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ETHNICITY, PATRONAGE AND THE AFRICAN STATE: THE POLITICS OF UNCIVIL NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

Recent research has revealed that modern African ethnicity is a social construction of the colonial period through the reactions of pre-colonial societies to the social, economic, cultural and political forces of colonialism. Ethnicity is the product of a continuing historical process, always simultaneously old and new, grounded in the past and perpetually in creation. Colonial states were grounded in the alliances with local 'Big Men', incorporating ethnically-defined administrative units linked to the local population by incorporation of pre-colonial patron-client relations. This was reinforced by European assumptions of neatly bounded and culturally homogeneous 'tribes' and a bureaucratic preoccupation with demarcating, classifying and counting subject populations, as well as by the activities of missionaries and anthropologists. African ethnic invention emerged through internal struggles over moral economy and political legitimacy tied to the definition of ethnic communities—moral ethnicity; and external conflicts over differential access to the resources of modernity and economic accumulation—political tribalism. Ethnicities were, in particular, the creations of elites seeking the basis for a conservative modernization.

The colonial legacy of bureaucratic authoritarianism, pervasive patron-client relations, and a complex ethnic dialectic of assimilation, fragmentation and competition has persisted in post-colonial societies. Patron-client networks remain the fundamental state-society linkage in circumstances of social crisis and uncertainty and have extended to the very centre of the state. This accounts for the personalistic, materialistic and opportunistic character of African politics. Such networks also penetrate institutions of civil society and liberal democracy, undermining programmes of socio-economic and political reform.

Introduction: African politics and the problem of ethnicity

IN APRIL 1996, John Stackhouse, international development correspondent of the Toronto *Globe and Mail* published a critical reflection on the process of democratization in Africa under the revealing title 'Are the Big

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Men Coming Back?'[1]   Somehow, after all the efforts at political reform and multi-party elections, all of the earnest concern with promoting the growth of civil society and pluralism, the evil triumvirate of patronage, corruption and tribalism appeared to be reasserting their retrograde influence on African societies.   Of the three, 'tribalism' appeared to be the underlying basis of the other two, the foundation of the power of the 'Big Men' and the catch-all explanation in academic analysis, as well as the mass media, of catastrophic political failure on the continent.   In African political language 'tribalism' stigmatizes all social and political manifestations of ethnicity.   African political leaders and intellectuals, as well as Western social scientists, have routinely denounced ethnicity or tribalism as retrogressive and shameful, an unwelcome interruption of the pursuit of modernity.   In Leroy Vail's vivid phrase, ethnicity has been treated as a 'cultural ghost . . . an atavistic residue deriving from the distant past of rural Africa . . . [that] should have evaporated with the passage of time [but] continues to refuse to obey laws of social and political change . . .   Ethnic consciousness is, in this view, a form of collective irrationality.'[2]

In the dominant paradigms of modernity, liberal or Marxist, preoccupied with the development of secular nation-states, the persistence of ethnicity instead of its supersession by the broader modern, progressive solidarities of class or nation threatens the entire development process.   As Samora Machel, leader of one of the most radically modernist African regimes, bluntly put it, 'For the nation to live, the tribe must die'.[3]   And yet, the increasingly obvious and stubborn persistence of indigenous cultures, their ability to create 'new identities and orders of difference' out of eclectic and often contradictory elements of modernity and tradition, challenges the paradigms of development with 'the inescapable fact that Westerners are not the only ones going places in the modern world'.[4]   Meanwhile, even as they ritually denounce 'tribalism', African politicians, in the open secret of African politics, sedulously attend to the maintenance of the ethnic networks of patronage that are the basis of their power.

Ethnicity, particularly the continuing and even increasing salience of communal solidarities in African politics, cannot be adequately understood by theories preoccupied with the reproduction of the modernist paradigms of state and society, with what Africa is not, rather than with explaining

1.   *Globe and Mail*, 6 April 1996.
2.   Leroy Vail, 'Introduction: Ethnicity in southern African History', in Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (James Currey, London, 1989), pp. 1–3.   See also Crawford Young, 'Nationalism, ethnicity and class in Africa: A retrospective', *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, **103**, XXVI-3 (1986), pp. 442–3, 453–5; and Peter Ekeh, 'Social anthropology and two contrasting uses of tribalism in Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, **32**, 4 (1990), pp. 688–89.
3.   Quoted in Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996), p. 135.
4.   James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth century ethnography, literature and art* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1989), p. 17.

what it is. Liberal modernization theory, recycled within the anti-statist orthodoxies of the World Bank and IMF, is preoccupied with the repro- duction of uncritical and idealized models of liberal democracy, the market and civil society. Meanwhile, the various versions of dependency theory and, in particular, neo-Marxism struggle with why African bourgeoisies, proletariats and peasantries fail to play their expected historical roles or pursue their anticipated, conflicting class projects. The former, particu- larly among political scientists preoccupied with the process of 'democra- tization' in Africa, remains marked by a teleological bias that clouds the understanding of historical change. The development of African histori- cal research over the past forty years, which has transformed understanding of both pre-colonial and colonial societies, has not been fully effectively assimilated in the various versions of modernization theory and political development theory, which remain largely based on erroneous assumptions about 'traditional society' and misconceptions of the 'colonial legacy'. While the theories of the Left are more historically grounded, and have been responsible for some of the most striking research on the political economy of colonialism, they tend to be fixated on structural analysis and uncomfortable with cultural factors that suggest African idiosyncracy and difference within the global development of the capitalist world system. Methodologically, moreover, both liberal and Left approaches to develop- ment have been directed towards the goal of creating parsimonious theories of their universal relationships, 'laws' even, that determine change every- where, and push towards a level of abstraction that, at its extreme in the market models of neo-classical growth theory, is virtually devoid of specific empirical content. In such a context, where the theory becomes the object and purpose of analysis rather than its tool, the description and explanation of the compelling singularities of historical experience and diversities of culture are increasingly impossible.

This essay pursues another track both theoretically and methodologic- ally. A growing body of research, primarily by historians and anthropolo- gists, has analysed the character of pre-colonial societies in Africa, the impact of and African response to colonial rule, and the contemporary continuity of institutions and trajectories of change laid down in the colonial period. This work has dealt with only a small proportion of the more than forty states and many hundreds of identifiable ethnic communities of sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, we can synthesize from it the common factors present and theorize the relationships between them to explain not only the similarities between cases but their contingent and idiosyncratic differences.[5] The

5. Charles Tilly makes the distinction between the theoretical focus on common relation- ships rather than more deterministic models of common sequences or outcomes in 'Reflec- tions on the history of European state-making', in Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975), pp. 15–17.

intent here, therefore, is to provide a conceptual tool-kit with which we can analyse the specific stories of different African states and cultures, not because of African 'exceptionalism', of its deviation from the otherwise common experience of humanity, but because 'in the real world all cases are in their own ways "peculiar" '.[6]

This approach reveals both how little we yet know about most contemporary African societies and how they became the way they are, and encourages the kind of 'thick description' that will make such understanding possible.[7]   It is also necessarily an historical approach that focuses on the cultural logic of African politics, but without falling into narrowly idealist or 'culturalist' explanations, and stresses instead the linkage between cultural and cognitive factors and material political and economic forces.[8]   The familiar characteristics of African politics, those that carry the stigma of failure—the combination of the heavy-handed authoritarianism of the state with the pervasiveness of patron-client relations at all levels of politics, the salience of ethnicity in political and socio-economic transactions, the crude materialism and corruption of the 'politics of the belly' that reduces the state to fought-over instruments of accumulation—can then be understood as grounded in factors of history, culture and political economy, and not the moral turpitude and cupidity of African elites or the inherent perversity of states.   The accumulating weight of evidence shows that African ethnicity and its relationship to politics is new, not old: a response to capitalist modernity shaped by similar forces to those related to the development of ethnic nationalism in Europe since the late nineteenth century,[9] but encountered in distinct African and colonial circumstances.

In this essay I will first sketch the principal components of a 'constructivist' approach to the analysis of ethnicity and then examine aspects of ethnic community and identity in pre-colonial Africa that constitute the socio-cultural basis for modern developments.   We will then examine the construction of ethnicity under colonialism, including the role of the colonial state and political economy, and of missionaries and anthropologists.   The African response to colonial changes will be discussed through the concepts of moral ethnicity and political tribalism that

6.   Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English state formation as cultural revolution* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1985), pp. 189–90.
7.   James Manor, 'Introduction', to Manor, ed., *Rethinking Third World Politics* (Longman, London and New York, 1991), pp. 7–9. 'Thick description' derives from Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, New York, 1973), ch. 1.
8.   Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*; Jean-François Bayart, 'Finishing with the idea of the Third World: The concept of the political trajectory', in Manor, *Rethinking Third World Politics*, pp. 62–5; and Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p. 52.
9.   Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological perspectives* (Pluto Press, London, 1993), pp. 8–9, 32–3, 88–90; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso Press, London, revised ed., 1991), esp. chs. 7 and 10.   The comparison between African ethnicity and the ethnic nationalisms of Europe falls beyond the scope of this essay, but it is illuminating for both and I hope to explore it in a further paper.

describe the complex internal and external processes of the development of ethnic community and consciousness. From colonial intrusions and African responses emerged the unique linkage under colonialism between bureaucratic authoritarianism, patronage and clientelism, and ethnic fragmentation and competition. The continuity of these institutions, power relations and identities in post-colonial states has shaped the particular character of state-society relations in Africa and the 'politics of the belly'. These coalesce in the uncivil nationalism that undermines the legitimacy of the state, inhibits the formation of broader trans-ethnic national identities and determines the prospects of current efforts at democratization.

Pre-colonial Africa and the construction of ethnicity

The initial analytic models of ethnicity of post-1945 African studies 'primordialism' and 'instrumentalism', have been subject to increasingly searching criticism. Primordialism, which emphasized the archaic cultural basis of ethnic identities, is plainly redolent of the traditional versus modern dichotomy of modernization theory, as well as of the earlier colonial and anthropological stereotypes of stagnant and unchanging tribal societies. Instrumentalism, meanwhile, focused on the manipulation of ethnic identities and loyalties for political and economic ends, and reflected the disillusionment among scholars from perspectives as different as neo-Marxism and rational choice theory with the mercenary character and corruption of post-independence politics. Each model was, in its own way, essentially ahistorical—the latter dealing with a decontextualized present, the former with an unchanging post—and they were actually applied before the current body of ethno-historical research was written. A detailed critical analysis of these analytic paradigms is outside the scope of this essay,[10] but both pointed to important elements of ethnicity that cannot be ignored. While instrumentalism alerts us to the 'contingent, situational and circumstantial' use of ethnicity 'in the pursuit of material advantage'[11] the primordialist model insists on the non-instrumental, deeply affective and emotional, character of ethnicity and its necessary origins in real culture experience that differentiate it from other bases of political identity and mobilization.[12] Both of these elements

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10. The development and critique of the changing paradigms for the study of ethnicity in Africa are perceptively discussed in Young, 'Nationalism, ethnicity, and class in Africa', and Carola Lentz, ' "Tribalism" and ethnicity in Africa: a review of four decades of anglophone research', *Cahiers des sciences humaines*, **31**, 2 (1995).
11. Crawford Young, 'Evolving modes of consciousness and ideology: Nationalism and ethnicity', in David Apter and Carl Rosberg, eds., *Political Development and the New Realism in Sub-Saharan Africa* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1994), p. 77.
12. Erikson, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 54–5; J. D. Y. Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis', in Elizabeth Tonkin *et al.*, eds., *History and Ethnicity* (Routledge, London, 1989), pp. 198–200.

can, however, be more effectively dealt with through the more nuanced, complex and historically grounded constructivist approach that has developed out of contemporary research.

