

# The Colonial State: Patterns of Rule, Habits of Mind

Whatever the future may hold, the influence of the West upon India is likely to decrease. But it would be absurd to imagine that the British connection will not leave a permanent mark upon Indian life. On the merely material side . . . the largest irrigation system in the world . . . some 60,000 miles of metalled roads; over 42,000 miles of railways . . . 230,000 scholastic institutions . . . a great number of buildings . . . The vast area of India has been completely surveyed, most of its lands assessed, and a regular census taken of its population and its productivity. An effective defensive system has been built up . . . , it has an Indian army with century-old traditions, and a police force which compares favourably with any outside a few Western countries. The postal department . . . the Forestry Department . . . These great State activities are managed by a trained bureaucracy, which is today almost entirely Indian. (Thompson & Barratt 1934: 654, in Chatterjee 1993: 14–15)

REG: All right, but apart from the sanitation, the medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, a fresh water system, and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?

XERXES: Brought peace.

REG: Oh. Peace? Shut up! (Chapman et al. 1979)

. . . oxen taxes, taxes on ‘chattering pigs’, salt taxes, rice field taxes, ferry boat taxes, bicycle or conveyance taxes, taxes on betel or areca nuts, tea and drug taxes, lamp taxes, housing taxes, temple taxes, bamboo and timber taxes, taxes on peddlers’ boats, tallow taxes, lacquer taxes, rice and vegetable taxes, taxes on cotton and silk, iron taxes, fishing taxes, bird taxes, and copper taxes. (The ‘Asia Ballad’, popular in the Tonkin Free School in 1907, in Scott 1976: 95)

Appointed French Minister of Colonies in 1906, Etienne Clémentel is said to have exclaimed: ‘Ah, the colonies, I didn’t know there were so many!’ Aside from what this may tell us about colonial expertise amongst the French Third Republic’s legions of parish-pump politicians, Clémentel’s professed ignorance also reflected the novelty of the map’s message. At the time, although the Algerian agricultural lands

and mountains had been divided into *départements* on the metropolitan model in 1848, the huge southern wedge of the Algerian Sahara had only been formally annexed in 1902; the federation of French West Africa (*Afrique Occidentale Française*, AOF), centred on the Government-General at Dakar, was barely more than ten years old, and a second Federation of French Equatorial Africa (*Afrique Equatoriale Française*, AEF) was not established until 1910. The French Republic had only annexed Madagascar in 1896. Laos, the final part of the constitutional jigsaw of French Indochina, was fitted into place in 1897. In 1905, France headed off the German Kaiser's efforts to assert control of Morocco; the Treaty of Fez establishing France's protectorate of Morocco was signed in 1912. King Leopold's personal fiefdom of the Congo was granted to the Belgian state's care on his death in 1908. British, German and Portuguese territories in Africa too were at a skeletal stage of development: one District Officer (DO) in German East Africa (subsequently British Tanganyika) learnt of the Declaration of War in 1914 from his British colleague in Uganda, as there was no telegraph to his command from Dar es Salaam (Iliffe 1979: 119). The Dutch empire was still expanding from its Javanese and Sumatran core to embrace the 'Great East' of the East Indian archipelago. Japan and the United States had recently been admitted to the hitherto European club of colonial powers. The Russian empire, too, had its colonial components, although the Tsar had taken the precaution of selling Alaska, the only part of his empire to be separated from Russia by 'blue water'.

The map's core message lay in the bright and uniform colours of the rival empires. Arguably, Republican concepts of Overseas France or Greater France relied on the impression left by the map of territorial contiguity, stretching from the *Manche* (otherwise known as the English Channel), across the Mediterranean to the Congo or, as General de Gaulle had it in the late 1950s, from Dunkirk to Tamanrasset (in southern Algeria). Portuguese aspirations to a *mapa côr de rosa* (rose-coloured map) in Southern Africa had been foiled by British imperial enterprise (MacQueen 1997: 4). The British thought more in longitudinal terms of an empire 'where the sun never set'. This perpetual sunshine bathed the settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, although by this time these were self-governing (South Africa definitively so in 1910). Imperial light also reflected upon areas of informal empire, notably in China and South America, where British influence was determined by trade and investment, or of indirect rule (for example, Egypt); these were more decisive to British power than duly coloured territories in, say, East Africa. But the light burned brightest on the vast Indian empire, which embraced Burma and controlled East Africa, and which exerted a determinant influence on British control of Egypt.

If the pre-1914 imperial map thus reflected the near-culmination of a period of rapid imperial consolidation, its gaudy homogeneity glossed over the reality of colonial state-building, mostly still in its infancy; this forms the focus of this chapter. The European colonial presence was much more fully established in, say, British India or French Algeria, but even here the modern forms of colonial rule in these dependencies only came into being after 1858 in India, when imperial rule was first organized under a Viceroy following the Sepoy Rebellion, and after 1871 for Algeria, where the establishment of the Third Republic triggered widespread revolt by Algerian Berbers; this led as in India to a tightening of administrative structures and to the crushing of further resistance.

Although much of this chapter necessarily relates to the pre-1945 period, we are less concerned here with ‘what happened before decolonization’, than with identifying approaches and reflexes which still operated, not always fully consciously or deliberately, in the period of the ‘late’ colonial state. We return first to the colonial map and to the ways in which it shaped colonial rule. Two corollaries of this structure of rule need to be examined in two reciprocal sections, in this and the following chapter: first, the significance of what imperial historians have come to call the ‘collaborator system’; and secondly, the issue of control and repression, where the question of that which was to be controlled or repressed forms a large part of the next chapter’s focus. We then examine aspects of colonial administrative structure, and in particular the implications of a ‘Prefectural’ system of rule characterized by a low ratio of rulers to ruled across the colonial empires. Finally, the colonial state may be considered an ‘open polity’, which is to say open to metropolitan and, increasingly, international influence, whether that process was managed deliberately by a ‘gatekeeper’ state, or outside the control of the state.

