A European and African Joint-Venture: Writing a Seamless History of Borno (1902–1960)

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Abstract: This article engages with existing scholarship that explores how colonial knowledge was constructed. Focusing on the region of Borno it will highlight the ways in which European officials collaborated with African elites when writing official histories of the region (1902–1960). These exchanges were indicative of both the ruling Kanemi dynasty's efforts to assert their authority in Borno, as well as the efforts made by foreign colonial officials to advance their careers.

Résumé: Cet article contribue au débat sur la construction du savoir en contexte colonial. En se concentrant sur la région du Borno, il détaille les modalités de la collaboration entre élites africaines et administrateurs coloniaux européens pour l'écriture de l'histoire officielle de la région (1902–1960). Ces échanges révélaient d'une part les efforts de l'ancienne dynastie du royaume du Borno, les Kanemi, qui voulait assoir son autorité dans le Nigeria colonial ainsi que, d'autre part, la volonté des officiers coloniaux d'écrire l'histoire du Borno pour avancer leur carrière.

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Introduction[1]

The production of colonial knowledge is arguably one of the most intensively treated subjects in colonial and global history. Studies based on authors such as Michel Foucault and Edward Said have flourished in the last thirty years as most recent authors have stressed that colonialism was as much about conquering and governing new polities as it was about acquiring and creating local knowledge of these territories. [2] "Knowledge" and "construction" have thus been two crucial words in the historical writing about the postcolonial world. One book in particular represents this constructivist school: *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Colonial India* was the title that Nicholas Dirks chose in 2001 to highlight the reification of the Indian past by British colonialism.[3] For this author, caste is "a modern phenomenon"[4] and the "product of an historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule."[5] If it became commonplace for scholars of India to deconstruct the historical concept of "caste," the same phenomenon happened in Africa with "ethnicity" being regularly and thoroughly analyzed by Africanists. Many scholars have pointed to the 1994 Rwandan Genocide as an example of this. Authors such as Gérard Prunier showed how the German and more especially the Belgian colonizers manipulated the concepts of Hutu and Tutsi for their own benefit.[6] The construction and, by consequence, the deconstruction of knowledge could thus help analyze but also criticize the colonial period. As it was directed mainly against European colonialism, the deconstruction of knowledge had therefore a strong polemical tone in African studies.

However not every single scholarly work was polemical. In Nigeria, for example, John Peel analyzed the role of the nineteenth-century European missionaries in the creation of the Yoruba language and national identity,[7] whereas Dmitri van den Bersselaar shed a light on the relationship between

[1] I would like to thank Shane Doyle, William Gould, Anthony Kirk-Greene, Andrea Major, and Paul Nugent for their comments on this article. Two anonymous reviewers of *History in Africa* also made useful suggestions. Despite such generous help, the author bears sole responsibility for the paper's contents.

[2] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1970); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

[3] Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[4] Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 5.

[5] Dirks, *Castes of Mind,* 5.

[6] Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (London: Hurst, 1998).

[7] John D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

the Nigerian colonial administration and George Basden, an Anglican missionary, who became an "expert" of the Igbo.[8] The present article is an attempt to highlight the construction of historical knowledge in an African polity without referring to "ethnicity," "tribe," "language" or "religion." No African exceptionalism therefore. This paper will focus on Borno, the successor of the ancient kingdom of Kanem-Borno. Created in the eleventh century, this polity has attracted numerous researchers for its precolonial history who have produced scant publications about its more recent colonial past. As a consequence, this article makes a contribution to the historiography on colonial Borno as the history of this region has been under-studied.

In addition, this article will describe in detail the creation of historical knowledge undertaken by the Bornoan elite and the colonial administration. This type of cooperation between a local elite and a colonial administration has already been studied in the African colonial context. For example, Peter Pels highlighted the "reification of Luguru political discourse" by the British colonial administration in Tanganyika.[9] Ralph Austen and Jonathan Derrick showed that, instead of being passive during the precolonial and colonial times, the Duala played a very active role in the redefinition of their trade, politics or culture in contact with the Europeans.[10] It is worth noting that Anthony Kirk-Greene already mentioned the importance of British colonial officers studying Borno.[11] Nonetheless, Kirk-Greene's contribution to the historical field is more about colonial administrators and the colonial service in general than about these specific colonial officers in Borno. This article thus expands on Kirk-Greene's argument about the importance of the figure of the district officer in Africa.[12] Scholars such as the authors of the edited collection *Ordering Africa* have stressed the close relationship between anthropology and European imperialism.[13] This article seeks to contribute to this scholarship and will bring an historical dimension to the lines of

[8] Dmitri van den Bersselaar, "Missionary Knowledge and the State in Colonial Nigeria: On How G.T. Basden Became an Expert," *History in Africa* 33 (2006), 433–450.

[9] Peter J. Pels, "The Pidginization of Luguru Politics: Administrative Ethnography and the Paradoxes of Indirect Rule," *American Ethnologist* 23 (1996), 738–761, 738–739.

[10] Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: The Duala and Their Hinterland, c.1600–c.1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[11] Sydney J. Hogben and Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria: a Preliminary Survey of Their Historical Traditions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[12] Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

[13] Helen Tilley and Robert J. Gordon (eds.), *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism and the Politics of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

enquiry developed in *Ordering Africa*. More generally, because of its richly documented past, this article will argue that Borno is a perfect example of this reconAQ1ction of knowledge in a colonial context.

