegambia and the Atlantic slave trade**, Cambridge; New York 1998: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Carolyn A.: **We were all slaves. African miners, culture, and resistance at the Enugu government colliery, Nigeria**, Portsmouth; Oxford; Cape Town 2003: Heinemann; James Currey; David Philip.

Conte, Christopher Allan: **Highland sanctuary. Environmental history in Tanzania's Usambara Mountains**, Athens 2004: Ohio University Press.

Crais, Clifton C.: **Poverty, war, and violence in South Africa**, Cambridge; New York 2011: Cambridge University Press.

Crais, Clifton C. / McClendon, Thomas V. (eds.): **The South Africa reader. History, culture, politics**, Durham 2014: Duke University Press.

Curtin, Philip D. / Feierman, Steven / Thompson, Leonard et al.: **African history**, London 1978: Longman.

Darge, Philippe: **Le café au Cameroun**, Paris 1958: Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer.

Djoumessi Dongmo, Odette / Nguimzang, Antoine: **Djoumessi Mathias, 1900-1966. Un exemple de chef traditionel chrétien**, Yaoundé 1991: Editions SOPECAM.

Feierman, Steven M.: **Peasant intellectuals. Anthropology and history in northern Tanzania**, Madison 1990: University of Wisconsin Press.

Fortuna, Carlos José C. G.: **O fio da meada. O algodão de Mocambique, Portugal e a economia mundo, 1860-1960 (The train of thought. Cotton in Mozambique, Portugal and the world economy, 1860-1960)**, Porto 1993: Edições Afrontamento.

Frankel, S. Herbert: **Capital investment in Africa. Its course and effects**, Oxford 1967: Oxford University Press.

Guernier, Eugène / Briat, René: **Cameroun, Togo. Encyclopédie de l'Afrique Française**, Paris 1951: Editions de l'Union Française.

Hall, Daniel: **Agriculture after the war**, London 1916: Murray.

Hamilton, Alan Charles / Mwasha, I. V.: **History of resource utilization and management under the British**, in: Hamilton, Alan Charles / Bensted-Smith, R. (eds.): Forest conservation in the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania, Gland; Dar es Salaam 1989: IUCN-The World Conservation Union.

Harms, Robert W.: **Games against nature. An eco-cultural history of the Nunu of equatorial Africa**, Cambridge; New York 1987: Cambridge University Press.

Hopkins, Anthony G.: **An economic history of West Africa**, New York 1973: Columbia University Press.

Isaacman, Allen F.: **Cotton is the mother of poverty. Peasants, work, and rural struggle in colonial Mozambique, 1938-1961**.

Kjekshus, Helge: **Ecology control and economic development in East African history. The case of Tanganyika 1850-1950**, Athens 1996: Ohio University Press.

Lawrence, James Cooper: **The world's struggle with rubber, 1905-1931**, New York; London 1931: Harper & Brothers.

Le Vine, Victor T.: **The Cameroons, from mandate to independence**, Berkeley 1964: University of California Press.

Manning, Patrick: **Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, 1880-1985**, Cambridge; New York 1988: Cambridge University Press.

Moodie, T. Dunbar / Ndatshe, Vivienne: **Going for gold. Men, mines, and migration**, Berkeley 1994: University of California Press.

Roberts, Richard L., Mann, Kristin (ed.): **Law in colonial Africa**, Portsmouth; London 1991: Heinemann Educational Books; James Currey.

Salm, Steven J. / Falola, Toyin: **Culture and customs of Ghana**, Westport 2002: Greenwood Press.

Sarraut, Albert: **La mise en valeur des colonies françaises**, Paris 1923: Payot.

Schwarz, Leonard John: **Cocoa in the Cameroons under French mandate and in Fernando Po**, Washington 1933: United States Government Printing Office.

Searing, James F.: **West African slavery and Atlantic commerce. The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860**, Cambridge; New York 1993: Cambridge University Press.

Thornberry, Elizabeth / Roberts, Richard L. / Burrill, Emily: **Domestic violence and the law in colonial and postcolonial Africa**, Athens 2010: Ohio University Press.

Tilley, Helen: **Africa as a living laboratory. Empire, development, and the problem of scientific knowledge, 1870-1950**, Chicago 2011: University of Chicago Press.

Van Beusekom, Monica M.: **Negotiating development. African farmers and colonial experts at the Office du Niger, 1920-1960**, Portsmouth; Oxford; Cape Town 2002: Heinemann; J. Currey; D. Philip.

Citation

Walker-Said, Charlotte: Post-war Economies (Africa) , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2016-01-04.
DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10794.

License