Of particular concern is the outlook of colonialism’s ‘official mind’, a term first used by Robinson and Gallagher (1961), but which also finds an analogy in Lévi-Strauss’s near-contemporary work, *The Savage Mind* (*La Pensée sauvage*, 1962). Although the term is often taken as a given, such an approach becomes impossible in a comparative work in which there are many such ‘minds’ at work. We will therefore address ways in which ‘official minds’ were formed and reproduced, as well as the doctrines which underpinned their rule, and the ways in which colonial officials adjusted to the demands of modern state practice. But if the metaphor is to be applied fully, it must be assumed that the collective or institutional ‘mind’ was structured with no less complexity than that of the individual: it functioned partly on the basis of habit and memory, it was sometimes self-contradictory, and frequently irrational. Moreover, this official consciousness was often introverted, that is, although it responded to external stimuli, it was quite capable of planning and debating with a largely theoretical frame of reference to the outside world. Conversely, although its internal equivocations may be of great interest, it was by its actions that it would be judged by the outside world.

### Mapping the Colonial State

Seeking to understand colonial rule in terms of lines and colours on the imperial map is like using a space telescope in place of a pair of binoculars: the realities of rule are to be found much closer to the ground than the map allows. Nonetheless, the map is important, not least because of its durability: Clémentel’s surprise would have been still greater had he known that, barely two generations later, the map’s outlines would survive largely unchanged into the post-colonial world, with only the bitterly contested partition-lines of India, Palestine and Cyprus, and perhaps the ‘balkanization’ of French sub-Saharan Africa, to mark the transition from administrative boundaries to national frontiers. Following Anderson (1991: 163ff.), the colonial map was one of three institutions, along with the museum and the census, with which the ‘imaginings of the colonial state’ unwittingly but indelibly marked the formation of the ‘imagined communities’ of post-colonial nationhood.

The map of Africa reflected perhaps most dramatically the arbitrariness of colonial rule. Straight lines on the map cut across pre-colonial political and ethnic boundaries, usually in favour of far larger entities: African 'partition' was in reality 'a ruthless act of political amalgamation, whereby something of the order of 10,000 units was reduced to a mere 40' (Oliver 1991: 184, in Wilson 1994: 20). Partition created barriers in the mind where none existed in reality: the mapping of the Sahara, especially the massive wedge of the Algerian Southern Territories, tells us more about the French army's influence in Paris (outweighing that of the 'junior' colonial ministry responsible for neighbouring French Soudan, Niger and Chad), than it does about Saharan political geography. Newly created territories were named after geographical features (Niger, Oubangui-Chari, Haute-Volta), much as were French *départements*, and with not dissimilar intent, imposing a new identity rather than admitting pre-existing local identities. Alternatively, they commemorated matters of European significance (Côte d'Ivoire, Gold Coast, Rhodesia), or otherwise reflected the European imperial illusion of creating *ex nihilo*.<sup>1</sup> In 1920, most of German East Africa became the British Tanganyika Territory under League of Nations Mandate; this name, meaning 'muddy village' in Swahili (after the lake), was chosen in preference to Smutsland, Eburnea, Azania, New Maryland, Windsorland, Victoria, Kilimanjaro and Tabora (Iliffe 1979: 247).

Partition typically preceded both the occupation of the territories concerned and the precise determination of boundaries. In the Algerian case, the 1909 Niamey Convention settled the boundaries between Algeria and the two sub-Saharan federations, but even then, these were delimited, rather than demarcated, frontiers: in other words, they were literally drawn onto the map, but left no physical trace on the Saharan landscape, and indeed nothing changed after independence (Brownlie 1979: 26–88). Boundaries between the colonial powers were far more significant than internal ones, and became hostile frontiers in both world wars; this was also the case for the two federations of French West and Equatorial Africa, which came under Vichyste and Gaullist authority respectively from 1940 to 1943 (Chapter 3). Even before that, the French had established an informal system of 'watertight bulkheads' reflecting rivalries between the Interior Ministry and the Army in Algeria, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for the Moroccan and Tunisian protectorates, and the Ministry of Colonies (AOF, AEF) (Young 1988: 32–3; Shipway 2002). The colonial powers continued to reorder the African map. German Kamerun and German East Africa were both re-partitioned, with the former divided into French and British Mandated territories, and Belgian Mandated Ruanda-Urundi carved from German-held territory on Lake Tanganyika's western shore. Haute-Volta was absorbed into Côte d'Ivoire in 1931, in order to regulate labour migration from the interior to the coastal plantations; in 1948, Haute-Volta was recreated, largely to suit Parisian party rivalries, rather than administrative rationality (Chapter 5).

These moves set precedents for colonial efforts to make the later colonial state more obviously 'state-like', or eventually to establish units which, when self-government came, might promote the interests of the (ex-)colonial power in the region. Thus the cumbersome and ill-fated Central African Federation embraced the very differently composed territories of Southern and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Conversely, the French African Federations, which lasted until the late 1950s as late

colonial 'super-states', were split into territorial units by Gaston Defferre's Framework Law of 1956. This law reinforced the powers of elected 'national' assemblies and set francophone Africa on the path to a 'balkanized' decolonization (Chapters 7 & 8).

Imperial cartography in Asia was typically based on pre-existing states and empires and on a more widely established imperial presence, but it similarly reflected imperial *raison d'état* and continuity more than local political realities. Here too, spatial boundaries were a European innovation, defining statehood in terms of territorial sovereignty, but also of imperial spheres of influence. This was true even for a state, Thailand, that was allowed to resist imperial encroachment, but whose national boundaries were imposed by surrounding British and French imperialism (Anderson 1991: 170–4). The Dutch imperial presence dated back several centuries in Java and Sumatra, but the Dutch East Indies were extended to carve out a sphere of influence, in response to perceived international pressure in the early twentieth century (van den Doel 2001). French Indochina, so named by French geographers, similarly agglomerated a decades-long process of conquest and annexation (Aldrich 1996: 73–82). The boundaries of both these colonial states subsequently acquired a degree of solidity in nationalist eyes. While Indochina eventually lost the status of 'map-as-logo', in the face of stronger claims to Vietnamese identity (Goscha 1995), Indonesian President Ahmed Sukarno continued after independence to lay claim to a Greater Indonesia embracing Western New Guinea (*Irian Jaya*), until the Dutch relinquished even that vestige of empire in 1963; conversely, expansionism rather than 'irredentism' may better explain Indonesia's thirty-year occupation of the former Portuguese colony of East Timor (Anderson 1991).