The understanding of ethnicity as socially constructed focuses on it not as a fixed primordial identity but as the protean outcome of the continuous and generally conflict-ridden interaction of political, economic and cultural forces both external and internal to developing ethnic communities.   With the development of African historical research, it has become increasingly clear that pre-colonial African societies, especially in turbulent decades before the establishment of formal colonial control in the late nineteenth century, were anything but unchanging.   Moreover, pre-colonial political and socio-cultural boundaries were marked by fuzziness and flexibility; and Africans existed within a reality of multiple, overlapping and alternative collective identities.[13]   Important twentieth century ethnic communities and identities, such as the Shona and Yoruba, had no conscious or institutional pre-colonial existence, although there were large numbers of linguistically and culturally related people who would later become Shona or Yoruba.[14]   There is also evidence that the notion of the individual person with the fixed, unique and bounded identity of Western modernity simply did not exist until introduced under colonial rule.[15]

If we have now moved beyond the myth of the ancient, stable tribe with a homogeneous culture and unambiguous identities, we can also transcend the equally mythological notion of the relatively egalitarian tribal community.   What historical research now richly documents is the complex differentiations of wealth and power within all African societies, even those 'stateless' societies that proved such a puzzle to European colonizers.[16]   African communities were pervaded by relations of domination and dependence, based on patriarchal power exercised across differences of genders and generations, lineages and clans, languages and cultures.   Where land was plentiful and populations small, wealth and power were measured in control of people, in having a large following of family and non-kin dependents.   The power relations of pre-colonial Africa were typically of patrons and clients.   'Big men' presided over intricate networks of clientage involving reciprocal but unequal relations

13.   The seminal statement of this perspective is Aidan Southall, 'The illusion of Tribe', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, v, 1 (1970).   See also the discussions in Carola Lentz, ' "Tribalism" and ethnicity in Africa', pp. 316–7; Sara Berry, *No Condition is Permanent* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1993), pp. 4, 25-6.
14.   On the Shona see Terence Ranger, 'Missionaries, migrants and the Manyika: The invention of ethnicity in Zimbabwe', in Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, and on the Yoruba, Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis'.
15.   R. Fardon, 'Ethnicity, the person and the "Problem of Identity" in West Africa', cited in Lentz, ' "Tribalism" and ethnicity in Africa', p. 319.
16.   John Lonsdale, 'The moral economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, poverty and civic virtue in Kikuyu political thought', in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book two: Violence and ethnicity* (James Currey, London, 1992).

with 'small boys', as well as power over women and children, and those held in the diverse forms and degrees of servitude of pawnship and slavery.[17]

Pre-colonial societies were thus full of conflict and competition, instability and change. The scourges of war, famine and disease destroyed old communities and identities, forced peoples to move, and also created new communities out of survivors and refugees, often linked in unequal and dependent relations. The large states of nineteenth century Africa were usually multi-lingual and multi-cultural, pulling together diverse communities under political sovereignties of widely varying effectiveness. Ethno-cultural construction was constantly present, an ambiguous and conflict-ridden process through which people struggled to create islands of order and meaning within the flux and turbulence around them. The invention of tradition and ethnic identities, along with polities, religions, trading networks and regional economies, were present in Africa long before the European proconsuls arrived to take control and attempt to integrate the continent more directly into the global economy of capitalist modernity. The modern ethnicities of Africa originate in the colonial period, however, and they are both clearly derived from the character of pre-colonial societies and profoundly influenced in form, scope and content by the social, economic, cultural and political forces of colonialism.

For the constructivist approach, therefore, ethnicity is not a fixed condition or essence, but a historical process that can only be studied in specific contexts. No African society was or is culturally homogeneous and univocal. Ethnicity is constructed in societies containing multiple and conflicting versions of culture and custom, as well as divergent interests and conflicts of gender, generation, clan, faction and, under the impact of colonialism, developing classes. Moreover, the modern ethnicities of Africa, so much larger and more sharply defined and differentiated than those of the past, also continue to be internally differentiated into regional or cultural sub-groups and identities engaged in vigorous internal rivalries, as among the Yoruba; or even in the assertion of new and distinct ethnic identities, as in formerly subordinate and pariah groups among the Tswana.[18] Ethnicities are the ambiguous, constantly contested and

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17. On the importance of the 'big man' syndrome in Western Bantu cultures see Jan Vansina, *Paths Through the Rainforest* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1990). The Ethiopian version, *tilik saw*, is 'as extreme an example as you will find anywhere in Africa'. (Christopher Clapham, personal communication, December 1997.) On pawnship see Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy, eds., *Pawnship in Africa* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1994).
18. Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis', p. 200; Jacqueline Solway, 'Multi-party democracy and ethnic politics in Botswana: grassroots perspectives', Canadian Research Consortium on Southern Africa, University of Toronto, November 1995. See also Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa* (Malthouse Press, Lagos, 1994), pp. 20–1; Githu Muigai, 'Ethnicity and the renewal of competitive politics in Kenya', in Harvey Glickman, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa* (African Studies Association Press, Atlanta, 1995), pp. 170–3.

changing results of cultural politics; the outcome of an endless process in which they are always simultaneously old and new, grounded in the past and perpetually in the process of creation.

At one level, the political salience and instrumental character of ethnicity is manifest in its deliberate activation as a combination of identity, interest and common action. 'Ethnic collective action', according to Mozaffar, 'is predominantly a process of strategic political interaction between self-interested actors with divergent interests'. However, the strategic rationality of ethnicity in groups with divergent internal interests requires a symbolic identity of collective interests with an ethnic identity endowed with normative significance and emotive power that transcends other bases of solidarity or conflict.[19]   Here we encounter the distinctive duality of ethnicity 'as a cultural identity and consciousness laden with possibilities for political mobilization and as a discourse which arranges collective memory as a basis for political action'.[20]   Ethnic identity cannot be conjured out of thin air, it must be built on real cultural experience. Before ethnicity is the basis for political mobilization and action, it must be a work of intellectual construction, an imagining or invention of a common history, language and culture, typically expressed in oral or written texts combining and reworking both old and new element.[21]   The efficacy of the potent combination of interest and affect 'rests on the transfer of the emotional power of kinship and "home" to larger communities', but behind a facade of ethnic unity and homogeneity there is always a multi-faceted, ambiguous and conflict-ridden process of 'multiple meanings and negotiations'.[22]   Whose imaginings and how they come to define the linkage of community, identity and interests are the core elements of the politics of ethnicity.

Colonialism and the construction of African ethnicity

The social construction of modern forms of ethnicity in Africa is coterminous with the development of the structure and culture of colonialism. The structural characteristics of the colonial state, an apparatus of authoritarian bureaucratic control, and of the colonial political economy, based on African cash-crops and wage labour in capitalist commodity and labour markets, radically, albeit only partially, transformed

19.   Shaheen Mozaffar, 'The institutional logic of ethnic politics: A prolegomenon', in Glickman, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa*, pp. 60–1.
20.   Bogumil Jewsiewicki, 'The formation of the political culture and ethnicity in the Belgian Congo, 1920–1959', in Vail, ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, p. 325.
21.   It is in the similar importance of written texts in the process of cultural invention that the comparison between African ethnicity and European nationalism is most revealing. See the comments on the European experience by Ernest Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983), pp. 55–61, which can be applied to Africa with only minor modifications.
22.   Lentz, ' "Tribalism" and ethnicity in Africa', pp. 323–4.

the structural and spatial organization of African societies.   These institu-
tions constituted the structural context shaping both the form and content
of ethnic communities, identities and interests, as well as the modes of
ethnic political mobilization and organization.   The ideology and culture
of colonialism, especially in the imagining of African societies by colonial
officials and European missionaries, provided the dominant cognitive
context molding the invention of tribes and their customs by Africans
themselves.

Institutions provide the most immediately encountered context of the
interaction of structural determination and conscious agency.[23]   The
crucial importance of institutions, especially the state, in the development
of ethnicity in Africa has been stressed most recently by Shaheen
Mozaffar.[24]   The state in colonial Africa, within the broader context of
the intrusion of capitalist modernity, was the central institutional force in
the organization, production and distribution of social resources.   It also
shaped the accompanying changes in the social criteria of access to those
resources; and the resulting social structural differentiation between indi-
viduals and communities.   By authoritatively defining rules of behaviour
that specified for Africans what was required, prohibited and permitted, the
colonial state structured the choices of individuals by constructing social,
economic and political situations; assigning individual roles and identities;
and defining the choice of goals, strategies and behaviours.   In so doing,
that state delineated the strategic contexts in which ethnicity was or was not
salient, and moulded the choices of political actors with regard to both the
ascriptive markers of ethnicity and the organizational forms in which it was
expressed.   This shaped, in turn, the scope of ethnic politics, its relation-
ship with other social cleavages, and the complex interaction of ethnic
identities and interests.   Exactly how this happened in specific historical
contexts depended on the actual structural characteristics of colonial states,
the broader structural contradictions and conflicts they struggled to con-
trol, and the distinctive manner in which colonial power was grounded in
indigenous African societies.

Colonialism in Africa did not reproduce the full range of European
institutions and culture; rather, it introduced partial and extremely skewed
representations of Europe not only through the state, but also through
the missions, merchant capital, and even settler communities.   What the
colonial states reproduced in Africa were the bureaucratic institutions of

23.   This is discussed in Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: the dialectic of domination* (James Currey and Ohio University Press, London and Athens, Ohio, 1990), pp. 16–23.
24.   The remainder of this paragraph is adapted from Mozaffar, 'The institutional logic of ethnic politics', pp. 37–55.   Mozaffar develops his model in the context of the 'new institutionalism', but the basic points are not unique to that approach and it is not adopted here.

political domination, particularly the prefectural field apparatus developed for the control of outlying provinces and largely agrarian populations, with deep historical roots in absolutist *ancien regimes*. This political structure was linked, as we shall see below, to a characteristic neo-traditionalist ideology of patriarchal bureaucratic authoritarianism. To this political apparatus of rule, with its attendant military and police organizations of coercion, was gradually added functional or technical departments, usually poorly staffed and funded, dealing largely with the development and control of the colonial political economy based on African labour and production.[25] The institutional forms of the European liberal state, notably those that provided public access to legislative and policy processes, or placed constraints on the arbitrary exercise of bureaucratic power, were not present until very late in the colonial epoch, save for the limited political access permitted for European capital and settlers.

