# Reconstructing Empire in British and French Africa

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It was indeed empire that European leaders at the end of World War II needed to reconstruct. They had come very close to losing a struggle with another form of empire, the Nazi Reich, and in South East Asia had lost valued territories to a country that had dared to play the empire-game with them— Japan. At the same time, both British and French leaders felt, with some reason, that they had been saved by their empires: by the resources in men and material contributed by the dominions and colonies of Great Britain and by the symbolic importance of French Equatorial Africa's refusal to follow Vichy, followed by the contributions of North African territories and diverse African people to the reconquest of European France from the Mediterranean. Both post-war governments acknowledged the dilemma they faced: their physical and moral weakness at war's end meant they had to find new bases to relegitimate empire, and their economic weakness meant they needed the production of empire all the more. Both were acutely conscious that another war might make them dependent on empire yet again. Leaders of political movements in the colonies were aware of exactly these points too.

This chapter is a sketch—an attempt to lay out a way of thinking about the post-war era, a reflection on research by myself and others on a period that is only beginning to be explored. I want to avoid the common weakness of accounts of decolonization, that read history backwards from the 1960s, when the territorial nation-state emerged as the modal end-point of the evolution of colonial empires.[1] In 1945, a clash among imperial powers of different sorts had just ended. In Dakar or Lagos as much as London or Paris, turning colonies into nation-states was only one possibility, and not necessarily the most desirable.

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[1] On methodological and theoretical issues in the study of colonization and decolonization, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005).

In this chapter I will look in turn at five points: first, the viability of the empire-form after World War I; secondly, what happened in 1945, considering the Asian roots of an African dilemma; then I will discuss political reconstruction and the building of an inclusive empire; economic reconstruction; and finally the alternatives for Africa after the war.

### What hadn't happened earlier: the viability of the empire-form after World War I

World War I is sometimes seen as a blow against empire, the advent of a world of self-determining nation-states. But only if one reads history backwards. The empires of the losers were dismantled, but various pieces were distributed to the winners. Japan's plea for a statement condemning racism was turned down. To be sure, people in India, China, Korea, and elsewhere read Wilson's words as if they applied to them, but at Paris they found that they did not.[2] There were disturbances in 1919 in Egypt, China, Korea, and India, but the powers-that-be were at the time able to stuff the genii of self-determination back into imperial bottles. Violent conflict in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt and tension in India and Indochina continued, but imperial powers had every reason to believe they could hang on to most of their colonies, in Africa for instance, and elsewhere, as in Egypt or Iraq, working through cooperative elites whose room for manoeuvre was limited. In Africa, the claims of soldiers to have paid the blood tax to France or Britain and therefore to be entitled to some of the respect and rights of the citizen were pushed back. Indeed, the 1920s were a period of assertion of a tribal model for Africa, when Africans' claims to citizenship were rejected, when indirect rule was given a name, when officials' ideas for pushing development plans were considered and set aside, when colonial rulers asserted their genius for maintaining the distinct cultures of their subjects rather than bringing them along a road toward European models of civilization and politics.[3]

A new empire-building project arose in Nazi Germany, while Japan claimed its place at an imperial table. The USSR insisted that it was a multi-national polity, providing parallel structures within the Communist party and government for elites within each national group (the definitions of which frequently shifted) to advance. The United States did not establish a conception of itself as a colonial power—it did not have a Colonial Office or

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[2] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007); Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York, 2003).

[3] Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, 1997).

Ministry—but it had its own repertoire of power at a distance, including the maintenance of a small number of colonies and a wider area where periodic invasions and occupations disciplined local elites when they did not cooperate with American interests or when revolution threatened. And American power was based on a century and a half of continental expansion, which produced a relatively self-conscious national population mainly because of the radical exclusion from the polity of people who were different, such as Indians and the descendants of slaves. These were all variants of imperial polities, some explicit in their embrace of an imperial mantle, some claiming to be something else. The exercise of power around the world, for all the talk of nation and of self-determination, was still exercised by a small number of powers, whose main worry was each other.[4]

The League of Nations provided a forum at which the conduct of colonial powers could at times be examined, but it left the judgement of what to do to those powers to themselves. The mandate system indeed expanded the imperial reach of Britain and France, which made German and Ottoman territories into yet another part of a varied imperial repertoire, alongside colonies, protectorates, dominions, and spheres of influence. The League, in the end, underscored the normality of colonial empire even while suggesting that there were international standards which colonial powers should meet.[5]

