AFRICA'S REVOLUTIONARY NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE IDEA OF THE 'SCRAMBLE'[1]

I

IN MAY 1963, THE CHARTER OF THE NEWLY FORMED Organisation of African Unity was signed in Addis Ababa. One apparently straightforward clause catches the eye: 'Principles', Article III (3), stipulated the importance of "Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State, and for its inalienable right to independent existence".[2] The essential point was reiterated almost forty years later in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the organisation which replaced the OAU, signed in Lomé in Togo on 11 July 2000. In Article 4 ('Principles'), clause (b), asserted a little more precisely "Respect of borders existing on achievement of independence".[3] In the quiet way of diplomatic prose, these were seismic declarations, for underpinning the entire modern Africa political order were decisions taken between the 1880s and the 1900s which were now regarded as binding; the partition[4] of the continent was a political fact which should not, could not, be challenged. Africa is not alone in the grand sweep of global history in having its internal political and territorial composition influenced by interfering foreigners, and through acts of cartographic diplomacy over which the locals had supposedly very little say. But it *is* distinctive in terms of the apparent scale of the project, and in the notion, implied or otherwise, that the 'Scramble for Africa' effectively heralded the advent of the continent's modernity. Africa stands in stark contrast from China, or South Asia, for which regions scholars have proposed an 'early modern' moment, a separate path of modernisation distinct from (even if eventually overtaken by) that of Europe.[5] In large part, this is attributable to the experience of the Atlantic slave trade between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, which seemingly pulled the continent – or a sizeable swath of it – inexorably backward, certainly relative to many other parts of the globe. For Africa, therefore,

[1] I am grateful to several reviewers of an earlier draft for their incisive comments and suggestions.
[2] 'OAU Charter', Addis Ababa, 25 May 1963, at https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/treaties/7759-file-oau_charter_1963.pdf
[3] 'Constitutive Act of the African Union', Lomé, 11 July 2000, at http://www.achpr.org/instruments/au-constitutive-act/
[4] The term 'partition' is used in this essay as shorthand for the period in which the majority of Africa's internal boundaries were drawn up, between the mid-1880s and the first decade of the twentieth century.
[5] For example: Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the hazards of world history* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The muddle of modernity', *American Historical Review*, 116:3 (2011).

there was no 'early modernity', no 'Great Divergence'.[6] Only violent conquest, and the modernity and 'development' which occupation engendered, or was presumed to have initiated.

This paper is concerned with how the era of the 'Scramble' – conventionally regarded as lasting between the late 1870s and the First World War – has been framed, and with how that remarkable 'moment' can be understood in relation to processes of change within Africa in the decades preceding it. The core aim is to posit a new interpretation of Africa's development during the nineteenth century, and the increasingly global context within which millions of Africans operated. This is a period long consigned to the 'precolonial' and thus regarded as little more than prelude to the main action of the twentieth century. A fuller appreciation of Africa's transformation in the decades preceding the 'Scramble' places African agency at the centre of a narrative habitually preoccupied with exogenous forces, in effect decolonizing a critical era – including the partition itself – in the continent's modern history. A clearer comprehension of the revolutionary shifts during this period also has implications for our understanding of what follows in the twentieth century, in terms of political creativity, economic innovation, and the multifaceted nature of global engagement.

Two central issues must be tackled before we proceed. The first is a definition of 'revolutionary'. Africa's long nineteenth century witnessed remarkable economic and commercial innovation, as polities and societies sought to diversify domestic production and both engage with and drive forward global trade. In many respects these transformations can be seen as the escalation of longer-term struggles – as during the Atlantic slave trade – of Africans to reinvent, reform, and assert some control over a growing global power imbalance. Commercial shifts in turn drove change in social status and identity: a dramatic increase in social mobility is evident as new groups of people emerged to make claims on political and economic power, and on social position. This was an era of violent entrepreneurs, who were both cause and effect of an unfolding military revolution – in weaponry, of course, but above all in military organisation and the professionalization of violence. Kings, rebels and warlords alike were conscious of the indelibly intertwined relationship between war and economy, and sought to integrate material and military cultures in pursuit of external expansion and/or internal cohesion. These political elites, new and old – alternately visionary and opportunistic,

[6] Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton NJ, 2000); Frederick Cooper, *Africa in the World: capitalism, empire, nation-state* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014), 11-14.

and often both – evinced energy, creativity and purpose as, through trial and error, they sought to forge new polities or reform extant ones. Intensifying global engagement, meanwhile, led to expanding spiritual and intellectual worldviews, throwing into flux ideas about creation and identity, and leading to new conceptualizations about both. Each of these revolutionary impulses was met with obstacles, and 'success' – depending on how we define it – was sometimes limited. The new forms of war were usually reliant on imported firearms and ammunition; polities were destabilized by contests over succession and centrifugal forces; producers and merchants were soon confronted by the realities of inequitable terms of trade, the burdens of debt, and inimicality of sustained violence to economic development. But the revolutionary dynamic is undeniable. Importantly, it is clear that these dynamics were in many places, to varying degrees, the product of the entanglement of endogenous and exogenous forces, a coalition of external intrusions and endogenous change – in terms of economic reform, demographic shifts, political innovation. The coalescence of these processes engendered political systems, elites and cultures which celebrated militarism and political and cultural exceptionalism, and which were underwritten by – and which in turn advanced – economic and commercial development.

The second issue is the question of responsibility. In short, is the argument for African agency essentially shifting 'blame' and responsibility away from Europeans and onto Africans, who in effect become liable for their own 'conquest'? The extension of *that* thesis could be, perhaps, that one is somehow 'absolving' Europeans, or at least mitigating their own violent aggression. In some ways, I am indeed arguing for some degree of local responsibility: but *not* as part of some larger 'colonial *apologia*', as it might be termed. In making the case for greater African agency, and for shifting the focus onto what is happening within Africa in the course of the nineteenth century. I am emphatically *not* suggesting that Europeans can in effect claim little responsibility for the 'Scramble'. Once on the ground, and having gained access to local resources and acquired effective leverage, Europeans acted with brutal efficiency. None of what is proposed here is concerned to diminish European culpability for what must surely be one of the largest-scale exercises in material exploitation and racial, at times genocidal, violence in modern times. What I *am* proposing is an altogether more nuanced, complex understanding of the relationship between the 'Scramble' and Africans' own achievements – and failures – over several preceding decades. The argument here is not that European imperialism was anything other than violent and aggressive but rather that its realization and actual capacity need to be understood in the context of longer-term developments within

Africa. This is only a matter of controversy if we continue to frame the partition itself in long-established *conquest* terms – a process in which Africans are either 'resisters' or 'collaborators' – rather than partition being part of an ongoing exercise in political, economic, social and cultural *reformation* across the continent, an exercise driven in large part, if not exclusively, by global interaction; the consequences of which continue to be felt, as well as misunderstood. With the recognition of 'co-option' – and thus agency – comes an element of responsibility on the part of multiple groups and communities, naturally. European violence, and Europeans' own co-option of Africans, are clear enough; but I am concerned here with the idea of concatenation, of intersection. The partition – the thoroughgoing *reformation* – of Africa was already underway, by Africans, long before Europeans intervened in pursuit of their own imperial projects.

We are concerned with two broad 'schools'. One centres on Europe's dramatic and violent expansion in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and is customarily the preserve of historians of empire and imperialism. Explicitly *African* developments have recently been given a little more careful consideration by those scholars than was once the case – compare John Scott Keltie's classic text, first published in the 1890s, with work by Thomas Pakenham, and certainly John Darwin[7] – but an intrinsic Eurocentrism has persisted. The other broad school – the domain of 'Africanist' writers – focuses on Africa's modern history, and specifically the ways in which the nineteenth century, once a mainstay in the historiography as it took form in the 1950s and 1960s, was regarded as a tumultuously innovative, even revolutionary era. How can we explain the 'Scramble' in light of Africa's longer-term internal transformations? Why is anything Africans achieved in the course of the nineteenth century apparently insufficient to 'head off' partition – and is that even the right question? Is it possible to award Africans, over a somewhat longer *durée* than is normally the case, a more prominent role within what are conventionally imperial and global forces for change?

The 'Scramble' occupies a dominant narrative place in textbooks and survey histories; an inescapable feature to be traversed in the historical landscape. The memorialisation of the epoch soon began in earnest – usually undergirding its seeming inexorability as well as its

[7] John Scott Keltie, *The Partition of Africa* (London, 1895), was the first account of the 'Scramble', its first edition appearing as events were still unfolding on the ground. Also Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876-1912* (London, 1991); John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: the rise and fall of global empires, 1400-2000* (London, 2007).

inherently benign nature. In his *Short History of the World*, H.G. Wells might be able to write that "[l]ittle heed was given to the welfare of the natives" during the 'Scramble', and express bemusement that the whole thing had happened at all;[8] but for most writers on the subject, the 'conquest' of Africa was both natural and benevolent. For Frederick, Lord Lugard, a central figure in the events themselves, this was captured in the notion of a 'dual mandate' which would be mutually beneficial to both Britain and its African territories.[9] In his hefty history of Europe, H.A.L. Fisher was in no doubt that the motives behind the partition were pure, indeed humanitarian – namely to suppress the evil slave trade and to generally improve Africans' lot.[10] It was with a certain blithe confidence that Fisher could write of Europe's successful campaign against "the poison of slavery": "The peaceful partition of Africa among the leading European States, which was perhaps the most striking achievement of European statecraft in the eighties and nineties of the last century, enabled this policy to be carried forward."[11] That this "striking achievement" could be presented in such assured terms even at the moment of a crisis of confidence in the colonial order is itself rather remarkable,[12] though there is no reason to suppose that this illustrious historian was particularly concerned with African affairs. The key point for him was that a mission had been accomplished and that it had all been wonderfully "peaceful": no visions of genocide here, or ravaged lands, or displaced peoples. It was a narrative which would embed itself in British popular culture and political discourse, whether in the remembrance of David Livingstone's sacrifice (which occurred prior to the partition but which was seen as providing the moral framework for it);[13] or in the cinematic portrayal of doughty military heroism in the face of various forms of savagery, noble and otherwise, from *The Four Feathers* to *Zulu*.[14] In France, too, the heroization of late-nineteenth century imperial figures has a long history.[15] A certain romance is attached to imperial military campaigns in the years before the slaughter of the First World War. And while discussions of empire and its legacy have become ever more fraught in both France and Britain, the idea of a great European

