

## Slow Abolition within the Colonial Mind: British and French Debates about “Vagrancy”, “African Laziness”, and Forced Labour in West Central and South Central Africa, 1945–1965\*

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**ABSTRACT:** After World War II, French and British administrations in the African continent were in theory obliged to end forced labour. According to the rhetoric, compulsory labour practices disappeared altogether. However, the scrutiny of processes on the ground, comparing French Equatorial Africa and Northern Rhodesia under British rule, shows that the practicalities of the abolition of such labour practices were far more complex. In the French case, colonial officials actively planned for the reorganization of compulsory labour through the back door, mainly through the battle against “vagrancy” and “African laziness”. British administrators continued with practices organized by “native chiefs”, and attempted to maintain involuntary labour through a generous definition of “emergency situations”. In both cases, more profound analysis of the late colonial mind shows interesting continuities in the commitment of European officials to forced labour, which are likely to have been transferred, in part, into the views of the agents of postcolonial states.

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In the 1950s, the progress of most colonial empires towards decolonization seemed to be irreversible. A narrative, established by the late colonial administrations and affirmed by many subsequent historiographical accounts, holds that the French and British administrations, although sometimes reluctantly, organized the widespread participation of African elites in territorial rule; and that only the smaller empires under Belgian, Spanish, and Portuguese administration had not yet planned any transfer of power, and lagged somewhat behind with reforms. The agents of the

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two larger European colonial powers, and their governments, are said to have been committed to improving the living conditions of their African citizens, or imperial subjects, which in the end spurred on decolonization. This narrative and the appearances it is based on, however, veil the fact that there probably never was any “master plan” by which British and French politicians and administrators would have organized a rapid transition towards independence – and that decolonization frequently resulted from reactions to nationalist challenges in the territories.<sup>1</sup>

The negotiation and ratification of Convention 105 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1957 appeared to be a part of this trend. The convention was to strengthen the international ban on forced labour that had slowly established itself in the 1930s. Its function was to close loopholes such as compulsory labour in so-called emergency situations, the employment of army recruits for labour tasks, and, eventually, the existence of forms of labour that were controlled by intermediaries at the local level and had often been defined as “traditional” communal obligations. Although the French government did not sign the new convention until 1969 – with the United Kingdom being the first state to commit itself to this convention (with even Portugal, as an authoritarian colonial power, following in 1959) – it was obvious during the debates on the draft of the convention that none of the colonial governments could avoid taking a clear position of supporting the battle against involuntary labour.<sup>2</sup>

During these discussions of the 1950s, the British and the French were keen to present themselves as champions of good labour standards overseas. By 1957, only the technical terms of ratification appeared to pose some difficulties (mainly for the French), while questions of labour abuses organized or tolerated by the state were only mentioned in other contexts, in particular when “Western” governments accused the Soviet Union of abuses.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, apart from the very particular Portuguese case, compulsory labour was hardly an arena of conflict any more between the colonial powers and international, anti-colonial activists.<sup>4</sup> This apparent evolution appears to fit neatly into an interpretation of late

1. The most impressive comparative discussion and interpretation of British and French labour policies, concerning the introduction of social rights with their ambiguous effects concerning decolonization, is Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996). Cooper has extended this argument for French West Africa in his recent book; see *idem*, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, NJ, 2014), pp. 132–164.

2. Daniel R. Maul, *Human Rights, Development, and Decolonization* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 202–210.

3. Sandrine Kott and Joël Golb, “The Forced Labor Issue between Human and Social Rights, 1947–1957”, *Humanity*, 3 (2012), pp. 321–335, 325–326.

4. Daniel R. Maul, “The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present”, *Labor History*, 48 (2007), pp. 477–500, 483–486.

colonial rule as finally giving way to “real” development efforts and a smooth transition towards decolonization.

However, it needs to be asked what we really know about the mindsets of French and British and other European colonial administrators after the abolition of the compulsory labour systems, which had been so important before the end of World War II. I understand as the “colonial mindset” the main tendencies of thought and points of discussion that officials represented, and the commitments they formulated – all of which were constantly adapted to cope with new problems in the field, and modified in collaboration with local informants and auxiliaries. In other words, what I call the “colonial mindset” in this analysis was no lofty, detached European planning, in ministries in the capital cities of the colonial powers, or elsewhere far away from the experiences of colonial subjects, but the result of intense activity on the ground, in which local experience and interaction played a central role, together with entrenched racist stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> The evolution of the positions of colonial administrators is frequently obscured by the focus of scholars on the outcome of the decolonization process – which by 1955 was still a process whose results, in sub-Saharan Africa, remained open for the historical actors.<sup>6</sup> Between 1945 and independence, officials of all the colonial empires had to come to terms with the shrinking legal and practical possibilities of forcing colonial subjects to work, and the British and French were, as we have seen, leading parts of this mainstream. Whereas it is obvious that labour policies were experiencing significant changes in this period, it is, at the same time, still unclear how these changing labour policies influenced the colonial mindset of administrators.

This question will be addressed here through a comparative design, which relies on empirical evidence from the ground level that I regard as representative. I rely on examples from two larger regions in the Equatorial-Central zone of sub-Saharan Africa: British-ruled Northern Rhodesia and French-ruled French Equatorial Africa (AEF). These regions did not share a common border, but they did share similar problems of colonial rule. These include a common context of decolonization, where European settlers with their own agendas of maintenance of power had a role locally, but were not the principal driving force. Even as Northern Rhodesia became integrated into the Central African Federation (the short-lived federation of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland) in 1953, settler interests always had a

5. For further discussion of the notion of “colonial mind”, see Patricia M. Lorcin, “Reflections on the French Colonial Mind”, in Martin Thomas (ed.), *The French Colonial Mind, I: Mental Maps of Empire and Colonial Encounters* (London [etc.], 2011), pp. 3–25; as well as the other contributions to this volume.

6. Frederick Cooper, “Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective”, *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), pp. 167–196.

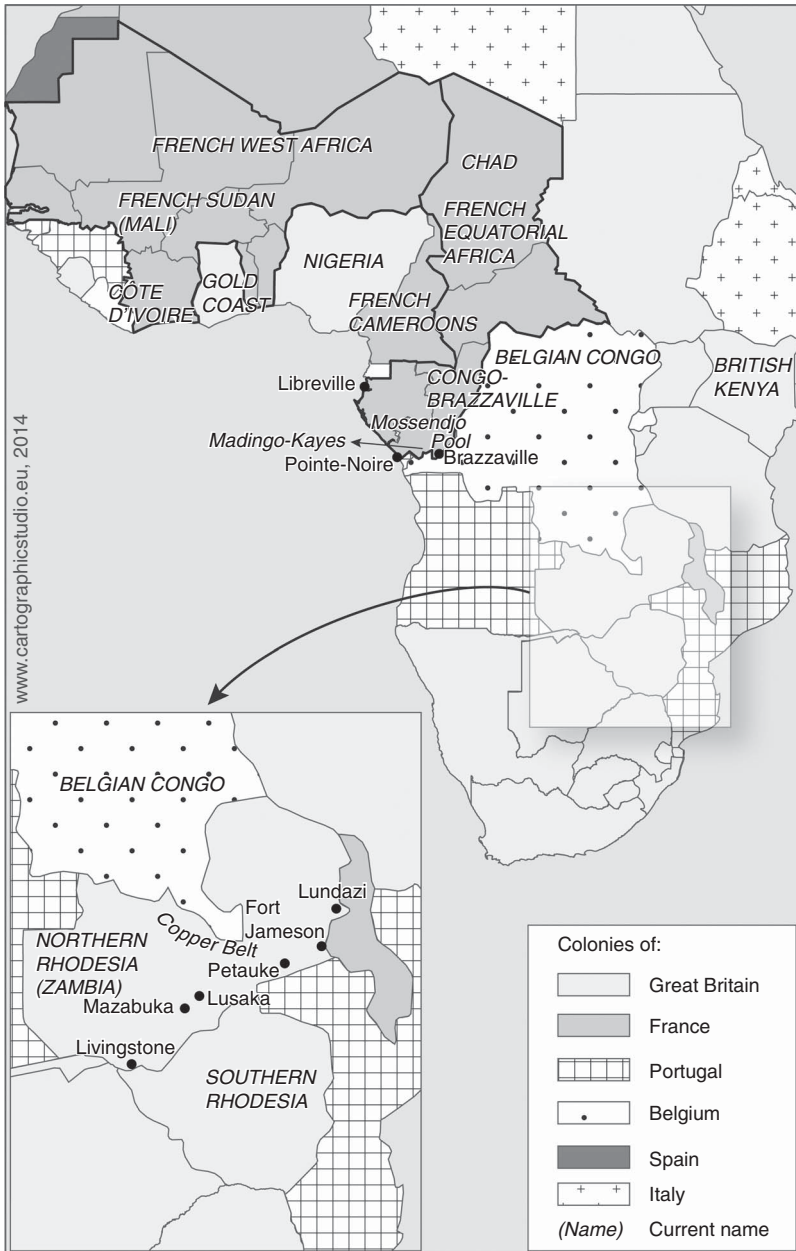


Figure 1. French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, and Northern Rhodesia in 1945.

limited impact upon administrative policies, as in the case of important French settler lobbies in Gabon or Middle-Congo in AEF – as opposed, notably, to Southern Rhodesia that became an unilaterally declared independent settler state in the 1960s.<sup>7</sup>

It will also be argued in this article that the issues discussed by officials from both empires were relevant and significant for broader processes of imperial reform and resilience. Both colonial administrations underwent considerable change as compared with conditions in the interwar period. The French empire made an impressive step towards reform by 1945. On the one hand, in the direct aftermath of World War II, the De Gaulle government opened the French National Assembly to African deputies, as a kind of reward for the loyalty of colonial Africans during the war years. On the other hand, although the system of election and representation was only slowly becoming more democratic between 1945 and 1957, the presence of Africans in Paris fostered the emergence of an elite group that created for itself its own strongholds in the African territories and at the same time became an important lobby group in the negotiation of the future of France's African colonies. This generation of African leaders, which had first been integrated into the late colonial state, transformed themselves into the leading politicians of the first decade after independence.<sup>8</sup> Although from 1963 they were increasingly being supplanted by military officers who secured power through a wave of coups d'état, it was the impact of this first generation that guaranteed the incorporation of some colonial practices into the new societies, while others were discarded or questioned.<sup>9</sup>

French officials of the colonial administration were compelled through the evolution of the French empire after 1945 to adapt to these changes. In discussions of the colonial past and their own role, many present themselves as early adherents of change.<sup>10</sup> However, during the Vichy

7. A summary of the role of white settlers in the Central African Federation is given in Martin Thomas, *Fight or Flight? Britain, France, and their Roads from Empire* (Oxford [etc.], 2014), pp. 209–218; the impact of settler lobbies in French Equatorial Africa is discussed in Florence Bernault-Boswell, “Le rôle des milieux coloniaux dans la décolonisation du Gabon et du Congo-Brazzaville (1945–1964)”, in Charles-Robert Ageron and Marc Michel (eds), *L'Afrique noire française: l'heure des indépendances* (Paris, 1992), pp. 285–296.

8. Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford [etc.], 2002), pp. 152–156.

9. An introduction to this context is Victor Le Vine, *Politics in Francophone Africa* (Boulder, CO [etc.], 2004), pp. 87–118; the removal of this first generation of African politicians is analysed in Alexander Keese, “First Lessons in Neo-Colonialism: The Personalisation of Relations between African Politicians and French Officials in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1956–1966”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 35 (2007), pp. 593–613, 599–604.

10. This spirit is well represented in Jean Clauzel (ed.), *La France d'outre-mer (1930–1960): Témoignages d'administrateurs et de magistrats* (Paris, 2003).

Period in French West Africa (AOF), French officials showed strong enthusiasm for overtly repressive measures<sup>11</sup> – and I will analyse in this article how the official mind was in the end able to cope with changes that were often introduced without the administrators' consent. The principal examples for this comparison are taken from the “federation” of AEF, in part because the political battles after World War II were less strong in French Equatorial Africa and tended to obscure less the social realities of the colonial administration on the ground.<sup>12</sup>

The case of British control in African territories at first glance differs considerably from the French case, because the British administrations managed to maintain for substantial periods a very low profile in international debates on repressive colonial labour policies. This was facilitated by the fact that the British government committed itself easily to most innovations in international labour legislation, and generally gave observers of conditions in sub-Saharan Africa the impression of a planned decolonization.<sup>13</sup> This apparent compliance with nationalist pressures tends to obscure the fact that British officials, at two principal points of the process, were opposed to the nationalist takeover: first in the Gold Coast and in Nigeria, and in a second phase in Kenya and the territories of the Central African Federation.<sup>14</sup> Much attention has lately been given to brutal British repression against the so-called Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya, but this has also deflected historical analysis from more in-depth research into the attitudes of British administrators in the other colonial territories.<sup>15</sup> I will for this comparison mainly employ examples from Northern Rhodesia, but, where possible, attempt to draw connections with other territories under British rule.<sup>16</sup>

11. Ruth Ginio, *French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa* (London [etc.], 2006), pp. 67–75.

12. On the political evolution of French Equatorial Africa after World War II, see Florence Bernault, *Démocraties ambiguës en Afrique Centrale. Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon: 1940–1965* (Paris, 1996), pp. 93–134.

13. A structural comparison between French and British colonial practices in sub-Saharan Africa, including the debates about the differences, is attempted in Véronique Dimier, *Le gouvernement des colonies, regards croisés franco-britanniques* (Brussels, 2004).

14. On the occasions of British opposition to independence, see John Cell, “On the Eve of Decolonization: The Colonial Office's Plans for the Transfer of Power in Africa, 1947”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 8 (1980), pp. 235–257; John Flint, “Planned Decolonization and its Failure in British Africa”, *African Affairs*, 82: 328 (1983), pp. 389–411.

15. There are few exceptions; see Frank Heinlein, *British Government and Decolonisation, 1945–1963: Scrutinising the Official Mind* (London, 2002).

16. In a recent edited volume, Northern Rhodesia's decolonization is excellently reviewed, offering new interpretations. These also have a relevance for the larger process of British retreat from southern and eastern Africa; see Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar, and Giacomo Macola (eds), *Living the End of Empire: Politics and Society in Late Colonial Zambia* (Leiden, 2011). Von Oppen's outstanding article on rural processes in the north-western part of Northern

Little is known so far about the effects that late colonial attitudes towards labour and practices of compulsory labour in particular may have had on practices in postcolonial African states. The conclusion of this article will provide some first reflections on connections between the two and also enlarge the comparative perspective on the late colonial state and its transition. I will attempt to give some examples that allow a linking of the results of the comparative discussion of late colonial mindsets to the debate on and the practices of involuntary labour within the independent states, at least for the early postcolonial phase.

#### FORCED AND FREE LABOUR IN COLONIAL SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: BRITISH AND FRENCH PREOCCUPATIONS

In scholarly research, forced labour loses its importance for French rule in sub-Saharan Africa after 1946, and it is nearly entirely neglected as a factor of British rule after 1925, with the exception of the years of World War II. From this perspective, compulsory labour was successfully challenged in the French case, and French worries were directed into other fields of labour, such as strikes, trade unions, family benefits, and the stabilization of an elite of free industrial labourers and public sector employees on the one hand, and worries about the uncontrolled movement of colonial populations into the cities on the other. In the debate about British rule over Africans, it is argued that the British did not use compulsory methods, except in the war years when compulsory labour services were employed to guarantee the availability of strategic resources. Scholars have been concerned with the “stabilization” of an elite of free labourers in places like the mines of the Copperbelt in the 1950s.<sup>17</sup>

These dominant perspectives on British and French labour policies reflect a changing focus of interest from the early 1930s into the late colonial states of the late 1940s and the 1950s. However, the neglect of questions of forced labour after 1945 does not reflect the reality on the ground, as I will show in this article. It is, of course, important to separate the discourse of colonial administrators from existing social conditions and practices in the territories, and while this article is interested in practices that were part of the experiences of colonial subjects in the

Rhodesia–Zambia also needs to be mentioned as a study that follows social evolutions in a particular region, but which is also interesting for British rural policies under the late colonial state; see Achim von Oppen, “The Village as Territory: Enclosing Locality in Northwest Zambia, 1950s to 1990s”, *Journal of African History*, 47 (2006), pp. 57–75.

17. Frederick Cooper ends his discussion of compulsory labour for the French case after 1946, and does not engage with any compulsory British practices after World War II; see Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, pp. 125, 148–153, 176–195.



British-ruled and French-ruled territories of west central Africa, it will show what these practices meant for the “colonial mindset” of local officials. Therefore, both concrete practices and plans of administrators, as they were reflected in their interaction with local auxiliaries and with colonial subjects, are central to this analysis.

While international pressures and the uneasy feeling within colonial administrations that substantial reforms needed to be brought in, led to the abolition of the more open forms of forced labour, a number of circumstances existed after 1945 on which colonial officials could rely to justify continuities in compulsory practices – to justify them with their superiors, with critics, and amongst themselves. The first was the element of “traditional labour”, much cherished by the British, where the abolition of labour practices in the local context was said to be contrary to “native customs”. The second was “emergency situations”, in which it seemed still to be acceptable to make African subjects work – even if it was against their will. During World War II the whole colonial economy in the French and British empires in sub-Saharan Africa had been conditioned by an emergency situation, which was used as an excuse to introduce harsh forms of compulsory labour and extract resources from African territories.<sup>18</sup> After 1945, this instrument was played less openly, but it continued to be important on several occasions, and could be relied upon in flexible and artificial ways.

A third mechanism that was employed to disguise continuities in forced labour practices, was the use of vagrancy legislation. Like the concept of “emergency”, the idea of “vagrancy”, linked to other, racist stereotypes of “idle” Africans, was very flexible and adaptable.<sup>19</sup> It relied upon a longstanding “tradition” of criminalizing “laziness”, which had been used widely in early modern Europe, and was connected to such concepts as begging, prostitution, and other “immoral acts”, and could be punished with hard labour. While in the interwar period, compulsory labour for “vagrants” had been used as complementary to other forms of colonial forced labour, it now became possible to inflict unfree labour as punishment for criminal and immoral acts, detached from other forms of forced labour that were no longer endorsed by colonial ministries. In the case of “vagrancy” after 1946, the discourse was far more important than the

18. For an overview taking both British and French colonial territories into account, see Raymond Dumett, “Africa’s Strategic Minerals During the Second World War”, *Journal of African History*, 26 (1985), pp. 381–408.

19. On the effects of anti-vagrancy policy and the definition of “vagrancy”, see the excellent discussion in Andrew Burton and Paul Ocobock, “The ‘Travelling Native’: Vagrancy and Colonial Control in British East Africa”, in A.L. Beier and Paul Ocobock (eds), *Cast Out: A History of Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global Perspective* (Athens, OH, 2008), pp. 270–301; and the other contributions in that volume.



practices of persecution, but anti-vagrancy measures were nevertheless used as an option and, again, the discussion of such measures sheds much light on the “colonial mindset”. I will now turn to the official abolition of, or retreat from, forced labour practices in the French and British colonial empires after World War II, which constituted the essential background for the reliance upon other forms of compulsory labour and the justification for these continuities.