In the colonial world, the 1930s deepened the involuted nature of colonial regimes: the problems of depression could be sloughed off onto a countryside that could be deemed backward rather than impoverished, and in any case was less visible than capital cities. Then, in the late 1930s, when recovering production created new social strains without measures to relieve them, waves of strikes broke out in parts of the British empire: in the West Indies, in Northern Rhodesia, and in some port cities in West and East Africa. The confluence of strikes and riots in the former plantation colonies and in the parts of Africa most integrated into a wage economy led top officials to realize that by 'tribalizing' Africans they had deprived themselves of the means to think about and act on social issues in labour and in urban life that were slowly emerging as empire-wide issues.[6] The illusion that Africans

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[4] On inter-empire conflict as a framework for history in the first half of the twentieth century, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010).

[5] For the new wave of scholarship on the League, see Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations: Review Essay', *American Historical Review*, 112 (2007), 1091–1117.

[6] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

lived in tribal cages and could be pushed back into them whenever authority was challenged began to fall apart as people migrated, entered new economic positions in cities and mines, and at times developed long-distance connections to other people elsewhere in the empires who in their own ways were confronting imperial authority.

### What happened in 1945: the Asian roots of an African dilemma

There are many aspects of World War II that shook empire more profoundly than the previous phase of conflagration: Hitler's giving racism a bad name, economic collapse and indebtedness to the US that limited options for reacting to problems in the colonies, and the credibility given to the alternative model of Soviet politics by its success in the war. But none was more telling than what happened in South East Asia. Dutch Indonesia, French Indochina, and British Malaya and Burma were taken over by Japan. Japan's invasions had much to do with a fear that it could be cut off from resources by other empires—it was very much an inter-empire view of the world. Japan's post-conquest relationships with local political actors were ambiguous, but some, notably Sukarno, established a modus vivendi with Japanese officials. When Japan fell, both Sukarno in Indonesia and Ho Chi Minh in Indochina were in a position to claim the state; it would take weeks before any European troops could challenge them. That meant, in effect, that these territories would have to be recolonized. Neither France nor the Netherlands was able to do that, despite bloody wars. Britain was able to reimpose its will on Malaya, but at a high cost and not for very long. Indian independence in 1947 was equally profound in its effects. When Indonesia and India entered the world of nations, the normality of empire was no longer a given. Political leaders in ex-colonies moved to make the most of this political and discursive opening.[7]

But did this mean that France and Britain saw the writing on the empire's wall? Quite the contrary. Both reacted to threats and losses in Asia by looking more to Africa. As Frederick Pedler, bright young star of Britain's Colonial Office put it 'Africa is now the core of our colonial position; the only continental space from which we can still hope to draw reserves of economic and military strength'.[8] French thinking was similar: African colonies were vital to reconstituting the economy.

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[7] C. A. Bayly and T. N. Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); Clive Christie, *A Modern History of South East Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism* (London, 1996).

[8] Pedler, Minute, 1 November 1946, CO 847/35/47234/1/1947, British National Archives.

The flip side of the vulnerability of Britain and France was that other states did not have to fear efforts on their part to secure a hegemonic position or exclusive access to resources across the globe. The former imperial giants, like other states, *had* to sell commodities from their empires. That freed everyone else from the dangers of being cut off from vital supplies by policies of empire preference or monopolies. Not least of the countries liberated from fear of someone else's empire were Germany and Japan. The inter-empire rivalries that had led to two world wars would not lead to a third.

## Political reconstruction: building an inclusive empire, but not quite of equals

The tendency among scholars to put all colonial territories on the train to the nation-state gets in the way of understanding the actual give-and-take of the post-war years. The French case is the most striking, and the most frequently dismissed. If one thinks of France as a very French nation-state presiding over very subordinate colonies, the long and intense debates over how to reconstitute a complex political entity make sense only as a smokescreen for stubborn maintenance of the status quo. But the archives make clear the acute uncertainty in official circles about what sort of polity France was and could become.[9]

The French Empire was renamed French Union; colonies became *territoires d'outre-mer*. They were part of a multiplex, not dualistic, polity consisting of old colonies in the Caribbean, new colonies in Africa, Algeria, protectorates like Morocco, and mandates like Cameroon, each of which had a distinct juridical status debated at length in French assemblies. Government leaders agreed that representatives from the colonies would have to help write a new constitution, but their numbers would not be proportional to population. But even a few Africans in the assembly, which also acted as a legislature, was enough to drive such durable, oppressive institutions as forced labour and the *indigénat*, separate administrative justice, out of existence. Senegalese deputies Léopold Senghor and Lamine Guèye helped draft and argued for constitutional articles concerning the French Union, and after colonial delegates briefly walked out, the majority realized that the constitution would have no legitimacy without their consent.