[8] H.G. Wells, *A Short History of the World* (London, 1929), 281.
[9] F.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh & London, 1922).
[10] H.A.L. Fisher, *A History of Europe: Vol III: The Liberal Experiment* (London, 1935), 1126.
[11] Ibid., 1034.
[12] John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge, 1979), chap. 11.
[13] Joanna Lewis, *Empire of Sentiment: the death of Livingstone and the myth of Victorian imperialism* (Cambridge, 2018); and some older scholarship, including J.M. Mackenzie, *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa* (London, 1996); and B. Pachai (ed.), *Livingstone, Man of Africa: memorial essays, 1873-1973* (Harlow, 1973).
[14] *The Four Feathers*, dir. Zoltan Korda (1939), which was remade in 2002; *Zulu*, dir. Cy Endfield (1964). More broadly, see also John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986).
[15] Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: the Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870-1939* (Manchester, 2013).

moment of civilising expansionism in the late nineteenth century (and beyond) retains a powerful hold on a particular segment of political opinion.[16] But in Africa, too, European military intrusion was recalled in some of the continent's greatest cultural output – in Ethiopian paintings of the Battle of Adwa, celebrating a rare African triumph; in melancholic but vivid Nyoro remembrances of their brutal extinguishing as a proud, independent kingdom at the hands of the British and their Ganda allies; in Chinua Achebe's classic novel, *Things Fall Apart*.[17] And of course, millions of Africans have lived in quotidian ways with the legal and political consequences of territorial demarcation for well over a century now.

Recently, we also have the 'New Scramble' narrative, this time focusing on the predations of the Chinese, in particular, but also India and the Gulf States, and a host of multinational conglomerates hungry for Africa's raw materials, who are interested in lending money to African governments, building infrastructure, and gaining access to resources.[18] Russia is reaching into the continent with renewed vigour in search of spheres of influence,[19] and the former colonial powers seem in some ways to be losing ground. It represents the curious endurance of the idea that this is what happens to Africa: it gets scrambled for, consumed, fought over by avaricious foreigners in partnership with equally venal local agents. At the same time, the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has witnessed a curious kind of latent aftershock of imperial conquest and cartography: in the violence of the eastern Congo and the instigation of Africa's 'great war'; in the collapse of peripheries from Somalia to Congo to Libya, requiring new forms of external intervention; in the dominant global narrative around 'development'. 'Scramblology' persists, it seems, and the tropes are perennial, representative of a fixed notion in Africa's global historical narrative.

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[16] See in particular Robert Gildea, *Empires of the Mind: the colonial past and the politics of the present* (Cambridge, 2019); and also Danny Dorling & Sally Tomlinson, *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire* (London, 2019).

[17] John Nyakatura (ed. Godfrey Uzoigwe), *Anatomy of an African Kingdom: a history of Bunyoro-Kitara* (New York, 1973) is a translation of Nyakatura's 1947 work of oral history, *Abakama ba Bunyoro-Kitara* [The Kings of Bunyoro-Kitara]; Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London, 1958).

[18] For example, Padraig Carmody, *The New Scramble for Africa* (Cambridge, 2011); Chris Alden, Daniel Large, & Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (eds.), *China Returns to Africa: a rising power and a continent embrace* (London, 2008).

[19] Peter Beaumont, 'Russia's scramble for influence in Africa catches western officials off guard', *The Guardian*, 11 September 2018 (https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/11/russias-scramble-for-influence-in-africa-catches-western-officials-off-guard); Luke Harding & Jason Burke, 'Leaked documents reveal Russian effort to exert influence in Africa', *The Guardian*, 11 June 2019 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/leaked-documents-reveal-russian-effort-to-exert-influence-in-africa)

It has long been the case that historians of empire and imperialism rarely converse with their 'Africanist' colleagues, and only a select few straddle both fields. The former belong to an old and venerable branch of the discipline; the latter, to a rather newer field, little more than sixty years old – roughly the same age as many African nations themselves – and are often segregated into 'area studies'. The scholarly distance thus maintained is particularly striking when we think about the 'Scramble'. Over the past thirty years or so, it often seems that anyone wanting to read something vaguely 'new' about the partition of the continent must dip into what we can broadly call the 'imperial' historiography. And the historiography of empire and imperialism continues to expand apace, as it has done since the 1990s. Scholarly interpretations of empire and imperialism abound in the catalogues of university presses and trade publishers alike. There is plenty of disagreement, of course; no overarching theory has held the stage for long. But the ongoing legitimacy of the exercise is scarcely in doubt. Among historians of Africa, however, interest in the 'Scramble' has declined markedly, and there is very little in the way of an African/Africanist interpretation. Approaches to the subject remain stubbornly metropolitan, and occasionally what we can call 'global-imperial'. There are many more Eurocentric explanations of the 'Scramble' than there are Afrocentric ones,[20] in large part, presumably, because it doesn't seem to make much sense at the African end in macro terms. The 'facts' of the era of partition are pretty much taken for granted, and now decolonisation is altogether more fashionable. It seems worthwhile pondering why this might be. Perhaps because "it's been done", as one senior colleague recently growled at the author, when floating the idea of revisiting the subject. Maybe it has – although few other subjects are regarded as having been 'done' quite so definitively, which is interesting in itself.

Since the appearance of Thomas Pakenham's hefty blockbuster[21] – which still sits on the shelves of high street bookshops – there have been various attempts to consider the 'Scramble' in a wider imperial context. Among the most insightful and nuanced have been by the eminent historian of empire John Darwin, who has refreshed the debate by highlighting the flexible, opportunistic nature of imperial expansion and demonstrating the importance of colonial or semi-colonial 'bridgeheads'.[22] Dierk Walter revisits older subject-matter – dealt with, among

[20] One of the most impressive remains David Levering Lewis's *The Race to Fashoda: European colonialism and African resistance in the Scramble for Africa* (London, 1988). For a somewhat different take, see Molefi Kete Asante, *The History of Africa: the quest for eternal harmony* (New York, 2007), Part V.
[21] Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*. An early edition contained the somewhat dubious subtitle *The White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent, 1876-1912*, which in time seems to have been quietly dropped.
[22] Notably, his 'Imperialism and the Victorians: the dynamics of territorial expansion', *English Historical Review*, June 1997; and *After Tamerlane*.

others, by Douglas Porch and Bruce Vandervort – in his work on imperial violence, in which Africa attracts some attention.[23] Somewhat less gruesomely, Africa is engulfed in a wave of complicated British genius in David Cannadine's account of Britain's triumphant nineteenth century,[24] while Germany's role in the era of European expansion – and its far-reaching implications – is explored by Sebastian Conrad.[25] The British angle is also considered in one of the case studies in Krishan Kumar's selective survey of imperial regimes.[26] The African dimension is treated with rather more sensitivity – and in greater detail – in Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper's global history of empire, as one would expect, considering that Cooper himself is an eminent Africanist, especially of Francophone Africa.[27] Something similar can be said of Cain and Hopkins' landmark study of British imperialism, the second edition of which appeared in 2002, as Hopkins began his professional life as a dyed-in-the-wool historian of Africa – although *British Imperialism* is a study of metropolitan dynamics.[28] Meanwhile, Daniel Headrick has consistently argued that in essence this was about the West's technological superiority – especially in terms of firearms – which enabled European army officers to conquer vast areas and swiftly defeat substantial African armies with mostly small numbers of men.[29] On the more commercial side of publishing, Edward Paice chooses settler bad boy Ewart Grogan – who uses Africa to win over the rich heiress to whom he has proposed – as a 'novel' and accessible way into the era of partition: another gripping yarn centred on a white man in Africa.[30] Lawrence James' *Empires in the Sun* is essentially the retelling of a well-known narrative with the 'Scramble' at its centre, and to some extent the heir to Pakenham's great technicolour production. The subtitle, again, is revealing: James's Africa is a place over which there has long been a struggle for 'mastery', mostly involving perplexed foreigners.[31]

[23] Dierk Walter, *Colonial Violence: European empires and the use of force* (London, 2017). See also Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830-1914* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1998), and Douglas Porch, *Wars of Empire* (London, 2000), part of Cassell's 'History of Warfare' series.
[24] David Cannadine, *Victorious Century: the United Kingdom, 1800-1906* (London, 2018).
[25] Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: a short history* (Cambridge, 2012).
[26] Krishan Kumar, *Visions of Empire: how five imperial regimes shaped the world* (Princeton & Oxford, 2017).
[27] Jane Burbank & Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: power and the politics of difference* (Princeton & Oxford, 2010). See also Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven & London, 1994).
[28] P.J. Cain & A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000* (London, 1993, 2002).
[29] The argument was first made in Headrick's *The Tools of Empire: technology and European imperialism in the nineteenth century* (New York & Oxford, 1981), and reiterated with some variations and additions in *Power over Peoples: technology, environments and Western imperialism, 1400 to the present* (Princeton & Oxford, 2010).
[30] Edward Paice, *Lost Lion of Empire: the life of 'Cape-to-Cairo' Grogan* (London, 2002).
[31] Lawrence James, *Empires in the Sun: the struggle for the mastery of Africa, 1830-1990* (London, 2016).