In the case of the French empire in sub-Saharan Africa, the end of compulsory labour has been presented erroneously as a clear-cut, unambiguous termination of the practice. Obviously, the step of abolishing compulsory labour through a law that covered the whole empire, was impressive. For French colonial planners, the context after World War II seemed to make it necessary to sacrifice a number of the more repressive elements of colonial rule in the African continent.<sup>20</sup> Through a fundamental reform of African representation in French institutions, notably in the National Assembly, French politicians had brought a small group of Africans into parliament that would function as a very vocal lobby group opposing various elements of social discrimination against colonial subjects. In the aftermath of World War II, compulsory labour was probably the most contested of these elements. In a complex trade-off against restraint in other parts of colonial reform, the Houphouët-Boigny Law, named after the deputy (and future post-colonial President) of Côte d’Ivoire, enshrined the ban on forced labour within the French empire. This vote impressively reversed the war politics personified by *métis* Governor-General of French Equatorial Africa, Félix Eboué, who had always held that the French empire in the African continent was unviable without compulsory services for “tribal Africans”.<sup>21</sup> This evolution seemed to seal the fate of repressive labour structures in the French territories.

Historiographical studies about administrators on the ground have very much centred on Côte d’Ivoire, i.e. on French West Africa. In that territory, a particularly liberal governor provoked especially strong resistance during the period in which the abolition law was prepared.<sup>22</sup> When the law was finally voted on (11 April 1946), a considerable group of French colonial officials insisted that this would mean the downfall of

20. On the context of French measures of liberalization directly after World War II, see Chafer, *End of Empire*, pp. 55–61, and Martin Shipway, “Reformism and the French ‘Official Mind’: The 1944 Brazzaville Conference and the Legacy of the Popular Front”, in Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (eds), *French Colonial Empire and the Popular Front: Hope and Disillusion* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 131–151.

21. James I. Lewis, “Félix Eboué and Late French Colonial Ideology”, *Itinerario*, 25 (2002), pp. 127–160.

22. Nancy Lawler, “Reform and Repression under the Free French: Economic and Political Transformation in the Côte d’Ivoire”, *Africa*, 60 (1990), pp. 88–110.

all prosperous colonies under French rule. However, the fact that debates on abolition quickly disappeared seems to suggest that for all but the most “reactionary” administrators a consensus on the importance of ending compulsory labour had been reached.

This vision fails to take into account a number of clandestine continuities. Babacar Fall has rightly pointed out that clandestine forms of forced labour existed years after the 1946 legislation. He mainly highlights reservist soldiers who were redirected into infrastructure building.<sup>23</sup> However, this was not the only form of continued forced labour, and such continuity can be found not only in the more remote part of the empire that was French Equatorial Africa, but also in French West Africa.

In 1949, the French Inspector-General of Labour of French West Africa, Pierre Pélisson, gave a damning account of the situation of rural labour in the federation: the “natives” were said to evade their obligations and to show little respect for their contracts.<sup>24</sup> This was regarded as an immense problem. However, in any future research it would still be necessary to enquire further about conditions in the rural zones of AOF. For French Equatorial Africa the examples of continuity in compulsory labour are perhaps easier to find. As in most colonial systems, the French had before 1946 four major forms of compulsory labour recruitment: a labour tax, the *prestations*, which forced male individuals to work a number of days per year on public labour sites; pressures exerted upon locals to accept labour contracts with private owners; forced labour as punishment, which had been easy under the *indigénat*, a form of “native legislation” that allowed local officials and chiefs to punish individuals for disobedience, and, as I have discussed above, for “vagrancy”; and agricultural quotas that obliged peasants to plant particular products and, usually, to sell them to a specific agency.<sup>25</sup>

The *prestations* ended with the Houphouët-Boigny Law, and administrative intervention in the recruitment of contract labourers became more difficult. The *indigénat* was abolished together with forced labour in the

23. Babacar Fall, *Le travail forcé en Afrique-Occidentale française (1900–1946)* (Paris, 1993), pp. 282–286.

24. Archives Nationales Sénégalaises, Dakar, Senegal [hereafter, ANS], 10D4/34, Pélisson, Inspector-General of Labour of French West Africa, “Rapport Annuel 1948” (without number), 4 June 1949, pp. 11, 29–30.

25. On the *indigénat*, see Gregory Mann, “What was the *Indigénat*? The ‘Empire of Law’ in French West Africa”, *Journal of African History*, 50 (2009), pp. 331–353; and Isabelle Merle, “Retour sur le Régime de l’Indigénat: Genèse et Contradictions des Principes Répressifs dans l’Empire Français”, *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 20 (2002), pp. 77–97; for forced agriculture, see Thomas J. Bassett, “The Uncaptured Corvée: Cotton in Côte d’Ivoire, 1912–1946”, in Allen F. Isaacman and Richard Roberts (eds), *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London, 1995), pp. 247–267, and Richard Roberts, *Two Worlds of Cotton: Colonialism and the Regional Economy in the French Soudan, 1800–1946* (Stanford, CA, 1996).

National Assembly, but “vagrancy” remained: not only were officials concerned about the mobility of colonial subjects, but the existing, often very ancient, legal provisions also opened pathways to other forms of punishment for “vagrants” that did not require the *indigénat*. Finally, in AEF, probably different from the situation in most parts of AOF, forced agriculture simply continued.

Marius Moutet, Minister of Overseas France, had been very angry in 1946 about the various signs of resistance against the Houphouët-Boigny Law and insisted that he would no longer tolerate any forced agriculture.<sup>26</sup> However, ten years later, in the immense cotton sector of Chad in AEF, forced agriculture was endemic. Some administrators even described these forms of obligation as “state agriculture”.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that also in French West Africa some practices of forced agriculture continued and that, in the case of French Sudan (present-day Mali), these conditions were oppressive enough to make the phenomenon appear in the speeches of Confédération Générale du Travail trade-union leaders: thus, it did not disappear in the new panorama of free industrial and public labour.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to what is known about AOF – which may nevertheless be regarded as incomplete – the mindsets, plans, and practices that characterized the administration in AEF in that period have not at all been analysed; my interpretation will focus on that gap.

With regard to British colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa, the absence of studies of involuntary labour under British rule is the result of scholars accepting British claims about conditions in their colonies – although these claims probably do not, or at least do not always, correspond to local realities.<sup>29</sup> In terms of obtaining international acceptance of labour policies in the colonies, officials in the British empire were far more creative than their French counterparts. The British had championed the ILO initiative in 1929, which led to Convention 29 on forced labour; they had taken an active role in the battle against the remnants of slavery in the

26. Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, France [hereafter, ANOM], Fonds du Gouvernement Général de l’AEF [hereafter, GGAEF], 2H/2, Moutet, Minister of Overseas France, to Bayardelle, Governor-General of French Equatorial Africa (without number), 2 April 1946, pp. 1–2.

27. ANOM, Fonds Fraisse, 8APOM/3, Morin, Administrator of District of Kyabé, to Fraisse, “Enquêtes sur plaintes diverses de M. J. Charlot” (no. 23/CF), 9 August 1956, p. 2; ANOM, Fonds Fraisse, 8APOM/3, P. Eydoux, Administrator of District of Moissala, to Administrator of Region of Moyen-Chari, “Prix Achat du Coton” (no. 8/CF), 13 March 1956, p. 1.

28. ANS, 11D1/226, Bailly for Cornut-Gentille to Governors in French West Africa (no. 10/INT/AP.2), 14 January 1952.

29. Unsurprisingly, much of the focus on late British colonial labour policies has been placed on the fate of workers and commercial peasants, and their reactions, in the years of the Great Depression. For an example of this focus, see Moses Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens, OH, 2009).

extra-European world in the 1920s; and by 1939 they had convincingly sold an image of Britain as the only colonial state without recourse to compulsory labour. This image was partly due to public opinion in Britain that was indeed sensitive to repressive practices in the colonies, at least as long as these seemed to be directly controlled by the administration. It was also partly due to a different organization of these labour practices. Much of what the British called “native labour” in the interwar period was officially left to the chiefs, and many colonial officials argued that such practices, even if they were compulsory, had been “traditional” for ages.<sup>30</sup>

During World War II, British officials partly forgot their qualms about directly controlled compulsory labour.<sup>31</sup> The war effort seemed to justify a more rigid approach to labour organization. For example, labour was conscripted for strategic resources, such as in the tin mines of Northern Nigeria, or to guarantee the availability of food through the forced recruitment of agrarian labourers for settler plantations in both Rhodesias and Kenya.<sup>32</sup> At the level of the Colonial Office, many officials remained uneasy about the effect that such policies could have on public opinion in the mid-term, although they believed that they were unable to find any alternative to compulsory labour during the war years.<sup>33</sup> The often scandalous conditions in Nigeria’s tin mines, one of the most abusive sites of forced labour, made it even more difficult to resort to such practices.<sup>34</sup> Although it was complicated for the Colonial Office to downsize state control over labour recruitment again at the end of the war – given the

30. This mechanism, often described by colonial administrators as “communal labour”, has not yet found much analysis. The most recent contribution is Opolot Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya: The Legitimization of Coercion, 1912–1930* (Basingstoke, 2012).

31. David Killingray, “Labour Mobilisation in British Colonial Africa for the War Effort, 1939–46”, in David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (eds), *Africa and the Second World War* (New York, 1986), pp. 68–96.

32. On labour policies for the Nigerian tin mines, see Bill Freund, *Capital and Labour in the Nigerian Tin Mines* (Harlow, 1981). Compulsory labour on Rhodesian and Kenyan plantations during the war years is analysed in David Johnson, “Settler Farmers and Coerced African Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1936–46”, *Journal of African History*, 33 (1992), pp. 111–128; Ian Spencer, “Settler Dominance, Agricultural Production and the Second World War in Kenya”, *Journal of African History*, 21 (1980), pp. 497–514; Kusum Datta, “Farm Labour, Agrarian Capital and the State in Colonial Zambia: The African Labour Corps, 1942–1952”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14 (1988), pp. 371–392; and Kenneth Vickery, “The Second World War Revival of Forced Labor in the Rhodesias”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 22 (1989), pp. 423–437.

