

THE BLACK MAN'S BURDEN

by Terence Ranger

The 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s were the time of a great flowering of invented tradition—ecclesiastical, educational, military, republican, monarchical—in Europe. They were also the years of the European rush into Africa. There were many and complex connections between the two processes. The concept of empire was central to the process of inventing tradition within Europe itself, but the Europeans' African empires came so late in the day that they demonstrate the effects, rather than the causes, of European invented tradition. Deployed in Africa, however, the new traditions took on a peculiar character, distinguishing them from both their European and Asian imperial forms.

In contrast to India, many parts of Africa became colonies of white settlement. This meant that the settlers had to define themselves as natural and undisputed masters of vast numbers of Africans. They drew upon the freshly minted European traditions both to define and to justify their roles, and also to provide models of subservience into which it was possible to draw Africans. In Africa, therefore, the whole apparatus of invented school and professional and regimental traditions became much more starkly a matter of command and control than it was within Europe itself.

In contrast to India once again, Africa did not offer its conquerors the framework of an indigenous imperial state nor existing centralized rituals of honor and degree. Ready connections between African and European systems of governance could be made only at the level of the monarchy. Africa possessed, so the colonizers thought, dozens of rudimentary kings. Hence, in Africa the British made an even greater use of the idea of imperial monarchy than they did within Britain or India. The "theology" of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent monarchy became almost the sole ingredient of imperial ideology as it was presented to Africans. For the Germans, the Kaiser stood as the dominant symbol of German rule. The French had the more difficult task of incorporating Africans into a republican tradition.

But serviceable as the monarchical ideology was to the British, it was not enough in itself to provide the theory or justify the structures of colonial governance. Since so few connections could be made between British and African political, social, and legal systems, British administrators set about inventing African traditions for Africans. Their own respect for

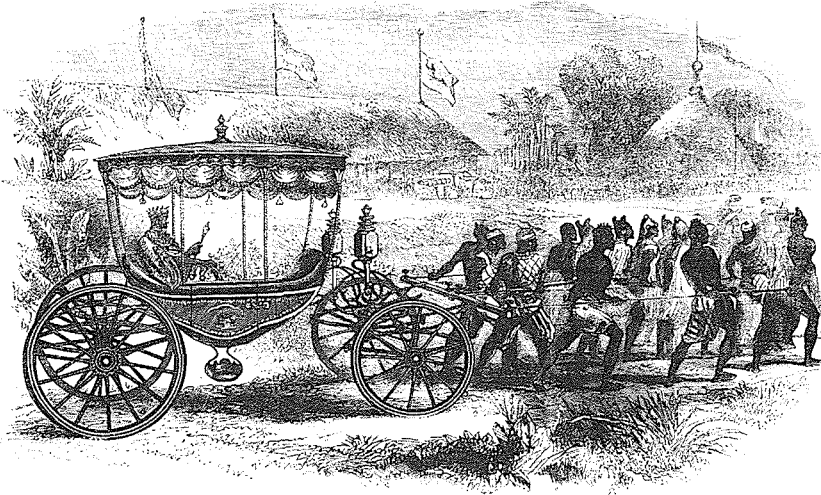
“tradition” disposed them to look with favor upon what they took to be traditional in Africa. They set about to codify and promulgate these traditions, thereby transforming flexible custom into hard prescription.

There were two very direct ways in which Europeans sought to make use of their invented traditions to transform and modernize African thought and conduct. One was the extension of training in a neotraditional context to some Africans, a concrete expression of the belief that certain Africans could become members of the governing class of colonial Africa after considerable exposure to British custom. The second—and more common—was an attempt to make use of what European invented traditions had to offer in terms of a redefined relationship between leader and led.

Crash Courses in French Glory

The best illustration of the first idea—that some Africans might be turned into governors by exposure to British neotradition—is perhaps King’s College, Budo, the famous school in Uganda. As G. P. McGregor observes in *King’s College, Budo* (1967), in Uganda, the missionaries aimed to impose a neotraditional, British-style secondary education on a British-style elementary education. They were always clear that their aim was “the adaptation of our English Public School method to the African scene.” They succeeded to an extraordinary extent. King’s College was built on the Coronation Hill of the Buganda kings, so that “both Coronation Services of this century have been held” in the college chapel; “though some of the traditional ceremonies were observed,” the service “followed many of the features of the English coronation service. The English Public School house spirit [was] quickly established,” and the Gandan members of Turkey House petitioned that its name be changed to Canada House so as to go with England House, South Africa House, and Australia House—Turkey seemed “distinctly unimperial.” The school motto, again said to have been chosen at the request of the pupils, was a Gandan version of Cecil Rhodes’s dying words, “So little done—so much to do.”