At the Africanist end of the debate, again, interest has diminished, at least at the macro-level. Partial recent exceptions would include Steven Press's book on the role of dubious speculators in Africa in the late nineteenth century;[32] and Jonas Fossli Gjerso's essay reassessing the British partition of East Africa.[33] Jelmer Vos's recent study of Kongo illustrates the potential for new ways into the experience of the partition.[34] A number of scholars have revisited aspects of the nineteenth century, touching on the partition or at least its prelude. Robin Law's study of Ouidah actually begins with the Dahomean conquest of the 'port' in 1727 but which dedicates considerable space to the nineteenth century.[35] Stephen Rockel re-examines the socio-economic implications of nineteenth-century Nyamwezi porterage and merchant activity,[36] while Giacomo Macola's pioneering and detailed study of firearms in Central Africa adopts a 'long nineteenth century' approach, beginning in c.1800 and encompassing the period of the 'scramble' for the region and its immediate aftermath.[37] Silke Strickrodt's work on West African trade spans the sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, and represents one of the most sophisticated attempts in recent times to highlight the centrality of commercial relations between Europeans and Africans.[38] In different but related ways this work is suggestive of the idea that partition was a process, not an event. Still, Africanists have generally shied away from anything that might be construed as a sweeping statement. How to compare South Africa with almost everywhere else? Why does Ethiopia survive as an independent state? How to compare, say, the kingdom of Buganda and its skilful adoption of a 'sub-imperial' role with Dahomey, smashed by a French force in the 1890s? Are larger, overarching narratives the preserve of a corpus of scholars in the post-imperial West? Occasionally, now, the era of the partition is seen as permeable, a transition, as navigable in seeking to understand both continuities and discontinuities from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.[39] But for many,

[32] Steven Press, *Rogue Empires: contracts and conmen in Europe's Scramble for Africa* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017).
[33] Jonas Fossli Gjerso, 'The Scramble for East Africa: British motives reconsidered, 1884-95', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43:5 (2015).
[34] Jelmer Vos, *Kongo in the Age of Empire, 1860-1913: the breakdown of a moral order* (Madison WI, 2015).
[35] Robin Law, *Ouidah: the social history of a West African slaving 'port', 1727-1892* (Athens OH, 2004).
[36] Stephen Rockel, *Carriers of Culture: labor on the road in nineteenth-century East Africa* (Portsmouth NH, 2006).
[37] Giacomo Macola, *The Gun in Central Africa: a history of technology and politics* (Athens OH, 2016).
[38] Silke Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World: the Western Slave Coast, c.1550-c.1885* (Woodbridge, 2015).
[39] Tom McCaskie, *Asante Identities: history and modernity in an African village, 1850-1950* (Edinburgh, 2000); Shane Doyle, *Crisis and Decline in Bunyoro: population and environment in Western Uganda, 1860-1955* (Oxford, 2006); Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: histories of chiefship, community, and state* (Woodbridge, 2013); Mark Leopold, *Inside West Nile: violence, history, and representation on an African frontier* (Oxford, 2005); Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c.1884-1914* (Oxford, 2006).

Basil Davidson's bold proposition that only a *longue durée* approach to the last two hundred years could elucidate Africa's modern development has come to be seen as an intriguing but somewhat eccentric notion.[40] Since then, historians of Africa – as opposed to historians of empire – have been largely uninterested in, even suspicious of, macro-level explanations of the partition, and have instead been concerned to examine the consequences of partition at the local level. The shift in focus to what comes afterwards is, in some ways, a straightforwardly methodological one: it is, bluntly, a whole lot simpler to study the history of colonial rule, or decolonization, than it is to do substantive work for many areas in the nineteenth century (never mind earlier). Enormously important work continues to be done on late precolonial topics, of course. Nevertheless, the creeping diminution of interest in Africa's nineteenth century seems to be indicative of a belief that its consequences are more interesting than what preceded it, and more specifically, that African agency and experience is more important to chart *after* c.1900 than before or even during the 'Scramble' itself.

II

IN HIS ESSAY IN THE SIXTH VOLUME of the *Cambridge History of Africa*, which deals substantively with the era of partition, Anthony Atmore concludes by arguing that "[t]he overall evidence suggests that the reasons [for the partition] were…shifts in the international balance of power and of trade amongst the European capitalist states *rather than changes within Africa itself* [emphasis added]."[41] Around the same time, A. Adu Boahen articulated a similar argument. "I believe", he wrote, "that the causes of [the Scramble] can be found, not in Africa…but rather in the congruence of the economic as well as the political and social forces operating in Europe during the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century."[42] Notably, however, Boahen spent much of the first chapter of *African Perspectives* arguing for the nineteenth century as a time of revolution and innovation in Africa – manifest, for example, in commercial transformation, intellectual endeavour, and political 'modernization'. It was an argument which had been made, too, by the eminent Nigerian historian Godfrey Uzoigwe, who was among the first to identify shifts in military organisation and the practice of warfare in

[40] Basil Davidson, *Africa in Modern History: the search for a new society* (London, 1978), 69-70.
[41] A.E. Atmore, 'Africa on the eve of partition', in Roland Oliver and G.N. Sanderson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Africa: Vol 6, 1870-1905* (Cambridge, 1985), 95.
[42] A. Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, 1987), 29.

Africa during that period.[43] But this era of transformation, it seemed, had no bearing – or very little – on the actual partition with which the long nineteenth century concluded. More recently, Olufemi Taiwo has followed a slightly different – but similar – path by arguing that the imperial partition actually knocked Africa off its own, rapid path toward 'modernity' in the nineteenth century.[44] Taiwo follows Boahen in framing the nineteenth century as an era of remarkable energy and dramatic change in Africa – which is then snuffed out by colonial invasion. In Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch's book on Africa's nineteenth century, too, the author spends most of her time focusing on African innovation and accomplishment during that "turbulent" period. The partition, however, is discussed in a separate chapter – again, with relatively little reference to the achievements discussed elsewhere in the book.[45] Boahen, Taiwo and Coquery-Vidrovitch essentially see the partition as a rupture from what had gone before, and whether implicitly or otherwise, that seems to be the approach adopted by most recent historians of modern Africa. More broadly, the ubiquitous 'c.1870-80' cut-off point in many texts is suggestive of a prevailing sense that something of a rupture took place as a result of the 'Scramble', and that the preceding decades of reform and innovation – while certain worthy of examination – were ultimately mere prelude to the great drama, the central narrative, that is European conquest and demarcation of territory.[46] In his landmark study of Equatorial Africa, Jan Vansina was in no doubt that the last two decades of the nineteenth century were indeed catastrophic, and that a combination of violence, famine and disease – a series of "novel calamities" – destroyed many of the "old ways of life". What followed was reconstruction, and the creation of new institutions by Africans to deal with the new order.[47]

The basic thesis – that Africa's nineteenth century was indeed remarkable but that its accomplishments (its 'early modernity', perhaps) were subjected to the wrecking ball of

[43] By G.N. Uzoigwe, see 'Pre-Colonial Military Studies in Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 13:3 (1975); and 'The Warrior and the State in Pre-Colonial Africa: comparative perspectives', in Ali A. Mazrui (ed.), *The Warrior Tradition in Modern Africa* (Leiden, 1977). I have since sought to retrieve that particular baton: Richard J. Reid, *Warfare in African History* (New York, 2012), esp. chap. 5; and my 'The Fragile Revolution: rethinking war and development in Africa's violent nineteenth century', in Emmanuel Akeampong et al (eds.), *Africa's Development in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2014).
[44] Olufemi Taiwo, *How Colonialism Pre-empted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, 2010).
[45] Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch [tr. Mary Baker], *Africa and the Africans in the Nineteenth Century: a turbulent history* (Armonk NY, 2009).
[46] For example, Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of African Societies to 1870* (Cambridge, 1997); M.E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, 3rd ed. (London, 2010). H.L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: the partition of Africa, 1880-1914* (Westport CT, 1996) is in many ways a much more substantial text than Chamberlain's, though the author rarely makes forays into the deeper past, except when absolutely necessary.
[47] Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (London, 1990), 240-45.

imperial partition, and then thrown into shadow by what followed – was implicitly or explicitly expounded in a significant corpus of scholarship over a number of years. Early interest in the 'Scramble' itself, one of the staples of Africanist historiography between the 1950s and 1970s, was often part of a larger concern to understand the nineteenth century in Africa. Most of the first wave of historians of Africa were 'late precolonial' in focus and range, with the partition seen as coming at the end of a remarkable epoch. The foundational texts of African historical scholarship often had the European partition as their last chapter, ending in 'c.1900', following deep investigations into the precolonial past but often with a particular focus on the nineteenth century – reflecting both the drama and significance of that era, as well as a relative expansion in the range of sources available.[48] The transformative character of Africa's nineteenth century, then, is described in what might be termed the 'classical' Africanist scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s.[49] One of the clearest and most powerful analyses is offered by Basil Davidson who was unambiguous in his assessment of Africa's nineteenth century as a time of dramatic innovation and indeed transformation. Or, at least, "the weight of evidence…suggests that [Africa] was moving toward a large if slow and diffused reorganization". We can only speculate, Davidson pondered, "what might then have developed without the colonial enclosure". But it was not to be, for "[a]s it was, each of these innovators was broken on the wheel of colonial policy". Davidson's arresting argument was that "the crisis of the nineteenth century led onward to the groundwork of nationalism".[50] Approaching the idea from a slightly different angle, Terry Ranger made a similar argument in contemplating the links between late nineteenth-century violence and later nationalist movements.[51]