The European empires in Asia ostensibly respected at least the outward form of pre-existing sovereignties, but this respect was heavily tempered by *realpolitik*. Thus, the map of the British Raj in India, the most powerful colonial state of all, was inscribed with a long history of imperial conquest, the realization of strategic necessities, for instance the guarding of the North-West Frontier against Afghan and possible Russian attack, and the persistence of rival imperial interests in the form of French and Portuguese enclaves (Pondichéry and the other French Indian Establishments; Portuguese India, now Goa). It also reflected unequal treaties signed with the rulers of the nearly six hundred Princely States, acquiescing to British rule following the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion. Ranging from tiny principalities to the vast domains of Kashmir and Hyderabad, these states constituted some two-fifths of Indian territory where British rule was exercised indirectly by a Resident or political agent. In Malaya, too, British rule was mediated through a complex system of Federated and Unfederated Malay States, established between 1893 and 1909, whose rulers' independence was recognized by the British. Only Singapore and the Straits Settlements, representing the core of British power in Malaya, came under direct British rule. In practice, the Sultans did not enjoy the freedom of political manoeuvre allowed even to the Indian princes, although the British were able to 'pay lip service to the Malay concept of sovereignty', particularly the Sultans' status as religious leaders (Smith 1995). Indochina's five administrative units, Laos, Cambodia, Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin, concealed a patchwork of protectorates, concessions and only one actual colony, Cochinchina, which thus elected a settler to the French National Assembly. Although the Emperor of Annam retained his throne until 1945, his nominal rule

extended only to 'Annam', the central portion of Vietnam: Cochinchina had been ceded to France, which also ruled Tonkin 'on behalf of' the Emperor. Dutch practice with regard to local rulers across the Indonesian archipelago broadly followed that of the French: local sovereigns were treated essentially as agents of the colonial state, although the panoply of courtly and religious ceremony was retained (van den Doel 2001).

The colonial map contradicted any idea of nationhood corresponding to established colonial boundaries, and not only those of rectilinear African cartography. 'India' was claimed as an imperial creation, and emphatically not the domain of a pre-existing nation. By the same token, 'Indians' were portrayed as ineluctably divided against themselves by race, caste or religious community. As the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, put it in 1925, it was absurd to speak of an Indian nation: 'There never has been such a nation . . . If we withdraw from India tomorrow, the immediate consequences would be a struggle *à outrance* between the Muslim and the Hindu population' (in Sarkar 1989: 228). As will be argued, this was in part a self-fulfilling prophecy, since the effect of British policy, if not its intention, was to deepen such communal divisions. The official non-existence of an Algerian nation was all the more forcefully argued because of Algeria's unique status as an assimilated extension of metropolitan territory, according to which 'Algeria is France'. The term 'Algerian' was thus applied generally to all inhabitants of Algeria, and perhaps preferentially to European settlers (to whom we return below), while the indigenous population was labelled variously 'Muslim', 'Algerian Muslim' or 'French Muslim'; indeed as French 'subjects', they did not even appear in French immigration statistics, although large-scale Algerian immigration to the French mainland began in the 1920s (Stora 1993).

Colonial 'divide and rule' policies and attitudes recur in various guises, but it was the map-makers' 'ruling' which initially determined the dividing. The colonial state excluded defeated national or proto-national polities, often for the duration of the colonial period. French officials even in 1945 deployed the historical record of conquest to deny Vietnam's existence, claiming that all five Indochinese 'countries' were geographically, historically and ethnically distinct (Chapter 4). The conqueror of Madagascar, General Gallieni, promoted a powerful narrative of Malagasy history, which cast the French as protectors of the 'coastal peoples' from the dominant Merina people, whose kingdom had been destroyed by the French; fifty years after the annexation, this 'official version' was still being used to explain Malagasy politics, and in particular the 1947 insurrection (Shipway 1996a; Tronchon 1974/1986). As this example also shows, the colonial state embraced and 'protected' favoured minority groups. Thus, Algerians were subdivided into 'Arabs' and 'Berbers', including particularly the Kabyles of the mountainous Algerian hinterland, around whom powerful stereotypes were elaborated (Lorcin 1995). Where the colonial map overlaid pre-existing states, minorities were corralled into quasi-states within the state, such as the Hill States in Burma, or the more informally recognized ethnic minority groups of Indochina, to be protected from more central 'nationalisms' (Christie 1996; Saleminck 1995). Berbers and Indochinese so-called 'montagnards' are also examples of minority 'martial races' favoured for recruitment into colonial armies, and typically selected from 'backward' or otherwise peripheral groups, alongside Punjabi Muslims (as opposed to, say, 'effeminate' Bengalis), Nigerian Tiv, Kenyan Masai or the Christian Ambonese islanders of the Royal Dutch Indies Army.

The colonial map also formalized patterns of imperial *bricolage* in its accommodation of migrant communities. These derived from multiple origins, whether resulting from trading patterns located in a regional *longue durée*, or more directly from European imperialism. At its most brutally coercive, 'migration' included the transportation of slaves to the plantation islands of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. Even after slavery was abolished by the British in the 1830s, and by the French Second Republic in 1848, its social and economic legacy remained 'the central fact of colonial times' (Young 1988: 39), while a plantation economy ensured that the colonial state remained minimal and problematic. The French so-called 'Old Colonies' were assimilated into the Republic, with voting rights for emancipated slaves; after the Second World War they were more fully assimilated, and thus in some respects decolonized, as '*Départements d'Outre-Mer*' (Overseas Departments) (Chapter 5). But these plantation societies remained vestiges of an older-style colonialism, 'holding operations' (Young, 1988) which the late colonial state would fail to modernize satisfactorily. Emancipation also necessitated a diversified labour pool, leading to further migration, this time of indentured labourers, creating far-flung diasporas, mostly Indian and Chinese in origin. Migrant communities of labourers and traders were a distinctive feature of colonial societies, not only in the plantation colonies, but also in British East Africa, in Fiji and in Malaya. The more 'state-like' the colonial state became, the more these groups were accommodated within the political order. In Malaya, the abortive Malayan Union Policy of 1945–6 attempted to integrate the Indian and Chinese communities within a colonial state which had hitherto favoured the indigenous Malays, whom together they outnumbered (Chapter 4). Colonial censuses played a crucial role in assigning both communal identities within the colonial state and quasi-national identities between states, so that, however artificially, the Chinese subject of, say, the Dutch East Indies could readily be distinguished not only from a Javanese Malay, but also from a Chinese subject of the British Straits Settlements (Anderson 1991). This too could turn into a way of imagining national communities, even if it primarily served to emphasize specific colonial jurisdictions.

