

The Case for Colonialism: A Response to My Critics

Bruce Gilley

Editor's Note: NAS board member Bruce Gilley's article, "The Case for Colonialism," was republished in *Academic Questions* in the summer of 2018 after its original publisher, the peer-reviewed *Third World Quarterly*, withdrew it from publication in 2017 under threats from activists and ideologues. This response to the article was read over 8,000 times in the six months after it was issued as a pre-print in June 2021.

Introduction

On September 8, 2017, the *Third World Quarterly* published my article "The Case for Colonialism" through its online platform in anticipation of its inclusion in a hard-copy edition at a later date. Within minutes of its appearance, a great controversy arose on social media. Over the ensuing weeks, half of the journal's editorial board resigned in protest and the editorial staff in London received credible death threats. On September 21, I assented to the withdrawal of the article in the interests of the physical safety of the journal's editorial staff. The article was reprinted in 2018 in *Academic Questions*, the journal of the National Association of Scholars, where it is the most read article in the journal's thirty-four year history.¹

The article has its origins in 2012, when I stumbled upon the final book of Chinua Achebe while at an academic conference.² Achebe's many positive comments on colonialism led me to delve deeper into the legacy of this supposedly anti-colonial figure, resulting in an article which I later published in *African Affairs*.³ It was while researching Achebe that I discovered the works of the British colonial official Sir Alan Burns, which led me to write a biography of

1 Bruce Gilley, "The Case for Colonialism," *Academic Questions*, 31, no. 2 (2018): 167-185.

2 Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

3 Bruce Gilley, "Chinua Achebe on the Positive Legacies of Colonialism," *African Affairs* 115, no. 461 (2016): 646-663, doi:10.1093/afraf/adw030.

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him which was published in 2021.⁴ I wrote “The Case for Colonialism” in order to frame the positive case that Burns made within a more general theory and body of evidence.

I submitted the article first to the *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*. The editor there, Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, gave it a desk approval and asked me to strengthen the policy-relevant aspects of the paper prior to sending it for peer review. The paper then received one positive and one negative review. Lemay-Hébert then asked his editorial board whether he should publish the paper and was told that it was too politically controversial to publish. The “fear of political backlash” determined the decision not to accept it, he wrote to me by email. I next turned to the *Third World Quarterly* in which I had previously published two peer-reviewed articles, one of which took a clearly pro-colonial standpoint.⁵ I first submitted it to a planned special issue on “the new imperialism.” The special issue editors immediately rejected it because it took a positive, rather than negative, view of their chosen topic, even though their call for papers had not indicated that a particular normative perspective was required of submissions. The “range of theoretical and empirical viewpoints” that they had in mind, as they later explained, was limited to Marxism, post-colonialism, black Marxism, pan-Africanism, and “the revolutionary theory of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara.”⁶

After I failed to win consideration for inclusion in the special issue, the *Third World Quarterly* editor Shahid Qadir sent my article for normal peer review. It received one positive and one negative review. Qadir, as was his prerogative, decided to run it but as a “viewpoint” rather than “research” article, with my consent.⁷

In the subsequent years, the article has been the subject of countless essays, conference panels, seminar discussions, and journal articles. It has over 130 citations in Google Scholar at this writing. It is the ninth “most read” article in the *Third World Quarterly*’s forty-two-year history, even though readers can “read” only the withdrawal notice. Oddly, the *Third World Quarterly* has begun to allow authors to cite the original withdrawn article, albeit only critically and in

4 Bruce Gilley, *The Last Imperialist: Sir Alan Burns’ Epic Defense of the British Empire* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2021).

5 Bruce Gilley, “The Challenge of the Creative Third World,” *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 8 (2015): 1405-1420, doi:10.1080/01436597.2015.1044962.

6 John Narayan and Leon Sealey-Huggins, “Whatever Happened to the Idea of Imperialism?” *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 11 (2017): 2387-2395, doi:10.1080/01436597.2017.1374172.

7 Bruce Gilley, “How the Hate Mob Tried to Silence Me,” *Standpoint*, November 27, 2017.

a way that directs readers to the withdrawal notice rather than to the published version in *Academic Questions*, as, for example, in Fasakin's recent article continuing a long tradition of blaming colonialism for Africa's contemporary woes.⁸ After a lifetime of writing as a journalist and academic, those eight-thousand words have come to identify me and to dominate my time in a way that I could never have imagined.

I have waited several years to respond to critics of the article, mainly in order to allow the dust to settle and for the best critiques to be lodged. Here I will address only what I consider to be serious scholarly responses. This means I am not responding to the outpouring of emotionally-charged attacks on the article by reputable scholars, of which there are dozens. But they are a reminder of what I believe is the fundamentally ideological rather than scientific basis of my critics.

I find that my critics mostly misread my article, used citations they had not read or understood, failed to adhere to basic social scientific principles, and imposed their own interpretations on data without noting the possibility of alternatives. I note that a failure to adhere to academic standards, the main charge levelled against my paper, is rife among those who have levelled such charges. The use of their critiques to impose professional penalties and punishments on me as a scholar bespeaks the fundamental problems of ideological monoculture and illiberal censorship in academia today. I conclude that the problems of most research on the colonial past since roughly 1960 are so deep-rooted that nothing short of a complete rewriting of colonial history under appropriate scientific conditions will suffice in most cases.

Definitions

I make clear in the article that I define "colonialism" as referring to "British, French, German, Belgian, Dutch, and Portuguese colonies from the early 19th to mid-20th centuries." This temporal separation of European expansion from the earlier fifteenth to early nineteenth century phase follows Abernethy who, along with others, argued that only in this second phase—which he dates to the 1824 Anglo-Burmese war—was formal "political control" the dominant mode of European empire while the industrial revolution made the modes and scope of

8 Akinbode Fasakin, "The Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Experiences from Nigeria," *Third World Quarterly* (2021): 1-20, doi:10.1080/01436597.2021.1880318.

empire qualitatively different from those in the first phase.⁹ Klein is thus careless in claiming that my naming of Libya, Haiti, and Guatemala as countries that can be used as counterfactual examples to places that experienced modern colonialism was among my “errors.”¹⁰ Guatemala became independent in 1821 while Haiti revolted against French rule and was granted independence in 1825. Libya remained independent throughout the second phase of European colonialism until 1912, when Italy briefly laid claim to this fragment of the Ottoman Empire. I am therefore justified in citing these three, along with China, Ethiopia, Liberia, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand as countries that “did not have a significant colonial history,” as I defined it.

Thus, while I believe that there is an equally compelling case for Anglo-settlement colonies in North America and the Antipodes, and for Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in the New World, those are separate historical issues and not my concern in this paper. I am also justified in excluding from my analysis the private estates in the Congo of the Belgian king Leopold II which he held from 1885 to 1908, until the area became a colony of Belgium. While general readers of my article, and undergraduate students, can be excused for this criticism, it is a puzzling mistake for credentialed scholars. Klein, for instance, in arguing against the use of *corvée* labor under colonialism writes of “Leopold’s minions” as an example of such “colonial” practices.¹¹ Likewise, Brandon and Sarkar refer to “Belgian Congo under Leopold’s rule” and “the trail of bloodshed that the small European nation left behind in the vast African country.”¹² MacWilliam too complains that I make “[n]o mention . . . of imperial Belgium’s rule in the Congo Free State,” which is true because there was no such thing.¹³

Klein, like others, cites the American journalist Adam Hochschild’s 1998 book, *King Leopold’s Ghost*. While carrying the subtitle *A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Hochschild acknowledged that control of the private plantation “was shared in no way with the Belgian government.”¹⁴ This was the same conclusion reached by an investigating magistrate at the time

9 David Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires 1415-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 81.

10 Martin Klein, “A Critique of Colonial Rule: A Response to Bruce Gilley,” *Australasian Review of African Studies* 39, no. 1 (2018): 40.

11 *Ibid.*, 43.

12 Pepijin Brandon, Aditya Sarkar, “Labour History and the Case against Colonialism,” *International Review of Social History* 64, no. 1 (2019): 73-109, doi:10.1017/S0020859019000063.

13 Scott MacWilliam, “Africa’s Past Invented to Serve Development’s Uncertain Future,” *Australasian Review of African Studies* 39, no. 1 (2018): 15.

14 Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 87.

who wrote: “The state of Congo is no colonized state, barely a state at all but a financial enterprise.”¹⁵ The Belgian Congo was *never* under Leopold’s rule and the fifty-two years of this colony from 1908 to 1960 were the *only* period of good governance that this benighted region has ever known. This is not a technicality. Quite the opposite. King Leopold’s private estates in the Congo were precisely the counterfactual to colonial rule and the best argument *for* colonialism. His inability to control his native rubber agents, who continued their pre-colonial business of slave-trading and coercive rubber harvesting, showed the problems that would arise if European freelancers allied with native warlords and slave-traders and established regimes with no outside scrutiny. The proposition that there was some feasible good governance model available to this region from indigenous sources is unsupported. The Batambatamba Afro-Arab slave traders of the area? The African warlord Msiri whose compound decorated with human remains was the inspiration, along with a similar compound of the king of Benin, for Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (transposed onto a white trader to elicit the predictable outrage from white readers)? The feared Arab slavers Tippu Tip or al-Zubayr? Belgian colonization of the Congo in 1908 put an end to “independence” for the Congo and thank goodness for that. In making this small mistake, my critics open us to the wider world of their misunderstanding of colonial history.

The Unadorned Argument

I will begin by responding to critics of my core claim that European colonialism was objectively beneficial to colonized peoples. It is important to note that a grand total of 126 words were devoted to this topic since much of the article’s prelude is devoted to arguing that most research on colonialism falls afoul of basic principles of scientific research and thus does not “prove” anything about this most central of questions. By contrast, I wrote:

Research that is careful in conceptualizing and measuring controls, that establishes a feasible counterfactual, that includes multiple dimensions of costs and benefits weighted in some justified way, and that adheres to basic epistemic virtues often finds that at least some if not many or most episodes of Western colonialism were a net benefit, as the literature

15 Félicien Cattier, *Étude sur la situation de l’État indépendant du Congo* (Bruxelles: Vve F. Larcier, 1906), 341.

review by Juan and Pierskalla shows. Such works have found evidence for significant social, economic, and political gains under colonialism: expanded education, improved public health, the abolition of slavery, widened employment opportunities, improved administration, the creation of basic infrastructure, female rights, enfranchisement of untouchable or historically excluded communities, fair taxation, access to capital, the generation of historical and cultural knowledge, and national identity formation, to mention just a few dimensions.