33. The National Archives, Public Record Office, Kew, United Kingdom [hereafter, TNA, PRO], CO 822/112/12, Seel, Acting Assistant Secretary in the Colonial Office, to Fitzgerald (without number), 25 November 1943.

34. Such concerns are, for example, expressed in TNA, PRO, CO 583/263/13, Gerald Creasy, Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Colonial Office, to Carr (no. 1937/12/43), 30 October 1943.

pressures of white landowners and concession companies – relief amongst administrators was considerable as soon as postwar colonial policy had again returned to a status quo in which repressive labour policies were absent, at least apparently.

In the following discussion I will examine, with a comparative approach, how the issue of involuntary labour was treated beneath the surface. In theory, two mechanisms of labour provision in the British case (instead of four in the French case) could have allowed continuity in forced labour: the support of private landowners through repressive measures against “deserters” from labour contracts and “vagrants”, including intervention in the recruitment process; and the delegation of powers to chiefs who would then be entitled to organize *corvée* labour, eventually in the form of a labour tax. The first measure could be combined with rhetoric about the stabilization of an industrial labour force, which is discussed by Cooper.<sup>35</sup> The second was a possible way to prolong practices of *corvée* labour that were more openly used in the 1920s and 1930s, and which have found some scholarly interest in the case of the Gold Coast.<sup>36</sup> Opolot Okia has recently shown, in his important studies on Kenya, that British administrators were very aware of the advantages that colonial economies drew from the employment of communal labour, on the back of colonial subjects.<sup>37</sup> He also points to the fact that continuity of the allegedly “traditional” and “communal” form of colonial labour is likely to have played a role under British rule even after World War II. My analysis will tackle this question by looking at the case of Northern Rhodesia after 1945 and by comparing it to the situation in French Equatorial Africa.

#### VAGABONDS, EVERYWHERE: FRENCH DREAMS OF COMPULSORY LABOUR AFTER ITS ABOLITION

A closer look at debates within the administration of AEF allows us to re-analyse the alleged end of forced labour in the “French colonial mind”. Such debates are especially significant whenever one tries to understand what organization of labour *without* forced labour meant to individual officials. In this context, we come across a representative range of

35. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, pp. 337–339.

36. Roger G. Thomas, “Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906–1927”, *Journal of African History*, 14 (1973), pp. 79–103; Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, “Colonial Forced Labor Policies for Road-Building in Southern Ghana and International Anti-Forced Labor Pressures, 1900–1940”, *African Economic History*, 28 (2000), pp. 1–25.

37. Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya*; *idem*, “The Northey Forced Labor Crisis, 1920–1921: A Symptomatic Reading”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 41 (2008), pp. 263–293.

opinions formulated by colonial administrators who held that the Houphouët-Boigny Law was not to be regarded as the end of labour obligations and “encouragement” of Africans to work. The military commander in AEF and Cameroun, Fernand Duchaussoy, set the tone in 1946 with a fervent indictment, in which he argued that freedom of labour had begun to provoke a “plethora of vagrants” coming into the urban zones instead of taking up rural labour as a necessary obligation. The latter phenomenon, Duchaussoy claimed, had already existed under the earlier system where compulsory labour had forced villagers to spend more time in their region of origin; however, it had then been well contained.<sup>38</sup> Only four weeks after the promulgation of the law in Paris, the Governor-General of AEF, André Bayardelle, also showed how little esteem he felt for the way chosen in Paris:

The natives need to be instructed that the removal of obligatory labour does not mean that labour disappears completely. They have to be taught about the moral and social character of the necessity of labour. In this sense, the officials of an administrative unit will use the chiefs of the land – who have their authority from unanimous designation on the part of their subjects – in order to distribute these principles amongst the autochthons.<sup>39</sup>

Even so, French administrators were pressured to refrain from forced labour, at least through the instrument of the *prestations*. The name of this measure stood for a labour tax, which had compelled the adult male population to carry out infrastructure labour for a number of days per year. It had involved whole families, as those had been charged to guarantee the transport of food to the labour sites, even if these sites were far away from the villages of the workers.<sup>40</sup> From 1946, such recruitment was no longer possible through the effect of the Houphouët-Boigny Law. In many of the rural districts, local administrators resigned themselves to the situation: even in the labour-intensive zones of Congo-Brazzaville, this type of forced labour slowly disappeared, although in the face of much local resistance on the part of individual officials.<sup>41</sup> The wood

38. ANOM, GGAEF, 2H/2, Duchaussoy, Brigade General, Commander General of Zone AEF-Cameroun, “Extrait du Compte-Rendu Mensuel (Mai 1946) de la Sécurité Militaire du Cameroun” (no. 663/2), without date.

39. ANOM, GGAEF, 2H/2, Bayardelle, Governor-General of AEF, to Governors of Gabon, Ubangi-Chari, and Chad (no. 66/API), 5 June 1946. All translations are mine.

40. ANOM, GGAEF, 6Y/5, Turenne, “Note: Prestations” (without number), 11 February 1929, p. 2.

41. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France [hereafter, CADN], Fonds Brazzaville, 83, Lucien Jacob, Administrator of District of Sibiti-Komono, “Rapport politique de l’année 1946” (without number), without date. Impressive examples of resistance by officials can be found in Archives Nationales Congolaises, Brazzaville [hereafter, ANC], GG 376, “Population de Madingo-Kayes” to Bayardelle, Governor-General of French Equatorial Africa (without number), 25 July 1946, pp. 1–2; ANC, GG 376, Acting Governor of Middle-Congo to

companies in this territory were amongst the most vocal complainants, as officials no longer pressured the local populations to accept labour contracts.<sup>42</sup>

The process of organization that had characterized the labour tax in many territories had depended upon the collusion of the chiefs, and the latter had sometimes used their position to enhance their own control over village communities. As their role in setting up the worker gangs of *prestation* labour ended after April 1946, the power of these chiefs was now considerably lessened.<sup>43</sup> In some regions, officials had been convinced that an undefined type of “customary labour” in the favour of the more prestigious chiefs would survive after the end of the *prestations*, but these hopes proved groundless. Reports and letters by colonial officials reveal that in districts like Mossendjo in Congo-Brazzaville, where the labour tax had been quite oppressive, locals who were encouraged by the chiefs to comply with the “traditional” part of their “obligations”, simply migrated out of their communities.<sup>44</sup> It became even impossible for many of the rural chiefs to maintain control over young women, who had in many cases constituted a last reserve of local community labour.<sup>45</sup> The signs seemed to point to the emergence of a free labour market, where neither the administration nor the chiefs could think of employing compulsory methods. The existence of urban centres, such as Brazzaville or Pointe-Noire in the case of the Middle-Congo, gave workers an additional motive to run away.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, it was obvious from the behaviour of wage workers, in particular in construction work, that these non-compulsory workers displayed a strong inclination to desert the sites at any sign of discontent and conflict. It is thus unsurprising that the French administration had little enthusiasm for these developments – and sought remedies to counter the effects of changed labour policies.<sup>47</sup>

Administrator of Subdivision of Madingo-Kayes, “Procès-verbal de passation de service” (no. 1352/AP.3), 10 July 1946.

42. CADN, Fonds Brazzaville, 77, Maillier, Administrator of Subdivision of Madingo-Kayes, “Rapport Politique: premier semestre 1945” (without number), 21 July 1945, p. 7.

43. See Alexander Keese, “Poser au village’: Un régime de travail en transition, relations de pouvoir, et la fin des prestations forcées au Moyen-Congo français, 1935–1958”, in Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto (ed.), *Trabalho forçado africano: Experiências coloniais comparadas* (Porto, 2006), pp. 349–366.

44. CADN, Fonds Brazzaville, 84, Ferrandini, Administrator of District of Mossendjo, “District de Mossendjo: Rapport Politique Annuel 1950” (without number), 10 February 1951, p. 22.

45. CADN, Fonds Brazzaville, 75, Perin, Deputy Judge in Pointe-Noire, to Da Costa (without number), 6 July 1948, p. 3.

46. CADN, Fonds Brazzaville, 78, Bancel, Administrator of District of Madingo-Kayes, “Rapport Politique: Année 1950” (without number), 15 February 1951, p. 1.

47. On social life in Brazzaville including in the late colonial period, see Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge [etc.], 1995).



Therefore, although the higher levels of the territorial administration did finally pay lip service to the abolition of forced labour, the mood on the ground was very different. Debates of the colonial administration in the districts and subdivisions, as in case of French Equatorial Africa, were not congruent with the new labour laws. On the ground, administrators, but also labour inspectors, continued to employ the same discourse on the “laziness of Africans” and their obligations to work, or the necessity to catch “vagrants” as they had before – and territorial governors and their staff were, in internal correspondence, very sympathetic to that. A principal issue was that, now that the administration could no longer extract labour from individuals as a tax, they could become liable to an extra tax if they could not prove any employment: and as many of such “vagrants” would not be able to pay this tax, they could then be imprisoned as tax defaulters and employed in road construction as prison labour. The Representative Council and the Governor of Chad introduced this modality as early as November 1948.<sup>48</sup> In Congo-Brazzaville, the council, including the large majority of its African councillors, was also inclined to convict individuals charged with “vagrancy”.

Here, the logic of the argument used to justify a new, more repressive legislation was to point to the dangers brought into urban life by a multitude of rural inhabitants who, free from their labour obligations in the villages, and avoiding the payment of taxes, came to the urban centres “to linger around”, in the case of young men, and “to prostitute themselves”, in the case of young women.<sup>49</sup> These arguments, fuelled by racist preconceptions built up in the interwar period, show the degree to which the end of the labour tax changed power relations in the countryside. Colonial administrators very gratefully responded to any such claims coming from the Congolese elite. Petitions from urban quarters such as Poto-Poto or Bakongo in Brazzaville, which urged repressive measures against incoming migrants, were used to underscore the point.<sup>50</sup>

The Labour Inspector, Georges-Henri Connillière, was more worried about the legal side of any future manoeuvres against “vagabondism”. As he was particularly interested in movement from the countryside into the towns, he suggested rigid controls of the living conditions of inhabitants.