It is also true, of course, that Africa's global nineteenth century cannot be fully understood without reference to the Atlantic slave trade which over several preceding centuries devastated swaths of the continent in economic and demographic terms, tied it into intrinsically unequal

[48] Notably, work by Jan Vansina exemplifies the point: *L'Evolution du Royaume Rwanda des Origines à 1900* (Brussels, 1962); *Kingdoms of the Savannah* (Madison WI, 1966); *The Children of Woot: a history of the Kuba peoples* (Madison WI, 1978); or, again, *Paths in the Rainforests*. But there are numerous other examples. See M.S.M. Kiwanuka, *A History of Buganda: from the foundation of the kingdom to 1900* (London, 1971); Andrew D. Roberts, *A History of the Bemba: political growth and change in north-eastern Zambia before 1900* (London, 1973); Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: the structure and evolution of a political order* (Cambridge, 1975); Robert W. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: the Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500-1891* (New Haven & London, 1981).
[49] The flavour is provided by John E. Flint (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Vol 5: c.1790-c.1870* (Cambridge, 1976). The cut-off between the first and second volumes of the OUP *History of East Africa* is, approximately, the mid-1890s. Volume 1 of the more recent *Cambridge History of South Africa* ends in 1885.
[50] Davidson, *Africa in Modern History*, 69-70.
[51] T.O. Ranger, 'Connexions between primary resistance movements and modern mass nationalism, I & II', *Journal of African History*, 9:3 & 9:4 (1968).

global commercial relationships, and wrought instability in most of the areas into which the trade reached. In other words, how do we frame the arguments around both agency and revolution in the nineteenth century in that context? After all, and in particular, the argument that Africans acted with heightened agency, reforming and innovating accordingly, in the course of the nineteenth century might be said to be weakened by the recognition that since the sixteenth century they had seen their agency steadily *eroded* by an Atlantic economy over which they had little direct control – and only slightly less so in the context of the Mediterranean and Red Sea worlds where external slave trades also operated.

Yet a couple of points are worth making at this juncture. First, recognition of the seriously deleterious effects of the slave trade[52] has not precluded the idea that African agency was extraordinarily important in shaping the Atlantic world, on both sides of the ocean.[53] This is not a question of transferring moral and operational responsibility for the trade from Europeans to Africans; rather, it was an attempt to see beyond the tragedy of mass forced migration, and the unquestionable suffering and victimhood which that involved, and to examine the creativity, the entrepreneurship, the means – whether we characterize it as 'resistance' or something else – by which Africans imposed themselves on a vast canvas in diverse, innovative ways. Second, there was indeed African agency on the continent itself. It is not the kind of agency with which those yearning for decolonial cleanliness are particularly comfortable; it was rough-hewn, violent, exploitative agency, militarized entrepreneurialism on the part of certain groups and communities imposing themselves on others nearby, or even within, their own polities. It is understandably simpler to espy decolonizing agency in Manichean terms. But a multitude of African societies and cultures engaged in the slave trade with vigour, leading to some of the most remarkable, and enduring, and globally-connected political systems anywhere on the continent, or indeed anywhere at all. Alongside recognition of a commercial power imbalance on a global scale, there was extraordinary African dynamism. In some respects an examination of the slave trade supports the thesis about the nineteenth century being posited here. This is not just a question of the ongoing, long-term 'colonial' weakening and undermining of African states and societies, but of opportunities for new forms of order, and

[52] Joseph Inikori & Stanley Engerman (eds.), *The Atlantic Slave Trade: effects on economies, societies, and peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe* (Durham NC, 1992); Joseph Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: a study in international trade and economic development* (Cambridge, 2002); Babacar M'baye, 'The economic, political and social impact of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa', *European Legacy*, 11:6 (2006).

[53] Notably, Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness* (London, 1993); also John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1998).

culture, and political creativity. Violent, yes, and often destructive; but opportunities were seized, and agency was exercised. For Atlantic Africa, or at least parts of it, the link with our revolutionary period is direct: while many littoral societies persisted with the export of people until the 1850s, in time the weakening of demand and the new demand for other commodities required fundamental economic reform, and new forms of entrepreneurship and investment, often themselves based on coercion and exploitation.

With all this in mind, what was the nature of Africa's nineteenth-century 'reorganization', its 'crisis'? What had been the dynamics providing openings for aggressive outside intervention in the course of the nineteenth century? In Robinson and Gallagher's classic text, it was a question, in crude summary, of the collapse of 'collaborative' regimes on the imperial periphery – commercial elites in Atlantic Africa, would-be modernizers in Egypt, settlers in southern Africa, each of them in their different ways inherently unstable – which drew the British (for example) into the continent, often unwillingly.[54] According to the Robinson-Gallagher thesis, peripheral disintegration ultimately drew Europe into scenarios in which formal administrative responsibility became impossible to avoid in order to ensure the flow of commerce. Africanist scholarship took up the essential idea, refined it in a local context, and focused their efforts on particular places at particular times. In many ways the most obvious place to turn was West Africa and the transition from the slave trade to 'legitimate commerce' in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, for it is here, arguably, that an Africa-centred explanation for the partition could be most clearly articulated.[55] Tony Hopkins, introducing us to the idea of a 'crisis of adaptation', argued that the Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century – and particularly those of the last period, between 1877 and 1893 – had been driven by the shift from the export of slaves to the export of palm oil. This traumatic transition diminished the wealth and authority of extant political elites, prompting them to turn to warfare as a means to maintaining income and status. The prolonged violence which resulted inevitably disrupted the export trade itself, and drew the British into annexing Yoruba territory in the 1890s. In other words, local stresses involved in the commercial transition contributed directly and decisively to the 'Scramble' for the area.[56] Martin Klein offered a similar interpretation of

[54] R. Robinson & J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: the official mind of imperialism* (London, 1961).
[55] Robin Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce: the commercial transition in nineteenth-century West Africa* (Cambridge, 1995); Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa: the palm oil trade in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1997). See also Strickrodt, *Afro-European Trade*, esp. chaps 5 & 6.
[56] A.G. Hopkins, 'Economic imperialism in West Africa: Lagos, 1880-1892', *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968); also his seminal work, *An Economic History of West Africa* (Harlow, 1973), 165-6. S.A. Akintoye's

developments in Senegambia, with a focus on the shift to groundnut exports.[57] Research on Dahomey likewise tended to support the 'crisis of adaptation' thesis – even if, as Elisée Soumonni argues, the kingdom successfully weathered the storm.[58] More broadly, these local stresses were exacerbated by the 'Great Depression' of 1873-96, during which the reduction of African elites' incomes from exports caused conflict between African suppliers and European buyers. It is undoubtedly a matter of debate whether we regard these coastal and near-hinterland societies as engaged in a fundamental struggle to 'modernize', but they were certainly seeking to control – often in violent, innovative ways – the forces of global economics. Presumably, Egypt also falls under such an analytical category, and it is presented as such in the Robinson and Gallagher thesis. French and British interests were centred on the Suez Canal, which since its completion in 1869 had transformed the capacity of Paris and London to communicate and trade with their Asian empires, and which greatly increased the financial and strategic significance of Egypt itself. But this was further complicated by Egypt's own 'crisis of adaptation', albeit one of a slightly different kind, in which an ambitious, modernizing elite around *Khedive* Ismail accepted European loans over several years in order to finance a vision of Egyptian 'modernity'. It failed, and the story is well known: by the end of the 1870s, Egypt was bankrupt, Ismail was overthrown, and his successor Tawfiq governed under the watchful eye of European experts whose job it was to oversee the country's complicated finances.[59]

In the West African context, not everyone accepted Hopkins' 'crisis of adaptation' thesis. David Eltis, for example, expressed scepticism about the actual significance of the export trade to most African societies, and argued that shifts in trade cannot have had such a major impact on the internal functioning of those communities.[60] But other refutations of the commercial

study of war and politics in nineteenth-century Yorubaland was primarily concerned with inter-state conflict at the local level, but it also offered a locally-rooted explanation of the eventual British intervention: see his *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893: Ibadan expansion and the rise of Ekitiparapo* (London, 1971).

[57] Martin Klein, 'Social and economic factors in the Muslim Revolution in Senegambia', *Journal of African History*, 13:3 (1972).

[58] John Reid, 'Warrior aristocrats in crisis: the political effects of the transition from the slave trade to palm oil commerce in the nineteenth century kingdom of Dahomey', PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 1986; Elisée Soumonni, 'The compatibility of the slave and palm oil trades in Dahomey, 1818-1858', in Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce*.

[59] Robinson & Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, chaps 4 & 5; P.M. Holt, 'Egypt and the Mile Valley', in Flint (ed.), *Cambridge History Vol 5*, 33-50. See also Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley & London, 1991).

[60] David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1987), 62-77. See also Patrick Manning, 'Slave trade, "legitimate" trade, and imperialism revisited: the control of wealth in the

strain argument actually serve our purposes in pointing toward the role of African agency, albeit differently conceptualised. While Hopkins in essence emphasised the *weakening* of indigenous structures as the result of commercial pressure, a process which prompted partition, others argued conversely that it was precisely the *resilience* of African institutions which necessitated colonial invasion. Ralph Austen proposed that in fact older ruling elites were largely able to dominate the new trade, much as they had the slave trade, and thus West African economic and political structures remain intact, by and large, before being crushed during the 'Scramble'.[61] Such resilience, so the argument went, were inimical to European commercial and capitalist interests, and so the states themselves needed to be crushed. The weakening, indeed breakdown, of indigenous structures was the consequence, not the cause, of partition. Gareth Austin finessed the argument in the context of Asante, which, he argued, more or less successfully managed the transition to 'legitimate commerce' – not least owing to the state's connections with the savannah to the north – and which exhibited a markedly dynamic economy in the precolonial period. But the continued existence of a powerful, independent Asante state was inimical to the free trade sought by the British in the Gold Coast Colony hinterland, and it was that which necessitated its removal.[62] To be sure, these are very different interpretations of the impact of overseas commerce. But in fact in their different ways they highlight the importance of recognising nineteenth-century African dynamism, innovation and a capacity for transformation and/or adaptation in explaining the 'Scramble'. Can a similar argument be made for other parts of the continent, notably eastern and southern Africa in the same period?