As I have often stated since then, the reference to just a few research works, including the overview article of Juan and Pierskalla,¹⁶ was clearly insufficient to substantiate that claim, even as a review of literature. To that end, I have subsequently generated what is in effect the missing bibliography for that single paragraph.¹⁷ It divides the topic into fifty-one subsections and runs to over forty pages, citing over five-hundred research books and articles. At over ten-thousand words, that bibliography could obviously not have been included, except as a separate article. Nonetheless, one response I commonly give to critics who argue that there is “no evidence” for the core claim of my article is: “Look at the bibliography.”

To critics like Osterkamp who complain that my article (and presumably, in his view, the bibliography as well) do not provide a thorough and balanced discussion of all research conducted on colonialism, I plead guilty as charged.¹⁸ Such an article, in addition to being unfeasible, would have served no purpose other than add to the “it’s complicated” intellectual approach that seems to be the only permissible alternative to the “it was evil” orthodoxy in the academy. If, after due consideration of evidence and logic, a scholar believes that colonialism was an unambiguously “good thing” in most times and places, then he needs to begin by making that case itself. My article does this. Indeed, if the main utility of my article has been to provide rhetorical cover for scholars who can thereby claim to be “moderates” on the question, I would consider it a worthy contribution.

16 Alexander De Juan, Jan Kenryk Pierskalla, “The Comparative Politics of Colonialism and Its Legacies: An Introduction,” *Politics & Society* 45, no. 2 (2017): 159-172, doi:10.1177/0032329217704434.

17 Bruce Gilley, “Contributions of Western Colonialism to Human Flourishing: A Research Bibliography,” ResearchGate, Version 3.0 (2020), doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.16960.56328.

18 Rigmar Osterkamp, “A Sober View of Bruce Gilley’s ‘The Case for Colonialism,’” *CCR Spectrum*, Band 1, 1, no. 1 (2021): 37-49.

Economics

Debates on the economic effects of colonialism occupy a large part of the criticism of my article. Thus in two separate responses, Khan charges that colonial rule “impoverished” and “exploited” subject communities.¹⁹ Others made the same claim, that the economies of colonies were “exploited” and “underdeveloped” under colonial rule, often citing the Guyanese Marxist Walter Rodney,²⁰ also one of the authorities cited by Sultana in arguing that my article amounted to Holocaust denial.²¹

Part of the perennial debate here is simply the misunderstanding of economic growth by scholars whose worldviews are shaped by zero-sum Marxist approaches. Without “exploitation” and “profits,” there can be no employment, wages, markets, and improvements in organization and technology. As the English economist Joan Robinson famously quipped, “the misery of being exploited by capitalists is nothing compared to the misery of not being exploited all.”²² That the re-issue of Rodney’s book in 2018 was accompanied by introductory essays not by economists but by black Marxist activists in the United States such as Angela Davis speaks volumes about the ideological rather than scientific basis of claims of “exploitation” and “underdevelopment.”²³

More specifically, critics should simply refer to the mountain of evidence from serious economists showing the erroneous nature of both Rodney’s specific claims about Africa, as shown in many regression studies beginning with the work of Grier,²⁴ as well as the more general claim first with respect to the granddaddy of them all, India, as shown repeatedly by the work of the acknowledged expert on that topic, Tirthankar Roy,²⁵ and to the colonial world taken as a whole as demonstrated by one study using islands as natural experiments.²⁶ Taylor writes: “[N]ot only should we not accept Gilley’s general pro-colonial explanation of the poor performance of many post-colonial African nations since he provides us with no good reason to do so, we do have good reason to

19 Sahar Khan, “The Case Against ‘The Case for Colonialism,’” CATO Institute Commentary, September 19, 2017; Sahar Khan, “Libertarians Shouldn’t Accept the Case for Colonialism,” CATO Unbound, October 9, 2017.

20 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Washington: Howard University Press, 1974).

21 Farhana Sultana, “The False Equivalence of Academic Freedom and Free Speech: Defending Academic Integrity in the Age of White Supremacy, Colonial Nostalgia, and Anti-Intellectualism,” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 17, no. 2 (2018): 228-257, 253.

22 Joan Robinson, *Economic Philosophy* (London: Pelican Books, 1962), 46.

23 Walter Rodney, Angela Davis, et. al., *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2018).

24 Robin Grier, “Colonial Legacies and Economic Growth,” *Public Choice* 98, nos. 3-4 (1999): 317-335.

25 Tirthankar Roy, *The Economic History of India, 1857-1947*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

26 James Feyrer, Bruce Sacerdote, “Colonialism and Modern Income: Islands as Natural Experiments,” *Review of Economics And Statistics* 91, no. 2 (2009): 245-262.

believe that their poor performance is a legacy of their colonial subjection.”²⁷ Actually, we do not. If colonial subjection caused poor performance, then today’s Ethiopia would be the economic miracle of Africa. Instead, the only semi-successful African economy ever was South Africa until its system of white minority rule was hastily “decolonized” in the early 1990s and the country went into a tailspin.

I agree with Osterkamp that the long-form essay by Heldring and Robinson measures up well to the highest standards of scientific inquiry in reaching the conclusion that colonialism’s overall effect on development in Africa was negative.²⁸ Though mainly a literature review and an interpretive foray, it provides a rigorous and logical counterargument to claims about colonialism’s positive impact on development.

Although anti-colonial narratives have less traction in Asia because of the success of its former colonies, recent work that affirms the positive contributions of colonialism in Asia as well includes a recent study by Dell and Olken about Dutch sugar production in Java which concludes:

The establishment of a sugar processing infrastructure in colonial Java persistently increased industrialization, education, and household consumption in areas near government sugar factories, even after the factories themselves had disappeared. Similarly, villages forced to grow sugar cane for the Cultivation System have more schooling and manufacturing today . . . the positive impacts on economic activity plausibly dominated [any negative effects] in the long-run.²⁹

Kendhammer writes that “while some studies find that former British colonies have performed better economically and politically than others, virtually none find that colonial rule was itself an effective method of setting up long-term prosperity and stability.”³⁰ While citing Grier incorrectly (his study makes a general claim about longer colonial rule in addition to the specific one

27 James Stacey Taylor, “The Case Against the Case for Colonialism,” *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2018): 28.

28 Leander Heldring, James Robinson, “Colonialism and Economic Development in Africa,” in Carol Lancaster, Nicolas Van de Walle, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Politics of Development* 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

29 Melissa Dell, Benjamin Olken, “The Development Effects of the Extractive Colonial Economy: The Dutch Cultivation System in Java,” *The Review of Economic Studies* 87, no. 1 (2020): 200-201, doi:10.1093/restud/rdz017.

30 B. Kendhammer, “A controversial article praises colonialism. But colonialism’s real legacy was ugly,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2017.

about British rule), the “virtually none” citation is to Lange, and Kendhammer might have added the subsequent book on the subject.³¹

Several points are in order. First, let us agree that Lange’s work is top-rate and scientific. Second, let us agree that other work that is top-rate and scientific reaches other conclusions. Third, if one were to pin such a sweeping statement about “virtually none” showing any positive effect to Lange’s work, one would want to read it carefully. Lange’s work looks only at variations within British colonialism: it has nothing to say about comparative colonialism much less colonialism versus non-colonialism. (“Since the analysis is limited to former British colonies . . . further investigation is necessary if one attempts to generalize outside of the cases analyzed here.”³²) Nor does it even consider the role of post-colonial policies in explaining contemporary conditions, a rather glaring omission. Moreover his theory does not work for India, which, depending on how you measure it, accounted for about seventy-five percent of British colonialism. Nor does it work for Botswana or Guyana, two of the four cases he chooses in the book to illustrate the uncertainties of his argument. Finally, the statistical model really just shows that African countries were six times more likely to be ruled indirectly than others,³³ and that such rule was associated with worse outcomes. Lange’s work tells us nothing about colonialism. It does tell us about the challenges of development in Africa.

Kendhammer also cites the work of Ochonu in support of the statement that in “parts of West Africa, the tax burdens on farmers were so high in the 1930s they created a cycle of poverty and debt that keeps their descendants poor today.”³⁴ In fact, Ochonu’s book is about the *inability* of the colonial state to tax farmers during the Great Depression. Still, Kendhammer unintentionally provides a sterling example of the intellectual dead-end of colonial studies that offers scholars two options on every question. As I wrote: “Eminent scholars repeatedly make the contradictory claim that colonialism was both too disruptive and not disruptive enough.” In this case: colonialism, according to Kendhammer, was bad because it did too much (like taxing effectively); or colonialism, according to Ochonu, was bad because it did too little (like failing

31 Matthew Lange, “British Colonial Legacies and Political Development,” *World Development* 32, no. 6 (2004): 905-922, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2003.12.001>; Matthew Lange, *Lineages of Despotism and Development: British Colonialism and State Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

32 Lange, “British Colonial Legacies,” 917.

33 *Ibid.*, 921.

34 Moses Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009).

to tax effectively). Tax well and you exploit and integrate into the imperialist economy while tax badly and you create patterns of disengagement from the state and the modern economy. Both are bad because both involve colonial rule. As Ochonu writes with puzzling logic: “British colonialism was just as disruptive to Africans’ lives when it failed to exploit them as it was when it did.”³⁵

The same self-contradiction is embraced by Taylor who writes that when Marxists criticize both an absence and a presence of colonial public health infrastructure “there is not even the appearance of contradiction.” How so? Because the former is about missing “provision” while the latter is nefarious “use.”³⁶ In other words, in Taylor’s mind, colonial authorities should have gone around the world providing free healthcare and other public goods to alien peoples as a sort of quixotic humanitarian mission but should not have expected anything in return such as the payment of taxes or even participation in the labor market. While Taylor is correct that there is no necessary contradiction in these claims, there is certainly a practical one.