In the end, the 1946 Constitution proclaimed that inhabitants of all these entities would now have the 'qualities' of French citizens. This provision did

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[9] The discussion of France and French Africa in the following pages is based on my current research. For an early version, see my 'Alternatives to Empire: France and Africa after World War II,' in Douglas Howland and Luise White (eds), *The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations* (Bloomington, 2009), 94–123.

not translate into universal suffrage for another decade nor did it say precisely whether people in overseas France were citizens of the French Union or of the French Republic. But it conveyed the rights of the constitution to people in the empire, and its language of equivalence quickly proved a springboard for claims to give substance to that language. The new constitution no longer made citizenship contingent on the subject's submitting to the French civil code instead of Islamic or customary law in private legal matters, such as marriage and inheritance. In the Overseas Ministry's own interpretation, 'the legislature wanted to mark the perfect equality of all in public life, but not the perfect identity of the French of the metropole and the overseas French'.[10] In principle, the new French Union would be multicultural as well as egalitarian.

Here we arrive at the basic dilemma of post-war empire: could an imperial regime adopt a more democratic form of governance, a more nuanced view of sovereignty, and still remain imperial? Unlike empires of the past, which from Rome to the Austro-Hungarians had incorporated people of different ethnicities, civilizations, or nationalities into gradations of status within an inclusive—albeit coercive—polity, citizenship in a European empire now entailed economic and social rights as well as political ones. The consolidation of the welfare state after the war implied growing expectations that the state would guarantee, in some form, citizens' access to pensions, family allowances, health care, and education. If older empires had emphasized hierarchical social order, the French republic proclaimed norms of equivalence of all citizens. Bringing millions of impoverished subjects into citizenship in the 1940s could thus entail high costs, if claims based on contemporary standards of citizenship were made good.[11] And it was not clear that citizens of either European or African France could quickly set aside habits and expectations of privilege and authority, of discrimination and denigration, built up in decades of colonial rule.

These dilemmas help to explain the schizophrenic character of post-war French colonialism—at times integrative, capable of calm debate with African or Asian political activists, at times brutally violent against an entire category of people perceived to be a collective threat. Africans could sit in the French legislature, and African labour unions could organize, strike, and claim equal pay and benefits for equal work. At the same time, anything that fell into the category of 'insurrection' received the full colonial treatment. During the repression of the revolt in Madagascar in 1947 and the Algerian

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[10] Afrique Occidentale Française, Directeur Général des Affaires Politiques, Administratives et Sociales (Berlan), note, July 46, 17G 152, Archives du Sénégal.

[11] On the social dimensions of citizenship, see Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*.

war of 1954–62—as well as the Vietnam war up to the French defeat in 1954–French forces used collective terror against categories of people among whom rebels were supposed to lurk, and they used torture.

But even in Algeria, French governments tried at the same time pro-grammes of '*promotion musulmane*'—what Americans would call affirmative action—to get Muslim Algerians to see the benefits of inclusion in the French polity. By the mid-1950s, French governments were aware that they were caught in a trap between following through on the logic of citizenship—which was costly—and a cycle of rebellion and repression, now taking place under the gaze of international institutions and observers increasingly sceptical of the normality of colonial rule. The media, as well as government officials, began to consider openly whether preserving an empire of citizens might be less in the interest of France than devolving power and renouncing responsibility.[12]

The more decentralized colonial structure of Great Britain did not foster such a debate over equivalence of all subjects of the Queen. But Britain couldn't escape the problem of preserving empire when the very terms by which the imperial state was trying to relegitimize itself—development and political participation—were leading to an escalation of demands for social and economic resources. Attempts to get educated Africans to focus their ambitions on local government quickly failed. The focus was not London, but it was not the local council either; it was the centre of each territory. Political parties in colony after colony demanded full participation in each territory's legislative and executive institutions, while social movements demanded better wages, fairer crop prices, and more educational facilities.