The final group of migrants accommodated by the colonial state were European settlers, but here the problems were of a different order. European settlement was a large part of the rationale for colonial expansion, and from the perspective of the British empire, represented something like the imperial norm. Moreover, to the extent that colonial rule was still considered normal across much of Africa after 1945, the concept of white-settled Africa was an important component of that normality, even if South Africa is left out of account. Settlers numbers grew substantially after 1945, much more rapidly than stagnant birth rates allowed, as new waves of emigrants bolstered the already substantial political clout of settler communities in Morocco and Tunisia, Southern Rhodesia and Kenya, Angola and Mozambique: in each of these six countries, settler numbers increased by more than half in the period between 1945 and independence, although only in Portuguese Africa was this a matter of government policy.<sup>2</sup> Even where settler numbers were stable, as in Algeria, or remained a tiny minority, as in French sub-Saharan Africa or the Belgian Congo, they wielded political influence out of all proportion to their number, and British, French and Belgian officials and politicians exercised considerable ingenuity to ensure their continued representation in late colonial constitutional arrangements. Moreover,

much as liberal officials or politicians might loath the racial attitudes of settlers, the thrust of late colonial reform favoured them, not necessarily *as* settlers, but as dynamic agents for economic growth. Settlerdom was also supported by British sentimental ties of 'kith and kin' or by myths of a 'Greater France' or a luso-tropical greater Portugal, or Eurafrica, or by the idea of pioneers settling a new 'Far West'. Amongst settler populations, the Europeans of Algeria came closest to white South Africans in their demographic weight and social cohesion (to say nothing of their politics), numbering almost a million in the late 1940s alongside an Algerian population of some eight million. The so-called *pieds noirs* were – not entirely implausibly – coming to regard themselves as possessed of roots, culture and other attributes of a proto-national 'Mediterranean' identity, distinct not only from Algerians but also from the French metropole. They had also established the prerogative to block attempts at even the most cautious of political or constitutional reforms.

### **Patterns of Rule: the Collaborator System, the 'Thin White Line' and the 'Official Mind'**

Colonial rule comes most clearly into focus when viewed at the local scale, and, just as Thomas Hobbes's Leviathan state was a composite of its individual citizens, so too patterns of colonial rule were created from the bottom up, starting at the interaction between the individual colonial administrator and local groups and 'big men', moving up to the level of the colonial state. The discussion here will centre on two inter-related concepts. The first of these is the 'collaborator system', whereby the functioning of the colonial state depended on the collaboration of indigenous groups or local rulers, thus enabling colonial rulers to maintain the benefits of empire while exercising the minimum degree of power consistent with the maintenance of imperial authority. The theme of 'collaboration', its implications for political actors on the side of the colonized, and the objections which may be raised to the term itself, is an important one to which we will return extensively in the following chapter. For the moment, however, it is the colonial side of this equation which chiefly interests us. We therefore consider a further essential principle of colonial rule, encapsulated in the image of a 'thin white line' of European colonial administration (Kirk-Greene 1980). This then leads us to explore the training, outlook and worldview of colonial field officers.

Concepts of collaboration (and, by extension, of resistance) are central to the 'peripheral' or 'excentric' theory of imperialism, and have been deployed to help explain every stage of colonial rule, from conquest to decolonization. Thus, modern colonialism developed from patterns of collaboration on which depended pre-colonial free trade imperialism and the still-preferred British system of informal empire. Formal colonial rule was established where collaborating rulers had ceased to become reliable, perhaps as a result of internal crisis, typically resulting from increased demands by the imperial powers, as in the case of the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, which in turn inspired 'much of the subsequent rivalry impelling the partition of Africa' (Robinson 1972). However, imperial reliance on collaboration soon transcended its origins in the diplomatic expedient of imperial protection. Rather, the

designated function of collaborating rulers, landlords and other 'big men' was as agents for imperial interests, for example tax collection, labour recruitment and maintaining local law and order. In essence, as in India, collaboration necessitated a political bargain, according to which revenue was collected without too many questions asked about who paid, while public order was taken for granted by the British without them taking too obtrusive a part in it (Seal 1973: 13). At times of public disorder, or widespread crisis such as the Indian Non-Cooperation movement of 1919–22, the British could persuade themselves that peasant unrest was not primarily directed at British rule, but at the inequities of Indian land rents (for which the Raj could disclaim all responsibility) (Pandey 1988). This was a dynamic system developing over time, as the Raj increased its demands and hence its need for wider systems of collaboration. The links between this system and the development of Indian nationalist politics will be explored more fully in the following chapter.

A parallel argument can be made for British Africa, where collaboration was elevated to a formal doctrine, but here the pattern of change was more imperceptible. The principles of Indirect Rule, which found their most complete expression in Lord Lugard's 1922 treatise, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, were inherently conservative. Drawing on Lugard's experience of conquest and pacification in Uganda and Northern Nigeria, and on wider European perceptions of 'traditional' patterns of rule, these were widely applied in Africa. Lugard noted the vigorous resistance of the Muslim Fulani emirates in Northern Nigeria, and their well-developed systems of taxation and justice, and argued that traditional rulers should be incorporated into the colonial system rather than rejected by it. Although dressed in the admirable rhetoric of modernizing colonial liberalism, Indirect Rule tended to shield the Northern emirates from change, whether that change came from the more intensively colonized South or from within. By the 1920s, Lugard was old-fashioned enough to see his policy as a safeguard against the growing influence of the so-called 'trousered African' of popular imperial prejudice, that is, the mission-educated and 'detribalized' Africans from whose ranks later nationalist cadres would indeed be recruited (Cell 1999).

The orthodoxy of Indirect Rule had been largely superseded well before the Second World War, but even its more liberal successor doctrine of Indirect Administration was arguably founded on a series of 'working misunderstandings' (Dorward 1974). Thus, although British administrative practice was based on extensive ethnographical research, the relationship between colonial ethnography and administration was largely circular and mutually supportive. British efforts to apply Indirect Administration in Tanganyika 'owed much to the Old Testament, to Tacitus and Caesar', but most to modern academic conceptions of African tribes as cultural units 'possessing a common language, a single social system, and an established common law'. The problem in Tanganyika was that these criteria rarely obtained, and that even where they applied, this was largely the result of Tanganyikans' creative efforts to elaborate or invent tribal histories (Iliffe 1979: 322–4; Spear 2003).