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Gelele, the King of Dahomey, riding to a state ceremony during the 1860s in a carriage given to him by the British. The King also received a silk tent and a coat of mail with gauntlets.

McGregor quotes a letter written by a Ugandan pupil in the first year of the school's existence, which enables us to see this remarkable process of socialization through Ganda eyes. "First in the mornings when we have got up we arrange properly our beds. If you do not arrange it properly there is judgement or rebuke when the Europeans make a visit. . . . We sing one hymn and pray and then we learn English. . . . When we come out at four, we go and play football, on one side eleven and on the other side eleven, and we arrange every man in his place, goal-keeper and back men and ba-half-back and ba-forward."

There is no doubt that the missionaries created at Budo a successful complex of new traditions that paralleled the increasing ceremonialism of the role of the kabaka and the other Ugandan kings, thus achieving a synthesis similar to that accomplished in 19th-century England. The Golden Jubilee ceremonies of the college—"We had four Kings at the high table"—were also a ritual expression of the commitment of a large section of the Ganda ruling class to these by now hallowed invented traditions.

But the Budo experiment was not to become a general model: The British themselves came to regret their original alliance with the Ganda chiefs and to believe that real modernizing change could not be brought about through their agency. Real

change would be the product of European commanders loyally supported by African subordinates.

Various traditions of subordination were available. One was the traditional hierarchy of the great-house. Few whites in Africa, however, maintained domestic establishments of a size that would have allowed the full "traditional" panoply of the British servant hierarchy. A more elaborate application of European neotraditions of subordination came with the restructuring of African armies. In Sylvanus Cookey's fascinating account of this process, the French emerge as the first and most imaginative manipulators of the military invented tradition, disbanding demoralized pressed levies during the 1850s and attracting African volunteers with "séduisant" uniforms, modern arms, Koranic oaths of allegiance and crash courses in the military glory of the French tradition.

The British were slower to follow such a policy. But in the face of the French threat, they also moved to regularize their African regiments. Lord Frederick Lugard devoted his meticulous passion for detail to the transformation of his Nigerian levies from a "rabble" to a disciplined and effective fighting force. Soon he came to esteem them highly; official praise was lavished on them for their conduct in campaigns in the Gold Coast and northern Nigeria.

The Socialization of Idi Amin

This kind of admittance of Africans into the European military tradition had both the same ambiguities and the same degree of success as did the operation of the spirit of Budo. Sometimes the two forms of socialization came together, as in the case of Kabaka Edward Mutesa. Mutesa became Kabaka while still a schoolboy at Budo and remained there to complete his studies; his coronation was solemnized in the school chapel; he led the procession celebrating Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. But he was also admitted into the regimental tradition of the British Army, joining the Officers' Corps at Cambridge and later becoming a captain in the Grenadier Guards.

The acceptance of Mutesa into the officer ranks was, however, a rare exception. Much more common was the production of men like Mutesa's successor Idi Amin as president of Uganda. In his *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda* (1975), Ali A. Mazrui argues that the rise of Amin and his "lumpen-militariat" can be seen as a revival of pre-colonial military traditions, in abeyance since the colonial conquest. But in fact, Amin's career provides us with an excellent example of socialization through the colo-

nial army. As Mazrui tells us, when Amin was recruited into the King's African Rifles in 1946, he showed "all the signs of colonial conditioning into dependency. . . . Within seven years, he was promoted to lance corporal and was displaying the qualities which so endeared him to his British superiors—instant obedience, fierce regimental pride, reverence toward Britain and the British, a uniform which crackled with razor sharp starched creases and boots with toe-caps like black mirrors."

Black mirrors of English privates and noncommissioned officers were precisely what African soldiers were intended to be.