British policy was at first glance quite unlike French. What was held out before Africans was, it seemed, the possibility that in some unclear time, maybe a generation or more, the Gold Coast could become Canada. Colonial Secretaries in the 1940s even claimed that such a trajectory had long been British policy. But Britain also recognized how important the em-pire's dominions and colonies had been in World War II, and the Nationalities Act of 1948 created something of an echo of what the French were doing—a second tier Commonwealth citizenship, derivative of the pri-mary citizenship of the Dominions, but applied to colonies as well. Not least

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[12] Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, 2006); Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York, 2002); Raphaëlle Branche, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie 1954–1962* (Paris, 2001); Cooper, *Decolonization*.

of its significance was that it gave colonials the right to enter the British Isles. In that way, British Africans were also becoming citizens of empire.[13]

When political movements strayed beyond certain (not entirely clear) lines, as in Kenya in 1952, the colonial government, like that of France, responded with massive detentions and confinements in prison camps, interrogations under torture, capital punishment with minimal judicial oversight, and forced relocations of entire villages.[14] Yet Britain in 1952 had already accepted that the Gold Coast was being governed internally by elected African politicians and that it was en route to independence, a status it obtained in 1957. The excess of repression may well have reflected the self-perceived openness to political reform: that some Africans rejected the political inclusion and economic development that was being offered them now struck officials as an affront, not the backward inclinations inherent in the nature of the African.

Beneath this split vision of modernizing and dangerous Africans lay thinking about the nature of African society and culture that had not made, in its substratum, as sharp a break with the past as it had on the surface. Reading speeches and archival documents from the late 1940s, one comes to realize that a work of imagination was developing in the official minds of French and British imperialism. If indirect rule and the work of interwar anthropology were on the same page in recognizing both the specificity and the backwardness of African societies, the post-war leap of faith was both an embrace of potential equality and a refusal of particularity. The African worker or farmer would be like a worker or farmer anywhere. The African who could sit in the legislative council in a British colony or in the legislature in Paris was fine as an abstraction, but likely to be labelled a demagogue in practice—Nkrumah, Kenyatta, and Azikiwe all suffered this fate until they became such political necessities that they had to be remade to fit the image of the respectable African leader.[15]

## Economic reconstruction: the delicate balance of exploitation and development

The post-war dilemma for France and Britain was that they needed empire more than ever and had fewer means to enforce their power over it. With the destruction of manufacturing plant in Europe and with revolution and

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[13] Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, 1997).

[14] David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War and the End of Empire* (New York, 2005).

[15] These themes are developed in Cooper, *Decolonization*.

204 Frederick Cooper

uncertainty in Asian colonies, Africa loomed large in post-war planning, the most promising source of primary products, which was about all that either empire was able to sell for hard currency. Sir Stafford Cripps, the Labour Government's Minister for Economic Affairs, told the conference of African Governors in 1947, 'the whole future of the sterling area and its ability to survive depends in my view upon a quick and extensive development of our African resources'.[16] The Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, fantasized, 'If only we pushed on & developed Africa we could have U.S. dependent on us, & eating out of our hand in four or five years.'[17]

This was fantasy, but it did mean that French and British governments had to take expanding the productive capacity of Africa more seriously than they had before. The Labour Government was also sensitive to accusations that it was merely interested in exploiting Africa more intensely. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, passed in the aftermath of waves of strikes and disorders in the West Indies and central Africa in the late 1930s, provided the ideal conceptual basis for asserting that economic development would be a win-win situation. The French came up with their own development funding legislation in 1946. Both these acts repudiated, for the first time, the colonial doctrine that each colony had to pay for itself. Unlike any previous effort, an explicit goal of these acts was to raise the standard of living of colonized people.[18]

The ministries in both Paris and London set about planning development for their African colonies, and both exhibited a sensibility also evident in their thinking about political change. 'African systems of land tenure and the cultural routines associated with them', said the head of the Colonial Office's economic division, 'if maintained to the full in their traditional form, would effectively prevent any rapid technical change, possibly any change at all'. His French equivalents believed Africans were 'frozen in anachronistic and archaic concepts and do not see the necessity to participate by a voluntary and reasoned effort in the progress of their country. *On the whole the masses are*

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[16] Transcript of African Governors' Conference, 12 November 1947, 37–40.