Kendhammer is correct that I discount Crawford Young because he is an example of an eminent scholar whose claims about the colonial state are tied up in self-contradictions, although I refer not to his 1994 book but to a 2016 book chapter.³⁷ Taylor too rejects my interpretation of Young or others making similar claims, saying that it is consistent to assert that colonialists both disrupted too much (such as by “replacing Congolese institutions . . . with Belgian ones”) and disrupted too little (such as by failing to create a larger Belgian colonial state).³⁸ What these “Congolese institutions” with the capacity to govern central Africa were remain a mystery to me. So too does Taylor’s and Young’s reasons for condemning the British for not trying to create larger units. Nigeria was the key example of doing just that, and its federation at independence was destroyed by Nigerians during a subsequent civil war.

Sometimes, my critics simply have a hard time coming to terms with the need for humans to earn their keep. Brandon and Sarkar, for instance, write darkly in their special issue devoted to rebutting my article that “[o]ne of the driving forces of the colonial project at large was the extraction of natural

35 *Ibid.*, 4.

36 James Stacey Taylor, “The Case Against the Case for Colonialism,” *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2018): 23, 24.

37 Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Crawford Young, “The Heritage of Colonialism,” in John Harbeson, Donald Rothchild, eds., *Africa in World Politics: Constructing Political and Economic Order*, 6th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2016, 9-26).

38 Taylor, “The Case Against the Case for Colonialism,” 22, 23.

resources and the cheap supply of precious commodities through the labour of the colonized.”³⁹ I cannot think of a more noble aim. The comparative advantage of colonial areas was in resources and commodities and modernization entailed developing those advantages. To their second claim that in doing so, colonial rulers engaged in historically unique forms of brutal treatment of labor we must distinguish two issues. The use of mandatory (“forced”) labor in many colonies was intended as a replacement for taxation and was of course historically common in places where taxation was impractical. It may rub our modern sensitivities the wrong way, but this was the most fair and liberal means of providing for public services and infrastructure. Secondly, the “labour question” is whether under colonialism wages were generally rising and conditions of employment were generally improving. The work on wages in British Africa and India, and on employment law and unions shows the answer is “yes,” most notably in the careful econometric work done on West Africa.⁴⁰

Digging into their back issues, Brandon and Sarkar reprint twelve articles that they believe substantiate their claim of colonial labor failures. All of them are narrative histories or theoretical forays, rather than scientific inquiries with careful case selection, variable measurement, controls, and estimates. Moreover, most are written by avowed Marxists such as Vijay Prashad.⁴¹ It is not clear what this is supposed to show. No doubt talking about one-hundred and fifty years of ruling half the globe with a rapidly modernizing global economy, diligent anti-colonial labour scholars can sniff out problems like truffle pigs.

One of the back issue articles they cite by Ian Kerr is explicitly written to reject anti-colonial dogmas, in this case concerning circulating labor groups in India. “The ideal of a harmonious, stable, communitarian Hindu India living in a state of contentment until disrupted by Moslem invasions and British colonialism is a component of Hindutva ideology,” Kerr wrote. Rather than singling out the colonial era, labor history in India “must be examined as a related activity.”⁴²

39 Brandon, Sarkar, 78.

40 Marlous Waijenburg, Ewout Frankema, “Structural Impediments to African Growth? New Evidence from Real Wages in British Africa, 1880-1965,” *The Journal of Economic History* 72 (2011), doi:10.2139/ssrn.1989839.

41 Vijay Prashad, “Marks of Capital: Colonialism and the Sweepers of Delhi,” *International Review of Social History* 40, no. 1 (1995): 1-30.

42 Ian Kerr, “On the Move: Circulating Labor in Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial India,” *International Review of Social History* 51, no. S14 (2006): 88-89, 106, doi:10.1017/S0020859006002628.

Lazy Reflexive Citations

This oversight by Brandon and Sarkar points up the common use of unread or misunderstood (“reflexive”) citations by my critics. This issue was reported by Ball in reference to science, where he quoted one study that showed that less than a quarter of citations used in physics were to work that the citing authors had read.⁴³ One thing that graduate students are supposed to learn is to avoid citing papers they have not read and citing them in a way that does not tell the reader anything about their methods or specific conclusions. “Don’t accept a claim just because an authority asserts it,” warned Booth and colleagues in their widely-used book on research methods.⁴⁴ Yet the practice of bombarding readers with a list of citations that supposedly provide evidence for a claim is widespread among my critics. Indeed, because of their careless nature, these citations are prone, as the Brandon and Sarkar case shows, to show the opposite of what is intended.

Klein, to take another example, writes: “The vast majority of employees of the colonial state were Africans, but those Africans did not necessarily work for colonial rulers because of affection for them (Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts, 2006).” I will return below to the substantive question. But what is this “Lawrance, Osborn and Roberts, 2006” that Klein reflectively cites as evidence without telling the reader anything about it? It is an edited collection for which Klein himself wrote the afterword. So by definition it does not take or show any one conclusion, separate from what Klein imposes on it. If there is a “corporate view” of the book, it is surely that of the editors who make clear in their introduction that Africans “used the new opportunities created by colonial conquest and colonial rule to pursue their own agendas even as they served their employers.”⁴⁵ That certainly does not contravene my claim about the legitimacy of colonial rule.

Lazy reflexive citations are also rife among the work of other critics. The article by Brandon Kendhammer is entirely made up of them⁴⁶ and, since it has been cited so widely by scholars demanding my head, it is worth considering

43 Philip Ball, “Paper Trail Reveals References Go Unread by Citing Authors,” *Nature* 420, no. 6916 (2002): 594-594, doi:10.1038/420594a.

44 Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 87.

45 Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Osborn, Richard Roberts, “Introduction,” in Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Osborn, Richard Roberts, eds. *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 7.

46 Brandon Kendhammer, “A Controversial Article Praises Colonialism. But Colonialism’s Real Legacy was Ugly,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2017.

each and every piece of evidence in detail. Granted, his is a newspaper opinion article rather than a scholarly critique.

Still, it is worth delving into the volley of citations he uses to bludgeon the reader into acceptance of his claim that “thousands” of studies have reached a “resounding conclusion” of colonialism’s harms.

1. Concerning living standards, the Frankema and Waijenburg paper that Kendhammer cites on real wage growth in British colonial Africa 1880 to 1965, which is meant to test the thesis that Africa suffered from impediments to growth due to geography and colonialism, shows instead that both are untrue: “Real wages increased during the colonial era in all of the countries we studied” and that such growth rates “were in line and sometimes even outpaced the growth rate of real wages of unskilled workers in London during the nineteenth century.”⁴⁷
2. Concerning the rule of law, Kendhammer cites a Berinzon and Briggs article that shows how seven former French colonies in West Africa retained different amounts of their French legal code from 1955 to 2013. If colonialism were harmful, then those that retained less would be better off. But the opposite is true. Senegal retained by far the most (fourty-eight percent) and was by far the best in terms of rule of law as measured by the World Bank governance indicators for 2013 (the year of the study). The correlation overall is 0.26 and rises to 0.93 without Guinea, an unusual case that was violently anti-colonial yet retained more of its colonial legal code by dint of the total dysfunction and aimlessness of the state. The other six countries line up perfectly: the less they retained in 2013, the worse their rule of law.⁴⁸
3. Concerning historiography, Kendhammer suitably cites Frederick Cooper’s work on the subject which pioneered the pushback against anti-colonialism as the “True Cause against which opposition has no legitimate place.”⁴⁹ Still, Cooper is hardly evidence of the vigorous contest of ideas about colonialism’s outcomes because he expressly eschews that question

47 Ewout Frankema, Marlous Van Waijenburg, “Structural Impediments to African Growth? New Evidence from Real Wages in British Africa, 1880–1965,” *The Journal of Economic History* 72, no. 4: 921, doi:10.1017/S0022050712000630.

48 Maya Berinzon, Ryan Briggs, “Legal Families Without the Laws: The Fading of Colonial Law in French West Africa,” *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 64, no. 2: 355, doi:10.5131/ajcl.2016.0012.

49 Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

- in favor of an emphasis on the process of colonial rule.
4. The “reversal of fortunes” hypothesis than Kendhammer cites approvingly is about how extractive and closed-access political institutions are worse for development than entrepreneurial and open-access ones. No arguments there. What is in question is whether European colonialism or pre-colonial legacies should be blamed for those institutions. The authors are unsure: European rule in places with extractive and closed-access systems that had made those places relatively rich prior to the Industrial Revolution “led to the establishment of, or continuation of already existing, extractive institutions in previously prosperous areas.”⁵⁰ Either way, their paper implies that intrusive and disruptive colonialism was the best thing, hardly an argument against colonialism.
 5. Kendhammer cites Vansina in support of the claim that “Central Africa lost as much as one-third of its population during the early years of colonial rule.” Vansina’s article is about the cosmology of the peoples of the Western Bantu language group, not about mortality rates relating to colonial rule. Kendhammer is referring to a single sentence where Vansina writes: “Central Africa may have lost half of its population and certainly more than one-third during the conquest.”⁵¹ Vansina’s citation is to a section of a Harvard study concerning the Belgian Congo colony founded in 1908.⁵² That section is *not* about the entire swath of Central Africa from the Cameroons to Mozambique. Looking at the reference itself, Vansina himself has misquoted it. The report quotes an earlier report on the Belgian Congo of 1919 which claimed that the population “has been reduced one-half.” It quotes this claim in order to state that it is almost certainly false. That is because population estimates for the Belgian Congo varied widely and remained pure guesswork. They were of “little value in drawing any precise conclusions.” The only firm conclusion it reached was that population was not increasing. The causes were multiple, including sleeping sickness, inter-tribal warfare, poor nutrition, female trafficking, polygamy, and the working conditions for men in European industrial and

50 Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, James Robinson, “Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of the Modern World Income Distribution,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117, no. 4: 1263.

51 Jan Vansina, “Deep-down Time: Political Tradition in Central Africa,” *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 341-362. doi:10.2307/3171791

52 Raymond Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

commercial enterprises.⁵³ Kendhammer's vast condemnation of European colonialism as a near-genocidal enterprise thus refers to a study that reaches no such conclusion and, according to a review at the time in the *American Sociological Review*, "is not grounded in sentimental anti-imperialism" given the "not infrequent praise for good results accomplished."⁵⁴

Health and Education

Economic development is closely linked to health and education. Here we see some uninformed attempts to discredit colonialism by taking absolute levels of health and education outcomes in the colonial period and comparing them to absolute levels today. Klein for instance writes: "At the time of decolonization, life expectancy in most African countries averaged around or a little above forty years. Today, most African countries have a life expectancy of over sixty years, often well over."⁵⁵ Again, while undergraduates may be forgiven, this is an unusual error for a credentialed expert. The standard for judging a governance system is not absolute differences across time—which will always by definition be improving because of technological advances and economic globalization—but comparative differences. Were these improving during colonialism faster or slower than the implied global or regional trendline and what about the rate of improvement before and after the colonial era?