Hail to the Kaiser

Admission of Africans into what were intended as replicas of the neotraditions of Britain did not end with schools like Budo or with recruitment into the army. Bishop Frank Weston's hypothetical African Christian in search of "brotherhood" might, if he were very fortunate, "conceivably learn to be a typist," and many mission-educated Africans were taken into the lower ranks of the bureaucratic hierarchy. African clerks came to value the rubber stamp and the row of pens in the breast pocket; African dance societies made use of purloined rubber stamps to authenticate their correspondence with one another and danced in full bureaucratic, as well as military, array. And of course, the African Christians, who were taken up as clergy into the imperfect brotherhood of the Christian churches themselves, were trained to perform the invented and reinvented rituals of 19th-century European ecclesiology.

Colonial governments in Africa did not wish to rule by a constant exercise of military force and they needed a range of collaborators that extended beyond those Africans who were brought into the neotraditions of subordination. In particular, they needed to collaborate with chiefs, headmen, and elders in the rural areas. This collaboration was, in essence, a very practical affair of exchanged benefits. But the colonial rulers felt the need for a shared ideology of empire that could embrace whites and blacks alike, dignify the practicalities of collaboration, and justify white rule. The British and the Germans found this in the concept of imperial monarchy.

In German East Africa, the notion of the monarchy had two aspects. On the one hand, the Germans believed that Africans themselves had a rudimentary idea of kingship. Especially in the first stages of interaction with African rulers, they were prepared to play up to African assertions of kingliness and to decorate Africans with some of the stage props of 19th-century

TRADITION IN THE NEW WORLD

European traditions, invented or not, never caught on in America as they did in Africa. Indeed, the Founding Fathers considered their colonial past under the English an impediment to the future. As Thomas Jefferson noted in a letter to James Madison in 1789, "The earth belongs in usufruct to the living. . . . The dead have neither powers nor rights over it."

The robust, egalitarian principles of the new republic went against the established, hierarchical ways of the Old World thrones. George Washington, importuned by many to become "king" of America, rejected the trappings of monarchy. His Presidency opened with a simple oath of office and a short speech at the corner of Broad and Wall Streets in New York City on April 30, 1789. Despite attempts at embellishment by later presidents, the simplicity remains. At his inauguration in 1976, Jimmy Carter wore a blue business suit instead of the morning coat worn by John F. Kennedy in 1960 and (to the delight of the TV networks) walked down Pennsylvania Avenue hand-in-hand with his wife to the White House.

The constant shift in population and westward expansion of 18th- and 19th-century America hindered the development of "native" traditions. But some religious, ethnic, and regional observances of custom did flourish. One of the earliest and most popular (especially along the Eastern seaboard) was Thanksgiving, originated in 1621 by Governor William Bradford of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who ordered turkeys roasted to celebrate a bountiful harvest. In 1863, in the middle of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln officially set aside the fourth Thursday of November "as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens."

Many Christmas traditions, including the exchange of gifts, caroling, and decorated fir trees, arrived in America with Dutch and German immigrants during the 17th and 18th centuries and were quickly adopted. Santa Claus was homegrown. Dr. Clement Moore based the "right jolly old elf" in "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (1823) on his handyman and borrowed Washington Irving's idea of a reindeer sleigh that flew through the air. In an 1863 issue of *Harper's Illustrated Weekly*, illustrator Thomas Nast added the final touch—the red, fur-trimmed coat worn by modern department store Santas.

As Americans moved further away in time from the revolutionary era, their distrust of *nationalistic* rituals waned. Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 observation that "there are no traditions, or common habits, to forge links between [Americans]" became less and less true. The placing of flowers on the graves of soldiers on Memorial Day (originally on May 30) was begun three years after the Civil War by General John A. Logan. Special ceremonies were held in the National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, marking the first formal observance of the day, an ob-

servance that continues today with little change.

During the 1890s, the divisive effects of labor unrest, economic depression, and renewed immigration made many Americans yearn for common national bonds. The Sons of the American Revolution, founded in 1889, and the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Colonial Dames of America, both founded the following year, together helped institute such practices as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance (first done by Boston schoolchildren in 1892) and the flying of U.S. flags over public buildings. These "American" rituals aided the assimilation of the more than 18 million immigrants who arrived between 1880 and 1920.