Colonial states were undoubtedly bureaucratic despotisms, but with striking limitations on their capacity to control and transform the African societies over which they ruled. While the small cadres of European administrators and their equally small and poorly equipped police and military units could mow down overt African resistance with a few machine guns, very little was invested in the civil apparatus of infrastructure development, social services and macro-economic management that could have facilitated the full transformation of African societies and their integration into the capitalist world economy. Only in the last decades of European rule was a substantial investment made in a state apparatus of 'development' and this was correlated with widening African resistance and anti-colonial mobilization. Meanwhile, colonial states were obsessed with depicting themselves as omnipotent and omniscient—the constant British concern with maintaining their 'prestige' before their African subjects or the menacing Belgian metaphor of 'bula matari' (crusher of rocks) in the Congo—and projecting an image of unchallengeable power over a far more ambiguous and contested reality.[26]

It is well understood today that colonial states presided over only partial and fragmented transitions towards capitalist forms of labour, property and production; transitions, moreover, that were spread very unevenly over the landscape. This was a consequence of how the state's limited capabilities shaped the way it dealt with the central contradiction between the

25. Bruce Berman, 'Structure and process in the bureaucratic states of colonial Africa', in Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book One: State and class*.
26. Crawford Young's recent account in *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994) takes the '*bula matari*' image as the reality of a state exercising unconstrained power over its African subjects, thereby missing the complex, but often shrouded, underworld of collaboration, negotiation and conflict at local levels that intimately tied the colonial state to African societies and significantly constrained its power. This analysis is further developed in Bruce Berman, 'The perils of *Bula Matari*: Constraint and power in the colonial state', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, forthcoming.

promotion of capitalist accumulation and the maintenance of effective control.[27]   The dilemma, in short, was that the more colonial states pushed the development of the central features of the colonial political economy, using extra-economic coercion to establish the basis of labour and commodity markets, the more African societies were disrupted and the maintenance of law and order threatened.   Colonial regimes were notably ambivalent about pushing a full-scale development of agrarian capitalism that would have involved a process of primitive accumulation in which the mass of the African peasantry lost access to land.   Until the post-1945 era of development, they were unwilling and unable to press beyond the point where sufficient African production or labour for mines and plantations was forthcoming to both satisfy immediate metropolitan economic interests and provide enough tax revenue to ensure the fiscal reproduction of the state itself.   This created the characteristic pattern of the partial transformation and apparent partial preservation of indigenous societies, in which most African peasants retained some rights to land while producing for the market and/or periodically entering into wage labour; not because this pattern was in someway 'functional' for capital, but because in the specific historical conjunctures of colonial Africa, colonial states were restrained both by their limited resources and fear of the political consequences of doing more.[28]

The strategic logic of political control in the colonial state rested on a particular application of divide and rule, namely a practice of fragmenting and isolating African political activity within the confines of local administrative sub-divisions and thereby inhibiting the spread of opposition and resistance to a colony-wide basis where it might threaten to overwhelm the limited coercive resources at hand.[29]   Each administrative unit ideally contained a single culturally and linguistically homogeneous 'tribe' in which people continued to live within the indigenous institutions and were subject to 'tribal discipline' through local structures of authority.   The imperatives of control thus also constrained the transformation of African societies and, indeed, made what the colonial state understood to be the local institutions of tribe and kinship into the grassroots foundations of colonial domination, as well as a means by which it could derive a degree of legitimacy from association with 'traditional' social forces.[30]

27.   Berman, 'Structure and process'; pp. 145–63; Catherine Boone, 'States and ruling classes in post-colonial Africa', in Joel Migdal *et al.*, eds., *State Power and Social Forces* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), pp. 110, 114–15.
28.   Berman, *Control and Crisis*, esp chs. 1–2; Anne Phillips, *The Enigma of Colonialism: British policy in West Africa* (James Currey, London, 1989).
29.   Berman, 'Structure and process', p. 162.
30.   Ekeh, 'Social anthropology and two contrasting uses of tribalism in Africa', pp. 683–5; Terence Ranger, 'The invention of tradition revisited: the case of colonial Africa', in Ranger and O. Vaughan, eds., *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa* (London, 1993), pp. 14–15.

Furthermore, the maintenance of indigenous authorities also supplied the thin ranks of European administrators with desperately needed local allies, agents of colonial power grounded in local society who could actually enforce the mandates of the state in scattered rural communities.   All colonial powers in Africa, as Mamdani has recently argued, practised a form of indirect rule, 'decentralized despotism', through local chiefs and village headmen, regardless of whether they characterized their systems as 'indirect rule' or 'administration directe'.[31]   In French West Africa, for example, the commandants de cercles relied on no less than 47,000 village chiefs and 2,206 chefs de canton.[32]

The most important political relationship in the colonial state was the alliance between European district administrators and the chiefs of administrative sub-divisions and village headmen beneath them.   The extensive autonomy and discretion that European administrators exercised in practice was applied primarily to working out an effective relationship with their local African collaborators, who supplied the actual day-to-day presence and muscle of colonial domination.   Chiefs and headmen were the essential linkage between the colonial state and African societies.[33] This relationship typically took on a patron/client form, and had several important and contradictory consequences.

First, administrators sought to provide chiefs and headmen with sources of income and patronage to supplement their generally meagre official salaries and to reward them, along with influential elders of powerful local families and growing numbers of other African officials, teachers, wealthy farmers and businessmen with some of the profits of commodity production and trade.   The distribution of such resources materially demonstrated the benefits of colonialism and secured the loyalty of those who shared them.   This both reinforced the role of the state as the principle source of the benefits of modernity and development, and gave a partisan cast to its involvement in the contradiction between accumulation and control.   It also, and most crucially, made patron/client relations not only the fundamental mode of access to the state and its resources, but also, as in pre-colonial society, the fundamental relationship between ordinary people and those with wealth and power.   Moreover, while colonial states recoiled, on the one hand, from the disruptive consequences of full scale capitalist transformation of African society; local administrators, on the

31.   Mamdani, Citizen and Subject, chs. 2–3.
32.   Robert Delavignette, Freedom and Authority in French West Africa (Columbia University Press, New York, 1950), p. 79.
33.   Berman, 'Structure and process', pp. 160–3; Boone, 'States and ruling classes', pp. 113–17; Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European foundations of European imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration', in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, eds., Studies in the Theory of Imperialism (Longman, London, 1972).

other, often promoted such development as a way of rewarding their allies and securing the support of a class of 'progressive' Africans.

Second, through the reliance of chiefs and headmen the colonial state was linked to the exchange networks of rural society and implicated in the factional conflicts of lineage and clan through the chiefs' increasing control of peasant labour, peasant access to land, and the distribution of state patronage and resources.[34]   The ability of the colonial state to act as a benevolent paternal protector of its African subjects and as a disinterested arbiter of conflicting interests was thus compromised by the involvement of its agents in grassroots society and politics.

Third, the chiefs and headmen, through their active pursuit of wealth, distribution of patronage to their families and supporters, and frequent abuse of their power to punish their enemies and extort extra-legal payments from the populace under their control, were not only active agents in the process of social differentiation and class formation, but also, as we shall see, principal subjects of both local challenges to the colonial state and the active internal politics and class conflicts of ethnic construc-tion.   Paradoxically, the colonial states' agents of local rule were also a critical source of social disruption and a threat to the maintenance of control.

Colonial domination thus came to rest on the unstable and contradictory mutual dependence of the colonial state and local African strong-men.[35]   As the principal clients of the colonial state, the chiefs were, in their own right, the most powerful patrons in local society and became the central focus of the development of clientelistic patronage networks around political institutions and positions of authority, networks that were also linked to and reproduced the relations of clientelism and dependence of pre-colonial societies.[36]   These networks, moreover, tended to be ethni-cally defined within the 'tribal' context of local administration.   Peasant rights to land and other resources increasingly came to depend on their ability to sustain claims to kin, client and ethnic affiliations that cut across developing class cleavages and, through the chiefs, blurred the line between state and society.   The chiefs embodied the principle of 'tribe' as the basis of social organization, custom as the basis of individual behaviour, and the maintenance of what administrators regarded as pre-colonial ethnic identities.[37]   A primary objective of indirect rule was to prevent the

34.   Jewsiewicki, 'The formation of the political culture of ethnicity', pp. 338–39; Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, pp. 126–28; Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, ch. 5.
35.   Boone, 'States and ruling classes', pp. 116–17.
36.   Jewsiewicki, 'The formation of the political culture of ethnicity', pp. 336–7; Jonathan Barker, 'Stability and stagnation: the state in Senegal', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 11, 1(1977).
37.   The essentially ethnic or 'tribal' character of chiefs and headmen was indicated by the fact that, unlike the European officers of the provincial administrations or even the Africans
footnote 37 continued overleaf

mobilization of African peasants in any trans-ethnic anti-colonial struggle,[38] and the power of chiefs and their control of patronage was a fundamentally conservative instrument of political fragmentation and isolation.

The structural dynamics of the colonial state and capitalist development thus generated the conditions for both political order and disruption, for class differentiation and ethnic identity, and for the linkage between chiefs and the local hierarchies of personal rule, patronage and ethnicity that uniquely characterized the state's intimate association with indigenous societies. The construction of the specific cultural content of ethnic communities and identities was crucially influenced, however, by the political and intellectual culture of colonialism, particularly European assumptions about the nature of African custom and society. 'Alien imperial states', as Peter Woodward has pointed out, 'did think ethnically and in so doing gave credence to a perceived social reality, which in turn they sought to manipulate and even mould'.[39] This concern with ethnicity, expressed in the conviction that Africans were people who naturally lived in 'tribes', reflected strongly the cultural formation of the European cadres of the colonial states. Between 1890 and 1914 the haphazardly recruited officials of the early expansion of colonial rule were replaced by elite corps recruited from the first universities and military academies of the metropoles. These men represented in themselves the culmination of more than a century of European nation and state-building, an overseas extension of the upper levels of the metropolitan civil service. Both their nationalism and their bureaucratic culture had a crucial impact on the formation of African ethnicity.

For Europe, no less than Africa, the nineteenth century was an epoch of social upheaval and transformation. The development of industrial capitalism which so influenced national competition and imperial expansion, also profoundly disrupted metropolitan societies, turning them from agrarian societies largely composed of peasants into urban industrial societies of proletarianized masses shaken loose from the solidarities of small communities and the control of traditional authority structures. In the principal

footnote 37 continued from previous page
who began to replace them in the last years of colonial rule, chiefs had few chances for promotion and were rarely if ever transferred to serve outside of their 'home' areas. Moreover, again unlike the officers of provincial administration, who were regularly transferred to prevent developing too close ties to powerful local interests, chiefs were expected to have such ties; and as time passed, were increasingly recruited from among the most powerful families. Delavingette noted that while the French directly appointed chiefs and headmen as subordinates of the field administration, they took increasing care to see that they came from the chiefly and politically powerful and wealthy families of pre-colonial society. See Delavignette, *Freedom and Authority*, p. 80.
38.   D. M. P. McCarthy, 'Organizing underdevelopment from the inside: The bureaucratic economy in Tanganyika, 1919–1940', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, **10**, 4 (1977).
39.   Peter Woodward, *Sudan, 1898–1989: The unstable state* (Lynne Rienner Publishers and Lester Cook Academic Publishing, Boulder and London, 1990), p. 5.

imperial powers in Africa—Britain, France and Germany—the ideology and culture of nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century grew as a conservative right-wing response to the growing spectre of rootless mass society, intensifying class struggles and the growing challenge from the left for political hegemony. Nationalism expressed a conservative and romantic anti-modernism through invented neo-traditions of national history and culture rich in symbol and ceremony that attempted to defend established ruling class power by both giving 'rapid and recognizable symbolic form to developing types of authority and submission', and providing 'reassurance because what they represented was unchanging in a period of flux'.[40] Within the unstable growth of industrial capitalism, nationalism asserted, through the invented traditions of the nation, the supposed stable hierarchy and mutual reciprocity of inter-class relations, as well as the extended kinship of *gemeinschaftliche* values of pre-capitalist agrarian society. The two critical public institutions of national integration of nineteenth century Europe—mass conscript armies and universal public education—spread nationalist ideology and its forms of dominance and submission.