Between the 1860s and the 1900s, southern Africa was subject to the combined forces of capitalism, imperialism, industrialisation, and urbanisation – the demonstration *in extremis* of colonial conquest, it would seem. And yet such an interpretation only does justice to part of the story. African states and societies had a profound influence on the nature and form of colonial authority and colonial economics, not least in terms of labour migration and the evolution of a wage labour force.[63] The story of the formation of South Africa could not "be

Bights of Benin and Biafra', in Paul Lovejoy (ed.), *Africans in Bondage: studies in slavery and the slave trade* (Madison WI, 1986).

[61] Ralph A. Austen, 'The abolition of the overseas slave trade: a distorted theme in West African history', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 5/2 (1970); also his *African Economic History* (London, 1987), 101-2.

[62] Gareth Austin, 'Between abolition and *jihad*: the Asante response to the ending of the Atlantic slave trade, 1807-1896', in Law (ed.), *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce*.

[63] Shula Marks, 'Southern Africa, 1867-1886', in Oliver & Sanderson (eds.), *Cambridge History: Vol 6*, 360-1.

portrayed homogenously as a single history", wrote Shula Marks. "The diversity of the African societies of the sub-continent, their differing nineteenth-century experience and the historical interplay of personality and chance led to complex and distinctive developments within the region."[64] In other words, *African* dynamics – unfolding over the course of the turbulent nineteenth century, most dramatically manifest perhaps in the rise of the Zulu state – were as significant in explaining the nature and direction of the eventual partition of the region as aggressive European interventions following the discovery of diamonds and, later, gold.[65] The Zulu and a host of communities caught up in the maelstrom of the *Mfecane* created the political and cultural landscape within which capital later operated; they forged new identities and carved out the spaces within which settler communities moved. As elsewhere on the continent, the transformation of southern Africa was at least in part – and often a large part – the outcome of intense interchange on the frontiers of globalization. This took many forms, including the co-option of faith and thought on the part of Africans. African Christian converts, the *amakholwa* ("believers" in Zulu), successfully positioned themselves as the intermediaries between African and Western worlds.[66] At the same time, violence between Africans and Europeans profoundly influenced ideas about gender and race which each side utilised to assert their moral and political authority, as T.J. Tallie has demonstrated for Natal.[67] The Xhosa – increasingly a disappointment to missionaries and administrators alike, in their refusal to behave as expected – had a profound influence on the nature of governance in South Africa, and on the British imagination.[68]

In other areas, Europeans came into the narrative only at the very end, on the coat tails of much more convincing trailblazers and pioneers. The story of the Nyamwezi is illustrative. Here, several decades of political and economic upheaval involved the transformation of Nyamwezi society between the 1830s and the 1880s, as young men abandoned the sedentary farming of their ancestors and embraced a life of both violence and commerce in response to demand for slaves and ivory from the Indian Ocean coast. 'Arab' merchant caravans pushed the global

[64] Shula Marks, 'Southern and Central Africa, 1886-1910', in ibid, 423.
[65] A similar interpretation can be discerned in the detail provided in N. Etherington, Patrick Harries & Bernard K. Mbenga, 'From colonial hegemonies to imperial conquest, 1840-1880', in Carolyn Hamilton, Bernard K. Mbenga & Robert Ross (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol 1: from early times to 1885* (Cambridge, 2010), though the overarching thesis advanced by Marks is less explicitly articulated.
[66] Robert J. Houle, *Making African Christianity: Africans reimagining their faith in colonial southern Africa* (Bethlehem, 2011).
[67] T.J. Tallie, *Queering Colonial Natal: indigeneity and the violence of belonging in southern Africa* (Minneapolis, 2019).
[68] Richard Price, *Making Empire: colonial encounters and the creation of imperial rule in nineteenth-century Africa* (Cambridge, 2008).

frontier westward, built permanent settlements at key entrepôts, and brought both conflict and opportunity wherever they went. There thus emerged networks of both commodities and ideas, facilitated by local intermediaries and coastal agents, which linked eastern African societies, cultures, politics and economics to an expanding Indian Ocean world.[69] Analogous with the Atlantic realm, the expansion of a slave trade tied to the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf drove economic initiative and political reimagining. These were commercial relationships which distorted Africa's economic standing globally, and which were intrinsically unequal. But acknowledgment of this is compatible with an appreciation of the African initiative, and dynamism, which represented an attempt to control and channel global economics; which represented social aspiration, demonstrated material innovation, and were underpinned by political reform. The result was the rise of remarkable, if short-lived, states such as those of Mirambo and Nyungu-ya-Mawe, which overthrew convention and practiced a distinctively violent entrepreneurialism. Andrew Roberts may have characterised commercial developments in the nineteenth-century East African interior as "progress towards an inevitable dead end", but even he ventured – with characteristic restraint – that "this progress, however illusory, may help to suggest that the local economies were less inflexible and more inventive than is commonly supposed."[70] Indeed; but I would go further. This was a fundamental reordering of African society, economy and polity, driven again in large part by global exchange: a revolutionary process into which Europeans were ultimately co-opted. A discrete set of dynamics, the product of nation-building exercises and international rivalries within Europe, may have led to the Germans turning up in East Africa in the 1890s.[71] But the consummation of the project, such as it was, was only made possible through the use of local agents – soldiers as well as political allies – who were themselves the consequence of the region's transformative and turbulent nineteenth century.[72]

Something similar can be described for neo-Solomonic Ethiopia, though with a famously different outcome. Ethiopia is often framed as exceptional, and dynamics in the Horn of Africa

[69] 'Special Feature: Africa and the Indian Ocean', *Journal of African History*, 55:2 (2014).
[70] Andrew Roberts, 'Nyamwezi Trade', in Richard Gray & David Birmingham (eds.), *Pre-Colonial African Trade: essays on trade in central and eastern Africa before 1900* (London, 1970), 73.
[71] A.J.P. Taylor, *Germany's First Bid for Colonies, 1848-1884* (London, 1938); Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: a short history* (Cambridge, 2012).
[72] G.C.K. Gwassa, 'The German Intervention and African Resistance in Tanzania', in I.N. Kimambo & A.J. Temu (eds.), *A History of Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1969); W.O. Henderson, 'German East Africa 1884-1918', in Vincent Harlow & E.M. Chilver (eds.), *History of East Africa, Vol II* (Oxford, 1965); O.F. Raum, 'German East Africa: changes in African life under German administration, 1892-1914', in Harlow & Chilver (eds.), *History*, 180.

as highly distinctive, with little connection to developments elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa – for various reasons, not always entirely convincing.[73] But in fact Tewodros, who violently 'reunified' the fragmented and largely illusory Solomonic state between the 1830s and the 1850s, is one of the clearest manifestations of a nineteenth-century African revolution. He used expanding commercial networks – especially with the Red Sea coast – to build up an arsenal of modern (or near-modern) firearms, and forged what was in many respects a new state which drew its restless energy from a combination of religious-nationalist fervour and the challenge posed by a range of external enemies on its turbulent frontiers. Tewodros's was a remarkable achievement, but he was ultimately undone by the very violence on which he had rebuilt Ethiopia – and by provoking war with the British.[74] The difference between Tewodros and his near-contemporary Mirambo, however, is that there were rather stronger cultural and political foundations on which the former's successors could build; and they did. Yohannes IV (1872-89) and Menelik II (1889-1913) famously forged modern Ethiopia as an expansionist, more or less cohesive empire in its own right, rivalling Egypt in the Sudan as an active *participant* in the partition and carving up swaths of the Horn alongside the British, the Italians and (to a much lesser extent) the French. Menelik's decisive and profoundly resonant victory against Italy at the battle of Adwa in 1896 was held, at the time and subsequently, to represent something singular and exceptional.[75] Only Ethiopia could achieve this, it was argued (albeit against a foe as weak and disorganised as Italy); Ethiopia came to be seen as a bizarre anomaly, its defeat of an Italian army (mostly composed of Eritreans) reinforcing the notion of its separateness from Africa 'proper'.[76] Still, the direct impact on Italy's national project was profound, and long-lasting. Emperor Menelik had as great a hand, arguably, as Garibaldi himself in how the Italian nation turned out.[77] But rather more importantly, in reality, Ethiopia – or more precisely, the Amhara ruling group – embodied, and was the most successful manifestation of, the nineteenth-century transformation of Africa and its turbulent, often violent, engagement with exogenous dynamics. The undoubted peculiarities of the Ethiopian

[73] B.K. Holcomb & Sisai Ibbsa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: the making of a dependent colonial state in northeast Africa* (Trenton NJ, 1990); Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia*.
[74] See two short essays by the late Donald Crummey which still stand up as useful introductions: 'Tewodros as reformer and moderniser', *Journal of African History*, 10:3 (1969); and 'The violence of Tewodros', in B.A. Ogot (ed.), *War and Society in Africa* (London, 1972).
[75] The classic account remains Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London, 1976). For a contemporary view, see for example G.F.-H. Berkeley, *The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik* (New York, 1969; 1st. pub. 1902); and A.B. Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* (Westport Conn., 1970; 1st pub. 1901).
[76] John Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia: struggles for history and identity in the Horn of Africa* (New Brunswick NJ, 1993).
[77] Giuseppe Maria Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa: Italy's African wars in the era of nation-building, 1870-1900* (Bern, 2009).

experience blind us to the ways in which Ethiopia elucidates much of what was happening across the continent at exactly the same moment.