The myth of the 'thin white line' certainly suggests the extent to which 'the system worked', relying as it did on an elaborate network of indigenous 'collaborators' in the guise of chiefs and other 'big men', but also subordinate officials, clerks and translators, policemen and troops. Although the very sparseness of an official European

presence across colonial territories was commonly taken as evidence of the extent of colonial 'pax' and as an eloquent demonstration of the consent of colonial subjects, the frequency with which the theme recurs suggests an underlying anxiety. The mantra was often uttered at moments of tension, as in the 'somewhat smugly' worded report of the 1935 Commission of Enquiry into labour riots on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt: 'To set down two or three British officials at an outstation to rule 100,000 natives, with a handful of police to keep order, is a customary British risk which many years of colonial development has proved to be successful' (in Hargreaves 1996: 10). A similar pattern of revolt and its suppression in 'police actions' which barely register in the records of colonial military action may be found across many parts of an over-extended interwar British Empire in, for example, Mesopotamia and the Southern Sudan. Thus, the Royal Air Force weathered the storm of post-1918 disarmament in large measure because of the capacity it offered for exercising low-level control at long distance (Omissi 1990).

Colonial rule was always a small-scale enterprise, constructed from the base upwards, and with its roots in arbitrary, sometimes brutal, but often fleeting personal contact between individual European officials and the communities they nominally commanded. It was also fundamentally parsimonious: until the last decade or two of development funding from a grudging metropolitan centre, colonies were self-sufficient, reliant on the revenues and labour which the administrators were called upon to extract. Thus, a French law passed in 1900, mirroring British practice, forbade any colonial budgetary drain on the French state, to the extent that French colonial officer cadets were trained at the expense of the Federation to which they were to be assigned; this was only effectively superseded by the introduction of the Investment Fund for Social and Economic Development (FIDES) after 1946 which channelled development funds from the imperial centre for the first time.

At the heart of the myth is the lone District Officer (or *commandant de cercle*, or his Portuguese, Dutch or Belgian equivalent) posted to a remote field station with poor communications to his superiors, whence he toured his district, probably on horseback or by other preferably unmotorized means,<sup>3</sup> and variously commanded, judged, counted and taxed hugely disproportionate numbers of loyal, or at least quiescent, subjects. Practice varied widely between the colonial powers, but field officers were deployed in spectacularly small numbers. Thus, the young Robert Delavignette found himself posted in the early 1920s to the *Cercle* of Zinder, in Niger:

The *Cercle* ruled over the ten thousand souls in the town and the 135,000 who lived in outlying cantons. There were seven *Cercles* in the territory of Niger, the cultivable area of which was more than half the size of France and had a population of a million souls. Seven *Cercles*, with twenty-one administrators and thirty-nine agents of the Native Affairs bureau: sixty officers in all. And in French West Africa, which was eight times bigger than France and had a population of fifteen million, there were 118 *Cercles*. (Delavignette 1940: 21)

The interwar colonial service in British Africa numbered slightly more than 1,200 men, spread over a dozen colonies with populations of some 43 million spread over more than two million square miles. The Indian Civil Service was staffed by a maximum of

1,250 British officers, for a population (in the 1930s) of 353 million (Gallagher 1982; Cell 1999: 232). These numbers conceal essential differences between areas of direct and indirect rule, nor do they allow for the proportion of indigenous administrators, or for the larger numbers of administrators and ancillary staff at lower levels, both European and local: the 1931 Indian census recorded as many as a million government workers.

Accounts of the 'golden age' of colonial rule almost invariably make a virtuous principle of this arithmetic necessity, and the stock image of the DO out and about with only a walking stick formed an indelible part of colonial mythology. The evidence is typically anecdotal, but builds into a picture of a ritualized expression of authority, as in the following vignette, relating the public schoolboy's reflexes of one DO in Southern Tanganyika:

D was in the habit of going for a long walk every evening, wearing a hat. When, towards sunset, he came to the point of turning for home he would hang his hat on a convenient tree and continue on his way hatless. The first African who passed that way after him and saw the hat was expected to bring it to D's house and hand it over to his servants, even if he was going in the opposite direction. If he ignored the hat he would be haunted by the fear that D's intelligence system would catch up with him. (Lumley 1976, in Ranger 1983: 216)

Although the cultural referents might vary from empire to empire, the underlying reality was the 'routinization of hegemony' (Young 1988: 48). There was nothing specifically colonial about this prefectural system of rule, which has typically been deployed where 'there were perceived to be threats to the survival of the established regime and/or doubts about the compliance with its directives of significant sectors of the society' (Berman & Lonsdale 1992: vol. 2, 231). In the French case, it represented the colonial extension of the Napoleonic system of rule – still in force in modified form in today's French Republic – where the Prefects were uniformed representatives of the might of the state.

Colonial officers were necessarily versatile agents of government. Of the functions recorded by Hubert Deschamps, relating to his first command in southern Madagascar in the 1930s, most would have been recognized by a British DO:

The administrator in my time was a Jack-of-all-trades of the bush: sub-prefect, gendarme captain, police commissioner, mayor, tax collector, judge, accountant, road engineer, nurseryman, mapmaker, land agent, customs agent, schools inspector . . . and more besides. He was on his own, in charge of everything, responsible for implementing innumerable regulations. (Deschamps 1975: 121)

By the mid-1940s, a further sub-prefectural role could be added, that of returning officer for the elections and referenda which multiplied in the post-1945 empires. Isolation and the heterogeneity of the societies overseen by these 'kings of the bush' placed a premium on improvisation and autonomous action: Deschamps' office volumes of the *Journal Officiel*, the very symbols of Republican legalism, went largely unconsulted, while British field officers were granted similarly large margins of discretion by their immediate superiors in the Provincial Administration. Personal

authority and practical expertise took precedence over specialist administrative skills or close attention to regulations.