The Colonial Heralds of Borno

Borno was one of the oldest kingdoms of Africa when the Europeans invaded it at the turn of the twentieth century.[14] In their colonial endeavor, the latter genuinely desired to understand the societies they just conquered. The first colonial residents realized that the history of Borno was not limited to the very recent events of the colonial conquest. If not already aware of it, they soon realized that they were dealing with a kingdom tracing back its history to the eleventh century. It is worth noting that their understanding of Borno's history did not come from their own experience in Africa only. The narratives of the nineteenth-century explorers were part of their compulsory training while in Europe. The travellers' perception of this territory was largely influenced by the first descriptions of Borno by nineteenth-century explorers such as Dixon Denham, Hugh Clapperton[15] but also by the historical accounts given by Heinrich Barth[16] and Gustav Nachtigal.[17]

The colonial officers in charge of Borno were eager to discover its history. One could argue that their interest was simply due to their need to implement British Indirect Rule. Indeed, in order to create the very type of colonialism Frederick Lugard desired, the colonial officers had to analyze and understand the African structures they were officially in charge of. As Lugard put it himself, the resident must "study the native laws and customs, which react on Koranic law in Moslem districts, and replace it in pagan areas. (…) The officer who knows the language cannot fail to acquire a keener interest in and sympathy with the people."[18] Lugard had particularly Northern Nigeria in mind when he theorized the role of the residents and the district officers in the British colonial empire. The relationship between the British and the emirs of the Sokoto Caliphate has often been

[14] See for example Dierk Lange, "The Kingdoms and Peoples of Chad," in: Djibril T. Niane (ed.), *General History of Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 238–265; Yves Urvoy, *Histoire de l'Empire du Bornou* (Paris: Larose, 1949).

[15] Dixon Denham and Hugh Clapperton, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa, in the Years 1822, 1823, and 1824* (London: John Murray, 1826).

[16] Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa: Being a Journal of an Expedition Undertaken Under the Auspices of H.B.M.'s Government in the Years 1849–1855* (London: Longman, 1857).

[17] Gustav Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan* (London: Hurst, 1980).

[18] Frederick J.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: Cass, 1965), 133.

perceived as the embodiment of Indirect Rule.[19] However, because of its Muslim population, its hierarchy and its size, Borno provided another ideal case. That Borno symbolized the type of colonial rule Lugard desired is indicated by the fact that he referred to Borno no less than thirteen times in his book, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*.[20] It would thus be possible to consider the British interest in the history of Borno as a purely instrumentalist study for the sake of the implementation of effective colonial administration.[21]

Colonial officers operating in Borno count as the first western scholars of the history of Borno who collated and analyzed documents of the history of the kingdom. In doing so, they emulated their predecessors in India. For example, eighteenth-century British scholars, Nathaniel Halhed and William Jones were considered as "aficionados of Indian culture."[22] The first governor-general of India, Warren Hastings already mentioned in 1784: "Every application of knowledge and especially such as is obtained in social communication with people, over whom we exercise dominion, founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state."[23] This scholarly interest was not, of course, devoid of any racist prejudice. These studies were not only undertaken in the name of Knowledge but for the sake of colonial rule. The scholar-administrators of Borno did not see the contradiction between their work as scholars and as administrators.

In an article published in 1974, Gwilym Jones, a colonial administrator turned anthropologist, examined the development of colonial anthropology in Nigeria. He isolated four different phases: the first one was that of the early and middle nineteenth-century traveler-ethnographers, the second phase concerned military men interested in travelling at the turning point of the twentieth century; the third phase was the era of colonial officials who were amateur ethnographers in the first half of the colonial period; the last phase was mainly about the professional anthropologists trained in London by Bronisław Malinovski. The time sequences examined by Jones correspond to the construction of historical knowledge in Borno.[24] The first historians followed the example of nineteenth-century explorers such as Denham,

[19] Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longman, 1977).

[20] Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*.

[21] Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

[22] Rosane Rocher, "British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and Government," in: Carol Appadurai Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 215–249, 225.

[23] As quoted by Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 45.

[24] Gwilym I. Jones, "Social Anthropology in Nigeria during the Colonial Period," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 44 (1974), 280–289.

Clapperton, Barth, and Nachtigal who were eager to discover the past of Borno. As a result, compared to other African regions, the nineteenth-century history of the Lake Chad area is rather well-documented. At the turn of the twentieth century, the tradition of studying Borno was perpetuated by European military officers who also developed an interest in the history of their conquests. For example, the Foureau-Lamy mission of 1898-1900 was charged with unifying the French colonial possessions between Western and Equatorial Africa. Among other goals, it had to deal with a Rabih, a Sudanese warlord who had invaded Borno in 1893. However, its members also studied the countries they visited. The scientific results of the expedition were published in the *Documents Scientifiques de la Mission Saharienne de la Mission Foureau-Lamy*.[25] These missions are by consequence a perfect example of the double aspect of the military conquest of Borno. On the one hand, they violently fought their way into the Lake Chad region, but studied on the other hand the invaded societies. In the first decade of the twentieth century, European soldiers, even if not fighting on the Northern Nigerian soil, were still writing about Borno. A French military member of the Anglo-French boundary demarcation mission paid specific attention to the Lake Chad region. With the help of his interpreter Moïse Landeroin, Jean-Auguste Tilho published the results of his enquiries in the same series of *Documents Scientifiques* as his predecessor Foureau.[26] A scholarly study of Borno started by nineteenth-century explorers was thus prolonged by European soldiers at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In Central Sudan, the European military and colonial conquest was never undertaken with a total ignorance of the conquered societies. The material collected by these soldiers contains a wealth of documents and in the case of Tilho's *Documents Scientifiques* particular examples of recorded oral history. These studies constitute the link between the narratives of the nineteenth-century explorers and the first colonial officials. Former member of the Anglo-German demarcation commission of 1903,[27] the German officer Arnold Schultze published in 1910 a monograph entitled, in German, *The Sultanate of Bornu with a Specific Emphasis on German Bornu*.[28] This book was the first western monograph entirely devoted to Borno. In nine chapters, it revealed the new perception of the kingdom by the colonial officials. The historical

[25] Fernand Foureau, *Documents Scientifiques de la Mission Saharienne Mission Foureau-Lamy* (Paris: Masson, 1905).

