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SCARS OF PARTITION

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POSTCOLONIAL LEGACIES IN FRENCH AND BRITISH BORDERLANDS

WILLIAM F. S. MILES

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Set in Sabon by Renni Johnson.

To Dr. Andycook (*sic*),
faithful friend and correspondent over time, over boundaries,
and despite my “Wayward” ways

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?”

—Paul Gaughin

Who are we? Several years after commencing my career-long comparison of indigenous peoples previously partitioned into French and British colonies, a psychologically astute colleague-friend made me realize that, at heart, my subject matter was *identity*. Now, identity is a topic that transcends several intellectual disciplines and paradigms. It is also a very personal matter—which is why I had ostensibly camouflaged my personal quest for it by conducting fieldwork in remote locales and among exotic peoples throughout the developing world. And I did so as a political scientist! That tension between scholarly research agenda and subconscious preoccupation was ultimately resolved (at least on paper) with the publication of my *Zion in the Desert*, a study of American Jewish baby boomers who, in the 1970s and 1980s, opted to become Israeli *kibbutzniks* in the Negev Desert.

But every one of us has reason to ponder the randomness of being bequeathed a particular society, culture, and nation. Relatively few on this planet enjoy the luck of acquiring at birth the nationality and support system of a developed, high-income nation. That existential puzzle has nagged at me ever since a two-year Peace Corps stint revealed both the unmerited luck of having been born citizen of a “developed country” and the corresponding (and humbling) dignity, solidarity, and tenacity of the impoverished majority otherwise allotted the “third world.” For allowing me to share those reflections *in extenso*, in *My African Horse Problem*, I acknowledge University of Massachusetts Press editor Bruce Wilcox.

Three questions undergird the present book: (1) How did discrete indigenous groups (e.g., Melanesian, Hausa, Tamil, Lao), respond, subvert, and adjust to the respective British and French colonial projects superimposed onto their society and culture? (2) In what ways (political, linguistic, economic) have their emergent postcolonial states differed as a consequence of their previous colonial imprints? (3) To what extent are contemporary world processes, particularly globalization and development, mediated on the national level by institutional and cultural patterns established during the colonial and early postcolonial eras?

To address these questions, I have conducted grassroots research in all regions of the world that have experienced the close-quartered impact of Anglo vs. French colonialism: West Africa, the West Indies, South and Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the Middle East. In the Middle East—where colonial/mandate Anglo-French borders were those of Iraq and Jordan with Syria, and between Palestine and Lebanon—my firsthand research into colonial legacies has been restricted to Palestinian and Israeli Francophones (Miles 1995b; Miles and Sheffer 1998). Since that research is not methodologically comparable to the other cases, I do not include it in this book.

For all but one of the cases that I do present here, following local language training I spent a minimum of seven months in the field. While my level of fluency has never been the same across all the relevant languages, in the process I have become quite comfortable in French, Hausa, and Bislama, and passably conversational in Creole/Kreol, Hebrew, and (at the time) Tamil. Although my first officially sponsored research began in 1982 in Martinique, my appetite for fieldwork was whetted by a 1976 undergraduate foray to rural Québec under the supervision of Vassar College geography professor Harvey Flad, and as assistant to the late anthropologist Horace Miner, to northern Nigeria in 1980. My two years (1977–79) as a Peace Corps volunteer in a town in Niger near the border with Nigeria were also formative in honing a sensitivity to postcolonial Francophone-Anglophone differences. However one dates my status as a grassroots researcher into Anglo-French postcolonialism, it now spans over a quarter of a century.

For fear of undue academic scrutiny, I hesitate to reveal which one of the chapters is based on fieldwork falling below my standard threshold of at least half a year in the field and reasonable familiarity with the local language. But the truth is that I know only a few words of Burmese and Lao and that my three research trips to Myanmar and Laos were each of only a few weeks' duration. (A previous visit to Thailand had brought me—thanks to Kwanchewan and Witoon Buadaeng—to the border with Burma.) Accordingly, except for the few Francophones I located in Laos, in Southeast Asia I depended heavily on translators. In instances where I interviewed hill peoples who did not know their country's official language, I had to work through double layers of translation. The ensuing loss in direct access to informants was frustrating. I trust that the excellent secondary sources upon which I draw for that chapter compensate in some measure for my regional and linguistic lack of expertise there. Two of the foremost experts on Myanmar and Laos, Professor David Steinberg and Dr. Martin Stuart-Fox, respectively, graciously agreed to make improvements on my draft chapter.