At its heart, late nineteenth century nationalism in the imperial metropoles was an ideology of rule that was the basis of the paternalistic authoritarianism of colonial states.[41] As Terence Ranger points out, 'European invented traditions of governance in colonial Africa helped to produce soldiers and administrators and settlers dedicated to the "feudal-patriarchal" ethnic rather than the "capitalist-transformative" one'.[42] This had a number of important effects. First, it ideologically reinforced the proconsuls' ambivalence about capitalist development, particularly their mistrust of its consequences in African agrarian societies and fear of the development of a rootless African proletariat detached from the supposed ordered certainties of tribal life. Second, it provided models of subordination and loyalty for Africans within colonial society. While these included emphasis on the time and work discipline of industrial society, 'the invented traditions which were introduced to Africans were those of governance rather than production', and this contributed to 'the relatively high prestige among Africans in colonial Africa of non-productive employment'.[43] In its skewed representation of modernity, the colonial state became the avatar of prestige as well as principal source of wealth and power. It showed to Africans a neo-traditional world view in which the dominant class were state officials, the 'heaven born' in the Indian Civil

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40. Terence Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983), pp. 237, 247.
41. Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 104–15.
42. Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', p. 220.
43. Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', p. 228.

Service that provided the standard for British Africa, not the 'box wallahs' of business.

Equally important, the conservative neo-traditionalism of colonial officials generated a crucial ambivalence about African cultures and societies. On one level African societies were denigrated as savage and primitive, classified, in the evolutionary model of social development of turn of the century anthropology that seems to have supplied the assumptions of the folk anthropology of the proconsuls, as ossified, stagnant survivals of earlier stages of social evolution. 'Blank, uninteresting, brutal barbarism' proclaimed one governor of Kenya early in the century, while another, fifty years later, proclaimed that '30,000 years ago turns out to be not the beginning but the end: for between the stone implements and Dr Livingstone there is nothing, except a little gradual change.'[44] It was assumed that such primitive and backward societies could not survive in the modern world and would inevitably and rapidly deteriorate and disappear under the impact of Western civilization. Avoiding the chaotic effects of such an outcome required the strong authority and paternal direction of the colonial state to guide Africans to civilization. At the same time, for neo-traditionalist colonial officials African societies represented precisely the sort of small-scale, integrated 'organic community' of order, stability and harmony that they idealized and feared would be destroyed by the development of capitalism.[45] Tribal societies thus represented a form of social order and culture which colonial officials also valued and regarded as 'natural' for Africans. For colonial officials 'every African belonged to a tribe, just as every European belonged to a nation', and they believed they confronted 'an Africa comprised of neatly bounded, homogeneous tribes'.[46]

Ideology reinforced political expediency to generate an understanding of African tribes as ancient communities and identities in which behaviour was governed by uniform and binding custom. The flexibility, fluidity and ambiguity of nineteenth century African communities and identities, understood today as the norm of pre-colonial societies, was seen as abnormal and, ironically, as often the disruptive effects of external intrusion, internecine wars and imperial conquest until order was restored by the establishment of colonial administration. The vision of stable,

44. Sir Charles Eliot, *The East African Protectorate* (Edward Arnold, London, 1905); Sir Philip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts* Hutchinson, London, 1954), pp. 18–19. The anthropological assumptions of colonial officials and how they shaped policy and practice is a subject that needs more study. There are some suggestive remarks about the ideas of British officials in Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The social history of British anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), pp. 221–3.
45. Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 106–8.
46. John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979), p. 323, and Charles Ambler, *Kenyan Communities in the Age of Imperialism* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988), p. 32.

bounded tribes was further reinforced by the bureaucratic culture of the colonial state, notably the powerful impulse to locate, demarcate, classify and count the population of a colony as a means of social surveillance and control. Through the application of such instruments of state as consensus and maps, and even the establishment of colonial museums, all communities, persons, land and even physical artefacts were assigned a unique tribal identity and physical location.[47] By classification and enumeration colonial states sought to know the location of every African in a colony and, through such agencies as the native registration system in Kenya, to track and control their movements outside their 'home' tribal areas.[48]

Thus, through reliance on collaboration with 'tribal authorities' ruling over demarcated, enumerated and supposedly homogeneous administrative units composed of a single tribe, the colonial state was actively engaged in the invention of ethnicities that often bore little correspondence to pre-colonial identities and communities, and were occasionally, as in the case of the 'Luba' in the Belgian Congo,[49] entirely novel creations. Moreover, colonial states acted to define the culture and custom of the demarcated 'tribes' with a greater degree of clarity, consistency and rigidity than had ever existed before. 'The most far-reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa', Ranger notes, 'took place when Europeans believed themselves to be respecting age-old African custom'.[50] Nowhere was this more evident than in the definition of customary law, governing such crucial issues as marriage and access to land and property, which was supposed to be administered by the chiefs and headmen. Relying on its local allies as sources of information on what was expected to be a fixed and consistent body of rules, the colonial state allowed chiefs, headmen and elders to define a customary law that asserted and legitimated their power and control over the allocation of resources against the interests of juniors, women and migrants.[51] Codified custom concealed the new colonial balances of wealth and power.

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47. See the discussion of Asian colonial examples in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, ch. 10. The development of surveillance, classification and enumeration as typical activities of the modern nation-state is discussed in Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985), and Christopher Dandeker, *Surveillance, Power and Modernity* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990).
48. The Kenya system, legislated in 1915 and brought into force from 1920, was a remarkable achievement for its (pre-computer) era and an expression of the colonial state's obession with control of the African population. See Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 147, 153.
49. Jewsiewicki, 'The formation of the political culture of ethnicity', pp. 326–30.
50. Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', p. 250.
51. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, ch. 4. The seminal works on the construction of customary law are Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), and Sally Falk Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986).

The colonial states' invention of African custom and identity was reinforced from two other directions. The first emerged from the activities of missionaries eager to understand and communicate with present and future converts. By compiling grammars and dictionaries from one among a diversity of variant local dialects, usually that spoken around the mission station, missionaries transformed it into the authoritative version of the language of a whole 'tribe' and propagated it through their schools. By creating and disseminating a standardized print vernacular, the missionaries promoted the development of an indigenous literate elite, encouraged the recording of standardized versions of local history and custom, and thereby had an important impact on the conceptual reification of particular ethnic groups and their cultures. Peel, for example, has analysed the missionary impact on Yoruba language and culture, and even on the spread of the name itself, noting that the ethnic message 'came wrapped in this language of literacy'; while Ranger has explored the way in which the linguistic efforts of various missions shaped the emergence of Manyika identity in colonial Zimbabwe.[52] Finally, by the inter-war decades professional anthropologists were making their own contributions to the invention of African tribes. British functionalist anthropology, with its emphasis on the depiction of homogeneous, integrated cultures contributed definitive versions of various groups in which evidence from field work in one community was taken as representative of the whole and from which all local variations, confusions, contradictions and ambiguities were eliminated. Inquiry into the historical origin or institutions was rejected and societies were depicted in the timeless 'ethnographic present'. While the relationship between anthropologists and colonial officials was often uneasy and the former were by no means simply the intellectual auxiliaries of colonial domination, they shared with the officials the preoccupation with social cohesion and fear of the disruptive effects of change, and reinforced as well 'the official view of African societies as clearly bounded and coherently organized'.[53] Equally important, anthropological analysis provided an approach to the depiction of African societies, reified cultural object that could be appropriated by an indigenous intelligentsia for its own constructions of ethnicity and identity.[54]

In a recent critical reflection on his important 1983 paper that stimulated so much work on the invention of tradition and ethnicity in colonial Africa, Terence Ranger noted that the process was not one of the imposition of rigid colonial invented tradition on flexible African custom, but of a European involvement in an intense and inherently political process in

52. Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis', pp. 201–3; Ranger, 'Missions, migrants and the Manyika', pp. 125–41.
53. Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The modern British school* (Routledge, London, 2nd. ed. 1983), pp. 99–120; Sara Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*, pp. 30–31.
54. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 15–17.

which culture and identity were the objects of continuous negotiation and conflict.[55]   As Dickson Eyoh has put it, 'contemporary ethnicity in Africa is the product of African re-appropriations and redeployment, in contests for control over resources in new political economic frameworks, of cultural inventions employed by colonial states to fashion structures of political intermediation and domination over subject populations'.[56]   It is to this dynamic process that we now must turn.

Ethnicity and the African response to colonialism

The rapid and uneven impact of social change under colonialism constituted for most African societies an extended moral and material crisis.   Into societies already internally divided along a number of axes of cleavage and in which culture, custom and social identity were by no means fixed and univocal, but were instead 'intensely debated collective fictions'[57] in fluid and flexible communities, colonialism both introduced new sources of wealth and power and undermined or abolished old ones.   Under the circumstances, former understandings of moral economy and political legitimacy which defined the reciprocal relations of rulers and ruled, rich and poor, elders and youth, men and women were all called into question and became the focus of new challenges and struggles.   Sara Berry has aptly summarized the dynamic situation:

> . . .the increasing involvement of rural people in wider spheres of domination, exploitation, and exchange gave rise to struggles over access to productive resources.   These struggles were, in turn, linked to debates over the meaning of African 'customs' and their relevance in the colonial social order, as well as over the meaning and legitimacy of commercialization and competing claims to property and power . . . 'traditions' did not necessarily stop changing when versions of them were written down, nor were debates over custom and social identity resolved, either during the colonial period or afterward.   In general, the colonial period in Africa was less a time of transition . . . than an era of intensified contestation over custom, power and property.[58]

The structures and practices of the colonial state, its demarcation of political boundaries and classification of people, as well as European expectations about African cultures and institutions, contained African political processes within the categories of 'tribe' and encouraged Africans to think ethnically.   Contests over property rights and access to resources, social differentiation and class formation, became inseparable from debates over the legitimacy of political power and the definition of moral and political community cast in largely ethnic terms.   It is within these intersecting social, cultural, economic and political processes that the social

55.   Ranger, 'The invention of tradition revisited', pp. 21–27.
56.   Dickson Eyoh, 'From economic crisis to political liberalization: Pitfalls of the new political sociology for Africa', *African Studies Review*, **39**, 3 (1996), p. 66.
57.   Ranger, 'The invention of tradition revisited', p. 25.
58.   Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*, p. 8.