[17] Bevin quoted in Hugh Dalton diaries, 15 October 1948, cited in R. D. Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy 1938–1948* (London, 1982), 95–6.

[18] The history of 'development' is a burgeoning field. For a collection of recent contributions, see *Journal of Modern European History* 8:1 (2010). For an earlier take on the subject, see Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley, 1997). One of the best recent studies of development as an on-the-ground, contested process is Monica Van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger, 1920–1960* (Portsmouth NH, 2002).

*not yet socially ready to adapt to the norms of a renovated life.*'[19] But change they must, and so planners talked about the need for an 'agricultural revolution'. Other elements of the colonial establishment were well aware—and even boasted about the accomplishment—that Africans, without a lot of help, were producing cocoa, coffee, and other export crops, and indeed a boom in such exports was beginning, but the top planners felt they were starting at zero. Having at last admitted that Africans could be made into modern farmers and workers, they felt that only they knew how to make them fit the role.[20]

But even that conceit was a dynamic factor, for development was now clearly articulated as an imperial responsibility, and the standard of living of African rural farmers and urban workers was on the agenda. Like citizenship in French Africa, the fiction that the African was, or potentially was, a worker or farmer just like any other, soon became a claim-making construct. Trade unions were in a particularly good position to make such claims, and the post-war years in both French and British Africa witnessed a series of major strikes. The unions not only had the strategic possibility of withholding labour at a time when Africa's productive capacities were vital to empire, but they had a rhetoric with which to make claims. As early as the Dakar general strike of January 1946, the slogan 'equal pay for equal work' had become the labour movement's theme. It went on to demand a labour code that would treat workers of all origins equally, a goal achieved in 1952, and family allowances equivalent to those received by workers in France, a goal achieved by civil servants in 1950 and (in part) by private sector workers in 1956. In British Africa, such as in Mombasa's general strike of 1947, the theme of equality surfaced as well, although without the same appeal to empire-wide citizenship and its norms of equivalence that animated unions in French Africa.[21]

Getting a handle on the social struggles in Africa brought French and British governments into a spiral of escalating demands, as concessions encouraged trade union leaders and workers to make further demands and made them desirable allies of political leaders. Both governments responded by deploying the knowledge they thought they had: the experience of

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[19] Sydney Caine, Minute, 23 April 1946, CO 852/1003/3, British National Archives; 'Observations et conclusions personnelles du Gouverneur Roland Pré, Président de la Commission d'Etude et de Coordination des Plans de Modernisation et d'Equipement des Territoires d'Outre-Mer', May 1954, Archives d'Outre-Mer, emphasis in original.

[20] Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens OH, 2007); Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War and Welfare in Kenya, 1925–52* (Oxford, 2000).

[21] Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven, 1987).

managing class conflict at home. They began to articulate a vision of a stable workforce, socialized into industrial discipline and urban life, breaking ties with backward rural villages and settling permanently, with wives and children, in cities, minetowns, and commercial centres. They envisioned a new gender order based on the ideal of the male breadwinner, as much as a new system of organizing labour. Not surprisingly, the vision stood at an oblique angle to the reality of daily life in post-war cities, as Africans faced not only difficult conditions of life, but also sought to create forms of family life and urban association that differed considerably from the Eurocentric models of the labour officers.[22] Nonetheless, even the imaginary possibility of a new order of class relations in Africa—and fear not only of radical movements, but of social chaos—confronted colonial governments with the high costs of meeting wage demands and providing the social services necessary to give their new visions even a semblance of reality.

## African alternatives: claim-making between empire and nations

We assume, from the way things ended up in the 1960s, that every African politician was or should have been claiming the right to have an independent nation-state. Such claims were present at the start, but the constellation was, at war's end, much wider than that. The Pan-African Congress of Manchester of October 1945 proclaimed the common struggle of the African diaspora against colonialism, but it was vague on what would replace it—territorial autonomy was not foremost on the agenda.[23] In the autumn of 1945, political activists in French Africa began a series of campaigns for seats in the assembly in Paris. The most important claim made by practically all the political activists in French Africa was for citizenship to be extended as widely as possible and to convey the fullest set of rights that could be wrung from the assembly. After the constitution enshrined a generalized citizenship for French Africans, political elites continued to battle to correct the flaws in the document and to insist that not just full political rights, but social and economic

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[22] Cooper, *Decolonization*. The pioneering research of Georges Balandier began in the mid-1950s to expose the complex realities of African urban life. *Sociologie des Brazzavilles noires*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1985 [1955]). For a recent study of family life and gender relations, see Lisa Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Men, Women, and Wage Labour in Southwest Nigeria* (Portsmouth, NH, 2003). On gender and politics, see Lynn Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley, 2003).