[26] Jean Tilho, "The French Mission to Lake Chad," *The Geographical Journal* 36-3 (1910), 271–286; Jean Tilho, *Documents Scientifiques de la Mission Tilho, 1906–1909* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1910).

[27] Rudolf Hafeneder, "Deutsche Kolonialkartographie 1884–1919," PhD dissertation, Universität der Bundeswehr (Munich, 2008), 178.

[28] Arnold Schultze, *Das Sultanat Bornu, Mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung Deutsch-Bornus* (Langensalza: Beltz, 1910).

interest developed by Barth and Nachtigal could be found again in Schultze's work as the latter was trained as a geographer.

Although the main part of Borno was British, the first study came from a German rather than a British officer, which reflects the nineteenth-century German academic interest in the Lake Chad area. The kingdom attracted a comparatively large number of publications. For instance, Rudolf Prietze, Nachtigal's nephew, wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century on the flora, fauna, songs and proverbs of Borno.[29] Between 1913 and 1942, Adolf von Duisburg wrote ethnographical articles and books on the Kanuri.[30] In the 1920s and 1930s, Albert Drexel, a linguist who desired to find links between Sumer and Africa, studied the Kanuri language among other languages.[31] From the 1930s to the 1950s, Johannes Lukas was the first linguist to study the Kanuri language within Borno itself;[32] despite the loss of Cameroon, German academic interest never disappeared.

British colonial officers rapidly understood the potential of such studies and in 1913, Philip Benton, an officer stationed in Borno translated Schultze's monograph.[33] He also published a revised version of Von Duisburg's grammar in 1917.[34] According to Anthony Kirk-Greene, he "became an authority on Bornu's ecology, embracing a host of interests, such as history, language, exploration, flora and fauna and thereby lending weight to his personal credo of, as he once expressed it, 'I am Bornoan, I consider nothing that is Bornoan alien to me.'"[35] Most of his writings were collected in *The Languages and Peoples of Bornu* reprinted in 1958.[36] Other colonial officers devoted their time to the study of Borno. John Patterson,

[29] Rudolf Prietze, *Bornulieder* (Berlin: Reichsdr., 1914).

[30] Adolf von Duisburg, *Grundriss Der Kanuri-Sprache in Bornu* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1913), Adolf von Duisburg, "Gestalten des Mittelmeer-Sagenkreises in einem Bornu-Märchen," *Koloniale Rundschau* 21 (1929), 323–327; Adolf von Duisburg, *Im Lande des Cheghu von Bornu, Despoten und Völker Südlich des Tschad* (Berlin: Reimer, 1942).

[31] Albert Drexel, "Bornu und Sumer," *Anthropos* 14–15 (1919), 215–294; Albert Drexel, "Gliederung der Afrikanischen Sprachen," *Anthropos* 18 (1923), 26–29. For a general discussion on the linguistic debates of the first half of the twentieth century, see: Jan Vansina, "Bantu in the Crystal Ball, I," *History in Africa* 6 (1979), 287-333.

[32] For example see: Johannes Lukas, *A Study of the Kanuri Language: Grammar and Vocabulary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

[33] See note 27.

[34] Adolf von Duisburg, *Primer of Kanuri Grammar. Translated and Revised by P.A. Benton* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917).

[35] Benton wrote: *homo sum Bornuensis, nihil Bornuense a me alienum puto.* Did he want to echo the Latin poet Terence who wrote: *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto*, or "I am a man, I consider nothing that is human alien to me?" See: Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, "Introduction," in: Philip A. Benton, *The Languages and Peoples of Bornu: Being a Collection of the Writings of P.A. Benton* (London: Cass, 1968), 1–34, 12.

[36] Benton, *The Languages and Peoples of Bornu.*

later Chief Commissioner of Northern Nigeria, published *Kanuri Songs* in 1926.[37] Charles Temple, Chief Secretary of Northern Nigeria in 1910 and lieutenant-governor in 1914, edited one the first ethnological surveys of Northern Nigeria in his *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Province of Nigeria*.[38] This collection of notes compiled by his wife Olive Temple[39] can be seen as one of the first attempts of the British administration to gather ethnological intelligence on the whole of Northern Nigeria.[40] As Charles Temple put it: "a close and detailed knowledge of the habits and customs of the native is of the first importance to the European administration."[41]?

This bibliographical account of the scholars of Borno is not a simple list of studies undertaken by colonial officers. It shows how a territory such as Borno became the centre of an academic tradition. The next section of this article will assess the motivations behind the pursuit of knowledge in colonial Borno.

A Question of Authority?