In many cases, merchants exploited and abetted the new receptivity of Americans to the creation of traditions. Stirred by the success of Christmas cards (first marketed in America by Marcus Ward and Company in the 1870s), greeting card manufacturers endorsed schoolteacher Anna M. Jarvis's campaign to designate the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day; florists promoted the designation of the carnation as the official Mother's Day flower. On May 9, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson gave federal approval by signing a joint congressional resolution lauding mothers (who still lacked the vote) as "the greatest source of the country's strength and inspiration." But even with commercial and federal encouragement, other rituals—such as the observance of Father's Day (the third Sunday in June) and Grandparent's Day (the first Sunday in September)—have yet to catch on.

The armed services, notably the Marine Corps, have been the one consistent exception to the relative indifference of Americans to the preservation of traditions. Officers in the Corps (established in 1775) have worn dress trousers with distinctive scarlet stripes since 1798 and carried the Mameluke Sword since 1805. The Navy, following British custom, still "pipes aboard" senior officers and lines the rails in salute to the Commander-in-Chief.

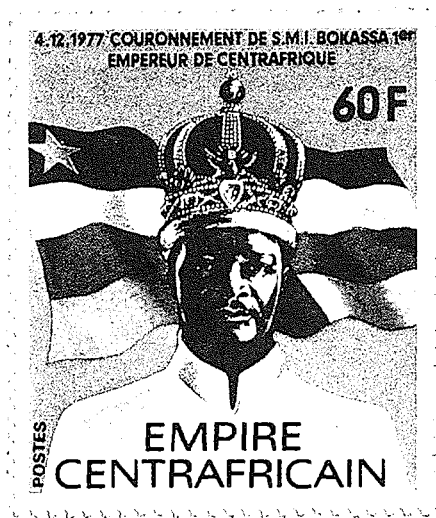


The pageantry surrounding the nationwide 1976 Bicentennial suggests that Americans have not lost a yen for parades. But they draw the line at pomp: When President Nixon ordered fancy new uniforms with gold braid, gold buttons, and plastic shakos for the White House police in 1970, widespread ridicule in Congress and the press soon forced him to shelve the new attire.

European ceremonial drama. Thus, a German officer reported to the Kaiser in 1890 that he had presented gifts from the emperor to Chief Rindi of the Chagga: "While the soldiers presented arms, I . . . encircled his shoulders with the coronation cloak . . . from the Berlin Opera House and placed on his head the helmet under which Niemann once sang Lohengrin." On the other hand, the Germans believed that African ideas of personal rule by a monarch could be infinitely enlarged so that the figure of an all-powerful Kaiser could come to personify German imperial authority.

The British King had nothing like the very real executive power of the German Kaiser, and he was spoken of more in mystical than in practical terms. J. E. Hine, bishop of Northern Rhodesia, found the coronation of King George V "a great ceremonial act of religion. . . . It was no mere piece of medieval pageantry. . . . It was symbolism of the utmost splendour, but there was reality behind it all."

In Northern Rhodesia itself, the acting administrator summoned all the Ngoni chiefs and their people to a Coronation Day fete: The "native police" band played; the Anglican "representative robed and said the special prayer chosen for the occasion, standing near the saluting flag." An enraptured missionary reported on the celebrations of that evening: "In the valley were four huge bonfires, around which some hundreds of dusky natives capered and danced. Some had bells on their feet, and almost all carried knobkerries. . . . The Europeans, sheltered by a grass



Jean Bedel Bokassa became President of the Central African Republic following a coup in 1966. After the discovery of local uranium and oil deposits, Colonel Bokassa declared his nation an empire and spent \$22 million on his 1977 coronation as Bokassa I.

screen, sat in a semicircle, and between them and the fire danced the inhabitants of the soil. . . . Then the police band came forward and in the dying flames regaled us with 'The March of the Men of Harlech,' 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' and other tunes."

Secular administrators presented to African audiences a King who was almost divine—omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. A series of official speeches to the Sotho, for example, stressed the royal knowledge of their situation, the royal concern for their well-being, and the royal responsibility for decisions that, in reality, had been taken by the cabinet. In 1910, Prince Arthur of Connaught told the Sotho Paramount Chief that the new King George V "remembers the representations you made to His late Majesty, King Edward," and that he knew "that, if and when, He decides that the time has come for Basutoland to be included in the South African Union you will loyally obey His decision."