48. ANOM, GGAEF, 5D/182, Blanchard for Representative Council of the Territory of Chad, “Délibération portant modification de la taxe sur les oisifs” (no. 13/48), without date, countersigned on 28 November 1948.

49. ANOM, GGAEF, 5D/182, Dadet, Malonga, Zala, RP. Le Comte, Yoca, Hugué, Mackanda, Masse, Kitoko, Monécolo, Oyabi, to Jacques Fourneau, Governor of Middle-Congo, “Lettre des Conseillers Représentatifs du Moyen-Congo” (without number), 17 October 1949.

50. ANOM, GGAEF, 5D/182, “[Lettre de Bakongo à] Haut-Commissaire de l’AEF” (without number), without date; ANOM, GGAEF, 5D/182, “[Lettre de Poto-Poto à] Haut-Commissaire de l’AEF” (without number), without date.

Lodgers in the urban areas who did not work for periods seemed to him to be the easiest targets for imprisonment and prison labour.<sup>51</sup>

In 1949 and 1950, the battle against “vagrancy” became a favourite theme for French officials who wished to reverse decisions made with regard to compulsory labour. The Inspector of Finances in Brazzaville, Robert Véron, argued that the last obstacle to recruiting compulsory labour efficiently amongst “unemployed” inhabitants of the territories was the criterion of the absence of a colonial subject from her or his home district. If this condition were to be removed – i.e. if locals could be recruited as “vagrants” because they seemed to be “idle” in their district of origin – the problem of the paucity of labour for essential infrastructure programmes would be resolved overnight:

The lack of disposition to work, and, more especially, the parasitism of the family, plague of the African society – would they not be susceptible to be efficiently fought if each [male] individual with the physical condition to work should justify his “regular and honest means of existence”, whether he finds himself or not in his district of origin?<sup>52</sup>

In 1950, the Government-General of AEF had assembled all the elements for a new plan to create a decree against vagrancy, built again on the argument that resources needed to be employed to battle “dangerous vagabondism” that was said to exist everywhere in AEF. This argument was based on the exploding number of both male and female inhabitants of the cities, which had more than doubled in, amongst others, Brazzaville and Libreville, the territorial capital of Gabon, and more than tripled in Pointe-Noire. The spectre of young rural populations fleeing “the bush” and of cities such as Brazzaville, where 10,000 to 12,000 persons out of 32,000 adults did not have labour cards, of prostitution, and of crime haunted the thoughts of officials. The French administrators complained that only some hundreds of these individuals had ever been prosecuted, but that a majority of these cases did not lead to any judgment, thanks to the insecurity and the lack of legal means of the magistrates. The Government-General of AEF devised a plan of repression that was based, of all things, on the application of Napoleonic laws and instituted regular punishment through hard labour.<sup>53</sup> The result of these preparations reads as follows:

I would personally be favourable, after this law text will have better armed the judicial authorities against these real dangers, of the creation of “vagabond

51. ANOM, GGAEF, 5D/182, Connillière, Acting Inspector-General of Labour in French Equatorial Africa, “Note sur la répression du vagabondage” (no. 20/IGT-AEF), 30 November 1949, p. 1.

52. ANOM, GGAEF, 5D/182, Robert Véron, Inspector of Finances in Congo-Brazzaville, “Note à l’attention de M. le Gouverneur, Secrétaire Général” (without number), 2 August 1949.

53. ANOM, GGAEF, 5D/182, Government-General of French Equatorial Africa, Directorate of Political Affairs, to Jean Letourneau, Minister of Overseas France, “Vagabondage” (without number), 26 January 1950, pp. 2–6.

houses”, organized analogously to the model of the “beggar houses” foreseen by the decree of 5 July 1808. The legislation, without intending to sanction generally a personal obligation to work, should at least tend to discourage those individuals who are tempted to lead an abnormal and vagabond life, through the threat of labour under surveillance.

If we imagine a residence where such individuals can live under surveillance, it would rely on the principle to offer a kind of asylum to the “vagabond”, but also to force them to work and to correct their vices and their laziness. These are, very nearly, the terms of the 1808 decree on the beggars, whose definition comes close to that of our de facto vagabonds, with the sole exception that the latter take more dangerous activities than just begging.<sup>54</sup>

The law project from AEF was never explicitly stopped. However, in the course of 1950 it was delayed and then repeatedly postponed by successive French governments which did not wish to treat the question of the “battle against vagrancy” in a context in which the difficult situation in Indo-China and the complications of imperial reform made it delicate to take any decisions in the way of *repressive* legislation. In contrast, amongst the officials in AEF there was little understanding of such hesitation. Large parts of the administration were committed to the idea that the labour tax needed to be replaced by other repressive techniques – and even as the attempt to introduce legislative measures failed, the first half of the 1950s saw the intensification of prison sentences of labour against “vagrants”, as administrators felt now encouraged to prosecute such “elements”. Therefore, attempts on the part of the colonial administration in AEF to show respect for international concerns with regard to forced labour were basically a delusion.

As soon as the ILO became occupied with the development of a new, stricter convention, leading officials in French Equatorial Africa assured the French government that their administration was unproblematic from that point of view.<sup>55</sup> These assertions did not, however, touch on the question of crackdowns on “vagrants”, which were always defined as a battle against vagabondism. No one really asked what these “vagrants”, whenever they were given short prison sentences, were used for.

The situation was similar with more regular prison labour.<sup>56</sup> After the passing of the Houphouët-Boigny Law, many governors had allowed

54. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

55. ANOM, GGAEF, 1H/36, Government-General of French Equatorial Africa, Directorate of Political Affairs, “Note: Révision éventuelle de la Conférence de Genève sur le Travail forcé – Questionnaire de la Conférence Internationale du travail” (no. 1802/AP.I), 9 August 1955; ANOM, GGAEF, 1H/36, Cédile, Secretary-General of AEF, for Governor-General Chauvet, “Rapport sur le Travail Forcé en Afrique Equatoriale Française (39ème session de la Conférence Internationale du Travail)” (without number), 25 April 1956.

56. For the situation in AOF, see Ibra Sène, “Colonisation française et exploitation de la main-d’œuvre carcérale au Sénégal: De l’emploi des détenus des camps pénaux sur les chantiers des travaux routiers (1927–1940)”, *French Colonial History*, 5 (2004), pp. 153–171.

their administrators to rely even more upon those prisoners who served longer sentences for forced labour on the roads. Article 228 of the Labour Code of 15 December 1952 had in theory closed this loophole and made such systematic use of prison labour illegal, but French officials, in particular in AEF, tended to ignore the provisions of the new law as long as they could. In April 1953, for instance, the Cabinet of the Ministry of Overseas France sent a dispatch in quite an exasperated tone, which urged officials on the ground to desist finally from using the compulsory labour of prisoners.<sup>57</sup> Again, reactions to this initiative were slow.

Faced with many pressures, the French officials in place still did not accept the end of forced labour as definitive. The debate about French participation in ILO Convention 105 showed that even the abolition of the *prestation*, now already more than ten years old, was constantly questioned. As late as December 1957, Jean Parisot, Governor of Gabon, noticed that the older ILO Convention 29 had permitted compulsory labour at times of emergency. Although this “emergency labour” was clearly forbidden by the Houphouët-Boigny Law, Parisot joined his colleagues in a general complaint that labour on the roads was too difficult to get in AEF, and that the existing system was too liberal.<sup>58</sup> In other words, less than one year before the constitutional referendum in the French state gave the colonial territories full autonomy, leading French colonial officials were still attempting to reintroduce the old labour obligations through the back door.

Such initiatives for a reversal in labour policies obviously came too late. In the last quarter of 1958, African ministers took over control of social and labour affairs fully, and in the period up to 1960, most efforts in territorial labour policies were centred on the complicated relationship between the political establishment and trade-union activities. However, it must be emphasized that the idea of compulsory labour was not abolished in the mindset of French administrators until the very end of empire – and that many of these officials were to stay in place during the transition period. Preliminary research suggests that this fact had repercussions for administrative routines after independence.

#### NO FORCED LABOUR AT ALL: BRITISH WORRIES AND APPROACHES AFTER WORLD WAR II

As I have argued, British diplomacy and politicians in the United Kingdom had successfully managed to shield British colonialism from criticism on

57. ANOM, GGAEF, 1H/36, J.N. Adenot, Director of Cabinet of Ministry of Overseas France to High-Commissioners, Governors, Administrators of First Rank, “Circular: Interdiction du travail forcé. Régulation de personnes” (no. 10–CT–MO1), 21 April 1953, pp. 1–2.  
58. ANOM, GGAEF, 2H/1, Parisot, Governor of Gabon, to Servel, “Main d’Œuvre” (no. 1058), 24 December 1957, pp. 1–2.

the grounds of compulsory forms of local labour. On the ground, however, conditions were often complex, and these complexities already existed in the interwar period. Northern Rhodesia is a significant case for the variety of measures taken with regard to compulsory labour behind the official claim that there were no such practices. Although there were bigger disparities between styles of administration in British sub-Saharan Africa than in the French case (or, for example, in the Portuguese empire), Northern Rhodesia – which in 1953 became part of the short-lived Central African Federation before obtaining its independence in 1964 – is representative of the ambivalences of British late colonial administration in the African continent as a whole. It is interesting that for Northern Rhodesia, a range of good analyses of struggles and strikes in mining, which clearly became politicized under the Federation, and of conditions in contract labour in agriculture are available; it is in these contexts that white settler interests were strong.<sup>59</sup> At the same time, as in other British colonies, these studies have failed to look at the engagement of the administration in compulsory labour practices – practices that were nonexistent in the British Empire if the official British discourse from the 1930s is to be believed, with the exception of the emergency situation of the war years.