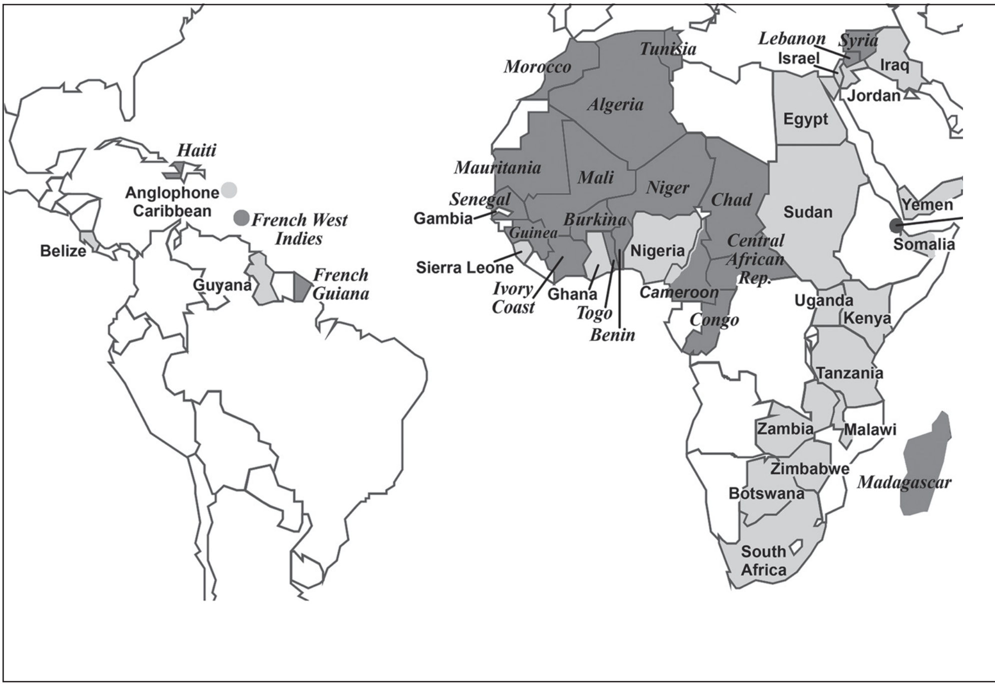
I owe debts to numerous other scholars. Colleague-*landsmen* who have encouraged me in my cross-regional research include Professors Bob Charlick, Larry Diamond, Michael Horowitz, and Lenny Markovitz; Leo Villalón keeps me on my Francophone Africanist toes. Professor Tony Asiwaju of the University of Lagos has kept me anchored to the borderline perspective throughout my comparative research; Professor John Paden has kept me grounded in Nigeria throughout my supra-African peregrinations. So has Dr. Binta Audu. The "psychologically astute colleague-friend" to whom I referred earlier is David Rochefort. It was Dr. Larry Diamond, above all, who most explicitly put it to me, during a beach walk in Mauritius in 1997, that I ought to begin integrating all my separate fieldwork cases into a synthetic whole. I resisted—for about a decade. Along the way I benefited from continuous intellectual exchange, encouragement, and hospitality from former diplomat Jeffrey Liteman and Dr. Andy Cook. Professor Philip Boucher, former president of the French Colonial Historical Society, directed me to the University of Nebraska Press on account of its long-standing high-quality scholarly imprints on France's former colonies.

Various institutions have made this work possible. For travel funding, but more important, the precious grant of time off for research, I thank Northeastern University. Based at Northeastern is Terry Beadle, illustrator and map maker for this book, whose professional expertise, commitment, and camaraderie have been a boon to my entire career as scholar, author, and lecturer. Students Elvira Josifi and Heather Peltier applied themselves to rooting out bibliographic oversights in the manuscript. For the initial gift of two years in an African borderland community, I thank the Peace Corps. The Shell International Studies Research program, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, the American Institute of Indian Studies, the American Philosophical Society, the Fulbright Program, the National Endowment of the Humanities, the French Government Teaching Assistantship program, and the Ministry of International Relations and Francophonie of the Government of Québec have all provided much-appreciated grants and fellowships. Collegial and intellectual reinforcement of the value of borderlands studies has come from fellow members (and especially "chiefs") of ABORNE, the African Borderlands Research Network. To round off the fieldwork and kick-start the writing, I needed the encouragement and opportunity provided by the Earhart Foundation, whose patience and support I acknowledge with much gratitude; thanks in particular go to Earhart Fellow Research Grant director Montgomery Brown. Without Earhart, there would be no book here.

Neither would there have been this book without the interest of the University of Nebraska Press and its anonymous reviewers, who with invaluable suggestions for improvement, endorsed it. Editors Bridget Barry and Lona Dearmont worked tirelessly to improve the flow and prose of the manuscript: the remaining deficiencies remain mine alone.

In the course of my career's research, many a Frenchman has inquired into my attraction to *la Francophonie*, French colonialism, overseas France. My fascination with former French colonies has been a subconscious foil, perhaps, for my own country, culture, and history. After all, I tell my students, comparative social science enables us to better see our own society and nation for what they are. "Does America not have its own history of colonialism? Is the United States not an imperial power today?" These challenges, put to me by (otherwise friendly) Frenchmen allergic to my incessant probing of their collective colonial heritage, have forced me to confront issues otherwise too close for comfort. "Comparing empires," as Jonathan Hart (2003) puts it, "is at the same time an exercise in situating our own collective selves in imperial history."