[23] Another possibility that seemed viable at war's end but was soon marginalized was that of a single anti-imperial project embracing both Africans and African-Americans. See Penny von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, 1997).

rights, including the benefits of the new welfare state, would go to all Africans. A group of political activists founded in 1946 a political party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine intended to take on French power across all of Africa, and until its leaders divided in 1958 over the issue of claiming immediate independence, it focused on demands for social and economic equality and more political voice and autonomy within the French Union.[24]

There were blockages along this route, but major milestones too, such as the Labour Code of 1952 that brought the 40-hour week, paid vacations, organizing rights, and other benefits of the French worker to all wage workers in the colonies. Union leaders were well aware that their arguments depended on the French connection and on the French Union being considered a meaningful unit of belonging and activity. But Léopold Senghor made it clear that he wanted that Union to be about political and civil equality, not about conformity to a French way of life. As he put it in regard to the Senegalese who had elected him, 'If they are politically French, they are not culturally French.'[25]

We know, in retrospect, that citizenship was too little, too late in Algeria, but in 1946 it was not such a sure thing. For Ferhat Abbas, a leading Algerian political leader, the point was to acquire a citizenship without giving up the sense of a distinct Algerian nationality. As he put it, 'For us, the problem is to find a form that permits us to integrate Muslim nationalism into French politics, and the best form seems to us to be federalism.'[26] What Abbas and Senghor meant by federalism was not exactly what most politicians from European France had in mind—the latter were thinking more of a devolution of specified political functions, with strong, French, institutions at the federal level. But a leading centre-right politician, Paul Coste-Floret, could say in

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[24] Politicians in post-war Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Dahomey, most notably, were emerging from a relatively lively activist milieu and organizing themselves effectively. Where education and associational life was more curtailed, especially in French Equatorial Africa, the first politicians came out of government service and missions, with less autonomy, and access to office-produced politics, rather than politics leading to office. See Florence Bernault, *Démocraties ambiguës en Afrique Centrale: Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon: 1940–1965* (Paris, 1996). See also Joseph Roger de Benoist, *L'Afrique Occidentale Française de 1944 à 1960* (Dakar, 1982), Ruth Schachter Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford, 1964), and Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford, 2002).

[25] Senghor, Assemblée Nationale Constituante, Commission de la Constitution, *Comptes Rendus*, 12 February 1946, 443.

[26] Ferhat Abbas, ibid., 19 September 1946, 577.

1946 what would be astounding from the Left as much as the Right today: 'We are today partisans of a pluralist democracy, that is a democracy of groups.'[27]

We are thus talking about a framework for political debate in France around federalism, which could be pushed in a direction more like an old empire, with a strong centre presiding over components marked by difference, or toward equality, with European France alongside African France in a wider political structure. The 1946 Constitution was a compromise, more like the former, but in generalizing citizenship, while allowing Muslims and others overseas to keep their civil status, it met the minimal demands of most African deputies. They regarded their defence of the citizenship provisions against attempts to dilute them as a triumph. They had put on the table alternatives that were neither continuation of colonialism nor the break-up of empire into territorial nation states. They were arguing that sovereignty was not all-or-nothing, that it could be shared among embedded territorial units or even embedded states.

In 1958, what had once been called colonies, later overseas territories, acquired the more ponderous name of 'Member States'. A few years later, Mamadou Dia of Senegal put his goal this way: 'It is necessary in the final analysis that the imperialist conception of the Nation-State give way to the modern conception of a multinational state.'[28]

The politics of citizenship—imperial, national, or federal—was far from the only dimension of African politics in the post-war years. Historians have begun to analyse a variety of forms of political discourse and organization, some located in particular spaces, others spreading out over larger networks. Political discourse took place in local languages, in lingua franca (like KiSwahili), and in European languages. By the mid-1950s, political parties were proving skilful in coopting some of these strains of political activism into their cause. They presented not only a set of grievances against colonial regimes, but a possibility of accomplishing goals as colonial states made one concession after another to elected African politicians, allowing them to promise schools, roads, and other services to constituents and distribute patronage to supporters.[29]

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[27] Coste-Floret, Assemblée Nationale Constituante, *Débats*, 9 April 1946, 1640.