We don't generally talk of the lacustrine region, meanwhile, in terms of a 'crisis of adaptation', but in the case of Buganda several decades of commercial expansion and, from the 1870s, missionary work had heightened tensions at the royal court, changing patterns of social aspiration, expectation and consumption, and rendering the kingdom particularly volatile as its global interactions intensified. Some of these stresses and strains pre-dated the era of direct global contact – the Ganda state was built on, and was the product of, creative tension at its centre – but they were dramatically exacerbated in the second half of the nineteenth century. A civil war (1888-90) among ostensibly religious factions opened the door to limited external intrusion, in the form of the Imperial British East Africa Company, but it also facilitated the rise of a political oligarchy which in the course of the 1890s worked with a small British force to lay the foundations of the Uganda Protectorate.[78] The Buganda kingdom provides one of the finest exemplars of empire-making *in situ*. Indeed, if any African community has a claim on full participation in the 'Scramble' outside of Ethiopia or Egypt, it is the Ganda.[79] Above all, their ability and willingness to *co-opt* a British imperial presence in the region to their own advantage was the direct outcome of their nineteenth-century experience of rapid economic change, political dynamism and conflict, and military challenge.[80] The kingdom did not suddenly discover a capacity for innovation and adaptability once Frederick Lugard showed up with a Maxim gun; it was present throughout the nineteenth century, indeed several centuries before that, and thus the territorial carving-up of the region was as much the culmination of Buganda's nineteenth-century vigour as it was the manifestation of British imperialism at its apex. There is a striking parallel here with Nigeria, where Hausa sub-imperialists grasped the opportunities presented by the British to gain considerable power over the peoples of the Middle Belt, and actively participated in the construction of the colonial order. As in the Great Lakes region, too, much of this was rooted in an innovative reading of nineteenth-century history – in the Nigeria case, the reimagining of a Hausa-Fulani aristocracy as the natural rulers of backward Middle Belt communities – on the part of both British and African agents.[81]

[78] D.A. Low, *Fabrication of Empire: the British and the Uganda kingdoms, 1890-1902* (Cambridge, 2009).
[79] A.D. Roberts, 'The sub-imperialism of the Baganda', *Journal of African History*, 3:3 (1962).
[80] Richard Reid, *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda: economy, society and warfare in the nineteenth century* (Oxford, 2002).
[81] Moses Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa imperial agents and Middle Belt consciousness in Nigeria* (Bloomington IN, 2014).

Of course, while Buganda may be said to have successfully co-opted the British, there were societies for whom this was demonstrably not the case: specifically, in the Ugandan context, Bunyoro, which was the target of prolonged assault by an Anglo-Ganda force, culminating in the military defeat of the kingdom, the exile of its king, Kabalega, and the political and economic marginalization of the area within the new colonial territory. In discerning successful, dynamic instances of co-option, we are simultaneously identifying groups and communities which were very much the victims of that co-option, and whose experience of partition was markedly different. Yet in some ways this was an extension of the kind of local violent struggle over resources and control which had been unfolding over several decades. Ironically, it was precisely because of Kabalega's rejuvenation of Bunyoro in the 1870s and 1880s – the kingdom exemplifies at least some of the key aspects of the nineteenth-century revolution, including political centralization and military reform – that made the Ganda so eager to co-opt the British, and to partner with them in the kingdom's defeat.[82]

Bunyoro sat toward the far end of a spectrum along which the experience of imperial violence may be measured. Even further along were the Nama and Herero people of South West Africa, deliberately and systematically targeted by German forces in what was by consensus an act of genocide in a colonial setting.[83] In these circumstances the brute force of Europeans was the product of a peculiarly toxic, dehumanizing military culture, as Isabel Hull has argued for the German Second Reich, and African 'allies' and auxiliaries were swept up in the destruction which ensued.[84] Actions against the Shona and Ndebele in 1896-97 serve as another stark representation of this level of violence,[85] and the Ngoni in modern-day Zambia likewise came to face-to-face with the Maxim gun.[86] Equatorial Africans were decimated by colonial violence, hunger and disease in the 1890s.[87] This was European colonial war, and its corollaries, *in extremis*.[88] But in many other situations, Europeans had few other options open to them than to take advantage of the turmoil and fission wrought by the events of the

[82] Doyle, *Crisis and Decline in Bunyoro*.
[83] David Olusoga & Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's forgotten genocide* (London, 2011).
[84] Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: military culture and the practices of war in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca NY, 2005).
[85] T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-97* (London, 1967); D.N. Beach, 'Chimurenga: the Shona risings of 1896-97', *Journal of African History*, 20:3 (1979).
[86] Andrew Roberts, *A History of Zambia* New York, 1976), 162-70.
[87] Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests*.
[88] For example, Kim Wagner, 'Savage Warfare: violence and the rule of colonial difference in early British counterinsurgency', *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018).

nineteenth century in practicing their particular form of racialized violence. This is evident in central and eastern Congo, for example, where the slave and ivory trades and resultant politico-commercial (and military) developments over the second half of the nineteenth century created the environment for violent intervention by Belgians and their local proxies. The notorious *Force Publique* was made possible through the recruitment of the displaced and the formerly enslaved, dynamic, entrepreneurial but brutal and brutalized communities which were the product of a commercial revolution unfolding across central and eastern Africa over several decades.[89]

Indeed, recruitment into late nineteenth-century colonial armies, so often framed in colonial-centric terms as the *beginning* of something, in fact represented the culmination of decades of demographic ebb and flow, and of the evolving fissures and frontiers within and at the edge of expanding and contracting polities. In French West Africa, colonial administrators from Louis Faidherbe onward developed increasingly efficient recruitment systems of recruitment for the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*; the French also relied heavily on the sale of former slaves by local chiefs. But above all recruitment was made possible by the emergence of communities (and individuals) displaced by transformative political and economic vicissitudes, including the Bambara, soon characterized as a 'martial race'. These recruits were entrepreneurs and agents in their own rights, seizing their opportunities with alacrity, and more generally were the products of dramatic local and regional economic and political shifts.[90] In the Eritrean Highlands, the Italians recruited men from across the turbulent plateau as *ascari*; but it is worth remembering that, as with fault lines and frontiers of conflict across the West African savannah, this had long been an unstable borderland, a zone of conflict and creativity pressed on various sides by the Amhara, the Tigrayans, the Ottomans, the Egyptians. In an unsettled, entrepreneurial landscape, men joined the ranks of the Italian colonial army, and to a certain extent Italy found itself co-opted into local dynamics.[91] The Portuguese in what would become Angola and Mozambique laid the foundations of their colonies by essentially co-opting local wars and armed entrepreneurialism which had their roots in the long nineteenth century.[92] In

[89] Adam Hothschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: a story of greed, terror, and heroism in colonial Africa* (London, 1998).
[90] Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: the* Tirailleurs Sénégalais *in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (London, 1991); Sarah Davis Westwood, 'Military Culture in Senegambia and the Origins of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* army, 1750-1910', PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 2018.
[91] Tekeste Negash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882-1941: policies, praxis and impact* (Uppsala, 1987); Richard J. Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in Northeast Africa: genealogies of conflict since c.1800* (Oxford, 2011).
[92] E.V. Axelson, *Portugal and the Scramble for Africa* (Johannesburg, 1967); Malyn Newitt, *A Short History of Mozambique* (London, 2017), esp. chaps 3-5.

the case of Angola, moreover, *assimilado* and *mestizo* populations – African colonial citizens and the mixed-race community respectively – played a key role in the creation of the territory.[93]

As the Germans demonstrated in South West Africa, and as the British did in Uganda and the Rhodesias, imperial violence could and did unfold in unfettered, racialized, destructive fashion. That is beyond dispute. Fissures and insurgencies within societies, and the expansion and contraction of polities old and new, offered openings for violent leverage, and Europeans seized those opportunities. But co-option by Africans was common, as was the local opportunism which was the product of those very same fissures and insurgencies spanning several decades.

III

BETWEEN THE 1790S AND THE 1880S, appearing at different times in different areas and unfolding at different rates, transformations took place in the realms of economic innovation, political order, the organization and prosecution of warfare, and social mobility. These were frequently violent processes, involving the expansion (or invention) of some polities and the contraction of others. There was widespread exploitation by powerful groups of less well-organized and defended communities, the former essentially armed entrepreneurs who were sometimes motivated by new forms of political and religious ideology. There are clear parallels with what was happening across much of Europe in the same period, and dynamics in each continent intersected with, and spurred, the other – the power imbalance inherent in much of the encounter notwithstanding. At the risk of conflating what were of course discrete aspects of European power, the central point here is that these were inextricably linked, and an appreciation of their entanglement is necessary to understanding the essence of Europe's engagement with Africa in the nineteenth century. Europe itself underwent a profound set of political, economic and social changes in the course of the nineteenth century, from the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars to the consolidation of the industrial nation-state.[94] The rise of the nation-state was undergirded by the emergence of potent nationalism, within which much subsequent change was framed.[95] Industrialization transformed economies, driving both

[93] David Birmingham, *A Short History of Modern Angola* (London, 2015).
[94] For an accessible overview, see F.R. Bridge & Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States System, 1814-1914* (Harlow, 2005); and J.M. Roberts, *The Penguin History of Europe* (London, 1997), 'Book Four: The European Age'.
[95] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, 1990), chaps. 2-4; Azar Gat, with Alexander Yakobson, *Nations: the long history and deep roots of political ethnicity and nationalism* (Cambridge, 2013), 246-59.