One French national in particular has been an indispensable spur to my lifelong quest for colonial and postcolonial knowledge. Martinican by birth, ultimately American by choice, Loïza Nellec-Miles brought to our foyer prenuptial memories of colonial and postcolonial life in Niger, Senegal, French Guiana, and Tahiti. The fruit of this love, Arielle Pooshpam and Samuel Benjamin, have already, through their own journeys, begun to enrich my understanding of the world. They, too, are part of the intriguing, unpredictable, and never-ending postcolonial story.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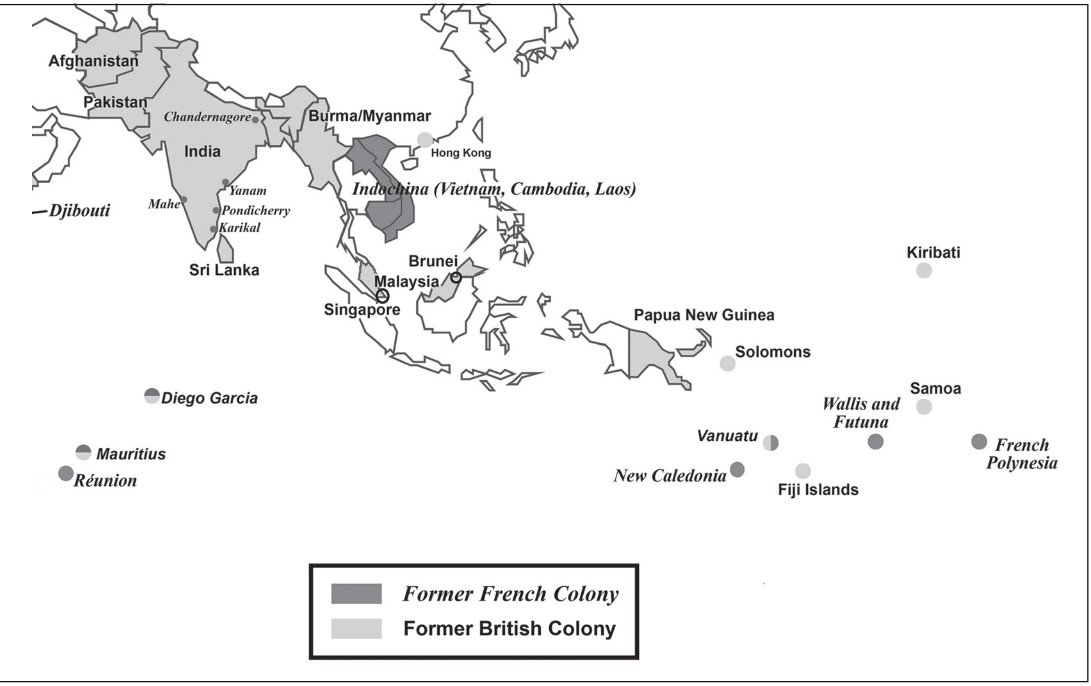
Former French and British Colonies—World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Singapore
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Papua New Guinea
Solomons
Diego Garcia
Samoa
Wallis and Futuna
Vanuatu
French Polynesia
Mauritius
Réunion
New Caledonia
Fiji Islands
Former French Colony
Former British Colony

1

Anglo-French Partition and Postcolonialism

> [D]ecolonization is a harlot of a word. It pleases so many needs that readers can never be sure of its real meaning.
>
> —Karl Hack, "Theories and Approaches to British Decolonization in Southeast Asia"

There are many related words invoked in scholarly settings that, following Hack, are easily prostituted: colonialism, exploitation, superpower, discourse, narrative. How neutral, how "objective" (itself a seductive concept), can one be in describing the operation and aftermath of conquest and overrule? For sure, ideological dispositions can color one's use of such terms. But dueling meanings, I believe, stem less from bad faith than from academic discipline.

Postcolonial is the terminological bugaboo for this book. As a political scientist who borrows inordinately from history, geography, and anthropology, I use the word "merely" to describe the social and political processes following the sovereignty exercised by European powers (here, British and French) over their African, Asian, Latin American, and Oceanic colonies, protectorates, and territories. In this sense, *postcolonialism* is intimately related to *decolonization* (Hack's semantic floozy).

This comparative inquiry into the long-term implications of French vis-à-vis British colonialism and decolonization, then, is primarily about identity—that of a large swath of humanity who, through no choice of their own, find themselves in territories recently under the dominion of France and Britain, the two major superpowers from the seventeenth until the mid-twentieth centuries. These colonial powers, moreover, with little regard for the peoples soon to be under their dominion, apportioned them to French or British tutelage. What difference, in the long run, has that arbitrary apportionment made?

What deep institutional legacies (regarding governance, development, education, language policy, and religion) did French vis-à-vis British colonialism leave behind? What postcolonial commonalties link former French territories, and British ones, throughout the developing world? What accounts for the dissimilarities that have arisen? At what junctures has culture begun to trump history?

To answer these questions with a pretense of scholarly "value added," I yoke together four usually disparate clusters of literature.[1] The first is history: precolonial and colonial history, accounts of colonial explorers, diplomatic history, social history, histories of French and British imperial rule (and their respective types of administration), history of decolonization. For some of the cases, I had the opportunity to consult colonial archival sources, and with others to undertake oral history of the late colonial era.

Geography is the second cluster of literature that I invoke. Colonial borders are notoriously arbitrary even if close historical inspection uncovers some surprising contemporaneous concessions. Boundaries, those totems of political geography, condition the life prospects of the people born behind them and divided by them. Partition represents political geography at the edges of the state, giving birth to entirely new micro-societies: the borderlands. These political margins crystallize differences. "Borderline" should not be only an epithet (as in "borderline personality," "marginal," or "barely acceptable"), for it can reveal starkly different political realities. Anglo-French carving of colonial space is a significant geographical legacy: nearly

40 percent of the entire length of today's international boundaries were traced by Britain and France (Imbert-Vier 2011, 13, following Foucher 1991). Awareness of "where-ness" is critical to postcolonial understanding.

Thirdly, anthropology facilitates a focus on actual people and cultures. One of the common sins of both colonization and conventional histories of colonialism is reification of the colonized, including partitioned, peoples. For sure, great anticolonial literature has emerged from such authors as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Aimé Césaire, to cite but a few. But only anthropology investigates ordinary life for otherwise unheralded ethnic people and peoples, both during colonialism and after. My forays into and borrowings from anthropology logically focus on those indigenous peoples most directly affected, in the long-term, by colonial partition. By zooming in on otherwise identical cultures that experienced French versus British colonialism, we can better discern the overarching effects of these two different systems on otherwise unrelated peoples. And we should gain a better appreciation of the import of this book's theme upon "real people," not just the erudite intellectuals whose writings are more widely known. I trust that whatever holes in my arguments professional historians of decolonization may feel compelled to poke are compensated for by a borderland sensitivity that conveys the contemporary perspectives of otherwise overlooked partitioned peoples.

As Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (2005, 653) aptly observes, "each social science subfield has its own epistemology of borders." The literature and methodology of these other disciplines may be somewhat remote to students of political science. But that is indeed my home discipline, ensuring that I retain an overarching concern for the political implications (local, national, international) of my findings. While acknowledging my debts to history, geography, and anthropology, this is a career-spanning exercise, above all, in comparative politics. Through the prism of the borderlands, it refracts foundational precepts of the discipline so vividly expressed by fellow political scientist Crawford Young, as he reflects on "territorial integrity and border sanctity": "[T]he elixir of sovereignty hardened the map lines of the colonial partition into a permanent array of containers. . . . [T]he affirmation of the colonial partition map even sharpened the territorial lines, now an iron grid of sovereign containers" (Young 2012, 90–91, 301). The present work advances a further assertion: *Borderlands do not negate sovereignty so much as they illuminate it.*[2]

By focusing cross-culturally on ethnic groups partitioned by colonialism, this book fashions itself as the first empirically grounded comparative study of the legacies of colonialism from the combined perspectives of political anthropology and political science. It thereby resolves a problem inherent in the literature thus far. To the macro-level surveys of Anglo-French colonialism and decolonization, it advances the role of indigenous cultures in shaping the outcome of colonial policies and their postcolonial aftermaths. To the case studies that focus on ethnicity, it magnifies the scope by a cross-cultural methodology, comparing the overall impact of Anglo-French partitions in six different world regions. In this light such otherwise universal concepts as, for example, Mbembe's "postcolony" (1972) can be examined empirically, using the borderland as illuminating frame.

Why This Book—and Now?

Colonial legacies of the British and French—how archaic this phrase must sound to thinkers glued to the moment, how seemingly removed from the "relevance" of today's pressing political issues! But not to all. In a review for *Foreign Affairs* (2007, 148), Walter Russell Mead acknowledges the ongoing relevance of Anglo-French rivalry: "The interplay between these two societies has done more to shape the geopolitics, economics, and culture of the world today than the relationship between any other two societies on the face of the earth." Four other impressive books strengthen my conviction that I am indeed joining colleagues at the crossroads of critical postcolonial thought.

The first is Crawford Young's most deservedly prizewinning *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (1994). In reassessing the colonialism of Africa in light of comparable histories elsewhere, Young—who trailblazed such studies with his 1976 classic *Politics of Cultural Pluralism*—makes a strong case for the uniqueness of African postcolonial outcomes.

In a remarkable, far-reaching chapter that foreshadows the aims of the present book, Young compares colonial and postcolonial Africa with North America and Australasia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Micronesia and Korea, Malaysia and Fiji, Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, Indonesia, Indochina, Oceania, India, the Philippines, and the Middle East. From his cross-national colonial comparisons, Professor Young identifies a "singular historical personality" for Africa vis-à-vis these other regions, characterized by a "singularly difficult legacy bequeathed by the institutions of rule devised to establish and maintain alien hegemony." While sensitive to French-British colonial differences, he does not make them his overarching framework. As I intend to demonstrate, a comparative perspective that does use this lens tempers the "singular" nature of Africa in favor of a global analysis that continues to privilege, for explanatory purposes, the legacies of distinct modalities of European colonialism.

My efforts to understand the ways in which indigenous societies and former colonies throughout the developing world continue to reflect their respective colonial antecedents echoes Young's pioneering work. So do my more focused attempts to perceive the distinctive French and British stamps that continue to mark daily life for ordinary people along and behind superimposed boundaries throughout the so-called Third World.

A second signal work in comparative colonialism and decolonization also takes the end of the Soviet Union as its springboard *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective*, edited by Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (1997). Several chapters focus on the British and French experiences as potential previews for what the close of the Soviet era may portend. In it, British and French colonial and postcolonial experiences figure prominently. For example, Michael Fry frames British and French decolonization as a Cold War experience that indirectly pitted the Soviet Union against the United States. Compared with the demise of the Soviet empire, Fry maintains, it unfolded in a premeditated and orderly manner.

In a subsequent, equally important edited volume *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*, Professor Young teams up with Soviet specialist Mark Beissinger to edit a cutting-edge work that again reassesses the contemporary applications of African colonial history. Shared syndromes—state breakdown and violence, economic collapse, ethnic and gender vulnerability—are identified as rooted in colonial and communist institutional patterns. Although tangential to their overarching thesis, Beissinger and Young also point out another shared legacy that is essential to our approach here: the porousness of boundaries, which reflects both their arbitrary origins and (many) states' inability to exercise meaningful control over them.

A key contribution of Beissinger and Young's volume lies in its cross-regional (as opposed to case-specific) approach. "The issues that grip Africa and post-Soviet Eurasia transcend region; they are global in scope" (Beissinger and Young 2002, 5). In like manner, many of my findings in areas where former French colonies butt up against former British ones (e.g., smuggling, human trafficking) certainly exist elsewhere, and are no less important for it.