The evidence shows that health and education improved dramatically under colonial rule separate from the gains that would otherwise have happened as a result of technical advance and globalization. For instance, using 284 country-decades 1730 to 1970, Cappelli and Baten showed that British colonialism had a significant and positive effect on human capital as a result of its approach to education, while non-British colonies, taken together, did not (but also did not make it worse).⁵⁶ Since the British colonies accounted for three quarters of all the country-years of colonialism, this result has wide implications. Moradi, for instance, was able to construct time-series data on the height of army recruits in Kenya to tease out the distinctive contribution of colonialism. One finding was that "the nutritional status of cohorts born twenty years before and after colonization did not change significantly." The second was that

53 *Ibid.*, 568, 570, 573.

54 Arthur Scott, "The Native Problem in Africa., Raymond Leslie Buell," *American Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 1 (1929): 128-129.

55 Klein, 46.

56 Gabriele Cappelli, Joerg Baten, "The Evolution of Human Capital in Africa, 1730 – 1970: A Colonial Legacy?" Centre for Economic Policy Research Discussion Papers, no. 11273 (2016).

during the colonial period “expanding health infrastructure, slightly favoring the central region and urban areas, improved the nutritional and health status of most Kenyans.” His conclusion: “the net outcome of colonial times was a significant progress in nutrition and health.” While anti-colonialism is “fashionable,” he noted, it is not supported by evidence.⁵⁷

Other studies have found a uniform, positive, and large effect of all colonial empires on health and education. For instance, Calvi and Mantovanelli found in a study of 183 Protestant medical missions in 1908 sponsored by the colonial government in India (and located along colonial-built railway lines) that the presence of those missions generated durable long-term improvements in health for Indians through improved hygiene, health behavior, and nutrition.⁵⁸

According to the theoretical model developed by Grossman and Iyigun, the gains in population size and health in the late colonial period created more “leisure” time for anti-colonial activism in Africa and Southeast Asia that may explain decolonization.⁵⁹ It is useful to pause to remind ourselves that the arguments I have made thus far in the paper have been described by critics as “Holocaust denialism.” Klein also charges that I ignore that “[c]olonial rulers ignored famines.”⁶⁰ Actually, I did not ignore it. I denied it, at least insofar as I made a passing reference to the general colonial outcome of rising food supply and security and in giving as an example food supply under Portuguese rule in what became Guinea-Bissau. While famines occurred, they were never “ignored” even if contemporary critics find efforts insufficient. Tom Young writes: “Whatever we think about Gilley’s article, then, the idea that colonialism can be summarized by reference to a gruesome picture of a Congolese peasant, a trite ‘what if it happened to you,’ scenario, and the cheap trick of its ‘tantamount to’ Holocaust denial is absurd.”⁶¹

Self-Government

57 Alexander Moradi, “Towards an Objective Account of Nutrition and Health in Colonial Kenya: A Study of Stature in African Army Recruits and Civilians, 1880–1980,” *The Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 3 (2009): 746, 719, 720.

58 Rosella Calvi, Federico Mantovanelli, “Long-Term Effects of Access to Health Care: Medical Missions in Colonial India,” *Journal of Development Economics* 135 (2018): 285–303, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2018.07.009>.

59 Herschel Grossman, Murat Iyigun, “Population Increase and the End of Colonialism,” *Economica* 64, no. 255 (1997): 483–493.

60 Klein, 39.

61 Tom Young, “The Gilley ‘Debate,’” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 57, no. 2 (2019), 333, doi:[10.1017/S0022278X19000090](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X19000090).

While many people assume that economic benefits dominate arguments for colonialism, it is the formation of states and preparations for self-government that dominated the self-understandings of colonial officials from at least the late nineteenth century onwards. Given that colonialism almost always intruded into alien empires, it enjoyed significant support from local actors. Resistance came from warlords and historic enemies of peoples placed under colonial protection. "In most colonial areas, subject peoples either faced grave security threats from rival groups or they saw the benefits of being governed by a modernized and liberal state," I wrote. Under those circumstances, "foreign control by a liberal state with its own robust accountability mechanisms is the closest that a people with a weak state [could] come to 'local ownership.'"

This is a fundamental point since many critics equate "colonialism" with "illegitimate and coercive rule by the white man." My claim took aim at a central article of faith of anti-colonialism and has thus been the subject of vigorous criticism. "European armies often marched uninvited into someone else's territories," wrote Klein. "[M]any colonial theorists talked about preparing Africans for self-government, but not much was really done."⁶²

Again, "uninvited" and "not much" beg for some definition and historical context. What precisely are those words supposed to mean? Klein seems to imagine some UN-sponsored international treaty with agreed upon metrics and constant monitoring and intervention by armies of bureaucrats and advocacy organizations followed on social media. In a statistical study of 143 colonial episodes, the Swedish economist Ola Olsson showed the positive colonial contribution to democracy.⁶³ A counterpart study by the Danish political scientist Jacob Hariri in a study of 111 countries showed that not to be colonized was to be saddled with an autocratic political system later on.⁶⁴ In other words, merely being a colony resulted in a diffusion of democratic norms, laws, and institutions, quite aside from whether the personal efforts of colonial officials in pursuit of self-government met the exacting standards of later scholarly critics.

For that reason, it is puzzling that MacWilliam claims that my article dismisses democracy as a "lower priority"⁶⁵ because I note that in many countries "the capacity for effective self-government is lacking and cannot be conjured

62 Klein, 43, 44.

63 Ola Olsson, "On the Democratic Legacy of Colonialism," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 37, no. 4 (2009): 534-551.

64 Jacob Hariri, "The Autocratic Legacy of Early Statehood," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 3 (2012): 471-494.

65 MacWilliam, 13.

out of thin-air.” To ensure “robust democracy,” I argue, requires taking a step back from the feckless pluralism of fake elections to bring in external institutions. Whatever the wisdom of my proposals, they certainly put democracy as one of the central goals of development.

A related issue is the formation of state borders. Lefebvre showed that in contrast to the “axiomatic” claim that African borders had been drawn by high-handed diplomats with no regard to local realities, in fact there was significant local input and fieldwork done to draw boundaries that accorded with political and economic (but not ethnic) patterns.⁶⁶ The appeal by colonial critics to redraw borders along ethnic lines, she argued in a separate article, “had the paradoxical effect of erasing the history of African political structures and the role of the local populations in defining colonial boundaries” and reflected a mistaken and prejudiced view “that the essence of Africans is to be found in their ethnicity.”⁶⁷ Thus, I wrote, Lefebvre had “noted” the self-contradictions of Africanists who criticize “[n]ew territorial boundaries . . . for forcing social integration while old ones are criticized for reinforcing tribalism.”

Taylor insists that I have misread Lefebvre: “At no point in her article does she hold that contemporary Africanists contradict themselves.”⁶⁸ Indeed, the bulk of her article is devoted to the critics of colonial boundaries and their demeaning ethnic essentialism. She says these critics demonstrate “colonial prejudice” that “still haunts much of today’s thinking about Africa.”⁶⁹ In thus criticizing the critics of colonial boundaries as “colonial,” Lefebvre exposes the contradictions of being an Africanist: you can be anti-colonial like her by rejecting primordialism, or you can be anti-colonial like those she writes about by embracing primordialism. Taylor is correct that I should not have written that this conclusion is “noted by” Lefebvre. A better phrase would be to say this contradiction is “highlighted by an examination of the work” of Lefebvre since the point being made is mine not hers. I hold however, that it is a well-grounded and fair interpretation of her work, and that the general point that Africanists contradict themselves by holding two diametrically opposite viewpoints to both be “anti-colonial” remains true.

66 Camille Lefebvre, *Frontières de sable, frontières de papier. Histoire de territoires et de frontières, du jihad de Sokoto à la colonisation française du Niger, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015).

67 Camille Lefebvre, “We Have Tailored Africa: French Colonialism and the ‘Artificiality’ of Africa’s Borders in the Interwar Period,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 37, no. 2 (2011): 199, 201.

68 Taylor, “The Case Against the Case,” 23.

69 Lefebvre, “We Have Tailored Africa,” 199, 202.

Other critics took up the “divide and rule” critique of colonial rule in rebutting my claims that colonialism advanced self-government and democracy. Khan for instance wrote: “The British exploited differences between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the sub-continent, creating deep resentments and divisions that persist today due to the 1947 Partition. Similarly, differences between the Hutus and Tutsis that led to the Rwandan genocide were created and exploited by Belgian colonizers.”⁷⁰

The old saw about “divide and rule” is indeed widely promoted by the likes of Khan who imagine their homelands as integrated, multi-ethnic utopias prior to the White Man. Others argue that existing divisions were institutionalized by colonial rule and but for colonial rule would not have erupted into inter-ethnic conflicts and later problems for democracy as they did. As Muslim League founder Maulana Mohammed Ali remarked during talks in London in 1930: “We divide and you rule. The moment we decide not to divide you will not be able to rule.”⁷¹ However, other scholars argue that this is not the case, and that colonial rule reduced, rather than worsened, this threat, and in turn made democracy more rather than less likely. In a recent paper making use of a novel experiment in three towns in Rajasthan, India, Latika Chaudhary and colleagues find that colonial institutions left stronger legacies of social cooperation than non-colonial ones.⁷² From this latter viewpoint, the “divide and rule” critique of colonial rule was really just a form of nationalist rhetoric masquerading as victimization claim.

Khan also stipulates a consensus where none exists. On the question of Rwanda and Burundi, for instance, Uvin concluded: “Burundians, Rwandans, and outside specialists of the region *disagree almost totally* on the nature of pre-colonial society . . . [and on] the impact of colonization . . . There is no scholarly consensus on answers to these questions.”⁷³

It is interesting to think that had Ethiopia been under any sustained colonial rule, anti-colonial scholars would by now have produced a vast corpus blaming ethnic conflict between the dominant Amhara and the minority groups like the Tigray and Oromo on the enduring malign legacies of colonial rule. Since no

70 S. Khan, “The Case Against ‘The Case for Colonialism.’”

71 G. Allana, *Pakistan Movement: Historical Documents*, 3rd ed., ed. (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1977).