domestic growth and global expansion, and was driven by remarkable advances in – indeed the growing cultural hegemony of – science and technology.[96] Nationalism and industrialization both enabled – and in turn were spurred by – new military technology and the organization of violence. As in Africa, the nineteenth century witnessed the increasingly effective and professional deployment of armed force, alongside new weaponry, both within Europe and overseas.[97] The emergence of nationalisms underpinned by economic innovation and made possible by heightened military capacity led to the racialization of the European worldview; newly aggressive processes of outward expansion were at least in part justified by the rigidification of racial ideas, witness the emergence in parallel of racial pseudoscience and novel academic disciplines such as anthropology.[98] As for God Himself, in an ostensibly secularizing age there was a new(ish) role for the Almighty in legitimizing overseas expansion, with missionaries becoming the manifestation of a potent evangelism and the standard-bearers for the assumed 'civilising mission'.[99]

In both Europe and Africa, entrepreneurs with access to political power and armed might sought to impose themselves both at home and further afield, though Europe proved more ambitious in terms of geographical reach, and able and willing to take advantage of long-term imbalances in global economic and technological power. In the course of the nineteenth century – especially after the 1850s, when some protection from malaria was provided by quinine – Europeans filtered across the continent, looking for geographical fame, commercial opportunities, or souls to convert, and increasingly all three simultaneously. In their own accounts, they are men of iron, bold pioneers in unforgiving, savage landscapes, and imposing themselves on the latter and their benighted inhabitants.[100] They certainly represented, and in their turn fortified, a growing sense of racial and cultural superiority over the peoples through

[96] Tom Kemp, *Industrialization in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1969); Rondo Cameron & Larry Neal, *A Concise Economic History of the World: from Paleolithic Times to the Present* (New York & Oxford, 2003), chaps 8 & 9.
[97] Bruce Collins, *War and Empire: the expansion of Britain, 1790-1830* (Harlow, 2010); Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford, 2009), chap. 6; Wayne E. Lee, *Waging War: conflict, culture, and innovation in world history* (Oxford & New York, 2016), chaps. 9-11.
[98] Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: ethnicity, religion, and nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997); Jane Samson, *Race and Empire* (Harlow, 2005); V.G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European attitudes to the outside world in the imperial age* (London, 1969); George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987).
[99] Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, 1990); Andrew Porter, 'Religion, missionary enthusiasm, and empire', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London, 2009), chaps. 21-23.
[100] Henry Morton Stanley is the exemplar: see his *How I Found Livingstone* (London, 1872), and *Through the Dark Continent*, 2 vols. (London, 1878, 1899).

whom they marched.[101] And they did so on the back of some extraordinary technological advances in Europe – in oceanic transportation, in communications, in military hardware, and, again, in medicine.[102] But to privilege these narratives at the expense of others is to present a one-dimensional account of an extraordinary interchange.[103] For above all they were borne aloft by turbulent currents within Africa – buffeted on the tumultuous frontiers of expanding (and contracting) states, pulled along by new commercial dynamics, co-opted into the affairs of dynamic polities whose rulers sometimes found them interesting, or entertaining, or useful.[104] Those swirling frontiers were themselves the direct result of African states' and societies' engagement with the external, as well as their own organic, internal processes of self-renovation. As Europeans moved across the continent in unprecedented numbers, their journeys – as much a matter of self-realisation as anything else – were facilitated by a veritable array of African guides, soldiers, porters, translators, merchants, rulers and chancers. Used judiciously, of course, their accounts provide some of our richest (and, occasionally, our only) source material into the nature of Africa's transformation during this era.[105] The haughtily dispensed violence of Europeans is clear enough – not least in their own texts. But the degree to which Africans imposed themselves on the European imagination and supplied knowledge to Europeans in search of it is equally evident.[106]

In its intensive engagement with Africa, then, Europe too was a product of the nineteenth-century African revolution, and in this interaction, in this energetic process of reciprocal co-option, lay the roots of the partition. The processes of change which defined Africa's global nineteenth century – its own moment of modernity, perhaps – help us to reframe the era of partition as one in which we acknowledge the assertion of European technological power as well as its harnessing by Africans. This was a continent-wide exercise in co-option, by no

[101] Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850*, 2 vols. (Madison WI, 1964); Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind*; Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*.
[102] Headrick, *Tools of Empire*; Robert A. Stafford, 'Scientific exploration and empire', in Porter (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol III*.
[103] For example, T.C. McCaskie, 'Cultural encounters: Britain and Africa in the nineteenth century', in Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol III*.
[104] There are innumerable examples of this; but perhaps Samuel Baker, whose adventures are told with characteristic bombast but whose texts can be read rather differently, will suffice: see his *The Albert N'yanza: Great Basin of the Nile and Exploration of the Nile Sources*, 2 vols. (London, 1866); and *The Nile Tributaries of Abyssinia* (London, 1908; 1st pub. 1867).
[105] John Thornton, 'European Documents and African History', in John Edward Philips (ed.), *Writing African History* (Rochester NY, 2005); Richard J. Reid, 'Violence and its Sources: European witnesses to the military revolution in nineteenth-century Eastern Africa', in Paul Landau (ed.), *The Power of Doubt: essays in honor of David Henige* (Madison WI, 2011).
[106] Helen Tilley & Robert Gordon (eds.), *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Manchester, 2007).

means equitable or proportionate, but certainly both chaotic and serendipitous, coming as it did in periods of profound change in both Europe and Africa. Critically, Africans rather than foreigners were the primary agents of change over a somewhat longer *durée* than the conventional timeframe of the 'Scramble' itself allows for.

IV

WHAT HAPPENED TO THESE HISTORIES? A steady process of foreshortening and an increasingly presentist interpretation of the continent's 'condition' threw Africa's dramatic nineteenth century into shade; the late precolonial 'moment' in some ways came to be framed as an exercise in failed modernity. This was its pre-dawn, its prelude; Africans sat glumly in Chakrabarty's "waiting room of history".[107] The long nineteenth century may have been a remarkably transformative episode in Africa's modern history, but it was one which, in time, became lost in transition. The perception subsequently was that Mirambo and Tewodros were the violent forerunners of modernity, who dimly glimpsed the future but who didn't quite comprehend it, and who certainly didn't master it. As the warm-up acts for colonial modernity, they were increasingly framed – in textbooks and undergraduate syllabi alike – in terms of 'defensive modernisation'. They tried to get hold of guns, and to reorganise their militaries in the face of the coming storm. Tewodros's successors were more successful than most; but Tewodros himself was consumed by the first manifestations of that storm, just as those a generation later were destroyed in its eye across the continent. The 'Scramble', at the same time, took on the lustre of immovable and indisputable 'conquest', rather than a culmination of African as well as European dynamics.

Various groups had a vested interest in the perpetuation of these narratives. They certainly suited a particular version of Europe's own narrative and self-image, at least on a conservative, populist stretch of the political spectrum. It reflected an enduring pride in the supposed essential benevolence of empire and the civilizing mission. At the same time, ideas about violence – the righteousness of Europe's, and the curious, tragic backwardness of Africa's – solidified. European racial thought hardened and became vitally important to Europe's own idea of itself in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was critical to nation-building exercises, and to the assumed link between empire and civilisation, that Africa was

[107] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, 2000), 7.

deemed to have been 'defeated', its messy barbarity brought to heel. It was a delusion, striking in its scale.

Yet it wasn't only a matter of European amnesia. By the time the OAU was signing off its inaugural charter, the era of partition had become the foundation stone of modern African nationhood. The 'Scramble' may have been unjust, and traumatic; European violent brutality would never be forgotten. But it was nonetheless an almost sacrosanct pivot, a rupture, a beginning and an underpinning. Mid-twentieth century nationalists – including Julius Nyerere in Tanzania – made occasional forays into the nineteenth century in search of heroes, models and inspirations.[108] But African political leaders increasingly came to think of the nineteenth century as a dangerous place, and not one which could be mobilised in pursuit of national cohesion. There was nervousness about what the 'precolonial' represented, and nationalist projects were at best ambivalent about the putative achievements of the nineteenth century.[109] A 'golden age' this was not. In fact, as Thomas Hodgkin observed in the mid-1960s, it was the very revolutionary, upstart nature of Africa's politics in the nineteenth century that made modern nationalists so nervous – paradoxically, in many ways.[110] Those politics *might* have offered models of reform and initiative; instead, they conjured up images of violent turmoil and failed exercises in modernization. Rather than Africa's political, commercial and military elites being understood in their own right as products and drivers in an era of revolutionary change for the continent, they were increasingly seen as either the exemplars of failed (or, at best, partial) indigenous modernization; or as emblematic of a violent instability in Africa's deeper past which somehow anticipated the continent's turbulent present. Conquest narratives facilitated the flourishing of, alternatively, heroic resistance tropes and victimhood histories, which in turn were tied to the experiences of the slave trade; they underpinned the crucial concept of ongoing virtuous struggle in the quest for the reclamation of sovereign independence, and, later, political projects around national renewal. In short, political elites could always blame the European conquest for much that was wrong in society and the body politic – and not without good cause, as students of African history are all too aware – but without having to scrutinise those legacies too much, nor to examine too closely what preceded

[108] For example, J.B. Kabeya, *King Mirambo: one of the heroes of Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1976), ix-xi; and more broadly, Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: the basis of African socialism* (Dar es Salaam, 1962).
[109] I have explored this in a pair of articles: 'States of Anxiety: history and nation in modern Africa', *Past and Present*, 229 (2015); and 'Remembering and Forgetting Mirambo: histories of war in modern Africa', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 30:4/5 (2019).
[110] Thomas Hodgkin, 'The relevance of "Western" ideas for the new African states', in J. Roland Pennock (ed.), *Self-Government in Modernizing Nations* (Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1964), 66.

the conquest itself. The curious prolongation of 'Dark Continent' mythology has served to post-date the moment of Africa's own modernity, and has rendered the era of partition something close to immune to scholarly revisionism. This view of Africa's nineteenth century stands in stark juxtaposition with the British obsession with all things Victorian. For those on the metropolitan side of History, the nineteenth century was, in many respects, the greatest of ages; the time of invention and dynamism and world-conquering ingenuity. The lustre of the Victorian age only seems to heighten with the passage of time.[111] What a contrast indeed with modern Africans' attitudes toward the same era.