construction of modern African ethnicities has taken place—partially
deliberate and intended, and partially as their unintended and unfore-
seen consequence.   The social construction of ethnicity had internal and
external dimensions that John Lonsdale has called 'moral ethnicity' and
'political tribalism'.   The internal dimension, moral ethnicity, was the
discursive and political arena within which ethnic identities emerged out of
the renegotiation of the bounds of political community and authority, the
social rights and obligations of moral economy and the rights of access to
land and property.   The dialectically related external dimension, political
tribalism, emerged out of the diverse consequences of colonialism for
different African communities, especially with regard to access to the
resources of modernity and economic accumulation.   Political tribalism
did not involve a search for a moral community of rights and obligations,
but rather collective political organization and action across the boundaries
of communities defined by moral ethnicity, first against the alien power of
the colonial state and then, increasingly, against the competing interests of
other emerging rival ethnicities for access to the state and control of its
patronage resources.[59]

  The colonial state and political economy characteristically disrupted
African societies along a number of existing social axes and introduced a
number of further sources of cleavage, all of which interacted in diverse,
contingent patterns that shaped the individual and often singular experi-
ences of each developing ethnic community.   Colonialism opened new
sources of wealth and power for some and threatened the social position
and access to resources of others.   Ethnicity emerged out of the conse-
quent conflict over and renegotiation of the rules of custom and identity as
individuals struggled to take advantage of the opportunities of colonialism
or protect themselves against its disruptions.   In particular, the often
tenuous and contested relations between generations and genders were
upset by new sources of money income through migrant labour and cash
cropping, as well as by the efforts of chiefs and elders to extend their

59.   John Lonsdale, 'The moral economy of Mau Mau', in Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy
Valley*, and 'Moral ethnicity and political tribalism', in Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin,
eds., *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and anthropological approaches to the study of ethnicity
and nationalism* (Institute for Development Studies, Roskilde University, Roskilde, Denmark,
1994), pp. 131–50.   More than twenty years ago Peter Ekeh also captured much of the two
dimensions of moral ethnicity and political tribalism with his notion of the two publics in
Africa.   The primordial public is 'closely identified with primordial groupings, sentiments
and activities, which nevertheless impinge on the public interest.   *The primordial public is
moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm.*'   The other, the civic
public, developed in relation to the colonial state and 'has no *moral* linkages with the private
realm . . .   *The civil public in Africa is amoral and lacks the generalized moral imperatives operative
in the private realm and in the primordial public.*'   See 'Colonialism and the two publics in
Africa: A theoretical statement', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17, 1 (1975),
p. 92.   Ekeh's argument is important, particularly with regard to inter-ethnic politics and the
linkages between ethnic communities and the state, but the quite different contemporary
import of the terms 'primordial' and 'civic' make his concepts for the present analysis.

control of land and labour through the self-interested codification of customary law. Growing differentiation of wealth and the changing economic value of land and property also challenged traditional patron/client relations and created new resources and avenues for patronage networks. The origin of differentiation in the spreading social relations of capitalism brought the issue of class formation into the moral economy of communities in ways that both reinforced and cut across existing cleavages. Finally, Christian converts who rejected indigenous religious belief and practice, and who embodied Western modernity in their literacy, dress and occupation directly challenged conceptions of cultural identity and community membership.[60]

Ethnicity thus became an issue in African societies precisely because previous identities and solidarities were being called into question, and ethnic identity provided a stable core of belonging and continuity with the past in a world of increasing flux and conflict.[61] This was particularly apparent in the way in which the moral economy of communities became a domain of conflict over obligations of sharing between rich and poor. The vertical relations of patrons and clients involved mutual obligations of support and assistance and extended the ties of kinship and sentiment into the wider structures of economies and politics.[62] Wealth and power rested on the ability to mobilize and maintain a following of both kin and unrelated dependents. For the poor, the 'lopsided friendship' of clientelism provided access to resources through an indigenous paternalism. In the fluidity and flexibility of pre-colonial societies, these ties were subject to constant negotiation and conflicting claims were often left open and unresolved, to allow both sides room for manoeuvre. The struggle over the redefinition of moral economy under the changing circumstances of colonialism became increasingly intertwined with the issue of the boundaries of the ethnic community: only those with recognized ties of kinship and ethnicity could legitimately negotiate the property rights and relations of obligation and reciprocity of the moral economy. The structures of indirect rule, however, assigned control over property and the management of resources precisely 'to social groups whose structures were subject to perennial contest'.[63] When faced with a growing flood of conflict and litigation, colonial officials simply exacerbated the politics of moral ethnicity in trying to resolve ambiguities and contradictions by imposing 'native law and custom' as defined by chiefs and elders.

60. See, in particular, Lonsdale, 'The moral economy of Mau Mau', *passim*; Vail, 'Ethnicity in Southern African History', pp. 7–11; Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*, pp. 32–39.
61. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 68–69.
62. Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, pp. 133–34.
63. Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*, p. 42.

How was ethnicity constructed in this highly charged political environ-
ment? Largely through the interaction of multiple, selective imaginings of
'tradition' and identity from a variety of cultural materials. An array of
self-interested interpretations of the past responded to the intrusion and
challenge of colonialism. The ambiguity and multi-vocality of cultural
symbols permitted a pluralistic process of invention with constant conflict
over meaning.[64] Nevertheless, several common elements appear in the
constructions of ethnicity in Africa. First, although the emerging ethnici-
ties were rarely homologous to pre-colonial communities, there is the
typical stress on common culture, language and descent. In particular,
ethnicity has involved the expansion of concepts of kinship in the definition
of moral and political communities; membership is conferred by birth and
descent, not by choice.[65] Second, customary law has been a key focus
of debate and negotiation, with a central focus on defining communal
membership, gender relations, access to land and control of labour and
resources.[66] Third, constructed ethnicities have been predominantly
masculine and patriarchal, with a notable concern with the control of
women.[67] Fourth, ethnic community and identity have rested on
invented histories and 'noble lies' responding to the exigencies of current
political struggles.[68] Finally, constructions of ethnicity were both pri-
mordial, through their grounding in heavily interpreted tradition, and
instrumental, being shaped by individual and group interests that blur the
distinction between utility and meaning.

While there was significant continuity between pre-colonial and colonial
processes of ethnic construction, colonial constructions of ethnicity were
distinctive for the crucial role played by colonial chiefs and headmen and
by an educated, literate intelligentsia. The increasingly literate nature of
the process of ethnic imagining is particular striking, as is the role of
distance from 'home' in both the growing ethnic consciousness of migrant
workers and the literate creations of the intelligentsia in urban or metro-
politan diasporas. The role of Christian converts who comprised the first

64. Ranger, 'The invention of tradition revisited', pp. 20–5.
65. Peter Ekeh, in particular, has stressed the importance of kinship concepts in the
construction of ethnicity, tracing the relationship back in West Africa to responses to the slave
trade. 'Social anthropology and two contrasting uses of tribalism in Africa', pp. 673–83. In
more modern terms, the kinship metaphor in African ethnicity is strikingly similar to the 'deep
horizonal comradeship' of European nationalism described by Ben Anderson in *Imagined
Communities*, p. 7.
66. Ranger, 'The invention of custom revisited', pp. 46–48.
67. Jewsiewicki, 'The formation of the political culture of ethnicity', pp. 340–42' Vail,
'Ethnicity in southern African History', pp. 15–16.
68. See, for example, Jomo Kenyatta's pamphlets *My People of Kikuyu and the Life of Chief
Wangombe* (Lutteworth Press, London, 1942), and *Kenya, Land of Conflict* (International
African Service Bureau, London, 1945); and Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, 'The labours
of Muigwithania: Jomo Kenyatta as author, 1928–1945', *Research in African Literatures*
(forthcoming). Other East African examples are examined in Greg Maddox, ' "Tribal"
histories and the meta-narrative of nationalism', paper given at the conference of the African
Studies Association, Orlando, November, 1995.

generation of the literate elite was crucial. On the one hand, they attempted to justify their position in the community and clarify their relationship to indigenous culture. Peel, for example, has stressed the importance of the literate Christian intelligentsia in the creation and propagation of a pan-Yoruba consciousness; and Lonsdale has shown how young Kikuyu *athomi* (readers) in the 1920s debated with the elders and among themselves the meaning of *kikuyu karing'a* (authentic Kikuyuness).[69] On the other, their accounts interacted with and were influenced by missionary and anthropological accounts of their cultures, which both accentuated the importance of historical constructions of the past and helped reify and objectify their conceptions of their culture and community.[70] Their role in the construction of African ethnicities appears strikingly similar to that of petty-bourgeois intellectuals in the development of European ethnic nationalism.

The central importance of a literate intelligentsia also alerts us to the strikingly dual character of the cultures and identities of modern African ethnicity; they are both traditional and modern, reactionary and progressive, eclectically combining elements of African tradition and European modernity. They express a project of conservative modernization attempting to control the terms of social change and preserve a sense of continuity; and this project reflects in turn the developing class interests of the literate petty bourgeoisie and the group of colonial agents and officials with whom they increasingly overlapped. The dominant discourses of ethnicity came from those groups who gained the most from colonialism—the indigenous authorities of the colonial state and the educated elite—and interpreted tradition to justify their gains and maintain control over the networks of patronage that provided access for others to the resources of modernity. The politics of moral ethnicity was thus as much about class as it was about culture and identity, but the confrontations over class formation were subsumed within disputes and discourses about custom, social obligation and responsibility, and the bounds of the moral community.

The ethnic constructions of moral ethnicity did not, of course, occur in a social vacuum, but rather in an environment of increasing integration with other developing ethnic communities within the broader socioeconomic and political context of colonialism. Much earlier research on

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69. Peel, 'The cultural work of Yoruba ethnogenesis', pp. 204–9; John Lonsdale, ' "Listen while I read": The orality of Christian literacy in the young Kenyatta's making of the Kikuyu', in Louise de la Gorgendière, ed., *Ethnicity in Africa: Roots, meanings and implications* (Edinburgh University, African Studies Centre, Edinburgh, 1996).
70. The most striking are the ethnographies produced by Africans educated in Western anthropology, such as Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1938), discussed in Bruce Berman, 'Ethnography as politics, politics as ethnography: Kenyatta, Malinowski and the making of *Facing Mount Kenya*', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, **30**, 3 (1996).

ethnicity in Africa and elsewhere has focused on this external dimension, often to the virtual exclusion of consideration of internal processes. From this perspective, the conceptualization of ethnicity requires the existence of an 'other' and the distinction thereby of insiders and outsiders.[71] It is a process of boundary setting, of making distinctions, involving a dialogue between insiders and outsiders in which the characteristics of different groups are both ascribed and chosen, instrumentally manipulated and socially shaped. The boundaries between groups are contested and negotiated, always retaining a degree of ambiguity, varying situationally and changing over time as individuals and groups move back and forth across them. The differentiation between ethnic groups has no necessary connection with language, culture or political organization; cultural differences, in particular, may not be the decisive factor and groups may simultaneously become more similar in culture and more concerned with demarcating their distinctiveness. Demarcation of ethnic differences takes on political importance to the degree it is relevant in legitimating claims to rights and resources, and in providing individuals with both meaning and organized channels for pursuing culturally-defined interests. Ethnic identities in such contexts can be consciously manipulated and invested in economic and political competition. Indeed, from the external perspective the most important aspect of the relations between ethnic groups is the competition and conflict over differential access to resources.