The history of Borno was most of the time published in articles or books produced by Europeans. The reasons which pushed the British colonial officers to analyze the history of Borno can perhaps be found in their education. In 2000, Anthony Kirk-Greene published a monograph on the training of British colonial officials.[42] The anthropology training became quite important in the 1930s when these colonial officers were encouraged to take such courses while on leave in the United Kingdom.[43] Post World War II officers were especially trained to administer Muslim communities such as Borno as they were encouraged to study Islamic Law and Arabic in order to fulfill their duty of District Officers in Northern Nigeria.[44]

[37] John R. Patterson, *Kanuri Songs* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1926).

[38] Biographic information from the notice of MSS Afr. S. 2000, Rhodes House, Oxford. Charles L. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Province of Nigeria* (London: Cass, 1965).

[39] Charles and Olive Temple produced numerous photos and aquarelles of Northern Nigeria to be found in MSS Afr. S. 1531 and MSS Afr. t. 37, Rhodes House, Oxford. Olive Temple (née Macleod) published a narrative of her journey through central Africa between August 1910 and May 1911 in: Olive Macleod, *Chiefs and Cities of Central Africa Across Lake Chad by Way of British, French, and German Territories* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1912).

[40] Jones, "Social Anthropology."

[41] Temple, *Notes on the Tribes*, ii.

[42] Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Britain's Imperial Administrators, 1858–1966* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

[43] Jones, "Social Anthropology."

[44] Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 51.

The officers present in Borno were directly influenced by their own education in Europe and consequently drew comparisons between European and Bornoan history. The content of their theoretical courses in Europe heavily relied on the experience of their predecessor but also on a version of history directly influenced by their European background. How could they not remember their education with the landmark of 1066 when William the Conqueror won the battle of Hastings? The Sayfawa dynasty of Borno had equally been in power between the eleventh and the nineteenth centuries. In Borno, the new subjects of the British Empire had been subjects of a king as long as the English themselves. As the Europeans were building colonial empires, they perceived themselves as heirs to the Romans. Richard Hingley demonstrated to what extent the British colonial officers in India and Africa were directly inspired by the Roman example.[45] For example, the British duplicated the Roman frontier policy of building a *limes* by creating the "Salt Hedge" or "Customs Hedge" in Northern India in 1843.[46] Similarly, for early colonial officers, the British battles against the Mahdi in Sudan mirrored the Roman fight against the "Welsh."[47]

Histories of Borno by colonial officers clearly reflected Edward Gibbon's history of the Roman Empire, written between 1776 and 1789,[48] and demonstrated the extent to which the first colonial officials were influenced by their own classical education when considering Borno. This history of the kingdom was always depicted as the history of the rise and fall of the "Holy Kingdom." This phenomenon was not limited to the scholarly-minded residents but also to other colonial officers or travelers. Margery Perham who travelled through Borno in 1932 described in her diary her personal feelings of admiration about the kingdom. In her book, she made sure to mention that Borno once "dominated that whole dry heart of north-central Africa, stretching from the present Bornu to the borders of the present Sudan."[49] Rex Niven, resident of Borno from 1940 to 1943 and again from 1948 to 1950, did not hesitate to repeat the history of the territory of Borno in his memoirs, *Nigerian Kaleidoscope*.[50] For him, the residency of Borno was "something essentially unique and out of this world."[51] This Bornoan exceptionalism was reinforced by other colonial officers. In their

[45] Richard Hingley, *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen: The Imperial Origins of Roman Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[46] Hingley, *Roman Officers*, 42.

[47] Hingley, *Roman Officers*, 47.

[48] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Lane, 1994).

[49] Margery F. Perham, *West African Passage: A Journey Through Nigeria, Chad and the Cameroons, 1931–32* (London: Peter Owen, 1983), 114.

[50] Rex Niven, *Nigerian Kaleidoscope: Memoirs of a Colonial Servant* (London: Hurst, 1982).

[51] Niven, *Nigerian Kaleidoscope*, 150.

memoirs of civil servants throughout the whole of the British Empire, Gawain Bell,[52] and Bryan Sharwood-Smith[53] emphasized the history of nineteenth-century Borno. R. Trevor Kerslake, Assistant-District Officer in Borno from 1942 to 1944, stressed that "Bornu was, and perhaps still is, a remote and somehow separate part of what was known as the Holy North."[54] Trevor Clark, member of the last generation of colonial officers in Nigeria, also referred to the history of Borno in his edited book.[55] Nicholas McKlintock in his memoirs evoked: "The core of the province was the great central emirate of Bornu itself, under its venerable ruler, the Shehu."[56]

Different travelers or colonial officers in Borno reproduced the idea of a Bornoan exceptionalism as the colonial authorities reproduced the ideas conveyed by the earlier colonial administrators and the Bornoan elite. The conservatism of the colonial officers in charge of Borno made them consider the territory of Borno as a "Holy Land" in essence. By repeating endlessly in their colonial reports or memoirs, the history of the rise and fall of the kingdom of Borno, they assured that it would survive the British colonization. Kirk-Greene stressed how these political officers sought to ensure that their power remained unchallenged in the whole of Northern Nigeria.[57] Securing knowledge was thus a strategy to reinforce their own power for these career-minded officers.

Studying the history of Borno enabled the colonial officers in charge to capture intellectually their province. This personal sense of belonging enabled them to administer Borno more as a ruler than as a colonial officer. Two factors were responsible for such an attitude. Firstly, the geographical distance between the administrative capitals of Northern Nigeria, Zungeru and later Kaduna and the capital of colonial Borno. As a result Borno was particularly isolated from the rest of the colony of Northern Nigeria.[58] Arguably, the residents in charge of Sokoto never developed such a strong autonomous attitude. Secondly, it could be argued that the British colonial officials were directly influenced by the strong political framework of Borno.