William Easterly's critique of Western aid to the developing world, *The White Man's Burden*, might not at first blush seem relevant to a reconsideration of colonialism. Yet Easterly sees a direct relationship between the failures of today's humanitarianism and yesterday's imperialism. "The West sowed . . . mayhem with chaotic decolonization," writes Easterly in his chapter "From Colonialism to Postmodern Imperialism," "especially the arbitrary way the West drew borders." Part of the white man's burden, as he recasts Kipling's formulation, is the economic diffi-

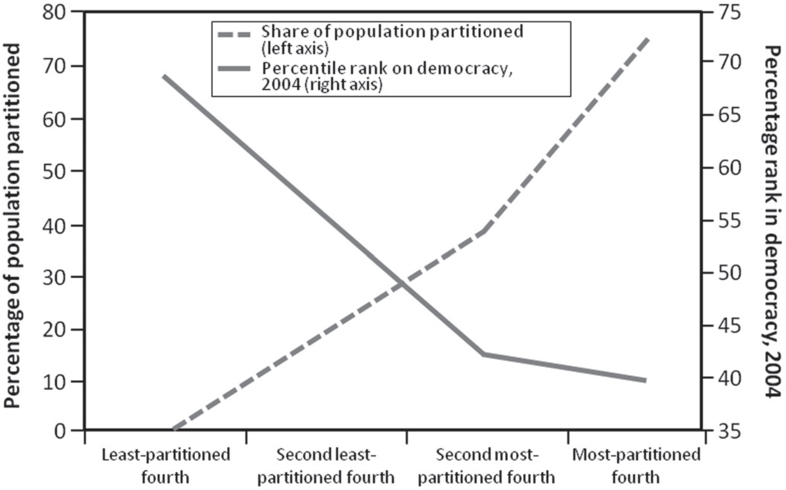

Fig. 1. Democracy and Partition in Former Colonies
From *The White Man's Burden* by William Easterly, copyright
© 2006 by William Easterly.

culty of repairing societies rent asunder by partition, even though "many will deny the relevance of colonial experience to today's allegedly more humanitarian exercises" (Easterly 2006, 272).

Easterly statistically examines the relationship between ethnic partition and economic development. Although he does not distinguish between French and British territories, he finds that globally, former colonies containing significant proportions of partitioned peoples perform relatively poorly in delivery of government services (health and education), transparency, and rule of law.

Taking literally the image of the colonial bureaucrat who, oblivious to ethnic reality on a faraway continent, draws a straight line on a map, Easterly even quantified boundaries according to their linearity or jaggedness. His intriguing finding: "artificially straight borders were statistically associated with less democracy, higher infant mortality, more illiteracy, less childhood immunization, and less access to clean water" (2006, 293) (see Fig. 1).

It is mostly in departments of language, literature, and cultural studies that *postcolonial* has become an institutionalized framework for analysis. There it is indissolubly wedded to deconstructionism and other literary devices I do not negotiate comfortably. The concept that dominates (paradoxically, given that postcolonialism postulates antidomination) is hybridization, the mixing or blending of cultures previously thought of as colonized and colonizing. Such a postcultural perspective is particularly suspicious of language as an oppressive vehicle that imposes a "master narrative."

The first journal to professionalize this paradigm, *postcoLoniaL studies*, began publishing in 1998; another manifestation is pursued by members of the Society for Francophone Postcolonial Studies, whose journal *Francophone Postcolonial Studies* first appeared in 2003. Truth in academic advertising: I do not situate my study of Anglo-French postcolonialism within that framework of analysis. This work, deliberately, is a non-Foucaultian social scientist's take on the postcolonial.[3] It intends to demonstrate that the distinctive stamps of France and Britain continue to mark daily life for ordinary people along and behind superimposed boundaries throughout the so-called Third World.

Professional historians might well disagree with this stance. With the passage of time, and the proliferation of the archival and other microlevel dissertation, there has been a tendency to cut away the forest of generality for the trees of specificity. Some have come to question the very validity of a stark difference between French direct and British indirect rule (Dulucq, Klein, and Stora 2008, 24). The debate is far from over, though, and in any event, it ought to shift location from archives to borderlands.

Framing Hypothesis

Although spurred by similar motives of national interest (foreign markets, mercantilism, competitive nationalism), Britain and France placed different emphases on the desired outcomes among their colonized subjects: technical competence for the former, cultural appropriation (even *amour propre*) for the latter. “Colonialism was as much a state of mind as it was a set of coercive practices and system of resource extraction,” notes Alice Conklin (1997, 248), and the French state of mind was substantially different from the British.

Despite their formal sovereign status, former French and British colonies—which together encompass more than one-third of the world’s territory—still bear the underlying imprint of their colonial pasts. Unlike the pragmatic and mercantilistic British, in their own colonial enterprise the French pursued much more culturally transformative aims. Even with respect to the pre-1789 First Colonial Empire holdings in North America, the Caribbean, and Indian Ocean, a “fusion of imagined administrative responsibility with proclaimed revolutionary purpose was the foundation of French colonial ideology” (Betts 1991, 17). This fundamental difference—embodied in the phrases *assimiliation* and *mission civilisatrice*—still assumes significant, if underappreciated, import throughout the Third World today. Whereas successor regimes to the British crown have used their juridical independence to pursue a wide array of postcolonial structures and policies, polities and nations decolonized by the French Republic have retained a comparatively formalistic, top-down, and centralized approach to governance and state-society relations.