Political tribalism in Africa was shaped by the asymmetry of relations that developed between various groups in several contexts of the colonial situation. First, and often overlooked, was the primary imbalance of power between Europeans and all African communities, justified by European claims to racial-cultural superiority. Colonial power and racism presented a challenge to which indigenous societies had to respond, both in terms of establishing a claim for the value and dignity of indigenous culture and custom, and in deciding what to take from European cultures and what to preserve of indigenous traditions—precisely the two dimensions of the conservative modernization imagined by the literate intelligentsia. Second, the colonial states' strategy of fragmentation and isolation of distinct triable units promoted ethnic competition and conflict. This was reinforced in many colonies by a hierarchical ordering and the labour or production specialization of different African societies as martial peoples, trading and administrative groups, cash crop farmers, migrant labourers, etc expressed in sharply drawn ethnic stereotypes. Third, the uneven development of capitalist production and markets introduced significant

71. This paragraph is based on Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, pp. 10–12, 18–21, 24–5, 38–42, 56–57, 66–69.

and growing economic differentials between regions and groups, including internal differentiations in class formation, that led to competition and conflict between ethnic communities for access to the benefits of colonialism and to patronage resources.[72]   Fourth, the movement of labour from rural areas as a result of the growth of both state and markets made urban areas, in particular, into cockpits of ethnic contact and differentiation. This was yet another arena of ethnic construction that was linked to rural societies, but urban ethnicities were also flexible and situational, and did not necessarily correspond exactly to rural ethnic groups.[73]

At this point I will pull the threads of the argument together and outline the basic features of what I believe to be the actual colonial legacy of African societies: bureaucratic authoritarianism, pervasive patron-client relations, and a complex ethnic dialectic of assimilation, fragmentation and competition.   All of these features of state and society interacted not only to produce diverse local variations around the general patterns, but also, as I shall argue in the next section, to make the full-scale development of both capitalism and the nation-state difficult, if not unlikely.

We must never forget that the colonial state in Africa was an authoritarian bureaucratic apparatus of control and not intended to be a school of democracy.   Its European officials believed themselves to be agents of a superior civilization with a right to rule over peoples of inferior culture and paternally guide them to a higher level of social development.   However haphazard and ramshackle the reality of state power, the proconsuls struggled to maintain the facade of omnipotence and omniscience.   Their sense of being a legitimate and uniquely capable ruling class was passed on through the elite secondary schools and, eventually, universities that trained cadres of potential African successors to run not capitalist enterprises, but the apparatus of the bureaucratic state.

For the African population, masses or elites, dealing with the colonial state was always a mixture of opportunity and danger—an opportunity to gain access to the diverse resources at the disposal of the state and its agents, and the danger of running afoul of its often apparently arbitrary and capricious actions and its coercive taxes and punishments.   Dealing with so dangerous and unpredictable an entity required the protection and support of a powerful intermediary; clients sought patrons as eagerly

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72.   Young, 'Nationalism, ethnicity and class', pp. 445–46.   Class thus has both an internal and external relationship to ethnicity in Africa, stimulating new patterns of conflict within and between groups.   To the extent that colonial stratification and uneven development created a correlation between the preponderant development of a literate elite, wealthy cash crop producers and/or indigenous commercial capital and particular communities (such as the Igbo in Nigeria or Kikuyu in Kenya), the basis was laid for the fear of other groups of post-colonial 'domination' and for increasing conflict.
73.   Lentz, ' "Tribalism" and ethnicity in Africa', pp. 308–10.

as patrons sought clients. The other, open but never officially acknowl-
edged, dimension of the colonial state were the pervasive patron-client
networks that deeply linked it through the local African agents of 'tribal'
authorities to the competitive factions of lineage and clan.[74]

Colonialism in Africa thus rested largely on the institutionalization of
'Big Man-Small Boy' politics in rural society, built on the hierarchies of
personal rule of the 'decentralized despotism' of chiefs and headmen.
Surrounding and linked to them were, in varying degrees in different
societies, the members of a growing literate intelligentsia occupying other
positions in the state and schools, wealthy farmers, cattle owners and
traders who also played patron-client politics with their kinsmen and
neighbours. Access to the state and its patronage resources became the
key to the accumulation of wealth. At the same time, the wealthy used
their surplus to invest in social networks, building their own clientage and
positioning themselves for access to the wider patronage networks of the
state.[75] While the patronage networks of colonialism were often built on
the base of the complex relations of clientage and dependence that existed
in many pre-colonial societies, in the context of a political economy based
on money and markets the relationships became increasingly focused on
access to short-run material benefits rather than the establishment of
long-term ties of mutual support.[76] The 'politics of the belly' originated in
the fundamental institutional structures and social relations of the colonial
state. At the same time, the social networks of patrons and clients shaped
and were, in turn, shaped by the colonial development of ethnic identities
and communities.

The internal and external factors of ethnic construction, cultural inven-
tion and political negotiation encompassed a process of both an increas-
ingly clear definition and enclosing of ethnic cultures and identities, and
a significant expansion of the scale of ethnic communities. The 'dual
dynamic of assimilation and differentiation'[77] shaped diverse stories of
ethnic development in Africa in a continuous process of reformulation that
included the creation of new groups and identities and the disappearance of
old ones. On the one hand, the development of ethnicity was a process of
cultural imagining based on real cultural experiences and resources,

74. The linkage of bureaucratic authoritarianism and patronage relations is not unique to
colonial Africa. As Christopher Dandeker has noted, it was characteristic also of Europe in
the partially market-dependent and politically autocratic transitional societies of the *ancien
regimes*, in which the prefectural apparatus of control originated. See his *Surveillance, Power
and Modernity*, pp. 44–51.
75. Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, pp. 180–91; Berry, *No Condition is Permanent*.
76. René Lemarchand, 'The state, the parallel economy, and the changing structure of
patronage systems', in Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan, eds., *The Precarious Balance:
State and Society in Africa* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1988), pp. 150–1.
77. Mozaffar, 'The institutional logic of ethnic politics', pp. 50–1. See also Ranger, 'The
invention of tradition revisited', pp. 28–9.

created and refashioned out of both old and new elements.[78]   In particu-
lar, the emotive power of the cultural symbols and identities of kinship and
'home' were transferred to larger social collectivities in the context of the
development of colonial states and markets.[79]   On the other hand, ethnic-
ity provided individuals and groups with their most important political
resource in the competition for the scarce goods of modernity, as well as for
access to local resources of land and labour.   Internally, this took the
language of moral ethnicity in to conflicts over the definition of custom and
moral responsibilities that shaped claims to communal membership and
rights to property.   Externally, it took the blunter forms of communal
solidarity and conflict of political tribalism.

From the perspective developed here, the tendency in African studies to
treat ethnicity and class as autonomous determinants of change and as
distinct and incompatible modes of analysis is incorrect.[80]   Instead,
ethnicity has been the fundamental context and idiom of class formation
and struggle in Africa, with contested processes of class formation being
contained largely within the internal politics of developing ethnic
communities.   The 'class project' of the dominant class emerging from
among the overlapping groups of chiefs and elders, the literate intelligent-
sia, wealthy farmers and traders was expressed in self-interested interpre-
tations of custom claiming rights to control of land and labour and in
investment in the social networks of clientage controlling access to state-
centered patronage.   Conversely, the poor and those whose social posi-
tions were undermined by colonialism used ethnicity to sustain their claims
to access to land and resources and to insist on the responsibilities and
reciprocities of the wealthy and powerful.   The political mobilization of
ethnicity is thus not simply an instrument of elite manipulation, of
self-aggrandizement by the rich and powerful, but also of demands from
below for internal redistribution of resources and external protection and
promotion of communal interests.[81]   The dialectic of ethnicity and class
had several important consequences that reinforced the process of ethnic
assimilation and differentiation.   First, internally, the patron-client net-
works local and ethnic identities and often muted the development of
class consciousness and conflict by reproducing ties of reciprocity across

78.   Since the end of colonial rule this can even encompass the appropriation of elements of
the culture and institutions of the colonizer into the 'tradition' of emergent ethnic communi-
ties, as in the development of an 'Anglophone' ethno-regional identity in Cameroon.   See
Dickson Eyoh, 'Conflicting narratives of a post-colonial trajectory: Anglophone protest and
the politics of identity in Cameroon', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, (forthcoming)
(1998).
79.   Lentz, ' "Tribalism" and ethnicity in Africa', pp. 322–24.
80.   See the critical discussion in Young, 'Nationalism, ethnicity and class', pp. 421, 469–72.
81.   Eghosa Osaghae, *Ethnicity and its Management in Africa: the democratization link*
(Malthouse Press, Lagos, 1994), pp. 14–15.

class lines.[82]   Second, externally, ethnicity inhibited the development of broader, national affiliations of class, especially with regard to the failure of a pan-ethnic dominant class to emerge in most African nations.   Instead of a national dominant class, ethnic class factions claimed internal leadership in the contestation of moral ethnicity and served externally as the principal agents of political tribalism.

Finally, it is clear from the perspective developed here that it is simply incorrect to characterize the colonial state in Africa as either 'over-developed', 'autonomous' or as a 'balloon' floating above the social landscape, lacking roots in and unconstrained by the indigenous societies it ruled.[83]   Instead, the colonial state was intimately tied to and shaped by indigenous social forces through its incorporation of the intermediaries of local native authorities as the base of the structure of control, and by its reliance on a reinvented tradition to fragment and contain African responses to the state and markets.   At the same time, as we have seen, colonial institutions and conceptions of African culture and ethnicity 'were also subject to multiple acts of reappropriation by indigenous social groups'.[84]   In particular, the patron-client networks of ethnic communities were the fundamental state-society relations, not only tying rural societies to the developing communities in colonial cities, but also binding the high politics of the state to the deep politics of peasant society.[85]

The socially-based forms of power of the colonial state also reinforced the partial and fragmented capitalist transformation of agrarian economies.   To the European proconsuls' fear of the threat to control from the disruption of 'tribal' societies by a full-scale development of market-based agriculture must be added the factor that the power of their African allies rested on an extra-economic control of access to land and labour in rural communities, as well as to state patronage and resources. Neither group had any compelling interest in pressing forward a process of primitive accumulation that would have deprived the mass of the peasantry of their access to land.   In the end, the pattern of state and society, ethnic construction and patronage politics typically created in colonial Africa had a fundamentally contradictory relationship with the foundations of modernity, capitalism and the secular nation-state.   The ambivalence of colonial officials regarding capitalist development emerged from the struggle to

82.   See, for example, Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, pp. 45–50, and the early discussion in Bruce Berman, 'Clientelism and neo-colonialism: Centre-periphery relations and political development in African states', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, ix, 2 (1974).
83.   John Saul, 'The state in post-colonial societies: Tanzania', in R. Miliband and J. Saville, eds., *Socialist Register 1974* (Merlin Press, London, 1974).   The over-developed state thesis is resurrected in a non-Marxist version in Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*.   The balloon metaphor is from Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress: African development management in perspective* (Heinemann, London, 1983), p. 19.
84.   Bayart, 'Finishing with the idea of the Third World', p. 52.
85.   The concepts of high and deep politics are from John Lonsdale, 'States and social processes in Africa: an histographical survey', *African Studies Review*, 24, 2/3 (1981).

sustain a political control that was continually undermined by the very forces they themselves had unleashed. This was revealed after 1945 when colonial states, particularly those of France and Britain, began to rapidly grow and aggressively expand their intervention into rural societies to draw Africans more fully into commodity and labour markets, initially for reasons related primarily to the needs of metropolitan post-war recovery. Developmental colonialism provoked the widening political mobilization of Africans in both rural and urban communities in a struggle against the colonial state and its local allies, organized for a crucial historical moment on a trans-ethnic basis by nationalist parties and movements.