[52] He became the last governor of Northern Nigeria in 1957. The second part of his memoirs were published in: Gawain W. Bell, *An Imperial Twilight* (London: Lester Crook, 1989).

[53] Bryan Sharwood-Smith, "*But Always as Friends:" Northern Nigeria and the Cameroons, 1921–1957* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

[54] R. Trevor Kerslake, *Time and the Hour: Nigeria, East Africa and the Second World War* (London: Radcliffe, 1997).

[55] A. Trevor Clark, *Was It Only Yesterday? The Last Generation of Nigeria's "Turawa"* (Bristol: BECM Press, 2002).

[56] Nicholas C. McClintock, *Kingdoms in the Sand and Sun: An African Path to Independence* (London: Radcliffe, 1992).

[57] Interview with Anthony Kirk-Greene, Oxford, 4 May 2010.

[58] To see the reasons for the choices of Zungeru in 1902 and Kaduna in 1913, see: William N.M. Geary, *Nigeria Under British Rule* (London: Methuen, 1927), 212.

In 1958, Robert Heussler, a historian of Northern Nigeria, described the specificity of what was then called "the Holy Kingdom."[59] Indeed according to him: "In a North that was sacred overall, Bornu was the *sanctum sanctorum* where the power of a small clique of officers was as great as their ideas were reactionary."[60]

Admittedly, Northern Nigeria was not at the summit of the career ladder for British colonial officers. In the unofficial hierarchy of the colonial empire, India, Sudan and Eastern Africa were more reputable and sought after. However if these officers were sent to Western Africa, it seems that Borno was an ideal place from which to advance their career. After his eight years in Borno, Palmer was promoted lieutenant-governor of The Gambia and became later on governor of Cyprus; Gordon Lethem, resident of Borno from 1925 to 1931, became governor of the Seychelles, the Leeward Islands and British Guyana; John Patterson, resident of Borno in 1937, became chief-commissioner in Northern Nigeria.[61] For career-minded Western African British officials, Northern Nigeria was then a place where they could advance their career. Comparatively, other colonial officers from Southern Nigeria did not obtain such prestigious positions.[62] Being stationed in Borno gave these officers the largest share of the prestige attached to Northern Nigeria. In addition, studying Borno provided academic laurels to them which benefitted their own career. The conjunction of these two factors made the British colonial officials eager to follow the steps of Benton or Palmer. Their scholarly interest, even if undeniable, was thus partly self-interested. As a consequence, these colonial officers became "authorities" in the two meanings of the term. In a system of Indirect Rule where the spatial structure of the nineteenth-century territory of Borno was preserved, they were at the head of a hierarchy through which they could exert their power. As products of European universities, they could become academic authorities of Borno to foster their own career. These officers were compelled to promote the unity and continuity of the Bornoan space to improve their own status as residents of the province. They were not in charge of a semi-arid, remote and relatively impoverished province; they were residents of the kingdom of Borno. The relationship between these two perceptions made these officers proud and defensive of their own authority of their province.

This does not mean that the Bornoan historical events or characters were overrated by these officers as the quality of their work is undeniable. Anthony Kirk-Greene, who was District Officer in Borno in 1955, stressed

[59] Robert Heussler, *The British in Northern Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 74.

[60] Heussler, *The British in Northern Nigeria*, 74.

[61] Heussler, *The British in Northern Nigeria*, 75.

[62] Interview with Anthony Kirk-Greene.

how these first figures of residents were genuinely attached but also protective of their own authority.[63] Kirk-Greene even became a specialist of Borno[64] while also focusing on the colonial service, hence becoming a scholar of these early scholars.[65]

Not every colonial administrator wrote scholarly works on Borno. However, all the annual colonial reports still available spell out the history of the "Holy Kingdom" of Borno. For the purposes of British colonial administration, the first part of the annual reports sent to the central government of Northern Nigeria summarized the history of Borno in a version mostly inspired by Schultze and Palmer. A process of accumulation was thus obvious as the history of the kingdom was repeated in every official document sent from Borno.[66] By producing a seamless official history, the British and the Bornoan elite created a vulgate of the history of Borno. Strikingly, this history is still to a certain extent the official version of the history of Borno. History, as it is taught in Bornoan schools, still corresponds to the history written endlessly in the colonial reports or in Palmer's *Sahara and Sudan*.[67] Knowledge on Borno was thus created and fossilized at the same time by this European-Bornoan joint-venture.

The Production of Knowledge: a European-Bornoan Joint-Venture

In a 1972 essay, Ronald Robinson revealed how collaboration was essential to British imperialism.[68] The memoirs of the British officers present in Borno certainly reveal such an attitude in Borno. During the colonial period, a new type of history was written, influenced by both the British officers and the Bornoan elite. The last part of this article will thus try to show how the relationship between the British officers and the Bornoan elite fostered the creation of a hybrid type of knowledge.

An affinity between the British colonial officers and the Borno aristocracy certainly existed in colonial Borno. The first colonial officers in British or German Borno were mostly military officers who had no special training

[63] Interview with Anthony Kirk-Greene.

[64] Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Maiduguri and the Capitals of Bornu* (Zaria: North Regional Literature Agency, 1958); Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, "The British Consulate at Lake Chad: A Forgotten Treaty with the Sheikh of Bornu," *African Affairs* 58 (1959), 334–339; Hogben and Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria*; Anthony Kirk-Greene, *Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria* (London: Cass, 1972).