### Training the Official Mind

The myth of the ‘thin white line’ invites investigation of the training and outlook of these ‘kings of the bush’, whose strength of character alone often seemed to hold together their vast, ramshackle domains. Conformity to the job’s requirements was ensured via the recruitment process, on the assumption that a shared background and close identification with ‘ruling class’ values in the mother country would be translated into consistent and effective colonial rule. British colonial officials were overwhelmingly drawn from the propertied middle classes, had fathers who worked in the professions or the service sector (typically the City or senior civil service), probably grew up in the ‘Home Counties’ of south-eastern England, and followed the traditional privileged path of Public School followed by Oxford or Cambridge. Orthodoxy was further assured by a personalized system of recruitment; thus, one man, Sir Ralph Furse, oversaw recruitment to the colonial service from 1919 until 1948. It is debatable whether the more conventional, and rigorous, British system of Civil Service Selection Boards could have recruited with more consistency than Sir Ralph’s ‘keen eye for the merits of that admirable class of person whom university examiners consider worthy only of third-class honours’ (Furse 1962: 9). Tough, competitive examinations for the ICS, and the more obviously academic criteria for selection to the Colonial Office, as opposed to the ‘character’ and athletic prowess required in the field, ensured intellectual mettle where it was needed, providing ‘a true elite of scholar-official mandarins’ (Hyam 1999: 259); the ICS drew on a wider geographic, if not social, catchment area for recruitment, with ‘fewer athletes, but more Irish and Scots’ (Cell 1999: 232–3).

French officials were recruited with the same aims of shared values and conformity of outlook, even if the methods employed differed substantially. An older generation of colonial officials were recruited rather haphazardly, but by the mid-1920s, the Colonial Corps increasingly consisted of graduates of the National School of Overseas France (ENFOM), which selected via state-run competitions for which students prepared for two years at one of an elite group of *lycées* (state high schools) in Paris and a few other large cities. This placed ENFOM on the same footing as other *grandes écoles* designed to train the state’s elite of teachers, engineers, army and naval officers. Significantly, ENFOM was the only *grande école* which specifically trained administrators, before the creation of the *École Nationale d’Administration* (ENA) in 1945, and thus prefigured the ‘technocratic’ ethos of the present-day Fifth Republic (which often seems to be largely run by ENA graduates, whether politicians or civil servants).

Whereas the more prestigious *grandes écoles* tended to favour the sons (and, far more rarely, daughters) of a social and professional elite, often Parisian, ENFOM cadets in the interwar period (who would reach the highest ranks by the time of independence) were apparently recruited from middle class, less than grand, provincial backgrounds. As one official put it: ‘The middle classes . . . have certain virtues which are well known. They make honest, reliable, and generally impartial agents of

the State' (in Cohen 1971: 91).<sup>4</sup> French colonial officialdom's values were those of provincial bourgeois Republicanism, with sympathy for the (usually non-communist) Left, or for an emerging doctrine of Catholic humanism. As for the ICS, competitions favoured the Republic's periphery: in the late 1950s, three Corsicans, all called Colombani (two related), dominated Niger's administration (Colombani 1991: 177). Three years at ENFOM contrasted sharply with the 'generalist' British system: cadets studied for a law degree alongside more specialist courses in accountancy, languages, ethnography and, even, in the early days, fencing and horse-riding. Sanmarco criticizes the 'almost infantile conformism' of ENFOM in the early 1930s, preferring the more informal opportunities offered by the libraries and cafés of Paris (1983: 49–50). Nonetheless, he admits that training at ENFOM translated into a formidable *esprit de corps* amongst its graduates, which was a large part of its purpose. Of the 21 governors and governors-general of French colonial Africa who deliberated at the 1944 Brazzaville Conference, all but three were ENFOM graduates, and of those two were already past retirement age.

What then were the values which colonial officials applied to their work in the field? In the British case, we enter here on ground well trodden by contributors to a rich genre of colonial novels. But nothing in the fiction of Kipling (1900), Forster (1924), Cary (1939), Orwell (1935), Greene (1948), Scott (1966–75) *et alii* outdoes the imaginative myth-making and the 'invention of tradition' documented by Ranger (1983), who demonstrates the extent to which British officers drew not only on the neo-traditional forms and rituals of 'Imperial Monarchy', but also on the hierarchies of army, public school and country house. Thus colonized societies could be imaginatively recast according to familiar models of king and subjects, officers and men, school prefects and junior boys, or lords of the manor and retainers.<sup>5</sup> At its heart the ethos of British field officers was Barrington Moore's 'Catonism': 'the anti-rationalist, anti-urban, anti-materialist and anti-bourgeois response of the traditional landed ruling class to the development of modern industrial society' (Berman & Lonsdale 1992: vol. 2, 234). Having been co-opted as at least honorary members of the ruling class, administrators now applied its values in a very different context. Change might be inevitable, but it was to be jealously controlled, preserving the best of a pre-existing, but idealized, rural society. Moreover, true to the 'Whiggish' instincts of a reforming landlord, the rural 'man in a blanket' was to be protected against 'detrIALIZED' urban upstarts, 'professional politicians' or even settlers, when, as happened in the 'White Highlands' of Kenya or in the even more extensively resettled lands of Southern Rhodesia, those interests ran counter to the DO's attempts to create a kind of 'Merrie Africa' (Pearce 1982: 181).

Many of these attitudes had their counterpart in the French outlook, although derived from very different cultural sources. The major distinction between British and French colonial doctrine lay in the French notion of assimilation, according to which French rule aimed to 'assimilate' colonial subjects to French standards of education, social development and, indeed, civilization. As de Gaulle's Commissioner of Colonies, René Plevin, put it succinctly before the Brazzaville Conference (which he chaired), the aim was 'to transform French Africans into African Frenchmen'. This was a rhetorical offshoot of the classic French republicanism that underpinned French efforts, under the Third Republic after 1870, to bring outlying provinces within

the enveloping fold of the One and Indivisible Republic. This involved the deployment of the conscript army and the state school system to impose French social and educational norms, and in particular the French language, on peasants and peripheral cultures (Bretons, Corsicans, Provençaux and others) and thus to modernize French society by turning 'peasants into Frenchmen' (Weber 1976).