72 Latika Chaudhary, Jared Rubin, Sriya Iyer, Anand Shrivastava, “Culture and Colonial Legacy: Evidence from Public Goods Games,” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 173 (2020): 107-129, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2020.03.005>.

73 Peter Uvin, “Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different Paths to Mass Violence,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 3 (1999): 254, doi:10.2307/422339.

such cop-out exists, they must turn to what are better explanations: bad policies, such as the pastoral land policies in southern Ethiopia studied by Tache and Oba and bad governance, such as the failure to implement decentralization studied by Mengisteab.⁷⁴ Denied the “colonialism made me do it” explanation, scholars of Ethiopia instead provide causally compelling explanations of that country’s plight.

Colonial Violence

The study of violent encounters between colonial police or military forces and various native rivals forms a cornerstone of much anti-colonial historiography. Such encounters are usually highlighted in order to make the general claim that colonialism was illegitimate and criminal. For instance, the Library of Congress catalogue lists no fewer than thirty books written about the 379 people killed by a British detachment at Amritsar (or Jallianwala Bagh, India) in 1919. Much less, by contrast, is written about pre-colonial or post-colonial massacres in these countries, including those committed by government forces.

In the article, I make only a brief mention of colonial violence because in most cases I believe it was justified and in cases where it was not, it never rose to a level that rendered colonial rule as such illegitimate. In the oft-cited case of the Herero war against German colonial rule in German Southwest Africa from 1904 to 1906, for instance, the initial German response was justified and restrained.⁷⁵ Only later, with a shift in battle strategy on the ground under Lothar von Trotha, did the German campaign become unintentionally brutal. The changed strategy, wrote Kuss, “emerged entirely independently of any conscious decision for or against a strategy of concerted racial genocide.” Trotha, she argued, “did not intend to bring about a situation in which the Herero would be subject to a slow death through adverse natural conditions.”⁷⁶ Citing the historiography of the Mau Mau rebellion in colonial Kenya as an example, I wrote:

[A]ny claim about . . . the level of colonial violence, requires not just assumptions about the scale of violence that would have occurred absent

74 Boku Tache, Gufu Oba, “Policy-Driven Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Southern Ethiopia,” *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 121 (2009): 409-426; Kidane Mengisteab, “Ethiopia’s Ethnic-Based Federalism: 10 Years after,” *African Issues* 29, nos. 1-2 (2001): 20-25, doi:10.2307/1167105.

75 Bruce Gilley, *In Defense of German Colonialism: And How its Critics Empowered Nazis, Communists and the Enemies of the West* (Washington: Regnery, 2022), chapter 3.

76 Suzanne Kuss, *German Colonial Wars and the Context of Military Violence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 74, 47.

colonial rule but also a careful measure of that violence relative to the population, security threat, and security resources in a given territory. One is hard-pressed, to take a prominent example, to find a single example of such care in measurement in the vast critical scholarship on the British counter-insurgency campaign against the Mau Mau in Kenya from 1952 to 1960 . . . At the very least, it is incumbent on scholars to show that the brutalities unleashed by the British in this campaign were not the likely result of a proportionate response given the context and scale of the threat. If this supposedly solid case is wobbly, what does it tell us about the lesser “violence” often cited as invalidating colonialism?

Taylor states that I provide “no reason” for my claims about scholarship on the Mau Mau and this in turn “sheds no light on the quality of the scholarship on other instances of colonial violence.”⁷⁷ But I cite the work of Elkins as failing this minimal standard and use the glowing reception of her work as evidence that the standards of research on colonial violence are hopelessly unscientific and biased. Is this not a reason and does it shed no light?

A failure to confront the “colonialism compared to what?” question is evident when critics cite “the Amritsar massacre.”⁷⁸ It is not just that there have been several massacres at Amritsar both before and after colonial rule which took far more lives. The general question is: did tragedies like the one in 1919 become more or less likely as a result of British rule? Simply scouring colonial history for “bad stuff” proves nothing, and indeed the fact that colonial governments so scrupulously documented the “bad stuff” bespeaks an accountability and transparency that was missing before and after colonial rule. Scholars who prefer to spend many delightful hours at the Public Records Office at Kew rather than in the trying and dysfunctional conditions of archives in post-colonial countries (if they even exist and are accessible) are falling victim to a colonial archives fetish.

Kendhammer also states that ninety percent of Africa’s conflicts are attributable to colonial rule while only ten percent have their origins in the pre-colonial period. His lazy reflexive citation here is to the work of Leonard and Strauss.⁷⁹ For a start, their explanation is threefold: colonialism, the post-colo-

77 Taylor, “The Case Against the Case,” 21.

78 Brandon, Sarkar, 80.

79 David Leonard, Scott Strauss, *Africa’s Stalled Development: International Causes and Cures* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

nial international system, and enclave economies, the latter two of which are not colonial legacies but legacies of Africa's encounter with the outside world. Moreover, only nine of the thirty-seven cases they consider have enclave economies. Even if colonialism is accused of creating weak states and enclave economies, why didn't post-colonial rules change that? Scholars have so trained themselves in structural determinism that they dare not ask such questions.

In any case, Kendhammer misstates the *central claim* of Leonard and Strauss: they state that ninety percent of countries *with* ethnic conflicts, not ninety percent *of* ethnic conflicts, can "most often" be traced to colonial, not pre-colonial causes.⁸⁰ More important, he cites them without seeming to recognize that they merely assert this claim without *any* evidence, not so much as a lazy reflexive citation of alleged evidence. To foreclose the discussion, they declare that "almost no contemporary conflicts correspond to ones found in precolonial times" and that attempts to show otherwise are "racist" and "offensive."⁸¹ Much work has shown the opposite: the overwhelming causal role of pre-colonial ethnic formations ("tribalism") on contemporary African conflict, as in the work using a new dataset of pre-colonial formations constructed by Paine.⁸²

This is in addition to the mainstream attention among conflict scholars to postcolonial decision-making by African elites. In other words, the "unsophisticated" and "racist" popular perception of Africa as wracked by pre-colonial tribalism and post-colonial corrupt rulers— notions that scholars take it upon themselves to beat out of their students—turns out to be a pretty good explanation. Klein writes that "[m]any of the students who enter our classes do so with ideas similar to Gilley's."⁸³ Perhaps those students know more than we give them credit for.

Concepts and Anchoring Vignettes

A common problem for historians and many social scientists is the failure to define concepts in a way that they could be properly measured. The sweeping and emotionally-charged denunciations of colonialism by many critics of my paper leave the reader puzzling about how they are defining their terms, what

80 *Ibid.*, 59.

81 *Ibid.*

82 Jack Paine, "Ethnic Violence in Africa: Destructive Legacies of Pre-Colonial States," *International Organization* 73, no. 3 (2019): 645-683, doi:10.1017/S0020818319000134.

83 Klein, 39.

evidence they would use to measure them, and how they reach conclusions they do. Klein, for example, offers a blanket summary of colonialism as “authoritarian, racist and often stagnant.”⁸⁴

If you are already predisposed to accept that characterization, I suppose you thump the desk with “Hear, hear!” and then cite Klein’s article as “evidence” that colonial rule was authoritarian, racist, and often stagnant. If not, then you ask: “by what standard?” Compared to the pre-colonial era and the likely counterfactual (as shown in Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, or Haiti)? Certainly not. Compared to what colonial powers could have achieved if they had tried harder or done a better job? Doubtful given the constraints of the era which Klein seems to magically wish away with his calls for more spending, education, and intrusive governance. Compared to what came after colonialism? No, with very few exceptions. So what exactly does his statement mean?

If the history profession still considers itself a social science that approaches questions and makes claims based on logic, evidence, and shared standards of justification—as opposed to being a branch of literary theory devoted to moralizing and flights of emotional fancy—then his statement is false.

Similarly, Kendhammer, in a typical imputation, charges me with ignoring the “violence, discrimination, and repression” of colonial rule. I am not sure how to respond to such blanket indictments, except to say: please define your terms. A key role for the historian, or social scientist, is to ensure that concepts like “discrimination” do not become useless through free-form interpretation using modern norms. Gary King and colleagues, for instance, have shown the importance of using “anchoring vignettes” so that concepts have validity when used in social research.⁸⁵ In the case of studying forms of political rule that are a century or more in the past and involve cultural contexts none of us could imagine, anchoring a concept like “violence” or “discrimination” or “racism” takes on major significance.

To make an obvious point, most contemporary scholars in the social sciences and humanities consider their own liberal democracies to be rife with “violence,” “racism,” and “exploitation” by ruling systems. What possible chance is there that they could reach an objective assessment of colonial ruling systems?

84 *Ibid.*, 49.

85 Gary King, Christopher Murray, Joshua Salomon, Ajay Tandon, “Enhancing the Validity and Cross-Cultural Comparability of Measurement in Survey Research,” *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (2004): 191-207, doi:10.1017/S000305540400108X.

Slavery

Klein allows that one of “the few things” I get right in my paper is that colonialism ended the slave trade and with it much of slavery itself,⁸⁶ recalling the folk memories he uncovered during his doctoral research in Senegal in the 1960s. British legal abolition of the slave trade came in 1807 and of slavery itself in 1834, so anti-slavery activism is one of the fundamental shifts that defined post-1824 colonialism that my paper defends. Actually, my claim in this paragraph is not so much about the ending of the slave trade—which is beyond dispute—but about how contemporary anti-colonial critics faced with this fact “squirm and fidget . . . because it puts the greatest strain on their ‘colonialism bad’ perspective.”

Khan, in her critique, illustrates the point. She insists that the claim that colonialism brought an end to slave-trading is “ridiculous” because pre-1824 colonialism was also responsible for its expansion: “Colonizers . . . created the slave trade. Systematic decolonization and subsequent wars of independence eventually ended the slave trade.”⁸⁷ She makes logical and empirical mistakes, both whoppers really. Early and late colonialism were different phenomenon, which as a result had different effects. As to the empirical question, in addition to being unsupported by any research I am aware of, her claim is flatly contradicted by that old friend of the historian: chronology. Most slavery had disappeared by the mid-nineteenth to late-nineteenth centuries as a result of imperial expansion. Independence did not come for a century.