[65] Kirk-Greene, *Britain's Imperial Administrators*.

[66] Most colonial reports are still available in the Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna, or in the British National Archives, Kew.

[67] Interviews with Bosoma Sheriff, Maiduguri, July 2010.

[68] Ronald E. Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in: E. Roger J. Owen and Robert B. Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), 140–177.

in territorial administration. However, each of them developed a personal relationship with the Bornoan aristocracy. This could be considered as the simple result of Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria. For example, when Lugard met the resident of Borno, W.P. Hewby, at the border of Borno province in 1909, the former said: "I may be High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria, but I see, Mr. Hewby, that you are King of Borno."[69] Heussler stressed that Hewby "was genuinely surprised to get back a rocket from headquarters" when he once mentioned to his superiors: "I never appoint a District Head without having consulted the Shehu."[70] It seems that from the beginning of the colonial period, the colonial officers were particularly involved with the local Bornoan hierarchy. This personal style could have been a consequence of the shortage of staff of the first generation of political officers as after the First World War, the European colonial officers were more numerous and particularly prepared for their task.[71] This personal involvement with the local hierarchy resulted in the production of knowledge based on information collected on the ground. Indeed, most authors conducted interviews with educated members of the places they visited in Borno. One man embodies this relationship between the British administration and the local elite in particular. This colonial officer, Herbert Palmer, desired to write the history of the kingdom since its beginnings. As Palmer himself stressed in the introduction of his book *Sahara and Sudan*: "During some twenty-six years spent in various parts of Northern Nigeria, much of the author's leisure was occupied in attempts to find *data* for the compilation of a true history of its more important units, or ruling classes, such as the Fulbe and Kanuri of Bornu."[72] History-writing was thus associated from the beginning with the "ruling class."

From 1904 to 1930, Palmer gathered oral and written data while climbing the ladder of the Northern Nigerian colonial hierarchy. First an assistant resident, he soon became resident in Northern Nigeria. He was promoted to the residency of Borno in 1917, before becoming lieutenant-governor of Northern Nigeria in 1925. His published Arabic letters and testimonies

[69] Niven, *Nigerian Kaleidoscope*, 150. Unfortunately, the "king of Borno" never wrote any histories or ethnographic studies of Borno.

[70] Heussler, *The British in Northern Nigeria*, 74.

[71] In 1926, a university course called "Tropical African Service" and after 1932 "Colonial Administrative Service" was devised at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. This course was mainly academic as it was not until 1945 that the course would be under the direction of a District Officer. After the Second World War, the course was also given at the London School of Economics with some particular training in colonial history, economics, law, anthropology, geography and languages. See Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority*, 44.

[72] Herbert R. Palmer, *The Bornu Sahara and Suda*n (London: John Murray, 1936), vii.

became the basis of modern scholarship for Hausa and Bornoan studies.[73] For example, while in Kano, he translated numerous documents into English with the help of his assistant, Abd Allah Al-Ghadamisi.[74] During his eight years in Borno, Palmer focused on the history of the Sayfawa kingdom. Admittedly, his approach and methods are nowadays outdated. For example, Palmer subscribed to the diffusionist theories which wanted to find the origins of Borno in distant migrations. According to him, as the kingdom of Kanem-Borno was the first kingdom to be Islamized in Africa, it must have found its origins in the Middle East. For example, Palmer concludes that the Bornoans were linked with "Iranian Barbarians."[75] This assumption was directly influenced by the Hamitic hypothesis which wanted to find the origins of complex societies such as Borno outside of Africa. In that sense, colonial historiography of Borno was not different from the colonial historiography of other colonial territories such as Rwanda.[76]

Palmer's chronology of the previous reigning dynasty was inaccurate and was revised later by historians such as Dierk Lange.[77] Nor did Palmer, for example, quote his sources when he mentioned the existence of a territorial division of sixteenth-century Borno. Palmer's monograph was not the first example of European scholarship on Borno. However, he promoted the kingdom on the historical academic stage. His monograph *Sahara and Sudan* revealed the importance of written and oral sources to understand the history of an ancient African territory. Palmer's work was more than a new way to deal with the history of Borno as every following author repeated the pattern described earlier: informants, even if not

[73] Herbert R. Palmer, "The Origin of the Name Bornu," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 28 (1928), 36–42; Herbert R. Palmer, *Bornu Arabic Manuscripts* (Kano: Emir of Kano's Press, 1930); Herbert R. Palmer and John Welman, *Gazetteer of Bornu Province* (London: Government Printer, 1972); Ahmad Ibn Furtu, *History of the First Twelve Years of the Reign of Mai Idris, Alooma of Bornu (1571–1533)* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1926).

[74] See the collection of articles written by Muhammad Sani Umar and John Hunwick in *Sudanic Africa*: Muhammad Sani Umar and John O. Hunwick, "Your Humble Servant: the Memoirs of ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghadāmisī of Kano, 1903–1908. Part I: The British Conquest of Kano," *Sudanic Africa* 7 (1996), 61–96; Muhammad Sani Umar and John O. Hunwick, "Your Humble Servant: the Memoirs of ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghadāmisī of Kano, 1903–1908. Part II: Serving Colonial Masters," *Sudanic Africa* 9 (1998), 91–134; Muhammad Sani Umar and John O. Hunwick, "Your Humble Servant: the Memoirs of ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghadāmisī of Kano, 1903–1908. Part III: Commentary," *Sudanic Africa* 11 (2000), 95–105.