Assimilation was only one pole in a debate conducted throughout the period of French colonial rule. While assimilationists believed that the universal values of French civilization could be shared by all within a 'France of a Hundred Million Souls', this idea was dismissed as impracticable or undesirable by proponents of the less ambitious and superficially less attractive doctrine of Association, with its underlying idea of a racial hierarchy. This doctrine was derived from the experience of French empire builders, including such authorities as General Gallieni, Marshal Lyautey, founder of the French protectorate in Morocco, or Jules Harmand, who drew on a quarter-century's experience in Indochina. Thus, when in 1941 Félix Éboué, Gaullist Governor-General at Brazzaville, drew up a statement of 'The New Native Policy', he sought to apply to French Equatorial Africa the lessons learnt in Morocco by Lyautey 25 years before. Assimilationist doctrine was largely abandoned by 1919, in favour of a more realistic, less interventionist 'Republican' policy in French Africa (Conklin 1997; Le Sueur 2001: 20ff.). However, although pronounced dead by various colonial modernizers, the doctrine of Assimilation refused to lie down, perhaps because it bulked so large in French officials' ideological baggage. Moreover, policies derived from assimilationist ideas and those inspired by association could sit happily side by side: Éboué's 'New Native Policy' also proposed a statute for so-called '*notables évolués*', that is, French-educated Africans who were to be allocated a key role in the projected new colonial order.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding heated arguments to the contrary, there was no necessary contradiction between 'associationist' policies and the idea of using French as the exclusive medium of education, as was recommended by Brazzaville, or of administration (since French officers were rarely in post for long enough to learn local languages).<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, French administrators saw themselves as members of a technocratic elite, but also as the sons of peasants. Thus Deschamps' rather Rousseauesque memoirs, published some thirty years after he left the service, offer a close approximation to the paternalism and the rural idylls more readily associated with British myth-making:

Frenchmen, with rural roots in a more or less recent past, knew the intoxication of landownership, the pride in a well-maintained estate and in the progress brought to it . . . I flourished in these village societies close to my own origins. Having escaped from a limited society and from the gloomy prison of industrial urban life, I returned to my ancestors, while at the same time finding what I had long sought: a taste of exoticism, of difference, of a magical journey in time and space. (1975: 125–6)

In short, assimilation provided a self-justifying myth, and thus constituted the functional equivalent of the 'invented traditions' of British colonial practice, and a parallel fantasy of an idealized and 'eternal' society to be protected against the threat of any but the most organic and incremental of changes.

The District Officer, *commandant de cercle* and equivalents thus constituted the front line of colonial administration, their role legitimated by a tradition with its roots in conquest, their training and ethos grounded in key aspects of metropolitan political culture, their versatility justified by administrative necessity but in turn serving to illustrate the extent, and the benefits, of the colonial 'pax'. Colonial hierarchy was thus built from the base upwards, and policy had also to be mediated through field officers. The almost inevitable consequence was an inbuilt tendency to immobilism: while policy was important both at the establishment of colonial rule, and as it drew to a close, 'In between, the landscape was dominated by a system, not a policy' (Heussler 1971: 576; Berman & Lonsdale 1992: vol. 2, 233).

### The Colonial State: an Open Polity?

The concept of the colonial state is a familiar one from the literature but not unproblematic, since in one obvious sense colonies were not states at all, but subordinate units in an imperial hierarchy. While in terms of colonial practice and tradition, colonial governors acted very much as 'proconsuls', and for most practical purposes the colony was the effective unit of government, colonial states might be called open polities (by analogy with open economies), in that they depended ultimately not only on policy directives from the metropolitan capitals, but also on the approval or acquiescence of domestic electorates. The ambivalence to which this gave rise was reflected in various ways, including the structures whereby colonial states were incorporated into imperial systems, but also the way in which a metropolitan political elite and its electoral clientele regarded (and quite often disregarded) the empire.

This ambivalence was reflected in the contrasting imperial frameworks within which a colonial dependency's legal status was established. The British colonial governor's relative freedom of action was assured by the system of 'crown colonies', derived from long experience of dealing with the Dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. This system vested law-making powers in a nominated Legislative Council composed of representatives of settler and commercial interests, and chaired by the governor, thus ensuring that each colony retained its legislative identity; in practice, this meant that the last word almost inevitably fell to the 'man on the spot', the governor. In this way the governor was given considerable powers to resist a proposed policy, and Whitehall was obliged to engage in prolonged consultation and, often, revision of its policy proposals. There were also profound differences in administrative culture or mission, so that it was difficult to consider implementing, say, West African policy in East Africa, and *vice versa*. This particularism was to have profound consequences for the pattern of British decolonization, as individual colonies each entered the process of devolving power according to its own timetable and its own tailor-made constitutional arrangements.

At its most extreme, British particularism found expression in a separate Government of India, answerable directly to the King-Emperor. The Viceroy was the grandest of proconsuls, and it is difficult to articulate meaningful comparisons with a case that was so spectacularly *sui generis*, since 'All-India' looked very much like an empire

in its own right. There were other separate administrations, too, with their own ethos and traditions, some maintained by ministerial barriers, for example the Sudan, run by a Sudan Service which, for reasons of British Egyptian policy (Chapter 7), was run from the Foreign Office. Others, notably the Cyprus government, maintained autonomy through sheer force of inertia (Holland 1998).

An obvious contrast is suggested with the Republican tradition on which the French based their colonial administration. However, this contrast may be overstated, and substantial differences are sometimes indiscernible in the local impact of the two styles of colonial rule. To be sure, the preferred French administrative model was one of direct rule derived from French conceptions of a strong, centralizing state and the almost sacred doctrine of the 'One and Indivisible Republic', and the impact of principles derived from these was felt at every level. In contrast with British Crown Colonies, the French Republic instituted vast federations in West and Equatorial Africa and in Indochina (and a similar structure was proposed but never implemented in Madagascar), headed by a governor-general who amassed considerable powers, and to whom answered governors of individual territories. Legislative power was exercised not by the governors or governors-general, however, but notionally by the National Assembly in Paris, or more usually by Presidential decree or ordinances enacted by the governor.