As so often, the views of the European officials in neighbouring administrations under the flag of other empires provides important indications of mindsets. In the case of Northern Rhodesia, the discourse was very clear. While opinions about Portuguese Angola and the Belgian Congo were not entirely negative, as both neighbouring colonies were considered to have the better transport infrastructure, the picture was clear with regard to labour policies. Here, Angola was characterized very negatively, as British officials stationed close to the border with this territory argued that the Portuguese blatantly employed a brutal type of forced labour. The abuses of the Portuguese administration in Angola have been discussed elsewhere, but for our analysis, it is essential that they

59. Miles Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Farnham [etc.], 2011), pp. 21–51, 40–41; Ian Phimister, “Proletarians in Paradise: The Historiography and Historical Sociology of White Miners on the Copperbelt”, in Gewald, Hinfelaar, and Macola, *Living the End of Empire*, pp. 128–145; Lawrence J. Butler, *Copper Empire: Mining and the Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c.1930–64* (Basingstoke, 2007); Samuel N. Chipungu, “African Leadership under Indirect Rule in Colonial Zambia”, in *idem* (ed.), *Guardians in Their Time: Experiences of Zambians under Colonial Rule, 1890–1964* (London, 1992), pp. 50–73. For a longer perspective of the history of mineworkers in the Copperbelt, see also Miles Larmer, *Mineworkers in Zambia: Labour and Political Change in Post-Colonial Africa* (London, 2007). For agricultural change during and beyond the late colonial period, see Ackson M. Kanduza, “History and Agricultural Change in Zambia”, *Transafrican Journal of History*, 20 (1991), pp. 97–109; Samuel N. Chipungu, *The State, Technology and Peasant Differentiation in Zambia: A Case Study of the Southern Province, 1930–1986* (Lusaka, 1988).

were described in internal memoranda as fundamentally different from any of the existing British practices.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast to these “outrageous practices”, the governor’s office in Lusaka held in the first half of the 1950s that in Northern Rhodesia, no compulsory labour existed. This opinion was defended when it came to discussing the provisions for new ILO regulations on forced labour.<sup>61</sup> While this view echoed the official position taken in the 1930s, an ambivalence played itself out behind such commitments. In the years after World War II, several administrators held that the Northern Rhodesian population had to participate more actively in the new “development effort”. The consensus was overwhelming that black Africans would not contribute in this way without compulsion:

Development plans in the tribal areas are about to be implemented and the danger that they may be seriously held up by the reluctance of the African to engage in work in the rural areas, even when such work is for the direct benefit of his own community, is a matter for concern. The difficulty will become more apparent when development teams start to work in the field.<sup>62</sup>

In most British colonies, the chiefs were responsible for the maintenance of (at least the) minor regional roads. By the end of World War II, the administration of Northern Rhodesia attempted to organize more coherent “native treasuries” directed by these chiefs, which would allow for the payment of work gangs in the rural areas.<sup>63</sup> In some zones, such as in the Southern Province, attempts were made to finance the workers through special grants.<sup>64</sup> Even so, such measures were exceptional; at least in the second half of the 1940s, there was a general reluctance to “interfere” in “traditional” forms of labour organization on the ground.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, while they always appeared to favour free labour in the sector

60. For a typical example of such views, see National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka [hereafter, NAZ], Loc. 5006, BSE 1/5/2, J.A. Dinwiddie, District Commissioner of Senanga, “Senanga Tour Report No. 11 of 1950: Minute No. 2 – Incident between Kwando Africans and Portuguese Administration” (no. 11), 4 November 1950, p. 2.

61. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, “Convention No. 29, Forced Labour, (1930) – Annual Report (1953–1954) on the application of Convention No. 29 in Northern Rhodesia” (without number), without date.

62. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, R.S. Hudson, Secretary for Native Affairs, to Provincial Commissioners and District Commissioners, “Circular: Obtaining African Labour for Essential Public Works and Services” (no. 4), 19 April 1947, p. 1.

63. NAZ, SEC2/405, Munday, Provincial Commissioner of the Eastern Province in Fort Jameson, “Memorandum. Maintenance of Roads in Native Rural Areas” (without number), 8 September 1944.

64. NAZ, SEC2/405, Provincial Commissioner of the Southern Province in Livingstone to Chief Secretary in Lusaka (no. 20/38/12), 8 September 1945.

65. NAZ, SEC2/405, Secretary of Mazabuka Road Board to District Commissioner of Mazabuka, “Ngwezi River Draft” (without number), 6 July 1945.

of road construction, British officials in Northern Rhodesia were quite committed to allowing local chiefs to organize compulsory labour for “essential works”. In 1947, they obliged the chiefs to draft lists of such works, with a view to revising them but also in order to endorse their necessity in the face of any ILO or international criticism.<sup>66</sup>

In 1959 the chiefs in Barotseland, the westernmost province of Northern Rhodesia, still used the sections of the Native Authority Ordinance that allowed them to draft compulsory labour for a certain number of days per year, in the guise of a solution to an emergency situation. Only then did British officials in Lusaka become worried about this possibility, as they (rightly) felt that the new ILO Convention 105 would make such measures even more problematic.<sup>67</sup>

However, indirect recruitment through the “native chiefs” was not the only method of drafting forced labour. Direct recruitment for compulsory labour – although it was officially regarded as “unwanted” and barely spoken about – also continued under a variety of labels and circumstances. Already in 1947, the Governor of Northern Rhodesia, Eubule Waddington, faced down hostile Colonial Office staff in London under Creech Jones, to defend the necessity of compulsory labour in cases of major emergency. Waddington’s definition of “emergency” was very wide: the regular occurrence of soil erosion was one such case that could be so defined.<sup>68</sup> As the Colonial Office did not explicitly regulate these cases, British administrators remained committed to such methods for the next decade, although the political panorama slowly became more complicated.

An exemplary case of the employment of compulsory labour in 1957 can be found in the Eastern Province, where works on the Lundazi and Great East Roads were carried out with such labourers.<sup>69</sup> Even the transport of groundnuts, for which insufficient numbers of free labourers could be found in 1957, was seen as essential enough to justify “exceptional” emergency labour for sixty days.<sup>70</sup> The central services in

66. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, R.S. Hudson to Provincial Commissioners and District Commissioners, “Circular: Native Authorities Obtaining African Labour for Essential Public Works and Minor Communal Services” (no. 2), 12 March 1948.

67. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, “Amendments to Sections 8 and 9 of the Native Authority Ordinance and the Barotse Native Authority Ordinance” (no. XD/29-114), without date, pp. 1–2.

68. NAZ, SEC1/1455, E.J. Waddington, Governor of Northern Rhodesia, to Creech Jones, Colonial Secretary (no. 128), 17 September 1947, pp. 1–2.

69. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, N.S. Price, Provincial Commissioner of the Eastern Province, to District Commissioners of Fort Jameson, Lundazi, and Petauke, Certificate (no. 311/3/17/1), 17 December 1952. This labour force was paid, but the wages were insufficient to attract any free labourers.

70. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, N.S. Price, Provincial Commissioner of the Eastern Province in Fort Jameson to Commissioner for Labour and Mines in Lusaka, “Direction of



Lusaka in fact contested the right of the Provincial Commissioner to define “emergency labour” as widely as he had done, including work on minor roads and groundnut transport, but such “emergency labour” was still very prominent in larger road-building projects. Nor did the commissioner for labour and the mines in Lusaka criticize provincial administrators for the idea in itself. He was more worried about the international view of Britain’s colonial labour policy, which might face criticism. Even so, he hinted at one of the fundamental reasons for the continued use of forced labour (the lower costs), musing “whether the wages offered are adequate for this unpopular work; whether rations of good quality are issued regularly and wages paid promptly upon the completion of a ticket. If all these conditions were satisfactory, would there have been no possibility of attracting voluntary labour?”<sup>71</sup>

Finally, a debate on the services for travelling British officers came up, but only very late. Until 1957, villages were still forced to give such services for free, and there was not the slightest consideration of the fact that these services could constitute compulsory labour. In 1957, members of the African Provincial Council of the Northern Province were amongst the first to protest against these routines:

The Government stopped Chiefs from demanding forced labour from their people, yet it expects Chiefs to force their people to provide free camps, water and wood. The Chief has no power to make people make camps. This is causing much dissatisfaction in the Province and enmity between the Chiefs and their people. I have seen Kapasus abusing women to get them to carry water to a District Officer’s camp.<sup>72</sup>

This might appear to be a minor issue, but it reflects very well the fact that the British administration continued to resort to measures that appeared to be “customary”, even if they involved compulsory labour. Such practices were difficult to reconcile with trends towards colonial reform. However, even when faced with growing criticism, the territorial government of Northern Rhodesia only alleviated the impact of administrative tours and related mandatory services shortly before the end of the decade.

Labour” (no. 1728/17/1.), 19 August 1953; NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, Acting Provincial Commissioner of the Eastern Province to District Commissioner of Petauke, Certificate (no. 2336/17/4/1), 17 October 1953.

71. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, Cousins, Commissioner for Labour and Mines in Lusaka, to Norman S. Price, Provincial Commissioner of the Eastern Province in Fort Jameson, “Direction of Labour” (no. Xb/19–18), 10 March 1953, p. 1; see the further discussion in NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, Price to Cousins (no. 913/17/1), 2 April 1953.

72. NAZ, Loc. 2008, MLSS 1/07/017, “Extracted from the Record of the Fifth Meeting of the Third African Provincial Council – Northern Province. 3rd–5th April 1957 at Kasame” (without number), without date, p. 1.