[75] Palmer, *The Bornu Sahara and Sudan*, viii.

[76] Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *Le défi de l'ethnisme. Rwanda et Burundi: 1990–1996* (Paris: Karthala, 1997), 72.

[77] Dierk Lange, *Le Diwan des Sultans du Kanem-Bornu: Chronologie et Histoire d'un Royaume Africain (de la Fin du Xe Siècle jusqu'à 1808)* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1977).

acknowledged, were sought after and repeated the apparently identical version of the history of Borno. Using a number of unacknowledged sources, they stressed the antiquity of Borno while focusing on a certain vision of the history of the kingdom. The content of their studies revealed both the preoccupations of the colonizers and the Bornoan elite. Indeed, most colonial officials devoted their attention to the history of famous men and their prestigious feats. The Bornoan scholar-administrators examined great figures of the past such as King Idris who used firearms against his opponents in the sixteenth century. The prestigious roots of the Bornoan kingdom were also sought after. Only informants from the educated elite could have been aware of the political conditions which led to the succession of monarchs of Kanem-Borno.

By publishing what they had gleaned from their time in Borno, the colonial officers rebuilt the political history of the kingdom. This means that the Bornoan elite tried to intervene in the production of knowledge. Because of the lack of sources, it is difficult to assess the precise preoccupations of the colonial officers' informants in order to determine whether they had a hidden agenda to influence the writing of their history. However, the elitist bias described earlier never disappeared from historical writings produced by Bornoan colonial officers. The motivation of the Bornoan elite to justify their own position in the colonial framework of Indirect Rule can explain this phenomenon. Their presence at the head of the Native Authority was comforted by their intervention in the creation of colonial knowledge. However, because of the lack of direct published and oral sources, recovering the actual voices of the Bornoan elite could be too speculative.

The content of this knowledge revealed the preoccupations of the Bornoan elite and the European colonizers. As authorities of Borno, they had to be perceived as a legitimate source of power. This could not be better illustrated by the fact that the British were constantly referred to as those who resurrected the kingdom of Borno. Defenders of the historical rights of the Kanemi dynasty, the British saved Borno from oblivion. The British were thus who restored the ancient order and British colonization should thus be thought as a territorial and dynastic restoration. For example, the conquest of Borno led to the creation of a relatively abundant bibliography which never displayed competing versions of the history of the kingdom. It seems improbable though that local informants always shared the same version of history. This could be explained by the fact that one official version of the history of Borno could satisfy the heirs of the Kanemi dynasty as they could find common ground with the British colonial administration in the legitimization of their own presence as sovereigns of the kingdom. According to the history of Borno as analyzed by the colonial officers, the founder of the dynasty, Muhammad El-Kanemi, rapidly came to dominate the whole of the territory of Borno after the Fulani jihad of 1810. Murray Last suggested that this was only one interpretation of the

events. It is entirely possible that it took years or even decades for Muhammad El-Kanemi and his sons to overthrow the ancient dynasty of the Sayfawa.[78] Conveniently, this hypothesis was never suggested by colonial officers. Louis Brenner also argued that events described in the official history of Borno were not as clear-cut as described by the colonial officers in their history of the kingdom: "In Bornu, where there are virtually no fixed testimonies and the informants are therefore free to relate only what they wish in the manner they wish, (…) cross-checking and re-examination is extremely important."[79]

Another example at the very beginning of colonial rule illustrates how the writing of Bornoan history was manipulated. According to colonial historiography, the British colonial officers convinced in 1902 the heir of the previous ruling dynasty, Shehu Garbai, to rule over what would become the Northern Nigerian province of Borno. For example, Charles Temple wrote: "The dynasty of El Kanemi, in the person of Garbai, son of Ashimi, had meantime been restored to the throne, and the British effectually occupied the country in 1902."[80] This "restoration" which was often reiterated by subsequent academic writings appears to be more complex as Shehu Garbai was not in British-controlled territory at that time. Hans Dominik, a German colonial officer claimed that Shehu Garbai was reluctant to cross the newly created colonial boundary and that he was "taken away" by British troops. According to this German account, the British kidnapped Shehu Garbai in the town of Dikwa, located in the future German colony of Cameroon but still controlled by the French army in March 1902.[81] This explains why the Germans complained about the kidnapping of a person they perceived as a "German Sultan."[82] The German archives contain the correspondence between the British, French and German officers in charge of this affair, each of them presenting a different point of view on this complex episode.[83] More than the event itself, Shehu Garbai embodies the European quest for rulers at the beginning of colonial rule. In the context of the creation of European colonies in Africa, local rulers were needed by every single power. Borno was no exception. Moreover, this incident totally disappeared from subsequent British accounts of the colonization of Northern Nigeria where the heir of the previous dynasty gladly joined the British colonial administration. On the one hand, this clearly shows

[78] Murray Last, "Le Califat de Sokoto et Borno," in: Jacob F. Ade Ajayi (ed.), *Histoire Générale de l'Afrique* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1996), 599–646.

[79] Louis Brenner, *The Shehus of Kukawa, a History of the al-Kanemi Dynasty of Bornu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 6.

[80] Temple, *Notes on the Tribes,* 438.

[81] Bundesarchiv Abteilungen Berlin (BArchB), RKolA (Reichskolonialamt), R 175F FA 1/ in 73 (S. 75).

[82] BArchB, RkolA, R 175F FA 1/ in 73 (S. 72).