Tea Parties for Lewanika

When the King addressed the Sotho directly—as in the Royal Message of 1910—British colonial officials put into his mouth words of a high patriarchal tone: "When a child is in trouble, he will go to his father, and his father after hearing all about the matter will decide what must be done. Then the child must trust and obey his father, for he is but one of a large family and his father has had great experience in settling the troubles of his older children and is able to judge what is best not only for the young child but for the peace and advantage of the whole family."

To give credibility to these claims, colonial administrators regarded the ceremonial side of the British monarchy as crucially important. When, in 1919, the Paramount Chief of Basutoland petitioned for permission to visit the Vatican as well as Buckingham Palace on his journey to Europe, the high commissioner feared that he "might be unduly impressed by the pomp and state of reception at the Vatican and might form the conclusion that the pope was more important than the King!" Permission was refused.

Not surprisingly, "tribal" African rulers found themselves contesting for the visible attributes of monarchy because their status came into question. In the early days, colonial administrators were happy enough to recognize African rulers as kings, and to present them, like Rindi, with the properties of stage monarchy. But as the colonial regimes established themselves and became less dependent on concessions extracted from African rulers, so there began a process of deflation. Thus, much of the British South Africa Company administration's claim to northwestern Rhodesia depended

upon the concessions it had gained from Lewanika of Barotseland. Lewanika was described as a great King and rewarded with access to the glamour of the British crown.

The symbolic climax of Lewanika's career came with his invitation to attend the coronation of Edward VII in 1902. Lewanika was received with honor by English high society. According to historian Brian Willan, "He had royal carriages put at his disposal, his horses were taken out of his carriage in a Dorset village so that village people could drag the carriage, he was taught to play simple games at tea parties by people like the Duchess of Abercorn." He was encouraged to acquire for his use both in England and back home some of the symbols of British royal ceremonialism—a royal coach, the uniform of a full-dress admiral, scarlet coats for his servants at Lealui. "When Kings are seated together," proclaimed the old Lozi ruler, "there is never a lack of things to discuss."

But soon the old man was being denied his kingliness altogether. As the North Rhodesian administration came to feel more secure, it cut back Lewanika's powers, rebuffed his protestations, and dramatized this withdrawal of favor through a double manipulation of royal symbolism. It was laid down that the high commissioner and the administrator must be greeted with the Lozi royal salute; it was also laid down that Lewanika himself should no longer be referred to as "King," since this elevated him above the other chiefs and drew what was considered to be an altogether inappropriate analogy with the imperial monarch. A similar pattern is apparent in the Ankole kingdom in Uganda. There was an initial period of colonial support for the Ankole monarchy, followed by a reaction in which, as M. R. Doornbos notes in *Regalia Galore* (1975), "officers at work in the country disliked the title of King being used for the rulers of small African states."

Beyond Victoria Falls

Nevertheless, African "paramounts" still strove to gain the title of king, to obtain invitations to British coronations in faraway London, to dramatize their internal authority with crowns and thrones, British-style coronations and jubilees. The Omugabe of Ankole managed to acquire a throne and a coat of arms and a crown. Lewanika's successor, Yeta, worked indefatigably to proclaim special royal status. He had certain advantages. Whenever a royal personage visited Northern Rhodesia, the local administration looked fairly desperately around for something other than the Victoria Falls to show him. They always had to fall back on the Lozi. Reviewing the ceremonial possibilities for the Prince of Wales's visit in 1925, the British governor

Boy Scouts from the Nyadiri School in Southern Rhodesia during the 1930s. Founded in 1908 by Lt. Gen. Robert Baden-Powell in Great Britain, the Scout movement soon spread to the rest of the empire.



complained that "generally speaking, none of these Chiefs are likely to look very impressive," but consoled himself with the thought that the Lozi "aquatic display" was likely to be "a fairly picturesque affair as native ceremonies go."