This dichotomy holds despite basic differences in culture, geography, and political systems. And as long as it does, the process of decolonization, as opposed to formal independence, remains incomplete. But before testing this initial hypothesis on the ground, we need to acknowledge what specialists of colonial history have to say.[4]

Although covering a broad swath of time and territory—from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, from the New World to the Golden Triangle—the literature agrees that at least on paper, British and French policy makers marked their colonial ambitions and actions with distinctive national stamps. Both powers viewed colonies as requisites for grandeur and sources of natural and human resources. Both approached their colonized from a position of cultural (if not racial) superiority, placing greater hopes (and making more sacrifices) in settler colonies (e.g., Kenya, Algeria) than in ones without European settlers. Over time, often in response to external events, both powers did shift their official implementation strategies. But overall, whereas the French officially assumed the additional obligation of transforming the colonized into likenesses of France, with an eventual promise of *égalité*, the British rarely, if ever, harbored equivalent illusions of assimilating the colonized into their national bosom. (To take this metaphor literally, contrast the iconic symbol of the bare-breasted French revolutionary Marianne with staid British photos of the Queen; both can still be found in diplomatic outposts throughout the postcolonial world.)

The major point of colonial historicist contention is this: on the ground, did colonial policy matter? Beyond grandiose pronouncements emanating from London and Paris (or even Delhi and Dakar), in the final analysis, did it make a difference to the colonized? Did lower-level French and British colonial administrators actually implement the policies that supposedly distinguished each from the other? Did partitioned peoples experience colonialism in substantially different ways? Only if the answer is yes will we find separate legacies that continue to condition life and politics in the former colonies.

Hack, quoted at the chapter head, discusses the "software of colonialism: books, languages, customs, judicial systems, social structures, attitudes" (Hack 2003, 119). However, as with the digital age, in which there is no uncontested electronic hegemon, so with colonialism. At the risk of anachronistic analogy, we may suggest that colonial Britain may have been from Microsoft, but colonial France hailed from rival Apple. Though part of the same overarching and inescapable network, their successor states continue to filter and process the world through different operating systems.

Although Africa did not experience the earliest or longest-lasting colonialisms, it is in this continental context that the scholarly debate has been most extensive. Perhaps it is because of the legacy of Lord Frederick Lugard, who, notwithstanding his distinguished service in India, is remembered for formulating the doctrine of Indirect Rule as the "model" of British colonization in Northern Nigeria. From the heyday of colonialism in the 1920s until the wave of independence in the 1960s, the debate over Direct versus Indirect Rule dominated colonial discourse.

Since the 1970s the colonial postmortem has pitted advocates of the "similarity" versus those of the "difference" schools of Anglo-French colonialism in Africa. The former deny the overall significance, as it affected on-the-ground decisions and outcomes, of supposed differences in French and British colonial policies: colonialism was colonialism, a mere episode in the longer evolution of African history. When the similarity school measures the overall impact of French *association*, a compensatory colonial policy in the interwar years designed, in direct contrast with *assimilation*, to soften the starkly imperial and chauvinistic implications of Direct Rule, it finds it wanting.[5]

Prospects for decolonization reflected these differential pathways. Whereas the English could conceive of a trust, granting autonomy and eventual independence, the French could not (Betts 1991, 17). This is why, invoking Todd Shepard's (2006) felicitous phrase, France had such a hard time "inventing decolonization." Even France eventually had to bend to anti-imperial reality, with Algeria and Vietnam providing the most painful spurs. Still, as Shepard shows in the Algerian case, France not only resisted to the bitter end the political inevitability of a breakup, but psychologically resisted it beyond.

Achille Mbembe's provocative analysis of the African "postcolony" does not engage the Anglo-French colonial debate explicitly, but by seamlessly offering examples of abusive, excessive, and fetishist power from Kenya (formerly British), Togo (formerly French), and Cameroon (formerly French *and* British), he implicitly embraces the similarity school of postcolonial inheritance. In positing that "decentralized despotism" best characterizes the continuity between late colonialism and postcolonial administration, Mahmood Mamdani (1996) also implicitly downgrades the continuity of distinctive European influences in France's and Britain's former colonies. Longtime specialist of French colonial policy Raymond Betts seems to be of two minds on the question.[6]

Defenders of the difference school accept the traditional understanding of French-British colonial distinctions (à la Oliver and Atmore 1972, and Gann and Duigan 1969) and maintain its overall explanatory relevance for African successor states. Adu Boahen (1987) lends great authority (if debatable details) to their position.[7] Widner (1994) has demonstrated differences, based on colonial provenance, in the likelihood of sustained competition within newly democratizing political systems. Dimier (2002, 2004) plumbs the respective national interests of those who posed the question of colonial differentiation in the first place. At the level of high diplomacy, contrast the Commonwealth—an older club of independent states over which Britain exercises desultory control—with La Francophonie, in which France is still very much in the driver's seat.[8]

But how have ordinary denizens of the Third World experienced the aftermath of colonialism? Does having been colonized by France rather than Britain still make a difference to them? An economist might very well conclude that on average, former British colonies perform better than French ones in growth and development (Grier 1997), and that a more populist pedagogy (as promoted by colonial Britain) is in large measure responsible (Grier 1999). That does not, however, settle the score, especially for indigenous peoples who, finding themselves on opposite sides of artificial boundaries drawn by alien powers, were differentially colonized. There is more at stake than aggregate GDP for national societies: there is also cultural integrity, and national treatment, in postcolonial society.

The continuing relevance of the colonial paradigm is more a matter of perspective than a question of empiricism. At the macro level of change, a focus on freedom or underdevelopment or globalization may well overshadow distinctions between inherited French and British structures and mentalities of colonialism. But with respect to middle-level change—say, educational structures or traditional rulership or church/mosque-state relations—the differences still outweigh the similarities. In any event, the relevance and repercussions of the debate far transcend the shores of Africa and remain open, despite claims by some that the similarity school has triumphed. It is at the grassroots in the borderlands, I hope to show, that the national differences in colonialism have changed lives most dramatically.