[83] BArchB, RkolA, R 175F FA 1/ in 73.

that the British tried to simplify the narrative of the beginning of colonial rule, which, for lack of clarity, was only explained by the fact that Shehu Garbai was willing to acquire the Bornoan throne. On the other hand, this episode is depicted as the return of a king to his rightful throne. Shehu Garbai is presented under a favorable light without any competitor from his family. The extent to which Shehu Garbai manipulated colonial powers in 1902 has totally been eluded by subsequent historical writings. The history of the beginning of colonial rule in Borno was thus simplified to create a coherent narrative favorable to the British version of events and to the person of Shehu Garbai who acquired the right to become the Shehu of what would be known as "British Bornu."[84]

This raises the question of the exact role played by the elite in the process of writing history. Were they simple informants, secondary or even co-authors? Recent Africanist literature has focused on the role of African as intermediaries or power brokers.[85] As in the conquest or the administration of colonial Africa, the local elite also played a very important role in the creation of knowledge. However, quantifying the degree of this influence seems difficult. Limiting the role of the local elite to that of simple informants would not be satisfying because of their considerable input in the creation of local history. As in the case of the Lunguru in Tanganyika,[86] a genuine pidginization of Bornoan history took place. It means that the colonial administration did not hesitate to intervene in the writing of history as seen previously in the case of the "kidnapping" of the first Shehu of British colonial Borno.

The case of Borno offers a case of historical pidginization where the production of historical knowledge in colonial Borno can be considered as a joint venture. This alliance between the Europeans and the local elite was illustrated by the stance taken by the British colonial administration in relation to education. In 1922, the Phelps-Stoke Report was used as the basis for a reorganization of education in Northern Nigeria and recommended that local languages should be used in class. In order to teach Kanuri culture to the young Bornoans members of the minority which attended Western schools, a series of book called *Kitabuwa Kanuribe*, the Kanuri books, was published by the Nigerian colonial authorities. The fifth and last book of this series was dedicated to history.[87] Not surprisingly, the

[84] "Borno" was spelled "Bornu" until 1976 when the Borno Emirate Council changed the official spelling of the name.

[85] For one recent example in Northern Nigeria, see: Philip A. Afeadie, *Brokering Colonial Rule: Political Agents in Northern Nigeria, 1886–1914* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008).

[86] Pels, "Pidginization."

[87] Thomas Geider, "The Universe of Kanuri Oral Literature and Documentary Texts," in: Norbert Cyffer and Thomas Geider (eds.), *Advances in Kanuri Scholarship* (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 1997), 157–224.

first author of this book was a colonial officer in Borno, Randall E. Ellison, who was working as the Officer of Education in 1935. His main informant was Muhammad Ngileruma who later became Waziri of Borno and was the Permanent Delegate of Nigeria to the United Nations Organization from 1960 to 1962.[88] Once again, the history of Borno was the history as reconstructed by colonial officers and the Bornoan elite.

Furthermore, a British version of Bornoan history was also transmitted in schools. The successor of the nineteenth-century rulers of Borno also supported the teaching of Bornoan history. The monarch of Borno from 1922 to 1937, Shehu Sanda Kura, was particularly involved in this production of history books. The joint work of these colonial officers and the local elite was thus taught to the minority of young Bornoans who attended school. This transmission of knowledge completed the hybridization of knowledge initiated by the Germans and British. It could thus be argued that historical knowledge was manipulated and transmitted by the Europeans and the local elite during the colonial times. Because of its richly documented past, the case of Borno was thus an extreme case of this joint production of knowledge.

Conclusion

The case of Borno shows how the history of an African precolonial kingdom could be reconstructed by colonial officials in collaboration with the local elite. The independent kingdom of Borno was no more but it could survive within the history books of the colonial period. Borno proved to be a very well-documented example of this complex academic and imperial relationship. The first colonial officials in quest of legitimacy and personal glory studied and wrote the ancient history of Borno. Thus, they produced history as a way to assert their own power. However, this was not the only goal of these academic endeavors as the colonial officers genuinely contributed to the production of the history of Borno.

In the case of Borno, the history of the kingdom was clearly manipulated and even transmitted back to a minority of influential Bornoans via colonial schools. This process meant that historical research undertaken by colonial officers with the help of the local elite permeated the small part of the Bornoan society attending western schools. Knowledge accumulated during the colonial period did not only shape Borno's colonial period but also its precolonial history. It is by consequence possible to talk about historical feedback operated by the British and the local elite. These studies re-shaped the colonial understandings of British rule in

[88] Bosoma Sheriff and Muhammad Fannami, "Tapping the Untapped - A Critical Analysis of Kitabuwa Kanuribe 1–5," in: Doris Löhr, Eva Rothmaler and Georg Ziegelmeyer (eds.), *Kanuri, Borno and Beyond: Current Studies on the Lake Chad Region* (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 2011), 155–171.

Northern Nigeria as it enabled many Borno residents to exert a conservative rule on "their" province. Preserving the nineteenth-century space became synonymous with preserving power for the British and the local elite. The fossilization of Borno within colonial writings led to the development of a Bornoan exceptionalism within Nigeria which helps explain the survival of Borno in academic writings. This article argues as a consequence that the Europeans were able to insure the survival of precolonial territories by giving them a definite academic status. The "provinces" of their colonies became "regions" as they were objectified by their different administrators and the local elite. The conjunction between the two administrative and academic spheres turned precolonial polities into "provinces" but also into intellectual "regions."

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