Ethnicity, patronage and the post-colonial state

What has happened to the colonial state and its links to patronage networks and ethnic development since independence? The paradoxical answer appears to be 'very little' and 'a very great deal'. On the one hand, the colonial power structure of bureaucratic authoritarianism and clientelism has continued essentially unchanged, especially the structures of rural control and collaboration between the state apparatus and local strong men. The nationalist regimes that came to power at independence faced the continuing problem of exercising effective control in the countryside, and most chose not only to rely upon the existing apparatus, including the prefectural field administration immediately over the local tribal authorities, but also to extend and intensify colonial modes of domination and surplus appropriation. Moreover, the regimes were preoccupied with the nation-state model of development, over which they had in any case been given little choice by the departing metropolitan powers; and obsessed with the problem of 'national integration' and achieving it through the use of state power. As Nnoli points out, the task became 'one of transforming a multi-ethnic society into a national society through the instrumentality of the state. The task of social engineering is to find a structure of state that would accomplish the goal. A strong state is often deemed desirable.'[86] The hastily carpentered institutions of liberal democracy and independence constructions quickly faded and disappeared in the face of growing authoritarianism of both civilian and military regimes.

On the other hand, if nationalist leaders feared the disruptive effects of ethnic cleavages, they also significantly underestimated the power of politicized ethnicity. The colonial state had provided little institutional scope for the expression of political tribalism within its structures of fragmentation and isolation. In the heady last days of the anti-colonial

86. Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnicity and democracy in Africa: Intervening variable* (Malthouse Press, Lagos, 1994), pp. 46–7. On the pressures on nationalist leaders to conform to the nation-state model and reject others, including both tribal or pan-African, alternatives see Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the curse of the nation-state* (James Currey, London, 1992), chs. 4 and 6 *passim*.

struggle the nationalist movements strived to achieve a unity which, in Tom Mboya's words, was 'based on the simplification of the struggle into certain slogans and into one distinct idea, which everyone can understand without arguing about the details of policy or of government programmes after Independence.   Everyone is taught to know the enemy—the colonial power—and the one goal—independence.'[87]   At the moment of indepen- dence, however, competitive elections and the Africanization of the bureaucracy began to make ethnicity increasingly important as a basis of political support and access to the higher levels of the state.[88]   Even before independence, however, the tenuous ethnic and class coalitions of nation- alist movements began to unravel into competing factions struggling for control over the very material rewards of state power.[89]

   Given the continuity of colonial structures of surplus appropriation and market controls, as well as the influx of external development aid, the state has remained the essential focus for the accumulation of wealth in an environment in which 'any official decision affords an opportunity for gain, from a fiscal control to a technical verification, from the signature of a nomination form or a concessionary market to an industrial agreement or an import license.   Civil service departments and public enterprises con- stitute virtually bottomless financial reservoirs for those who manage them, and for the political authorities which head them.'[90]   The result has been the extension of ethnically-based patron-client networks to the very centre of the state apparatus, with their ramifying linkages reaching from cabinet to village to produce what J-F. Bayart graphically describes as the 'rhizome state'.[91]   And these networks have reached beyond the state as well. First, there have been repeated attempts, with varying degrees of success, to co-opt into the patron/client nexus diverse social groups such as Christian churches, which represent a non- or trans-ethnic moral commu- nity and ideology; or trade unions, professional associations and non- governmental organizations that speak for class and interest-based expressions of a more secular modernity.[92]   (This tendency, as we shall see below, significantly complicates the problem of 'civil society' in contemporary Africa.)   Second, patronage networks have also been extended to include triangular links of state officials, local middlemen and

87.   Tom Mboya, *Freedom and After* (Andre Deutsch, London, 1963), p. 61.
88.   Young, 'Nationalism, ethnicity and class', pp. 82–5.
89.   See, for example, Jean Marie Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante nationalism in an emergent Ghana* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1993).
90.   Bayart, *The State in Africa: the politics of the belly* (Longman, London, 1993), p. 78.   See also pp. 60–103 for a comparative analysis of state forms of appropriation and accumulation.
91.   Bayart, *The state in Africa*, pp. 218–27.
92.   See, for example, the analysis of the reproduction of class, ethnic and patronage politics within and between churches in Kenya in Mutaho Ngunyi, 'Religious institutions and political liberalization in Kenya', in Peter Gibbon, ed., *Markets, Civil Society and Democracy in Kenya* (Nordiska Africainstitutet Uppsala, 1995).

international capital.[93]   Third, African heads of state have themselves often become clients of external powers such as the U.S. and, in particular, France.[94]

The post-colonial state, like its predecessor, presents two faces to the world, described by Emmanuel Terray as '*le climatiseur et la veranda*', the air conditioner and the verandah.   The first is the face of modern state power, bureaucratic omnipotence and technical expertise—the avatar of modernity; the second is the scene of the real business of government in the patronage handed out from the verandah 'governed by a logic which is no longer that of efficiency, but of the share-out'.[95]   The facade of state power is expressed in an obsession with pomp and theatrical ritual even greater than in its colonial predecessor and in an opaque and arbitrary decision-making process that masks the vulgar, even obscene reality of power from its subjects.[96]   To the latter the state offers an implicit, tenuous moral contract of material benefits in return for political quiescence.   As Haugerud notes, 'both the colonial and post-colonial state emphasized that politics were dangerous, and that political activity had to be curbed in order to preserve civil order. . . .   The state's capacity to convince citizens that restrictions on political expression are needed to preserve order (or to prevent "chaos") depends in part on delivering to the populace some of the material benefits of "progress" and modernity.'[97] The politics of political tribalism and moral ethnicity become linked to the ability of the 'big men' of ethnic communities holding positions in the state to obtain for the districts and regions a significant share of the large-scale collective benefits of development in infrastructure projects of roads, schools, dispensaries, etc, as well as the more individual rewards apportioned through the discrete personal contacts of the back verandah.

By reproducing the structures of the colonial state and extending patronage networks through them, however, post-colonial states in Africa have been unable to resolve the inherited contradictions of the colonial political economy.   In societies that remain predominantly agrarian, the focus continues to be on control of the peasantry and markets, and the appropriation of surplus through extra-economic command over access to land and resources.   Balancing the contradictions of accumulation and control continues to constrain capitalist development in the countryside. Neither state power nor ruling coalitions have been organized around

93.   Lemarchand, 'The state, the parallel economy, and the changing structure of patronage systems', pp. 158–60.
94.   Donal Cruise O'Brien, 'The show of state in a neo-colonial twilight: Francophone Africa', in Manor, ed., *Rethinking Third World Politics*.
95.   Emmanuel Terray, 'Le Climatiseur et La Veranda', quoted in O'Brien, 'The show of state in a neo-colonial twilight', pp. 151–52.
96.   Achille Mbembe, 'Power and obscenity in the post-colonial period: The case of Cameroon', in Manor, ed., *Rethinking Third World Politics*.
97.   Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, pp. 76 and 106.

transformative projects directed towards the modernity of either capitalism or the nation-state.[98]   Indeed, such projects can directly threaten the essential bases for the accumulation of wealth and power and for the patronage politics that sustain elites and ethnic factions.

At the same time, the structures of the state and political networks and the fragmented and partially transformed structures of production and exchange to which they are intimately linked did not constitute a system tending towards a stable equilibrium.   A combination of internal and external factors produced the declining revenues from the export agriculture on which most African states continued to depend and the increasing reliance on foreign borrowing that led to the economic and fiscal crises of the 1980s.   The structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF and World Bank as supposed solutions to the crisis represent yet another effort to more fully integrate African societies into the capitalist world economy by removing constraints on market forces and their ultimate complete penetration and domination of agrarian communities.   The so-called reforms by which this is to be accomplished, particularly the privatization of state corporations; the elimination of marketing boards and other market controls; the removal of tariffs, export licences and other constraints on external trade; and, not least, the reduction in public spending, services and the size of the state bureaucracy all represent threats to the maintenance of the established structures of political and economic power in African states and to the politics of patronage.   It is not surprising that political elites dependent on state patronage have periodically clashed with the international financial institutions over the terms of adjustment programmes, as both the civilian Moi regime in Kenya and the military magnates of Nigeria did in the early 1990s.[99]   Furthermore, state deregulation and divestment does not so much free markets as extend political struggles for control of key elements of the national economy from the state into the private sector.[100]

Economic decline, draconian reforms, the deterioration of already relatively weak states and the delay of distributable resources exacerbate reliance on patron/client relations and intensify the inter-ethnic political conflicts of political tribalism.   In circumstances of economic and political instability, where even the wealthy face daily the insecurities and uncertainties of life, kinship and ethnicity, provide networks of mutual support and trust, 'charts of trustworthiness' in Anna Simons striking phrase, defining a political community from within which demands are made both

98.   Boone, 'States and Ruling Classes', pp. 124–9.
99.   Benno Ndulu and Francis Mwega, 'Economic adjustment policies', in Joel Barkan, ed., *Beyond Capitalism and Socialism in Kenya and Tanzania* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1994), pp. 102–17; Tom Forrest, *Politics and Economic Development in Nigeria* (Westview Press, Boulder, new edn., 1995), pp. 242–8.
100.   Osaghae, *Ethnicity and its management in Africa*, pp. 22–3.

on the state and its own leadership.[101]   For the ethnic community and
identity to be sustained, however, there must be real material, political and
symbolic goods to deliver.   The elites and masses of the ethnic commu-
nities, rulers and ruled, both draw on the same moral contract embedded in
the debates of moral ethnicity to legitimize or challenge the distribution of
wealth and power.   Externally, elites are expected to be the spokesmen of
their people, defending their interests in national institutions and getting
for them their share of 'the national cake'.   Internally, as a dominant class
they are expected to meet the moral obligations of reciprocity to both kin
and other members of the community.[102]   Patronage networks not only
distribute material benefits, but also are expected to sustain an intimacy of
relations between rulers and ruled, a semblance of the personal ties of the
traditional *gemeinschaft* rather than the impersonal relations of the capitalist
gessellschaft.   Distribution of patronage by the wealthy and powerful both
displays their status and subordinates to them those who accept their
largesse.   Such relations are cloaked in the mantle of 'tradition' and
publicly expressed in elaborate ceremonial, including the ultimate state-
ment of the extravagant funerals at which 'Big Men' and their families are
buried 'at home'.[103]

The increasing intensity of inter-ethnic conflict has been matched by the
aggravation of the intra-ethnic conflicts of moral ethnicity over social
obligations of redistribution between classes.   Declining and contracting
states are incapable of creating new programmes and positions or even
paying existing officials, while patrons with declining resources become
increasingly unwilling and unable to sustain distributions to their
clients.   In the face of an increasingly materialistic and opportunistic
appropriation of state resources for purely private and personal gain, the
relations of trust underpinning patronage networks are threatened by
growing cynicism and corruption.[104]   The poor place greater demands on
their wealthier kin for aid, while families bitterly divide over the inheritance
of land and property.   The broader conflict between rich and poor finds
expression in acts of resistance and escape, as in the growth of parallel
economies beyond the grasp of decayed states, or even in the confronta-
tions between elites and masses in such public rituals of politics as the rural

101.   Anna Simons, 'Democratization and ethnic conflict: the kin connection', *Nations and
Nationalism*, **3**, 2 (1997), p. 276; Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, pp. 33–8, 192–8; Ekeh,
'Social anthropology and two contrasting uses of tribalism in Africa', pp. 691–3.
102.   Carola Lentz, 'Home, death and leadership: discourses of an educated elite from
north-western Ghana', *Social Anthropology*, **2**, 2 (1994), pp. 153, 163–6; Nnoli, *Ethnicity and
Democracy in Africa*, pp. 18–19; Muigai, 'Ethnicity and the renewal of competitive politics in
Kenya', pp. 168–9.
103.   Mbembe, 'Power and obscenity in the post-colonial period', pp. 176–8; Lentz, 'Home,
death and leadership', 1994, pp. 158–60.
104.   Lemarchand, 'The state, the parallel economy, and the changing structure of patronage
systems', pp. 152–7; 161–5.

barazas (mass public meetings) of Kenya.[105]   The conflict of classes within ethnic communities is also imbricated with the continued existence of sub-ethnic groupings within the larger group and with a potential for fragmentation as aggrieved sections demand their turn to 'eat'.