Problems of Partition

Partition takes different forms. Most common is proximate territorial: either a recognizable river (as in the case of the Mekong, chosen to divide Laos from Burma) or a geometric line (drawn through the Sahelian sand to separate Nigeria from Niger). But maritime demarcations also partition. Think of the islands of the French West Indies cordoned off from the British West Indies. In the Indian Ocean and South Pacific, colonial partition has been less territorial than ethnic and psychological: in Mauritius, British supercession of French sovereignty (dichronous partition) led to institutionalized differences on the same island on the basis of race; in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu), condocolonialism[9] mentally partitioned islanders not on the basis of territory, but with respect to perceived Anglophone and Francophone varieties of religion (synchronous partition).

Those readers more used to the conventional, territorial use of partition and borders may be bothered by those cases in which I use the terms in less than literal ways. Rest assured that boundary and borderland specialists have been incorporating similarly metaphorical applications for some time. Moreover, even for those two cases that I do characterize as experiencing "lines in the mind"—Mauritius and Vanuatu—a more conventional (albeit maritime) colonial partition also persists. Thus, I shall contrast postcolonial Mauritius with its neighboring overseas French department of Réunion. Similarly, Vanuatu begs contrast with nearby New Caledonia, which also remains part of the French Republic. Beyond those familiar maritime demarcations, I still contend that undergoing British rule after French colonialism in Mauritius, and dealing with dueling colonialisms in Vanuatu, are the more interesting configurations of partition in those two island nations.

Even more than in the realm of science fiction, it may be in the colonial and postcolonial worlds that space becomes the final frontier. Colonialism entailed "respatialization," not only with respect to border lines and land use but also in deeper perceptions of place for the colonized. "In reworking the physical space of the territories into which they moved so as to ensure and justify their own domination . . . the Europeans forced drastic changes in the local geography of the mind" (Betts 2004, 90). Colonialism forced indigenous denizens to invest old places with new meanings: thus do sociologists' and geographers' formulation of social space find pertinent application in colonial and postcolonial situations.

Touching points for otherwise identical colonially separated cultures particularly excite me. It is on the periphery, on the margins of the postcolonial state—often denigrated in the term "borderline"—that one most clearly captures the long-term legacies of colonialism.[10] Rarely have I encountered confirmation of the conventional wisdom that borderlanders "ignore" the artificial colonial boundaries that divide them "only on paper."[11] Even where the border itself is invisible, I have been repeatedly impressed by the extent to which denizens of frontiers do assimilate and therefore legitimate the reality of state differences as inherited from the colonial era.[12]

Ethnic partition is not always a surgical cut of a spatially homogenous group, as with the Hausa of West Africa or the

Tamils of South India. In the case of Southeast Asia, I examine as "partitioned" into Laos and Burma (1) minority hill tribes that were already dispersed, with little preexisting territorial contiguity, and (2) contiguous lowlanders, who had a very loose sense of unity to begin with. Among some of these peoples, colonial partition immediately set into motion changes that affected the peoples so divided; among others, it merely planted the seeds for wider-reaching dynamics that have been accentuated in the postcolonial eras. In the West Indies and the South Pacific, I maintain that ethnic partition also is at work when peoples are divided not only by geometric cuts of line but by expanses of water: archipelagic societies were partitioned, too. And in the case of the Indian Ocean (Réunion, Seychelles, and Mauritius) we focus on one society, Mauritius, whose colonial partition was not spatial but temporal: a century of French colonial rule followed by a century and a half of British colonialism.

For comparative social scientists specializing either in former British or former French colonies in the developing world, the framework pursued here illuminates embedded structural constraints that continue to affect the direction and pace of development. By examining legacies of comparative colonialism from the bottom up, and paying particular attention to the mediating forces of local culture, a much more nuanced understanding of contemporary state and society in the former colonies of Britain and France emerges. For different cultures react to colonialism differently.

Borderlands crystallize the differences between the former colonies; that is why I use them as my methodological frame, despite the common criticism that I encounter, that border regions are by definition peculiar, peripheral, atypical, and otherwise unrepresentative. "Study the heartland, the urban centers, the capital," I am advised. "That is where the essence of a nation lies." Undoubtedly, borderlands *are* special, but it is precisely the extent to which they nevertheless do reflect their respective states, formally and informally, that they are instructive. One can also keep variables more constant between indigenes of the Mekong River than between the populations of Yangon/Rangoon and Vientiane, or in the case of Hausaland, between the denizens of Abuja and Niamey. Two broad questions undergird the inquiry: How did discrete indigenous groups (e.g., Melanesian, Hausa, Tamil, Lao) respond, subvert, and adjust to the respective British and French colonial projects superimposed onto their society and culture? In what ways (political, linguistic, economic) have their emergent postcolonial states differed as a consequence of their previous colonial imprints?

"A retrospective examination," writes Crawford Young within the context of the colonial state in Africa, "can illuminate some of the frailties of its postcolonial successor and perhaps even suggest avenues of escape from its more burdensome legacies" (Young 1994, 9). The following chapters aim to advance Professor Young's laudable goal by harnessing other regions' experience in comparative colonialism and decolonization. Chief among the "burdensome legacies," as we shall see, is the postcolonial inheritance of the artificial, superimposed boundary.

Plan of Book

After briefly examining several West African peoples separated by adjoining British-French colonial divisions, the second chapter focuses on the Hausa (Africa's largest ethnic group), divided into Niger and Nigeria. Distinctive colonial policies combined with characteristics of Hausa society created distinct national versions of ethnic identity. Mostly (but not completely) arbitrary territorial divisions—the classic "line in the sand"—marked the partition of West Africa into (mostly) British and French colonies.