[28] Mamadou Dia in *La Condition Humaine*, August 29, 1955. See also ibid., 29 November 1951, 31 May 1956.

[29] For an example both of political mobilization in local idioms and its relation to national political organization, see Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison WI, 1990); Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (Athens OH, 1992); and Derek Peterson, *Creative*

Political movements in the 1950s did not all focus on the individual territorial state—on Senegal, Nigeria, or the Gold Coast. Regional movements proved hard for African politicians to tame in 1950s Africa. Alternative forms of political imagination appeared at an international level: the possibility of world revolution led by the recently victorious Soviet Union and especially after the 1955 Bandung conference, the possibility of an ex-colonial bloc working collectively against imperialism.[30] Indeed, the importance of subnational and supranational alternatives may well have focused the attention of elites in both Africa and Europe on a terrain they thought they could manage in their own interests—or at least a terrain they thought they could understand.[31]

The territorial alternative seemed to be a focus of political organization in British Africa at an earlier date than it did in French Africa, and its importance grew as African politicians refused to confine themselves to local government and pressured governments to give more and more scope to elected legislative bodies in each colony. Especially after the Gold Coast riots of 1948, officials had to undertake a series of constitutional reforms in each territory.

British Africans adapted to the territorial framework in which they saw increasing possibilities for power. Kwame Nkrumah had set out after the war to work for pan-Africanist organizations in London, but when he found himself in the Gold Coast, stopping in Liberia and Sierra Leone for a bit of pan-African organizing, he recognized quickly the opportunities which the minimal degree of political participation at the territorial level allowed. With a few stops in detention, he found that those openings could be pushed wider. In 1951, he became the 'Leader of Government Business' in the Gold Coast, a kind of junior prime minister. London knew that the Gold Coast was on the road from self-government to independence, and that the other colonies were well aware of the possibilities opening up to them. In assuming his new role, Nkrumah confronted another complexity in defining a new nation-state, the fear that such a state would be used by some of its members against others who regarded themselves as a distinct collectivity, with their own cultural and

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*Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth NH, 2004). On politics and religion in regional perspective, see Karen Fields, *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa* (Princeton, 1985).

[30] For more on the international context, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2005). On Bandung, see Christopher Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens OH, 2010).

[31] For an overall interpretation of African independence and its consequences, see Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002).

economic interests. He put down a movement in the relatively wealthy cocoa-producing region of the Gold Coast that used his own language of nationalism to claim an Asante, rather than a Gold-Coast nation. As he consolidated power, he attempted to prevent cocoa-generated wealth from financing opposition politics, making the state into the focus of aspirations for economic development and social advancement.[32] But when Nkrumah achieved in 1957 his promise of turning the colony of the Gold Coast into the state of Ghana, he saw beyond it, hoping to create what he called a 'United States of Africa'.[33]

That is to get beyond the scope of this paper. Whatever Nkrumah, Senghor, and others wanted in 1945, by the late 1950s, it was becoming clear that what they could get was the nation-state. Nkrumah wanted more, and Senghor wanted something better. Even as governments elected under universal suffrage were gaining real power within French Africa, Senghor expressed his disappointment. Africa was being balkanized he said, invoking by his reference to an earlier imperial breakup—that of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, the danger the nation-states would be too small, too weak, too disunited to exercise real power in the world. To him, federation had offered the possibility not only of connections with France, but of connections within Africa, of sovereignty shared both horizontally and vertically. The failure of the one would turn out to be the failure of the other.

What we are left with, looking from the vantage point of 1945, was that as France and Britain tried to reconstruct empire, African political activists, aware that empire could not be constructed as it had been before, saw uncertain but open possibilities to make claims not just for autonomy and expression of an African personality, but for forms of political inclusion and access to resources as a right open to members of a supranational polity. Out of differing but overlapping agendas at war's end came a dynamic of politics more diverse and uncertain than national narratives today allow us to see.

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[32] Jean Marie Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison, 1993). See also Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951–1960* (Athens OH, 1999).
[33] Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (New York, 1963).