Those African rulers who *did* succeed in acquiring some of the trappings of neotraditional monarchy were caught up in an ironic process. What was involved, as Doornbos notes, was a transformation from flexible and adaptable customary monarchical institutions to a colonial monarchy "fitted into the bureaucratic structure and in time adorned with a thick overlay of new ceremonialism." The essence of the change in Ankole was to turn the Omugabe "into an instrument of bureaucratic hierarchy and to relegate the traditional values to the level of folklore." Aspirations to become more like the king/emperor ended in African rulers *really* becoming more like him, as they came more and more to occupy the ceremonial center, rather than the political or cultural center, of their societies.

It was a process neatly summed up by the title of Doornbos's book, *Regalia Galore*. But unlike the ceremonial of the king/emperor, which still serves a function in shrunken, post-imperial Britain, the ceremonial of African kings ultimately failed to mirror anything very important. The Ankole kingship was abolished without a ripple of dissent, and the local press headlined the

transition to a more openly bureaucratic symbol of authority—"The Throne Replaced by Chairman's Seat."

But it was not only African rulers and clergymen who tried to manipulate the symbols of European invented tradition. They were also seized upon by thousands of others who were experiencing the colonial economy, whether as migrant laborers or as petty clerks and functionaries. Both of these two groups sought to come to terms with the new colonial society, and they did so partly by means of participation in dance associations, which drew on various European invented traditions to express the essence of colonialism.

In his *Modern History of Tanganyika* (1979), John Iliffe has described the coastal dance associations in German East Africa just before the First World War. Dances were performed in the Kaiser's honor in 1911 by *ngoma ya kihuni*—the hooligans' dance association, a name defiantly chosen by "low-class, up-country immigrants." They danced the *Bom*, an imitation of German military drill, named after the sound of the machine gun. The dance associations of clerks and bureaucratic servants gathered in houses furnished in European style; they drank tea; "and at the end of the feast they said 'Hurrah' three times."

The Myth of Tribes

In the towns of the Kenyan coast, a similar class division produced competition between the Arinoti up-country migrants and the Marini Swahili youth. The Marini rejoiced in rich aristocratic patrons, and they triumphed over their plebeian opponents with processions headed by replicas of British governors and their equerries; with floats of battleships, with admirals in full dress taking the salute on the bridge; and on one glorious occasion, still much celebrated in the photograph albums of Lamu, with a stately line of peers of the House of Lords, all in full ceremonial dress.

Ironically, the most far-reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa took place when the Europeans believed themselves to be respecting age-old African custom. What were called customary law, customary land-rights, customary political structure, and so on, were in fact *all* invented by colonial administrators as these Europeans codified what they thought to be African tradition.

There is a growing anthropological and historical literature on this process, which it is not possible to summarize here. But the essentials are clear. For example, John Iliffe describes the "creation of tribes" in colonial Tanganyika: "The

notion of the tribe lay at the heart of [Imperial Germany's] indirect rule in Tanganyika. Refining the racial thinking common [at home, Kaiser Wilhelm's] administrators believed that every African belonged to a tribe, just as every European belonged to a nation. . . . Tribes were seen as cultural units 'possessing a common language, a single social system, and an established common law.' Their political and social systems rested on kinship. Tribal membership was hereditary. Different tribes were related genealogically."

This concept totally misrepresented the realities of African societies. Almost all recent studies of 19th-century, pre-colonial Africa have emphasized that, far from adopting a single "tribal" entity, most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan, and at yet another moment, as an initiate in that professional guild.

Similarly, 19th-century Africa was *not* characterized by lack of internal social and economic competition, by the unchallenged authority of the elders, by an acceptance of custom that gave every person—young and old, male and female—a place in society that was defined and protected. Marcia Wright has shown, for instance, in a stimulating account of late 19th-century society in the Lake Tanganyika corridor, that economic and political competition overrode the "customary securities" offered to women by marriage or extended kinship relations. Women constantly found themselves being shaken out of the niches in which they sought security. Later on, of course, and in the 20th century, the dogmas of customary security and fixed relationships grew up in these societies. But, as Wright remarks, the terms of this reconstruction "were dictated by the colonial authorities in the years after 1895, when pacification came to mean immobilization of populations, reinforcement of ethnicity and greater rigidity of social definition."

In the end, Africans were left with an ambiguous legacy from the colonial invention of tradition. After independence, those Africans who repudiated the British-style "elite" culture and regimental traditions imported from Europe faced the paradoxical danger of embracing another set of colonial inventions—dubbed "native African custom"—instead.