Moreover, direct compulsion by the British administration and the chiefs was not the only area of repressive measures within late colonial labour policy. The different forms of continuous compulsory labour were paired with two other elements of repression. First, as in the French case, the question of “vagrancy” and “undue” mobility was also on the agenda of the British authorities. Unlike in French Equatorial Africa, where the chiefs only had a limited interest in the issue, in Northern Rhodesia they were at the forefront of calls for more control and repression in these cases.

In the Northern Province, in the final phase of the war years, different chiefs demanded a more aggressive policy against “loafers” in settlements close to the railway line. The Paramount Chiefs of Lunda and Ngumbo demanded that “vagrants” be compelled to return to their villages, where they were to fulfil their tax and labour obligations.<sup>73</sup> New African associations, which still were strongly in tune with the interests of the chiefs, also supported these measures.<sup>74</sup> Two years later, the situation in the province had not changed from the point of view of the “native authorities”, which continued to discuss steps for more rigid control of “lazy Africans”, such as individual passes and inspections.<sup>75</sup> Shortly before, in the urbanized mining regions of the Copperbelt, the administration had prepared means to “repatriate” up to 3,000 “loafers” from Ndola and other centres, who were allegedly seeking an “idle life”, staying illegally in rented houses to evade labour obligations in their home towns.<sup>76</sup>

In the early 1950s, the British administration acceded to the complaints of powerful local chiefs and started to exert more control over intra-territory migrant labour. In Barotseland Province, the Paramount Chief and other “native rulers” were authorized to restrain the mobility of

73. In Northern Rhodesia, “paramount chiefs” as rulers of “tribes” stood at the top of a system of indirect rule; after World War II these chiefs continued to enjoy considerable authority with the colonial administrators, in spite of challenges that had to do with the growing role of nationalist activity in the colony. For a contemporary view on the importance of chiefs, as late as in 1959, expressed by a former Provincial Commissioner of the territory, see Melvin George Billing, “Tribal Rule and Modern Politics in Northern Rhodesia”, *African Affairs*, 58:231 (1959), pp. 135–140.

74. NAZ, SEC3/66, “Extract from Minutes of the First Meeting of the Northern Province (Western Areas) Regional Council: held at Fort Rosebery on the 23rd and 24th May, 1944. Filed on Secretariat File No. NAT/A/65” (without number), without date.

75. NAZ, SEC3/66, “Extract from Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the Northern Province (Western Areas) African Provincial Council: held at Fort Rosebery, Wednesday to Friday: 1st to 3rd May, 1946” (without number), without date.

76. NAZ, SEC3/66, “Western Province Item No. 2 – Administrative Conference 1945. – Repatriation of Destitutes” (without number), without date, p. 1; NAZ, SEC3/66, “Western Province Item No. 2 – Administrative Conference 1945. – Repatriation of Destitutes” (without number), without date, p. 1.

young male inhabitants, who were likely to claim they were going to migrate to the Copperbelt but whose final destinations and willingness to carry out hard labour were regularly questioned by the chiefs and the administration. Candidates for migration were required to pay at least two yearly tax sums before departure, and by 1951, illegal migrants were caught, mainly in the urban environment of Livingstone, and sent back to Barotseland, where they were severely punished. Many endured short prison sentences that led them into temporary forced labour. The British administration applauded these tactics. It was generally held that the province needed such strategies, because vital services would cease to work otherwise.<sup>77</sup> In the long run, these attitudes played into the hands of the nationalist parties – mainly the United National Independence Party (UNIP) in the Barotseland case – which pointed to the repressive means tolerated by the administration and orchestrated by the chiefs, winning thereby considerable grass-roots support in difficult terrain.

The second repressive practice in which the British administration in Northern Rhodesia was strongly engaged turned on the question of “desertion” from contracts. Here, it was important that British labour laws had favoured a different set of measures of coercion when it came to the obligatory nature of labour contributions. As we have seen, the British had never had an instrument comparable to the French labour tax, but the criminalization of “desertion” from contracts – following the old master-and-servant legislation, which had been abolished in Britain in the 1870s – was very characteristic of the British situation.<sup>78</sup> Obviously, in a territory such as Northern Rhodesia, in which mining companies and settler plantations had a crucial impact, these issues appeared at regular intervals.

The Labour Commissioner in Lusaka, William F. Stubbs, defended the notion of “desertion from contract” against pressures from the Colonial Office to end criminal sentences against “deserters” from contracts. He argued that African contract labourers would no longer show even the minimum respect for the rights of the European owners if they were not prosecuted for breach of contract.<sup>79</sup> Plantation owners in Northern Rhodesia wanted even more: now that the compulsory measures of the war years were over, they wished for additional measures to reintegrate and control recalcitrant labourers who, after short prison sentences, were very likely to remain as opposed to conditions on the farms as they had

77. NAZ, SEC2/71, vol. 5, Anderson and Jones, District Commissioners of Mongu-Lealui, “Annual Report 1951 – Mongu-Lealui District – Barotse Province” (without number), without date, p. 3.

78. The most important overview is Douglas Hay and Paul Craven (eds), *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

79. NAZ, SEC1/1323, Stubbs, Labour Commissioner, to Chief Secretary of Northern Rhodesia (without number), 3 October 1946, p. 2.

been before.<sup>80</sup> Effectively, repressive measures against “deserters” were intensified in the second half of the 1940s, but they brought few successes, as police agents in the outlying stations were not willing to do much extra work to find these refugees.<sup>81</sup> In 1948, conditions had not improved, and the administration was still helpless to change the odds: very few “deserters” were caught and contract labourers were inclined to flee their occupations as soon as they had received their first wages.<sup>82</sup>

Examples from Northern Rhodesia illustrate that the British Empire, even after 1945, was far from being untouched by the pitfalls and problems of compulsory labour. British colonial politicians and high-level administrators were quite ingenious when it came to presenting these practices as nonexistent at the official level, and professed that routines of compulsory labour carried out by the “native chiefs” were defined by “custom” and nothing else. Even so, behind this curtain of apparently more liberal practices, the internal discussions show, as much as the experiences of locals drafted for “emergency labour” or prosecuted as “vagrants”, a more repressive reality. It was the accelerated process towards independence that characterized the British colonial world in the second half of the 1950s, together with resistance and evasion on the part of the African populations, which forced the late colonial administrations to bury hidden strategies of compulsory labour.

## CONCLUSION

In 1962, for the first time, a colonial power – Portugal – was taken to court before the ILO, accused of a breach of the Forced Labour Convention by the government of the now independent African state, Ghana. The experience of the ILO process against Portugal, which ended with the acquittal of the Portuguese government, showed dramatically a number of issues with regard to the transition from forced labour under colonial rule to the post-colonial world.

First of all, as might have been expected, the Portuguese case showed that the British and French had obviously not had the most repressive

80. NAZ, SEC1/1323, Draft by Chief Secretary of Northern Rhodesia to Chief Justice in Livingstone (no. LAB/A/58/2), without date [1946]; NAZ, SEC1/1323, Labour Commissioner’s Office [W.F. Stubbs] in Lusaka, to Chief Secretary of Northern Rhodesia (without number), 29 July 1947.

81. NAZ, SEC1/1323, Labour Commissioner’s Office [W.F. Stubbs?] in Lusaka to Chief Secretary of Northern Rhodesia (without number), 29 June 1946; NAZ, SEC1/1323, Circular from Acting Chief Secretary, P.D. Thomas, to Commissioner of Police in Lusaka (without number), 23 July 1946.

82. NAZ, SEC1/1323, S.M.W. Andreassen, entrepreneur in Mazabuka, to Labour Commissioner in Lusaka (without number), 6 February 1948, in W.F. Stubbs to Commissioner of Police (without number), 10 February 1948.

practices of forced labour – the Portuguese only abolished forced labour as punishment for “vagrancy”, through forced cultivation quotas and *corvée* labour on roads, in 1961. Secondly, however, the case also showed that an attack on colonial powers by post-colonial governments had considerable weaknesses – in a phase of strong solidarity with anti-colonial movements in the last remaining European colonies, such governments were easily criticized by European officials. In the case of Portugal, a group of reformist officials managed to compile a dossier that emphasized the wish for reform in the Portuguese colonial state of the early 1960s, sought excuses for the slow performance of this colonial state by attributing it to structural difficulties, and, principally, showed evidence suggesting that the post-colonial governments in independent African countries were far more committed to practices of coercion than the old colonial powers, including Portugal.<sup>83</sup> It is clear that the arguments put forward by the Portuguese officials were not at all neutral – as these European administrators were ready to use whatever propaganda weapons they had to counter international support for guerilla movements in their African territories. However, the ease with which it was possible for the Portuguese to point out these coercive practices in post-colonial African states is impressive.

Although it has not been studied as a broader phenomenon, it must be considered very likely that compulsory labour remained an important factor after independence. It was a temptation for many governments which, after the transfer of power, had to struggle with budgets that seriously curtailed the modernization plans modelled on the development projects of the former colonial states. It is plausible that the need for compulsory labour turned out to be less important when the channels for access to international credit became far more reliable by the second half of the 1960s.<sup>84</sup>

In the case of the two strongest colonial powers in the African continent, the abolition of forced labour in 1946 (in the French case) and the end of compulsory structures related to the war effort by 1947/1948 (in the British case) could have started a trajectory in which the employment of compulsory measures to “make Africans work” could have disappeared

83. Principal arguments on the Portuguese side, and more or less trustworthy references to forced labour in post-colonial Africa, can be found in Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, Portugal, MU/GM/GNP/18/Cx 1, Hédio Augusto Esteves Felgas, “O Neo-Colonialismo Africano (Medidas especiais tomadas pelos novos governos africanos)” (without number), 26 Oct. 1960, *passim*.