How can a cause come a century after an effect? Khan’s claim here is simply untenable. Oddly, one of the fidgeters I cite is Klein himself, who in an introduction to an edited volume with a co-editor wrote of the “flaws and hypocrisies of colonial policies” that “compromise with their principles” for a variety of practical reasons.⁸⁸ Although I did not cite these passages, they are indeed as good as any in showing the utopian and unrealistic ways that scholars approach questions relating to colonialism. What a luxury it is to sit in one’s study poo-pooing the “compromises” and “flaws” of complex governance questions of two-centuries ago, never admitting the possibility, much less adopting an analytical lens

⁸⁶ Klein, 42.

⁸⁷ Khan, “The Case Against ‘The Case for Colonialism.’”

⁸⁸ Suzanne Miers, Martin Klein, “Introduction,” in Suzanne Miers, Martin Klein, eds., *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1999), 1-15, esp. 2, 5.

to understand normative judgements. Like Khan, Klein makes my point all too well.

Finally, Kendhammer, as well as Taylor, cites evidence on the negative consequences of the slave trade for Africa as an argument against colonialism, again either ignoring my focus on post-1824 colonialism or simply deciding that all alleged crimes of the West need to be thrown into the hamper when the argument requires it. Kendhammer cites Nunn and Wantchekon. Actually, their paper is not about the negative effects of only “the transatlantic slave trade,” as Kendhammer writes, but the negative effects of “Africa’s four slave trades (the transatlantic, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and trans-Saharan) between 1400 and 1900,” even though data is available only on the first two. Delving deeper, both Kendhammer and Taylor miss the main finding of this article as a result of their lazy reflexive citations: slavery explains almost nothing of contemporary social trust levels in Africa, despite the article’s title “The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa.” The magnitude of the effect is *very* small, ranging from a standardized coefficient of 0.10 to 0.16. As the authors insisted heroically in an unpublished version of the paper: “These effects are not enormous, but they are not trivial either.”⁸⁹ As to the strength of the relationship when controlling for other factors, it is indeed trivial. The contribution of slave exports to overall explained variation is between one and two percent, in effect a rounding error.⁹⁰ Again, reflexive citations intended to pummel the reader into agreement can go disastrously wrong in the hands of motivated reasoning.

Taylor cites a different work by Nunn on “A Model Linking Africa’s Past to Its Current Underdevelopment.”⁹¹ It posits that the slave trade and colonial rule forced Africans out of productive labor and into unproductive activities like banditry, migration, and government jobs, which caused path dependent effects on future development. I do not want to gainsay Nunn’s rigorous and important paper, except to say that when he delved into the former (and allegedly worst) period, the effects turned out to be minimal. There is also, as mentioned, a robust econometric literature cited above showing the opposite. A World Bank study argued that unlike India, Africa’s “relative weakness or absence of states, classes, literacy and cities” in the pre-colonial period critically explained

89 Nathan Nunn, Leonard Wantchekon, “The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa,” NBER Working Papers, 14783, 2009, 25.

90 Nathan Nunn, Leonard Wantchekon, “The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa,” *American Economic Review* 101, no. 7 (2011): 3229, 3234, doi:10.1257/aer.101.7.3221.

91 *Ibid.*

its inability to productively embrace and engage with colonial institutions.⁹² Again, to make my main point without taking sides: claiming that my paper is “discredited” or “offensive” is to ignore the significant debates and research in which it is squarely situated.

Costs and Benefits

In assailing my reference to the “objective costs/benefits” approach, many critics fly off the handle. Brandon and Sarkar write: “How many miles of railroad built by the colonial powers or children educated in missionary schools equate to the worsening effects of the El Niño famines by imperial policies, the indignities produced through the application of scientific racism, or the systematic employment of torture in the Algerian War?”⁹³ Actually, I don’t know, but it is a good question, especially once one discounts the reference to the work of the Marxist union activist Mike Davis claiming that nineteenth century global droughts were, in the mocking words of agricultural economist Vaclav Smil, “murderous global conspiracies planned and executed by a small number of zealots from the smoggy capital of Victorian England.”⁹⁴ My guess is that many colonial subjects would prefer the life-saving gains of education and infrastructure even after taking into account the indignities of petty racism or the excesses of justified counter-insurgency operations.

Critics like Kendhammer tend to use “cost-benefit analysis” as a byword for “cold-hearted and utilitarian calculations based on money” or some such vague characterization. They have little idea about this policy analysis method. If they understood it better, they would know that its main purpose is to elucidate the implications of different scope, weighting, and valuation strategies in policy analysis mainly for the purpose of stress-testing hypotheses and double-checking other methods. As I wrote: “One main challenge of this research is to properly enumerate the things that matter and then to assign them weights, weights that presumably vary with time and place.” Critics studiously ignored my direct quotation from Abernethy that there is at minimum a plausible cost/benefit strategy under which “the case for colonialism is strong.”⁹⁵ I can only assume that they worried that my argument might benefit from its clear appeal

92 Nathan Nunn, “Historical Legacies: A Model Linking Africa’s Past to Its Current Underdevelopment,” *Journal of Developmental Economics* 83, no. 1 (2007).

93 Brandon, Sarkar, 93.

94 Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: New York: 2001); Verso. V. Smil, “The Shadow of Droughts’ Deaths,” *Science* 292, no. 5517 (2001): 644–645.

95 Abernethy, 403.

to such a reputable scholar. By rushing to the blackboard to scribble down the most outraged reference they can recall on the “costs” side, whatever its dubious quality, they make my point more eloquently than I could have.

Legitimacy

Khan prefaces her critique of my article to declare that it is “offensive.”⁹⁶ I’m not sure what that means or why it is relevant. But one aspect of the article that clearly gave offense to anti-colonial critics was my claim that colonialism was by and large subjectively legitimate among the colonized. The reason this gave offense, I have since learned, is that many scholars define colonialism as illegitimate alien rule, thus foreclosing the empirical study of its legitimacy by definitional fiat. To even suggest that colonialism was sometimes or often empirically legitimate was, for these scholars, to debunk their preferred concept of colonialism altogether and thus to open their work to unwelcome scientific scrutiny. The relevant paragraph in the article read:

Millions of people moved closer to areas of more intensive colonial rule, sent their children to colonial schools and hospitals, went beyond the call of duty in positions in colonial governments, reported crimes to colonial police, migrated from non-colonized to colonized areas, fought for colonial armies, and participated in colonial political processes—all relatively voluntary acts. Indeed, the rapid spread and persistence of Western colonialism with very little force relative to the populations and areas concerned is prima facie evidence of its acceptance by subject populations compared to the feasible alternatives . . . In most colonial areas, subject peoples either faced grave security threats from rival groups or they saw the benefits of being governed by a modernized and liberal state.

My quotation of a young black man in Congo from van Reybrouck—“When are the Belgians coming back?” which he reports was “a widely heard lament” that he heard “countless times” when he was there in 2010—⁹⁷ has invariably been put into *my* mouth by critics like Brandon and Sarkar⁹⁸ as well as by my university’s hysterical faculty union.⁹⁹ They clearly cannot face the fact that

96 Khan, “The Case Against ‘The Case for Colonialism.’”

97 David Van Reybrouck, *Congo: The Epic History of a People* (New York: Ecco, 2014), 255.

98 Brandon, Sarkar, 83.

99 “PSU-AAUP Condemns Professor Bruce Gilley’s ‘procolonialism’ Platform,” PSU-AAUP, Press Release,

many former colonial peoples wish their countries could return to colonial rule. Colonial rule was for these people not some philosophical idea but a practical alternative that needed to be weighed against other practical alternatives and was often found less wanting in comparison. Such “dangerous thoughts” clearly need to be policed by the scolds in the faculty lounge lest they become widely known. The same response occurred when, during a talk, I cited the words of a woman belonging to the Habe sub-group of the Muslim Hausas in the slave-based Sokoto Caliphate of the Fulani in what is today northern Nigeria on the coming of the British: “We Habe wanted them to come, it was the Fulani who did not like it,” she recalled.¹⁰⁰ Bjerk charged me with ignoring the “complexity” of this response because the Fulani remained politically powerful under the British and slavery did not disappear at once.¹⁰¹ But I never claimed otherwise, only that this reduced form under British colonialism was preferable to the Habe than its pre-colonial form. Why is that so hard to accept?

Klein admits that African support for colonial rule was another thing that I (sort of) got right. But he seems confused about the concept of legitimacy, which is simply the degree to which a political object is treated by those subject to its power as rightfully holding and exercising that power, a topic on which I have done conceptual and empirical research.¹⁰² As an empirical concept, legitimacy: (1) admits of degrees; and (2) can be measured only through behavioral and attitudinal responses of the subjects themselves, who are alone in a position to judge in light of contextual factors.

While admitting that “the vast majority of employees of the colonial state were Africans” Klein hastens to add that “those Africans did not necessarily work for colonial rulers because of affection for them.”¹⁰³ I am not sure what he means by “affection” but it is certainly not what I meant by “legitimacy.” I doubt we would ever want people to “love” their rulers or hold them in “affection.” They should love their families, their neighbors, and their gods. Africans may not have “loved” colonial rulers but they often treated them as legitimate—the preferable alternative compared to other feasible options.

2021.

100 Mary Felice Smith, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 67.

101 Paul Bjerk, “Commentary: ‘The Case for Colonialism,’” in Institute for the Study of Western Civilization, Texas Tech University, 2018.

102 Bruce Gilley, “The Meaning and Measure of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries,” *European Journal of Political Research* 45, no. 3 (2009): 499-525, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00307.x>; B. Gilley, *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

103 Klein, 41.

Klein cites my discipline of political science to show how I “should know” that interests, not ideas, motivate individuals. Actually, that is not the only way political scientists view the world, even if it is the outlook of Marxists in our discipline. Legitimacy is not a rationalization of self-interest but a wholly different concept, embedded in ideas of fairness and truth that, if anything, define “self-interest” more than vice versa. While we are a long way from being able to measure levels of consent and legitimacy in various times and places during the colonial era, the fact that colonial rule existed in so many places with a trifling overall presence and even less coercive force and was staffed mostly by natives is ipso facto evidence of its legitimacy.