Why do slave descendants in the French Antilles today experience a very different reality than do their counterparts in nearby Anglophone islands? This is the underlying question in chapter 3. Prior to the partitions outlined in chapter 2, Europeans were already subjecting Africans to distinct versions of imperial sovereignty: slavery scattered Africans to dozens of

West Indian islands controlled by Britain and France. In the Caribbean, France still practices decolonization without independence. Slave-based colonialism bequeathed fewer options for postcolonial transformation than in colonial lands of ethnically indigenous populations.

Chapter 4 shifts the paradigm to another partitioned ocean, the Pacific. As in the West Indies, the South Pacific was also arbitrarily parceled into French and British colonial zones. Here, however, entire clusters of islands were ruled under single administrations. In one such archipelago, the New Hebrides, France and Britain agreed to share sovereignty by establishing a condominium. Indigenous Melanesians responded by a policy of "divide though conquered." After independence, the archipelago nation of Vanuatu used language and reinvented custom to transcend inherited colonial divisions. How well has this strategy worked beyond Melanesia?

Whereas Vanuatu experienced concurrent colonialism, in the Indian Ocean (chapter 5) the islanders of Mauritius underwent consecutive colonialism: French, followed by British. So why does Francophone culture remain stronger than the one bequeathed by Britain? Lacking most of the usual preconditions for democracies—including national unity—Mauritius embraces its dual colonial heritage for the purposes of managing ethnic conflict and promoting development. No wonder the literature abounds with Mauritius as a "model." I maintain that an overlooked dimension to Mauritius's success lies in the hybridic nature of its colonial heritage, layered by South Asian immigration. The ancestral homeland of most Mauritians is India, where France remained longer than did Britain. So in chapter 5 I also examine how the Francophone Indians of Pondichéry compare, especially in their political culture, to their migrant counterparts in Mauritius. While the anomaly of French India could have been treated in a separate chapter—it is, after all a distinct case of Anglo-French rivalry with unique postcolonial outcomes—the commonality of French colonial influence over ethnic Indians, be it in the Dravidian heartland or Mauritian diaspora—provides an intriguing frame for parallel treatment.

Chapter 6 discusses how, in all of Southeast Asia, there is only one border that separates a former French colony from a former British one: the 150 miles of the Upper Mekong separating Laos from Burma (Myanmar). Dividing the Mekong River into Lao and Burmese territories affected two geocultural categories of indigenous peoples: those whose territory actually straddles the riverine boundary and those who inhabit noncontiguous communities on both sides of the international border. Postcolonial revolution greatly disturbed these spatial patterns, however, introducing a new variable into the comparative colonialism paradigm. In order to persist, colonial legacies require a critical threshold of political stability.

Until the concluding chapter, colonial policies are framed against indigenous group response patterns. In the concluding chapter, I revisit general questions of ethnicity, history, and variability in colonial policy; the overall diversity in types of postcolonial regimes and patterns of response to them; overarching regional and geocultural extrapolations; broad differentiations in material and political outcomes; long-term implications for languages (official and indigenous); and the possibility of an overarching borderland message. Despite these generalizing frameworks, my greater plea is for more empiricism within postcolonial studies, currently an overtheorized, highly abstract, field.

When I began this project, I had hoped to personalize a Rawlsian-type hypothetical: "If you did not know in advance into which culture or region of the world you would be born, but could choose between a former French or British colony, which would you choose?" Although some have used statistical models to approximate this scenario (is it a postcolonial "prisoner's dilemma"?), I realize now that the question presents a false choice. Contingencies—cultural, historical, strategic—are too multistranded to reduce the Anglo-French colonial grid into a single outcome, life choice, or number.[13] More important is the freedom to choose one's culture and society *after* achieving political consciousness.

Comparison is also complicated by time, both historical and fieldwork related. Temporal proximity to events of research focus certainly skews some cross-national generalization. On one end of the scale, thirty-five years had already lapsed between the juncture when the French West Indies opted to become *départements* of France (1946) and my first visit there. At the other end of the scale, a mere eleven years separated the independence of Vanuatu (1980) from my major block of South Pacific research.[14] So recent, so fresh was the demarcation between the colonial era and the postcolonial one that the transition still seemed fluid and the research in Vanuatu all the touchier. As time passes, some variables tend to lose their salience as others come to replace them. The long-term significance in British versus French policies of colonization is a case in point. As colonialism became supplanted by the Cold War and then globalization, the European distinction has lost much currency as an explanatory factor for postcolonial developments. My contention—tempered by the acknowledgment that decades separate the time from decolonization and my research in some polities as opposed to others—is that the Anglo-French distinction still matters a lot more to partitioned borderlanders than to students of postcolonial history.

That said, the legacies of Anglo-French partition live on in a wide array of arenas, for larger swaths of the population, in arenas I identified above: language, education, governance, religion, and so on. Francophonie remains a societal reference in former French colonies in a more penetrating way than "Anglophony" is in former British colonies. I am referring here not only to language use but to conceptualization and institutionalism. Both forms of colonization were transformative, for sure: in the long run, though, the French legacies are more constant and identifiable than the British ones. This argument holds only in the strictly comparative sense: by holding constant for similar ethnic groups who experienced both forms of colonialism.

In offering this global dichotomy of French and British colonialism and its aftermath, I hope the reader will join me in better appreciating the singularity of his or her own historicized life story. For, in our own way, are we not all postcolonials?