When Jean-Francois Bayart chose *La politique du ventre* or 'the politics of the belly' as the subtitle for his important book on the state in Africa he used a metaphor that summed up the constant references and analogies in political discourse throughout sub-Saharan Africa to politics as 'eating' or 'devouring', of getting one's share of the state's resources.   These cultural forms themselves encapsulate the personal, materialistic and opportunistic character of African politics, and the relative unimportance, if not irrelevance, of ideology, principal or policy.   Politics as eating also captures the duality of relations with the state as both opportunity and danger—those who aspire to eat can also be eaten in the amoral food-chain of politics—and calls forth the linkage between politics and the shadow world of the supernatural.[106]   To survive in such a dangerous world requires both support and protection, which is precisely what patrons and clients are supposed to provide for each other, cemented by ties of kinship and ethnicity, and the reason why wealth is invested in developing and maintaining social networks.   But both Big Men and Small Boys are also potential rivals who can turn and devour the other, a tension inherent in their relations.   The contradiction of the politics of the belly is that both rich and poor, elites and masses, share the same opportunistic and materialistic view of politics and the state.   While opposition politics focuses on demands for equity and denunciations of corruption, nepotism and tribalism, 'because of the sharing of ideological repertoires, popular resistance to political oppression in the (African) post-colony evince ambiguity and ambivalence as their main trait; a ready condemnation of the excesses of the consumption of the spoils of office by the powerful, but not a rejection of the values which sanction such behavior'.[107]

Crawford Young has noted that if African ethnicity is modern and not an atavistic survival, 'then all the developmental scripts required revision'.[108]   Instead of the political and economic forms of modernity, the pattern of state-society relations, the patronage systems, and ethnic communities and identities that have developed over the past century produce the vicious circle of what I have termed 'uncivil nationalism' in which internal processes of moral ethnicity, groping towards defining communities of cultural identity and social responsibility, contrast with an external

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105.   Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics*, pp. 71–106, 162–82.
106.   Bayart, 'Finishing with the idea of the Third World', p. 66.
107.   Eyoh, 'From economic crisis to political liberalization', p. 65.
108.   Young, 'Nationalism, ethnicity and class', p. 444; and also Lentz, 'Home, death and leadership', pp. 165–6.

realm of competitive political tribalism defined by purely materialistic and opportunistic relationships to the state through the control of patronage. What is missing is the development of a trans-ethnic public arena grounded in universalistic norms and the essential relations of social trust in the disinterested competence and probity of millions of unknown and unseen others that are the foundation of the day to day transactions of both capitalism and the nation-state.[109]

Instead, African states are stalled in a heaving, chaotic pluralism of institutional and cultural elements in which public institutions have little legitimacy and trust of others is low. In circumstances of uncertainty, instability and intense, even desperate, competition for resources, people attempt to find in ethnic communities and identities a degree of support and security, and some semblance of cultural and moral coherence.[110] While the colonial state was able to maintain a tenuous autonomy and legitimacy through its asserted role as benevolent protector and disinterested arbiter for its African subjects, its post-colonial successor, pervaded from top to bottom by clashing ethnic factions and patronage networks, can sustain no such posture. Instead, the state is a conglomeration of agencies and offices to be captured and manipulated, beneath the guise of official 'development' ideology, for individual and communal benefit. The arbitrary and authoritarian use of state power to accumulate wealth reflects the limited development of the impersonal exchange relations of the capitalist market and of the state as an impersonal and impartial arbiter of political conflict.[111] Moreover, not only does ethnic and patronage politics inhibit the development of a coherent national dominant class with a project of social transformation, but also the fragmentation and privatization of state power undermines its ability to act as the agent of such a project of national development.

Expectations that the development of 'civil society' in African states will serve as a force for social and political renewal in contemporary Africa are clearly unrealistic. Based on idealized conceptions of Western experience,

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109. Ekeh, 'Colonialism and the two publics in Africa'. I discuss more fully the critical issue of social trust and its relation to the development of state and market in 'Ethnicity, social trust and the democratic process in Africa', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Columbus, Ohio, November 1997. The relationship of social trust and modernity is analyzed in Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990).

110. See the trenchant discussion of how the relationship between security and the legitimacy and impartiality of the state makes possible broader social identities of class and interest, and how the lack of both in the Somali context compels reliance on the biologically ascribed identities of kinship and ethnicity in Simons, 'Democratization and ethnic conflict', pp. 278–83.

111. Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, pp. 28–9. The only recent writer to emphasize the importance of what he termed 'the acceptance of the nation-state as the ultimate and impersonal arbiter of secular dispute', was Kalman Silvert. See his introduction to Silvert, ed., *Expectant Peoples: Nationalism and development* (Random House, New York, 1963).

analyses of civil society tend to focus largely on socio-cultural forms
borrowed from the West—churches, professional organizations, labour
unions, universities, etc—and ignore the dense networks of indigenous
institutions that surround and pervade them, i.e., precisely those features of
historical experience and the socio-cultural landscape that are idiosyncrati-
cally African.[112]   If we examine the latter, as we have here, then it is clear
that civil society in the sense in which it ostensibly exists in Western liberal
democracies does not exist in Africa, where the boundaries between state
and society, public and private, are neither clear nor consistent.   We find,
rather, a 'civil society' in Africa, as Robert Fatton has pointed out, that is
neither a democratic *deus ex machina* nor universal movement of popular
empowerment, but a 'disorganized plurality of mutually exclusive projects
that are not necessarily democratic', and is traversed by inequalities and
clashing interests of ethnicity, class and gender revealing deep and poten-
tially violent conflicts.[113]   As we have seen, the reliance on the loyalties
and personal ties of kinship and ethnicity represent both attempts to find
individual security and defensive cultural and political reactions *against* the
disruptions of the social forces of modernity.   Moreover, the desire to find
stability and meaning in a turbulent social universe also finds expression in
the spread of Islamic fundamentalist movements and Christian fundamen-
talist and Pentecostal churches that both cut across or reinforce ethnic
cleavages.   These are both anti-modernist, and in the case of some of the
churches, also hostile to indigenous cultures, further dividing families and
communities.[114]

I am not attempting to resuscitate the tradition versus modern
dichotomy and Parsonian pattern variables of neolithic modernization
theory.   Instead, I want to insist on the distinctiveness of the historical
trajectory of African states and societies sketched here and produced by the
interactions of indigenous and external social forces in the twentieth
century.[115]   The future direction of this trajectory is not rigidly deter-
mined, but subject to the contingent outcomes of the diverse social forces
we have examined.   It is not likely, however, *given current circumstances*, to
eventually reproduce in sub-Saharan Africa the paradigmatic and hegem-
onic forms of Western modernity, particularly industrial capitalism and a

112.   A critique of the use of the concept of 'civil society' in the analysis of contemporary
African politics falls outside of the scope of this essay, but two trenchant examples are Eyoh,
'From economic crisis to political liberalization', and Robert Fatton, 'Africa in the age of
democratization: The civic limitations of civil society', *African Studies Review*, **38**, 2 (1995).
113.   Fatton, 'Africa in the age of democratization', pp. 75, 72–3, 76–7.
114.   In different contexts fundamentalist religious movements can either cut-across or
reinforce ethnic and class cleavages.   See Ruth Marshall, 'Power in the name of Jesus',
Review of African Political Economy, **52** (1991), and other articles in that special issue on
'Fundamentalism in Africa'; and, Mutahi Ngunyi, 'Religious institutions and political
liberalization in Kenya'.
115.   The concept of political trajectory is developed in Bayart, 'Finishing with the idea of
the Third World'.

liberal democratic nation-state.   This is not to deny the reality of the opposition parties, law societies, churches, trade unions and student organizations that have struggled to establish democratic institutions and free elections, and to defend human rights.   These do represent the presence in African societies of a commitment to institutions and values of Western modernity.   However, it is the ability of such groups to become the resistance of existing structures of wealth and power and shift the historical trajectory that is at issue.   With distressing frequency, the rhizomes of ethnic factionalism and patron-client politics reproduce them-selves within these parties and associations, rendering them, like so much of the apparatus of the state, into ideological and institutional facades covering the reality of business as usual on the back verandah.[116] Moreover, formal democratization in the form of parties and elections not only is compatible with continuing ethnic clientelism, but also often brings a destabilizing surge of ethnic claims and conflicts, suppressed by previous authoritarian regimes, that can discredit the process of liberalization itself and invite renewed authoritarian interventions.[117]

   This suggests, finally, that efforts to promote democratization in Africa have thus far targeted the wrong institutional levels and missed entirely those where bureaucratic authoritarianism, patronage and ethnicity are entrenched.   For ordinary people the central problem lies in their day to day contacts with local authorities and agents of the state where they cannot and do not expect disinterested competence and fairness. Instead, they expect and mostly get incompetence, bias, venality and corruption.   So long as this persists, they cannot develop the critical relations of trust in their dealings with the state, and will continue to rely on the personalized, protective ties of clientelism.   Without displacement of the decentralized despotisms in the countryside, limitations on the opportunities for accumulation and patronage through the state appara-tus, and effective accommodation of the reality of ethnic pluralism in formal political institutions, there can be little hope of fundamental change moving more clearly towards modernity.   With the underlying structures unchanged, even more than one relatively free multi-party election can be no guarantee of the establishment of an enduring democratic polity.   To finally answer John Stackhouse's question with which we began this essay: the Big Men are not coming back; they have never left.

116.   See, for example, Muigai, 'Ethnicity and the renewal of competitive politics in Kenya', pp. 182–8, 190–1.
117.   E. O. Akwetey, 'Ghana: Violent ethno-political conflicts and the democratic challenge', in A. O. Oluskoshi and L. Laakso, eds., *Challenges to the Nation-State in Africa* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1996), pp. 102–3, 121–9; Osaghae, *Ethnicity and its management in Africa*, pp. 24–7.