I am not the only scholar who sees substantial evidence of the legitimacy of colonial rule. It is a truism that colonial rule depended on native collaboration and cooperation, a theory first propounded by Robinson faced with the brute fact that there were hardly any Europeans in most colonies relative to population and geography.¹⁰⁴ Yet anti-colonial scholars have been slow to admit the role of indigenous agency and to abandon their Eurocentric perspective on colonialism, preferring “helpless victims” rather than active participants, as the editors of one recent collection on various case studies of native collaboration argue.¹⁰⁵

This leaves two issues: the balance of cooperation and coercion; and the extent to which cooperation was based on prudential and self-interested calculations or ethically-grounded moral evaluations. Scholars struggle to handle these issues in anything except impressionistic, untheorized, and ultimately ideological ways. Bühner and colleagues, for instance, insist confusingly that cooperation and coercion were “often two sides of the same coin” and that most cooperation was simply prudential. In those rare cases where cooperators “internalized colonial normative discourses,”¹⁰⁶ this too should be treated as coercion, but of the mind rather than the body. Thus, by definitional fiat they make impossible any finding of legitimacy. Other scholars can then cite their work reflexively as “evidence” that there was no legitimacy. Any suggestion to the contrary is “offensive.”

Taylor charges that I misuse Hechter’s analysis of the conditions under which alien rule can be legitimate. Hechter’s work, I reported, showed that

104 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: Longman, 1972), 117-142.

105 Tanja Bühner, Flavio Eichmann, Stig Förster, Benedikt Stuchtey, *Cooperation and Empire: Local Realities of Global Processes* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 4.

106 Bühner et al., 6, 12.

“alien rule has often been legitimate in world history because it has provided better governance than the indigenous alternative.” I did not state that Hechter believes that alien rule has usually been legitimate, indeed he states clearly that he thinks it has not because of the very demanding conditions legitimacy requires for alien rule.¹⁰⁷ But his work is a theoretical not a general empirical study. Whether he is right about the empirical claim when applied to modern colonialism is separate from his theoretical analysis, which he illustrates with respect to three cases of legitimate alien rule, two of which are examples of British colonialism (in Hong Kong and Shanghai). Does this imply, as Taylor writes, that “the correct conclusion to draw from Hechter’s work is thus that that colonial rule is almost always illegitimate”?¹⁰⁸ Hardly.

The general point is this: absent any minimally empirically robust general measurement of subjective legitimacy in the colonial era, we are left with the default assumption that given the ease of its spread and the minimal degree of coercion and coercive forces relative to time, population, and geography, the standing assumption must remain that colonial rule was highly legitimate, a fact reinforced by the tumult that followed colonial rule, especially in Africa. The only way to upset that conclusion, absent empirical evidence, is to rule out legitimacy by definition and not surprisingly this is precisely the strategy that scholars have adopted. Having definitionally ruled out the legitimacy of colonialism, scholars have to sweep under the carpet any unauthorized emanations of legitimacy from the colonized. This was my finding in a 2016 paper on the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, whose naughty pro-colonial utterances have been studiously airbrushed from scholarly memory.¹⁰⁹

Several critics were peeved by my quotation of the autobiography of Congo’s first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, published in French in 1961 just months before he was killed (and in English posthumously in 1962). In it, he praised Belgian colonial rule for “restoring our human dignity” and “turning us into free, happy, vigorous, and civilized men.”¹¹⁰ As someone celebrated as an anti-colonial hero in the contemporary academy, it is often forgotten that Lumumba was an active “collaborator” in Belgian colonial rule by any measure: a postal clerk, the head of a local trade federation, and an insider in colonial society as

107 Michael Hechter, *Alien Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 141.

108 Taylor, “The Case Against the Case for Colonialism,” 25.

109 Bruce Gilley, “Chinua Achebe on the positive legacies of colonialism,” *African Affairs* 115, no. 461 (2016): 646–663, doi:10.1093/afraf/adw030.

110 Patrice Lumumba, *Congo, My Country* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1962), 12, 13.

head of Stanleyville's Association des Évolués. His book was written in 1956, a year before anyone even talked about creating an independent country. Taylor insists that "there is considerable doubt as to whether it represents Lumumba's true views."¹¹¹ Where is the evidence of this "considerable doubt"? I know of none. While scholars have speculated about *why* Lumumba suddenly became an anti-colonial radical, no one doubts that he saw himself as a moderate and as a supporter of Belgian colonial institutions during the colonial era. As Catherine Hoskyns, who undertook a study of the first post-colonial Congo crisis for the Royal Institute of International Affairs in 1962 to 1964,¹¹² wrote reviewing the book: "Those who expect from it an exposition of the dynamic nationalism for which he is now the symbol will be disappointed. Lumumba at that time was a self-conscious évolué and an exponent of gradualism, much more concerned to mediate between the Belgian colonial system and the mass of Congolese peasants than to demand immediate independence."¹¹³

The Achebe and Lumumba examples highlight the trained incapacity of contemporary scholars to imagine, much less acknowledge, evidence of the subjective legitimacy of European colonial rule. With that as background, it is hardly surprising that they found my suggestion to the contrary to be "offensive."

Decolonization

Despite characterizing my article as "seriously flawed," Klein admits that, in addition to colonialism's role in the abolition of slavery, the participation of natives in colonial rule, and the many problems of post-colonial governments, another thing I got right was that "African nationalists often did not have massive support."¹¹⁴ As Tom Young noted in passing, "This seems rather a lot to be right about."¹¹⁵ Lumumba's party, for example, won only twenty-four percent of seats in the first election in Congo of 1960. Most Congolese, especially traditional leaders, saw him as a threat. The same was true of anti-colonial nationalists throughout the colonies.

111 James Stacey Taylor, "Foreign Rule and Colonial Fictions," *CATO Unbound*, October 13, 2017, 26.

112 Catherine Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

113 Catherine Hoskyns, "Review of Congo, My Country," *International Affairs* 39, no. 1 (1962): 129-130, doi:10.2307/2610570.

114 Klein, 39.

115 Tom Young, "The Gilley 'debate'," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 57, no. 2 (2019): 332-337, doi:10.1017/S0022278X19000090.

The result was a rush to hand over power to political neophytes with little knowledge of or support from the countries they claimed to represent. It was a disaster, not just in Africa but also in South Asia, the Middle East, Southeast Asia. Klein coyly allows that “a lot of unpleasant things have happened since the end of colonial rule.”¹¹⁶ Might we too be tempted to call this understatement about a half century of human misery caused by decolonization a form of Holocaust denial?

Kendhammer takes the normal route for scholars in blaming the disaster on colonialism. As he writes: “many of the post-colonial world’s economic and political difficulties (including corruption, poor economic productivity and violence) are directly linked to colonialism and the geopolitical system it created.” An ontological issue that none of my critics grapples with is that every historical phenomenon is by definition rooted descriptively in historical antecedents which, in the case of former colonies, are by definition colonial. So, yes, the post-colonial disasters are “directly linked” to the colonial era, just as the colonial era is “directly linked” to the pre-colonial era. That tells us nothing about causes, counterfactuals, and where the blame lies. My paper lays the blame for this disaster squarely on the nationalist leaders and their post-colonial leadership, as well as on Cold War pressures to decolonize.

Kendhammer offers two reflexive citations to bolster his claim. One is Nunn’s 2007 paper discussed above which, as mentioned, hardly offers evidence for the depredations of colonial rule. The other is Bates’s 2010 revision of his book *Prosperity and Violence*.¹¹⁷ For the life of me, I cannot see how this reference substantiates Kendhammer’s claim since it is a general study of state formation. More typically, Bates is a scholar whose work on Africa has repeatedly emphasized pre-colonial social structures and post-colonial policy choices—not colonialism—as determinative. His more pertinent book, on state breakdown in Africa after the colonial period, makes this clear:

When thinking about the origins of political disorder in Africa, I can find no way of analyzing the origins of insurrection without starting with the behavior of governments. The conditions that led to the breakdown

¹¹⁶ Klein, 49.

¹¹⁷ Robert Bates, *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); Robert Bates, *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2010).

of order in Africa include the authoritarian nature of its states and their rulers' penchant for predation.¹¹⁸

Khan is another critic who claims I get decolonization wrong because of my claim that it was “sudden.” This is “empirically inaccurate,” she insists, because India’s independence “can be dated to the 1840s, when calls for independence from the British began” while “Algerian calls for independence from French rule date back to World War I.” Thus: “This may be news to Gilley but decades of emancipatory struggles is not ‘sudden.’” Note, first, her description of these struggles as “emancipatory,” as if it is a truism that colonialism was oppressive and independence was freedom-giving. Put that aside: my claim is that the process of going from colony to independent state was a sudden and largely unexpected movement in most places, whatever the decades of “calls” that preceded it. As noted, when Lumumba wrote his autobiography in 1956, no one was even talking about independence. Four years later a country was birthed. The same story could be told of dozens of colonies. When Julius Nyerere testified at the United Nations in 1955, he estimated that Tanganyika would require another twenty years before it was ready for independence. Instead, it came like a firecracker in 1961. Throughout the 1950s, British policymakers talked of a renewal and expansion of empire, a fact too often obscured by the retrospective lens of knowing that this did not happen, as the papers in an edited volume by Lynn showed.¹¹⁹ This may be news to Khan, but the view that decolonization was unexpected and sudden is the overwhelming consensus of those who were there.

Bring Back Colonialism

In my discussion of the three modes of reviving colonialism—through colonial governance forms, sovereignty-sharing with advanced countries, and the creation of charter cities—I make clear that the precondition for any such shift is “the consent of the colonized.” Given my view that colonialism itself enjoyed considerable consent and legitimacy, this condition is not applied in order to make a break with the past but to be consistent with it. Khan, among others, rejects any such arrangements on the grounds of “the repressive nature

118 Robert Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

119 Martin Lynn, *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?* (Basingstoke, England, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

of colonialism and the avenues it provides for gross violation of human rights.” I am not sure which liberal and rights-abiding post-colonial states she has in mind, or why she believes that rule by advanced countries makes this less likely, but if she has in mind her native Pakistan, then I believe my case is made.

Others simply doubt whether the consent of the colonized could ever be secured, and I agree with them that this is a tall order, as it was in colonial times. As I write: “at least in the initial phases, legitimacy will be demonstrated not by the holding of a plebiscite or by the support of organized and broadly representative groups, but simply by the ability of the intervening state to win compliance from key actors and get the job done.”