In the very first issue of the *Journal of African History* in 1960, John Hargreaves observed that "[t]he partition of Africa is one of those historical processes which have been more discussed than studied".[112] Of course, Hargreaves' bold assertion was made a quarter of a century before the appearance of the sixth volume of the *Cambridge History of Africa*.[113] Edited by Roland Oliver and G.N. Sanderson – both of whom had published on aspects of the partition earlier in their careers[114] – it covered the years 1870 to 1905, and comprised some of the most insightful writing ever produced on the 'Scramble'.[115] In some ways, it is difficult to imagine essays by Atmore, Sanderson, or John Lonsdale being bettered. Then there was the seventh volume of the UNESCO *General History of Africa* series, under the stewardship of Albert Adu Boahen, in which the level of detail offered up in numerous regional chapters dealing with the impact of partition is difficult to improve upon.[116] And yet those volumes are now several decades old: while in many ways much of the writing holds up remarkably well, research agendas have since developed apace and scholarly interests have diversified dramatically. In many ways, Hargreaves' observation seems as true today as it was then.

What are the possibilities for revisionist histories reframing Africa's global nineteenth century, and reconnecting it to the era of the partition? The co-option approach holds out considerable potential. In 1960, Hargreaves wondered whether a more prominent role could not be

[111] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: past and present in contemporary culture* (London & New York, 2012; 1st pub. 1994).
[112] J.D. Hargreaves, 'Towards a history of the partition of Africa', *Journal of African History*, 1:1 (1960).
[113] Oliver and Sanderson (eds.), *Cambridge History of Africa: Vol 6*.
[114] For example, Roland Oliver, *Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa* (London, 1957); G.N. Sanderson, *England, Europe, and the Upper Nile, 1882-1899: a study of the partition of Africa* (Edinburgh, 1965).
[115] See the late John McCracken's typically thoughtful review of the volume in the *Journal of African History*, 28:2 (1987).
[116] A. Adu Boahen (ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol VII: Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935* (Paris & London, 1990).

identified for Africans themselves in the 'Scramble'.[117] A few years later, Saadia Touval explored the *African* input into the making of borders and treaties on the ground during the 1880s and 1890s, and he eschewed the long-held notion that this, of all aspects of the partition, was a process devised and implemented by Europeans.[118] Even now, more work might be done on this, looking beyond the obvious examples of the Ganda and the Amhara for indications of African input at the local level. Ronald Robinson himself went on to challenge the prevailing Eurocentricity which underpinned many of the standard accounts of the 'Scramble' by proposing a 'theory of collaboration'. European power, he suggested, was often an illusion, and the form taken by – indeed the very chances of success of – imperial endeavour were entirely contingent upon local agents and dynamics.[119] David Fieldhouse, likewise, argued that too much emphasis had been placed on the centre to the detriment of a more nuanced understanding of the 'periphery'.[120] In very practical terms, the partition can be understood as an Afro-European affair, in that African agency was paramount, and not simply 'supportive' of empire-building projects designed in European capitals. Empire in Africa was entirely contingent upon local partners and manpower – and not just the outcome of Maxim Gun-wielding, telegraph-linked, potable water-toting European supremacy. The idea of a surge in the advantage in military technology enjoyed by Europe in the late nineteenth century has been widely accepted. But as Sharman argues for the early modern period, it is equally plausible that European armed supremacy is something of a myth and that the 'Scramble' was only made possible through a concoction of local alliances as well as a generous dollop of good fortune.[121] Those local alliances, moreover, are not solely the result of a particular European genius for diplomatic machination and persuasion – although to be sure such skill is in evidence, necessitated by a greater degree of weakness than was subsequently acknowledged – but the direct outcome of the continent's own political transformation in the course of the nineteenth century. Europe's imperialisms in Africa were made possible by a whole range of African imperialisms unfolding over much the same timeframe, though to be sure some of the latter were rooted in the era of the Atlantic slave trade. Europeans possessed much in the way of technological advantage – the material power at their disposal was of an altogether greater

[117] Hargreaves, 'Towards a history'.
[118] Saadia Touval, 'Treaties, borders, and the partition of Africa', *Journal of African History*, 7:2 (1966).
[119] Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European foundations of European imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration', in Roger Owen & Bob Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972).
[120] D.K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire 1830-1914* (London, 1973).
[121] J.C. Sharman, 'Myths of military revolution: European expansionism and Eurocentrism', *European Journal of International Relations*, 24:3 (2018). See also William R. Thompson, 'The Military Superiority Thesis and the Ascendancy of Western Eurasia in the World System', *Journal of World History*, 10:1 (1999).

magnitude than that possessed by most African societies – but more often than not they were co-opted into local scenarios. The violence which Europeans either committed or directed in pursuit of territory is plain. But the conquest narrative has clouded the reality on the ground of appropriation and reciprocity; of Europeans, propelled into Africa as a result of their own creative convulsions, drawn into dynamic processes of expansion and contraction, of explosion and implosion, driven at least in part by heightened global interaction in the course of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most remarkable element of all this is the narrative which then developed, indeed became reified: Europe's sense of mission, its exceptionalism, its economic and military might, and its superiority in political, racial, and cultural terms.

In recent years, there has been some attention paid to the African personnel whose involvement in the colonial order enabled that very order to function. Notably, studies of African military personnel during the era of partition – or at least, studies which encompass that moment – have proliferated.[122] The extent to which that scholarship, much of it excellent, actually tells us about the causes and the dynamics of the 'Scramble' itself is, however, questionable. The lived experiences of these early servants of the colonial order are painstakingly and often movingly reconstructed; but they are not presented as the drivers of historical change, or as constituting the raw material for a possible new explanation for how the partition actually unfolded. At the same time, a collection of essays on the role of African intermediaries in the functioning of colonial rule – widely regarded as seminal in its thematic focus – nonetheless doesn't have *too* much to say about local facilitators of the partition itself, or in the run-up to it.[123] Still, the 'intermediaries' theme offers considerable potential.

V

THE AFRICAN NINETEENTH CENTURY witnessed transformations in economy, in political form, in the practice and culture of warfare, in social order. In many ways these developments mirrored those unfolding in Europe at the same time – and Europe undoubtedly drew upon those shifts in Africa. This was a clash of empires, a collision of imperialisms, which is the culmination of revolutionary change in both Europe and Africa through the nineteenth century

[122] Recent examples include Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African soldiers, conquest, and everyday colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens OH, 2014); and Ronald M. Lamothe, *Slaves of Fortune: Sudanese Soldiers and the River War, 1896-1898* (Woodbridge, 2011).
[123] Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts (eds.), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African employees in the making of colonial Africa* (Madison WI, 2006).

– an era characterised by connection, reciprocity, exchange, and of course violence. Africa's transformation intersected with that of Europe, each making the other possible; this is a story of coalescence, not of conquest. Moreover, this was the culmination of Africa's multifaceted and overlapping relationship with global forces, characterized by a series of interdependencies – involving Europe, the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, the Middle East – with deep histories which can only be fully understood over the *longue durée*. Debates about the nature of the continent's global engagement continue; but the processes which come to a head in the course of the nineteenth century should be central to those debates.[124]

We must acknowledge the globally exploitative nature of the systems within which Africans were operating; and of course those systems in turn fed off, and to some extent drove, internal violent exploitation and various forms of associated social conflict. But that does not negate African efforts to innovate, reform, diversify and develop; nor should it be allowed to conceal widespread social aspiration and mobility. In many, if not quite all, cases, these dynamics were closely intertwined with the external. The partition cannot be understood without fully comprehending them. The 'Scramble' could not have happened in the way that it did without them. In many ways this is analogous to explorations of the subaltern in the context of colonial rule. No-one has to deny the intrinsically odious nature of colonial rule – its aims, and governing principles – to recognize the vigour of local agency, local participation, local influence, indeed to the point where we need to understand colonial rule as something hybrid in its culture and function, exercising a profound influence on the metropole.[125] By the same token, we do not have to deny the brutal inequality of a nineteenth-century global economy to recognize the degree to which Africans operated dynamically and asserted agency *within* that arena, nor to understand the absolutely critical role played by that agency in the shaping of a larger, global system – up to and including the 'Scramble'. This is not a question of absolving external actors, but rather of eschewing the idea of their omnipotence, and to emphasize the extent to which a range of local actors retained a profound influence, if by no means complete control, over their own destinies.

[124] Donald R. Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (Armonk NY, 1997); Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African consumerism and the genealogies of globalization* (Berkeley CA, 2008); James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order* (Durham NC, 2006); Cooper, *Africa in the World*.

[125] Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The impact of imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century* (London, 2005); Finaldi, *Italian National Identity*.

The ‘Scramble’ was the outcome not of Africa’s ‘falling behind’ everyone else, nor of its failed modernity, but of a tumultuous, dynamic process of global engagement. We need to position Africa more firmly in the imperial and global scholarly frameworks now so prominent in the field, and to do so without diluting the distinctiveness of the African experience. We are thus able to better comprehend the era of partition as part of an ongoing exercise in political, economic, social and cultural reformation linking Africa with the rest of the world. The African revolution was not derailed by the ‘Scramble’; it culminated in it.