In practice, the realities of imperial coordination softened the edges of this pyramidal geometry. Governors-general had a long proconsular tradition to uphold of defying or ignoring Paris, and were still capable in the 1940s and 1950s of presenting the metropole with some alarming *faits accomplis*. Thus although the Governments-General at Hanoi, Dakar, Brazzaville and Tananarive were created in order to coordinate policy between Paris and the colonial periphery, the incumbents were powerful officials who could defy Paris at will. Moreover, there were two significant exceptions to this adapted metropolitan model of the unitary Republic. The first was Algeria, which, since 1848, had been considered an integral part of the 'One and Indivisible Republic'. Although the representative of the state in Algeria was a governor-general, he was appointed by the Ministry of the Interior, and his immediate subordinates were the Prefects of the three *départements* (each subsequently sub-divided into four). Since European needs and interests dominated, the civil administration existed side-by-side with a more properly 'colonial' administration responsible for the majority Muslim non-citizen population. This translated into a corrupt system of indirect rule based on locally recruited '*caïds*' or headmen. The Algerian Southern Territories were governed directly by the Army, and were incorporated as *départements* as late as 1957. The two North African territories of Tunisia and Morocco constituted the second exception, as international protectorates under the treaties of 1881 and 1912, where the Bey of Tunis and the Sultan of Morocco retained notional sovereignty. Since they were governed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Moroccan and Tunisian administrations were protected to a degree, under an informal system of 'watertight bulkheads', from parliamentary scrutiny or from reformist initiatives originating in other ministries, particularly the Ministry of Colonies. By the same, largely fictional, principle of retained sovereignty, the League of Nations Mandates in Syria and Lebanon were also managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Shipway 2002; Longrigg 1958).

The efforts of colonial ministries to rationalize and coordinate colonial or imperial policy could often be blocked or resisted by appeals to the greater knowledge and experience of the 'man on the spot'. The voluminous correspondence between ranking governors and metropolitan-based officials was informed by an effective gulf between separate administrative cultures. Simply expressed, pith helmets or ostrich plumes (or the less ostentatious *képi* of the French governor) were greatly to be preferred to, say, bowler hats and rolled umbrellas. But the converse perception in both the British and the French services was more commonly expressed, of a metropolitan-based ministerial staff out of touch with the realities of colonial life. Thus Deschamps, appointed in 1936 as private secretary (*chef de cabinet*) to the incoming Socialist Minister of Colonies, Marius Moutet, confronted a 'cult of incompetence' whereby Parisian officials sought to minimize the influence of officers returning from a colonial posting, for fear that their own control over policy would be lessened (1975: 127–8). An informal tradition of 'beachcombing' allowed members of the British Colonial Service to serve a term in Whitehall, and the regular traffic in the opposite direction by which junior Colonial Office officials spent a year or two overseas, usually in a Colonial Secretariat, went some way towards reducing the cultural gap, although this was inevitably an *ad hominem* solution (Parkinson 1947).

Colonial ministries' capacity to coordinate policy was further affected by their low position within the ministerial pecking order. The British Colonial Office in the inter-war period went a long way towards establishing new structures for the modernization of colonial policy through the delivery of technical expertise, establishing functional departments to cover the increasing range of responsibilities in the realms of economic and social policy, a development viewed somewhat wryly by the Permanent Secretary of the period, Sir Cosmo Parkinson (*ibid.*). In reality, these new departments often merely shadowed the work of separate departments of state or ministries with a different perspective and set of priorities. Paradoxically, as the colonies came to be perceived as more central to British economic prosperity after 1945, the Ministries of Food and Supply would lead the so-called 'second colonial occupation', sometimes against the interests and better judgement of the Colonial Office and Colonial Service, as was the case for the infamous postwar Groundnut Scheme (Iliffe 1979: 442).

One of the paradoxical rules of thumb of colonial administration might thus be expressed as the tendency for the oxygen of influence to become more rarefied nearer the summit of the governmental pyramid. British Colonial Secretaries and French Ministers of Colonies alike tended to be either politicians with little influence within government as a whole, or conversely men for whom the colonial portfolio was a convenient passport to Cabinet rank, but who had little interest in, or knowledge of, colonial affairs. Politicians with a long-term interest in colonial affairs while in opposition, such as Marius Moutet (French Socialist Minister of Colonies, 1936–7, and Minister of Overseas France, 1946–7) or Arthur Creech Jones (British Labour Secretary of State, 1946–50), were a relative rarity. But colonial affairs tended anyway to be the concern of committees, and the major British and French parties each had their contingent of colonial 'experts'. Colonial policy as such thus had relatively little impact on the national political agenda, except, of course, in the event of crisis when the minister or his department could conveniently be blamed.

### Notes

- 1 Slave Coast had disappeared from the map. Except where there are commonly accepted English forms – for example, Algeria, Dutch East Indies, Indochina – colony names are given in the form imposed by the colonizer, especially where there might otherwise be confusion – for example, between German Kamerun, French Cameroun, and the British Cameroons, French Soudan (Mali), vs the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.
- 2 Wilson (1994: 125–7) gives the following figures for European settlers in East and Central Africa (to which add the ratio Africans:Europeans): 207,000 in Southern Rhodesia in 1958 (13:1), 72,000 in Northern Rhodesia in 1958 (31:1), 67,700 in Kenya in 1960 (93:1).
- 3 As Berque (1969: 67) comments, the advent of the motor car severely reduced the contact possible between French officers and their subjects.
- 4 The ‘governor-general of Indochina in the 1940s’ is presumably Léon Pignon, High Commissioner in Indochina, 1948–50, a schoolmaster’s son from Angoulême. Of the other French officials cited, Delavignette was the son of a Burgundian sawmill manager, Deschamps of a bailiff from Western France; a third ex-colonial memoir-writer, Louis Sanmarco (1983), was the son of an immigrant Italian docker in Marseille. See also Bourdieu 1989.
- 5 On the British ‘public schools’ (i.e. private, usually boarding schools), Cell 1999: 233n.; for a subversive post-imperial account, see Lindsay Anderson’s 1969 film *If. . .*: the headmaster now sees his charges as future television directors rather than DOs.
- 6 ‘*Evolués*’ (‘evolved persons’) was the unflattering term applied to French- or Belgian-educated Africans; ‘*notables*’ were dignitaries or ‘big men’, originally those to be found in small French towns.
- 7 On Brazzaville, see Chapter 5. According to one British official in the 1930s, the French aim of ‘creating a new race of black Frenchmen’ would ‘hasten the decline & fall of western civilization’, in Ashton & Stockwell 1996: doc. 125 & lxxvii.