I cite the work of Sèbe¹²⁰ on “the resurgence of official and social respect” for “the founding figures of Western colonialism in Africa” to suggest that his concept of “cosmopolitan nation-building” that embraces the colonial past fits well with the revival of colonialism I am proposing. Several scholars, including Sèbe himself, have taken issue with my use of his work to reach conclusions not authorized by post-colonial groupthink. Sèbe, who declares my essay “deeply objectionable” on moral grounds, claims I make “selective use” and “misrepresent” his article.¹²¹ But his critique is not about my use of the facts he cites but only about reaching different conclusions about the implications, admittedly a distinction I could have made more clear. As he wrote: ‘While my research certainly offered an innovative framework of interpretation in an attempt to make sense of the resurgence of European imperial heroes in Africa, my argument that this new trend reflects a ‘post-racial form of cosmopolitan nation-building’ cannot be interpreted in any way as supporting, implicitly or explicitly, a ‘case for colonialism.’”¹²² I beg to differ. Khan charges that I ignore the “complex and multi-layered” conclusions reached by Sèbe and that my article “blatantly ignores postcolonial scholarship.”¹²³ Again, if my error is to have reached conclusions that differ from those of Sèbe about the facts he uncovers, and in doing so steered clear of the jargon-ridden and ideologically-charged “post-colonial scholarship,” then I plead blessedly guilty as charged.

120 Berny Sèbe, “From Post-Colonialism to Cosmopolitan Nation-Building? British and French Imperial Heroes in Twenty-First-Century Africa,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42 no. 5 (2014): 936-968, doi:10.1080/03086534.2014.959720.

121 Berny Sèbe, “The Case Against Historical Anachronism,” CATO Unbound, October 11, 2017.

122 Berny Sèbe, “How Birmingham research into cultures of empire feeds into worldwide debates about colonialism,” *Modern Languages News*, University of Birmingham, December 22, 2017.

123 Khan, “The Case Against ‘The Case for Colonialism.’”

Like other “studies” fields introduced in the 1960s with explicit and mandatory ideological doxologies, “post-colonial studies” is a field that lacks scientific conditions like falsifiability, openness to new data, and intellectual pluralism. Rodriguez too charges me with not adopting a post-colonial perspective, including requisite denunciations of capitalism, pollution, and mental health issues in the West. “The problem with Gilley’s case for colonialism is the lack of rigor, his inability or unwillingness to vigorously and transparently challenge his own beliefs, values, and fears—in a word, his perspective.”¹²⁴ I will not claim to be superhuman in transcending my perspectives. I would ask, however, whether the same strictures apply to my critics, including Rodriguez. Has he so fully internalized Third World victimology and hatred of the West (where he lives) that his own perspective too has become an obstacle to truth? Isn’t the point of science to question our perspectives?

Criticisms of my discussion of the human catastrophe that became Guinea-Bissau after the flight of Portuguese rulers are particularly instructive. MacWilliam charges that I fail to provide “any detail on its colonial condition” and do not consider the possibility that “the character of Portuguese colonialism had anything to do with” its anti-colonial disaster.¹²⁵ Actually I have quite a bit to say about its colonial condition, a full 433 words, practically a treatise given the word count limitations of the article. The direction of that discussion is made clear in those 433 words: Portuguese rule brought stability, new institutions, market relations, and growing health and food supply, all of which was a necessary beginning for any hopes of a viable country. It had ruled only since 1936, with a world war that delayed any efforts at governance until Portugal’s First Development Plan of 1953. In the colony’s budgets for 1952 and 1953, infrastructure accounted for twenty-seven percent of spending, health for twenty-five percent, and police and military for nineteen percent.¹²⁶ Portugal itself was an impoverished country at the time and was an authoritarian regime until 1974. This, MacWilliam argues, “would not seem to fit the description of liberal colonial governance.” Why not? Despite the blanket description of “authoritarian regime,” Portugal in the postwar era was characterized by plural institutions that laid the foundations for its successful transition to democracy. Given

124 Amardo. Rodriguez, “A case against colonialism,” *Postcolonial Studies* 21, no. 2 (2018): 258, doi:10.1080/13688790.2018.1474705.

125 MacWilliam, 22.

126 Rosemary Galli, “Capitalist Agriculture and the Colonial State in Portuguese Guinea, 1926-1974,” *African Economic History* 23 (1995): 51-78, doi:10.2307/3601726.

its small size, Portuguese Guinea had only a small advisory council to the governor rather than a legislature. It was run much like Hong Kong a generation earlier. I was quite intentional in choosing this colony because it was ruled by a relatively illiberal and poor European nation with a bad reputation compared to Britain and France. Choosing the Bahamas or Botswana would make the argument easy. Instead, I chose a hard case and found the case for colonialism no less compelling.

As to whether Portugal's comparatively executive-run and undemocratic rule of the colony in the 1950s explains the militancy of its opposition, much depends on how we explain the behavior of nationalist leader Amilcar Cabral. If he had grown up under the boot of Portuguese colonialists and faced repression, one might make a case. But none of that is true. I offer Chabal's description of his behavior:

He was a Cape Verdean agronomist, born in Guinea in 1924, and educated in Portugal where he had been a brilliant student. He was at the time regarded as a young and promising engineer. He had published widely in his field and was highly regarded by his Portuguese colleagues. Unknown to them, however, he had steeped himself into political and social literature while a student in Lisbon. He had become thoroughly acquainted with the cultural movements (most notably Negritude) which had led so many privileged and educated young Africans to 'return to their African roots'. Unlike many, however, he had become determined to go beyond this cultural revolt and to seek an end to colonialism by political means.¹²⁷

This speaks to a more general point about the dirty laundry of anti-colonial nationalists who despoiled the countries they claimed to "liberate." Most of their ideas and violence were hatched among radicals in Europe who exported anti-colonialism with a missionary vigor. The many scholars who celebrate the central role of Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and London in creating and exporting anti-colonial ideology reveal quite clearly its lack of indigenous roots. That many colonial subjects became addicted to claims that all would be paradise if they ousted colonial rulers was not a surprise. But blaming it on the colonial system itself is to get things exactly backward. MacWilliam is correct that I do

¹²⁷ Patrick Chabal, "National Liberation in Portuguese Guinea, 1956-1974," *African Affairs* 80, no. 318 (1991): 75-99.

not believe that “the character of Portuguese colonialism had anything to do with” its anti-colonial movement. If Portugal is at fault, it is the radicals in the cafes of Lisbon who should be blamed.

Academic Standards

While scholarly critique is central to the academic vocation, the critiques lodged against “The Case for Colonialism” discussed above have been used by scholars to seek to censor and punish me as a professional. While some of the critics make clear that they oppose such censorship, they contribute to an eco-system in which this is the predictable result. By engaging in such shoddy and erroneous critique, they make it possible for others to claim that my article fails “academic standards.” The main instances in which these criticisms have been used include:

1. Farhana Sultana of Syracuse University, who started one of the petitions calling for the article to be retracted and for Princeton to revoke my Ph.D., cited the critiques by Khan and Kendhammer. She argued that it “downplayed or overlooked colonialism’s legacies, cherry-picked data, was full of historical inaccuracies and misrepresentations, poorly researched, and distorted truths.” As such, it was “hate speech” and “Holocaust denialism.” In the future, “instruments and systems” should be put in place to silence people like me.¹²⁸
2. The publisher Rowman & Littlefield cited the critiques of Khan in order to justify a cancellation of a book series I was supposed to co-edit for them.¹²⁹
3. Hamid Dabashi of Columbia University citing the many critiques of my “shoddy scholarship” called for me to be “treated with utter disgust, with unsurpassed revulsion. He must be ostracized, publicly shamed and humiliated.”¹³⁰ His Ayatollah-like emanation is still difficult to credit.
4. The chair of my home department, Melody Valdini cited the work of Brandon and Sarkar as well as Rodriguez in an attempt to deny my post-tenure review in 2020, seeking to overturn a positive assessment by my senior colleagues. As she wrote citing Rodriguez: “The fundamental issue with Dr. Gilley’s research is his lack of an open-minded, scientific approach.”

128 Sultana, 232, 237, 238, 248.

129 B. Gilley, “An Academic Responds to His Cancellers,” *The American Conservative*, October 9, 2020.

130 Hamid Dabashi, “Moral Paralysis in American Academia: On ‘Civilised’ Scholars and Their Liberal Defence of Immoral Hate Mongering,” *AlJazeera.com*, September 28, 2017.

5. Kanika Batra of Texas Tech University cited the critiques of Khan and Kendhammer in an attempt to have a talk I was giving at Texas Tech cancelled.¹³¹
6. The faculty union at my home institution led by “academic freedom” director Jennifer Ruth, a film studies professor, issued an official censure of my work, citing “the overwhelming consensus among our colleagues who are experts in history and political science that Gilley’s research is not merely unpopular but rather discredited.”¹³²
7. Tanya Lyons of Flinders University in introducing her two commissioned critiques of Klein and MacWilliam in the *Australasian Review of African Studies*, joined in efforts to have my article censored through one of many petitions, and “specifically advised our membership not to raise the metrics of the TWQ article or journal by clicking on their DOI or URL.”¹³³

Summary of Lessons

The response to “The Case for Colonialism” is a black eye for the academy. In addition to censorious petitions, no-platform attempts, and professional punishments, scholars who took up the task of rebutting the arguments proved only how deeply the problems the paper addresses reside. Those scholars who insisted on rebuttal engaged in dishonest and shoddy engagement with the question, showing their motivations were no different from those acting as outright censors. If this is the “scholarly” response that anyone pointing out anomalies in the anti-colonial paradigm is likely to receive, how can scholars of colonialism in good faith consider *anything* that they write as scientifically valid? The field has become a cult, not a place of science. Those not willing to participate in the cult will choose other subjects. And the human costs of anti-colonialism will continue to be borne by those least able to respond.

131 Kanika Batra, “Protest letter against ‘The Case for Colonialism,’” Texas Tech University, November 26, 2018, https://web.pdx.edu/~gilleyb/TexasTech_DisinviteDemand.pdf.

132 “PSU-AAUP Condemns Professor Bruce Gilley’s ‘procolonialism’ Platform,” PSU-AAUP, Press Release, 2021.

133 Tanya Lyons, “Decolonising African Studies—The Politics of Publishing,” *Australasian Review of African Studies* 39 (2018): 7, doi:10.22160/22035184/ARAS-2018-39-1/3-12.