84. For a definition of post-colonial involuntary labour in sub-Saharan Africa, which almost entirely ignores state-organized compulsory labour, see Mike Dottridge, “Types of Forced Labour and Slavery-Like Abuse Occurring in Africa Today: A Preliminary Classification”, *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 45:179–180 (2005), pp. 689–712.

as a policy option in the arena of infrastructure-building and other sectors. In this case, it would have been far less likely that post-colonial rulers would have made these techniques part of their own policies. However, as we have seen, the realities of life under the late colonial states were quite different. The idea of the “necessity” of compulsory labour, at least in some sectors, even if it was legitimized through high-handed interpretations of legal and administrative instruments, haunted the “colonial mindset” after World War II. This “spectre” did not vanish after independence, and led to hidden continuities in the experiences that African populations had of these repressive practices. I will in the final part of this article attempt to reflect upon the results in light of post-colonial continuities of compulsory labour. The examples that I will present here for post-colonial policies of “public labour” go beyond the region analysed in this study: they are selected to illustrate the potential for further studies on such continuities.

The French administration in French Equatorial Africa was very frustrated by the progress towards the abolition of forced labour in the form of the labour tax. Many officials deplored the loss of these techniques as part of the end of economic prosperity in the African colonies, and, shortly afterwards, they confirmed the predicted economic problems but emphasized in particular the loss of control over young, rural populations, who had before been subject to compulsory labour services. French officials focused on an alleged syndrome of “vagrancy” that they purported to be battling through repressive measures: the legal and practical means of punishing individuals who left the “good” routines of rural, agricultural labour but did not become “decent wage workers” were extended in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Although the agents of the colonial state failed with this initiative, the theme of the battle against “parasitism” – labelling as such all individuals who were not working according to the criteria of the colonial administration – remained on the agenda until far into the 1950s.

After independence, it is remarkable that some of the new governments emanating from French colonial rule chose the same discourse. The most visible continuity is the case of Madagascar, a former island colony, where the hunt for “vagrants” was phrased in identical terms to those in AEF in the late colonial period.<sup>85</sup> However, in other former French colonies, the arguments of the new rulers went noticeably in the same direction. In the first three years of independent Senegal, the government of Mamadou Dia insisted on the necessity of labour brigades.<sup>86</sup> Independent Congo-Brazzaville chose the

85. For the vagrancy discourse in Madagascar, see ANOM, Fonds Privés, Fonds Reynaud, 61APOM/8, Philibert Tsiranana, President of the Republic of Madagascar, “Programme Economique” (no. 66/PRM/P), 17 March 1962, p. 20.

86. For Senegal see ANS, Vice-Présidence et Présidence du Conseil de Gouvernement du Sénégal (VPP), 204, Governor of the Region of Cap-Vert, “Allocution Radiodiffusée Prononcée par M. le Gouverneur de la Région du Cap-Vert” (without number), without date.

same kind of “public duties” for the infrastructure of this new state. In 1960, measures were taken against “vagrants” in Brazzaville that strongly recalled French ideas after World War II.<sup>87</sup> During the 1960s “communal labour” was established for road maintenance, and became a kind of “obsession” for some Congolese administrators.<sup>88</sup>

British administrators employed several, more hidden forms of compulsion when dealing with the rural labour force. Their techniques were sometimes so successfully concealed that scholars and observers have swallowed the idea of an empire without forced labour. The reality is, however, more complex, also reflected in the complicated discourse used by British officials in a colony such as Northern Rhodesia. While the British late colonial state preferred to work through the “native chiefs”, such organization was, nevertheless, bringing about involuntary labour under several forms. Moreover, British officials were also very devoted to other forms of compulsory labour services in which they retained direct control, such as with “emergency labour” or compulsory labour services supporting touring officials.

After independence, some of these policies appear to have retained their importance. Indications of these phenomena are clear for Ghana, where the Nkrumah government operated consistently through labour brigades.<sup>89</sup> For other cases, such as Zambia,<sup>90</sup> research has still advanced very little, although it is at least to be expected that in rural areas some continuities may be identified. For instance, where “native chiefs” defended a part of their authority, they also had the possibility of organizing such labour services as “traditional communal labour”.

Connections can still only be made tentatively between two late colonial empires and the post-colonial experience of the ensuing independent nation states, in which the idea of compulsion with regard to labour organization had not been expunged to the extent that was claimed in the international arena. I do not argue that post-colonial leaders simply

87. Archives Municipales de Brazzaville, Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, 3N, Techer, Inspector of Administrative Affairs, “Procès-Verbal” (without number), 18 January 1960, pp. 2–3.

88. See for instance, ANC, PR 64, S. Mambou, Administrator of District of Mayama, “Région du Pool, District de Mayama – Année 1968 – Notice Mensuelle – Mois de Juin” (no. 20768/S.M./M.L.), 30 June 1968, p. 1.

89. Analyses of attitudes towards youth labour within the Nkrumah regime can be found in Jeffrey S. Ahlman, “A New Type of Citizen: Youth, Gender, and Generation in the Ghanaian Builders Brigade”, *Journal of African History*, 53 (2012), pp. 87–105, or the classical article by Peter Hodge, “The Ghana Workers Brigade: A Project for Unemployed Youth”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 15 (1964), pp. 113–28.

90. See Andrew Bowman, “Mass Production or Production by the Masses? Tractors, Cooperatives, and the Politics of Rural Development in Post-Independence Zambia”, *Journal of African History*, 52 (2011), pp. 201–221.



reproduced repressive colonial forms of labour organization. However, it appears to be an important observation that the late colonial states did not finish with compulsory labour entirely: it remained a *possibility* in one form or another. It thereby transformed itself into a policy option for post-colonial governments – and this option was taken up in various cases.

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS  
FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Alexander Keese. *La lente abolition dans la mentalité coloniale: débats britanniques et français sur “le vagabondage”, “la paresse africaine”, et le travail forcé en Afrique centrale de l’ouest et en Afrique centrale du sud, 1945–1965.*

Après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les administrations françaises et britanniques sur le continent africain furent, en théorie, obligées de mettre fin au travail forcé. Dans la rhétorique, les pratiques de travail forcé disparurent entièrement. Toutefois, l’examen comparatif de processus sur le terrain en Afrique Équatoriale Française et dans la colonie britannique de la Rhodésie du Sud, montre que les pratiques de l’abolition de ces pratiques de travail furent beaucoup plus complexes. Dans le cas de la France, les fonctionnaires coloniaux planifièrent intensivement pour réorganiser par la petite porte le travail forcé, principalement en luttant contre “le vagabondage” et “la paresse africaine”. Les administrateurs britanniques continuèrent les pratiques organisées par des “chefs locaux”, et tentèrent de maintenir le travail involontaire par une définition généreuse des “situations d’urgence”. Dans les deux cas, une analyse plus approfondie de la mentalité coloniale de la fin de l’ère coloniale révèle d’intéressantes continuités dans l’engagement des fonctionnaires européens envers le travail forcé. Elles furent probablement transférées, en partie, dans les opinions des agents des États post-coloniaux.

Traduction: *Christine Plard*

Alexander Keese. *Die langsame Abschaffung der Zwangsarbeit im kolonialen Denken. Britische und französische Debatten um “Landstreicherei”, “afrikanische Trägheit”, und Zwangsarbeit im westlichen und südlichen Zentralafrika, 1945–1965.*

Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg waren die französischen und britischen Kolonialverwaltungen auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent theoretisch dazu verpflichtet, die Zwangsarbeit abzuschaffen. Auf der rhetorischen Ebene verschwanden auf Zwang beruhende Arbeitspraktiken auch vollständig. Untersucht man aber die konkreten Vorgänge vor Ort und vergleicht Französisch-Äquatorialafrika mit dem britisch regierten Nordrhodesien, dann zeigt sich, dass sich die Abschaffung solcher Arbeitspraktiken tatsächlich viel komplizierter gestaltete. Im französischen Fall planten Kolonialbeamte aktiv, Zwangsarbeit durch die Hintertür zu reorganisieren, vor allem durch die vorgebliche Bekämpfung der “Landstreicherei” und der “afrikanischen Trägheit”. Die britischen Kolonialverwalter griffen auf Praktiken zurück, die von “einheimischen Häuptlingen” organisiert wurden und versuchten, die unfreiwillige

Arbeit durch eine großzügige Definition von “Ausnahmesituationen” beizubehalten. In beiden Fällen ergeben sich aus einer genaueren Untersuchung des kolonialen Denkens aufschlussreiche Kontinuitäten, was die zustimmende Haltung europäischer Beamter zur Zwangsarbeit angeht. Wahrscheinlich übertrug sich diese Haltung später zum Teil auch auf die Akteure postkolonialer Staaten.

Übersetzung: *Max Henninger*

Alexander Keese. *La abolición lenta en la mente colonial: los debates británico y francés sobre la “vagancia”, la “indolencia africana”, y el trabajo forzado en Africa Central del oeste y del sur, 1945–1965.*

Tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, las administraciones francesa y británica en el continente africano fueron, en teoría, obligadas a poner fin al trabajo forzado. Desde la retórica, esas prácticas de trabajo forzoso desaparecieron completamente. Sin embargo, el análisis de los procesos sobre el terreno, haciendo una comparación entre el Africa Ecuatorial Francesa y la Rhodesia del Norte bajo dominio británico, se muestra que en la práctica real la abolición de tales usos laborales fue algo mucho más complejo. Para el caso francés, los funcionarios coloniales planearon de forma precisa la reorganización del trabajo forzado por la puerta de atrás, principalmente mediante el establecimiento de la lucha contra la “vagancia” y la “indolencia africana”. Por su parte, los administradores británicos continuaron con prácticas organizadas por “jefes indígenas” e intentaron mantener el trabajo involuntario mediante una generosa definición de las “situaciones de emergencia”. En ambos casos, un análisis más profundo de la mentalidad colonial tardía muestra interesantes continuidades en el involucramiento de los funcionarios europeos en el trabajo forzado. Esto probablemente se ha reflejado, en parte, en las concepciones de los agentes de los estados postcoloniales.

Traducción: *Vicent Sanz Rozalén*