

insightfully articulates themes of diasporic movement to Africa and the too often disregarded, yet ongoing dialog between the continent and her diaspora. Consequently, the offerings of this monograph stake a claim of notable significance as a contribution to reverse diaspora scholarship that examine the influences of the African diaspora on Africa as opposed to the established unidirectional scholastic gaze on how Africa influenced the diaspora.


Odamtten's book has the potential to become a very important publication. In the wake of the African Union's declaration of the African Diaspora as the sixth region of Africa, this book will prove useful as diasporic African interest in study abroad trips to the continent increases in tandem with a marked growth in migration by African descendants from the global African diaspora to Africa.¹ Blyden's ability to straddle both the diaspora and Africa can inspire global Africans to see themselves as part of a long tradition of diasporic return to and connection with their homeland. On the other hand, this book may prove challenging for readers not comfortable with the idea of African intellectual and philosophical agency without overt European stimuli. Thankfully, Africa's historiography is no longer based on such racist and paternalistic assumptions. Harry Odamtten's study now takes us even further, through the concept of 'Afropolitan', which might still prove unsettling to some. The book provides an elegant exposition of both the term and its exponent, Edward Blyden, in an accessible way, to a broad spectrum of readers ranging from intellectuals to the cursory reader. Importantly, having established Blyden's importance, Odamtten is able to show how the Afropolitan concept might be applied to pan-African thinkers like Du Bois and Nkrumah. This book is an important contribution to and essential interpretive analysis of the African intellectual tradition and is deserving of a wide readership.

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Action on the Margins

Boundaries, Communities and State-Making in West Africa: The Centrality of the Margins

By Paul Nugent. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
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Paul Nugent builds on the African borderlands literature that he has helped to forge to bring our attention to the ways that three social constructs — boundaries, communities, and states — have helped define much of the political history of West Africa from the eighteenth to the twentieth

¹See, for example, 'Back to Africa movement gathers pace', *New African*, (<https://newafricanmagazine.com/17835/>), 4 Jan. 2019; A. Jordan, 'The American entrepreneur leading the Back to Africa movement', *Forbes*, (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/adriennejordan/2020/05/01/meet-the-american-that-decided-to-self-quarantine-in-ghana/?sh=279abaf01712>), 1 May 2020; E. Harrison, 'Stevie Wonder to move to Ghana permanently because of racism in the US', *The Independent*, (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/stevie-wonder-ghana-us-racism-b1807398.html>), 25 Feb. 2021.

century.¹ Founder of the [African Borderlands Research Network \(ABORNE\)](#), Nugent, along with A. I. Asiwaju, has led the charge for scholars arguing that African borders are not exceptional because they are ‘artificial’. Since all borders are artificial in that they are socially constructed, African borderlands provide useful frames of analysis for those interested in how states and communal identities affected one another over time, especially on the geographical margins.

Nugent compares the development of two West African borderlands — the Trans-Volta (Ghana-Togo border) and the Senegambia (Senegal-Gambia border) — to argue that West African borderland societies were not marginalized by events at the political center but rather were crucial to them. These ‘margins’ go beyond geography to include social and ethnic groups sidelined by colonial officials and nationalist leaders in state-making processes. Thus, he stakes a claim for the influence of borderlands in colonial state-making in his subtitle: ‘the centrality of the margins’. Nugent shows how trade and exchange on the borders often subverted or avoided state control in the capital or port city, which were often the same thing. Indeed, as Nugent demonstrates, these African states were made less through the ‘war and taxes’ formula of Charles Tilly and more through the regulation of cross-border trade.² Nugent claims that the geographical margins were therefore ‘productive’ in at least three respects:

Temporally, in that states were forged in the process of converting frontier zones into colonial borders; structurally, in that fiscal logics, which hinged on regulating border flows, fundamentally underpinned the morphology of colonial states and that of their post-colonial successors; and politically, in that the social contracts that were forged under colonial rule, and which were reconfigured after independence, hinged on the interchange between centres and the geographical margins (4).

Nugent follows the themes of time, structure, and politics throughout the book.

Nugent’s argument is organized into four parts and thirteen hefty chapters before a somewhat extensive (but worthwhile) conclusion. Part One takes the story ‘From Frontiers to Boundaries’, with two chapters that start in the precolonial past and take us up to the moment of colonial partition. Chapter Three focuses on the development of colonial space and ‘the spatial lineages of the colonial state’. In Part Two, ‘States and Taxes, Land and Mobility’, Nugent examines Tilly’s thesis on states, war, and taxes to show how and why the ‘social contract’ forged by Europeans applied with various effectiveness in the African context and how Africans affected that relationship in their own ways.³ In Part Three of the book, ‘Decolonization and Boundary Closure, c. 1939–1969’, Nugent starts a pattern of alternating chapter-long examinations of the spatial logics of decolonization in the Trans-Volta and the Senegambia. For example, why did Senegal and The Gambia *not* become one nation-state after colonialism? Why maintain the lock-and-key geography of the two states?⁴ Building on the continued relevance of such questions in the postcolonial period, Part Four, ‘States, Social Contracts and Respacing from Below, c. 1970–2010’, returns to much of the borderland agenda to examine the influence of borderland societies on contemporary African states.

¹ P. Nugent and A. I. Asiwaju (eds.), *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits, and Opportunities* (London, 1996); P. Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists & Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier: The Life of the Borderlands since 1914* (Athens, OH, 2002); S. R. Dorman, D. P. Hammett, and P. Nugent (eds.), *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa* (Leiden, 2007); P. Nugent, ‘Cyclical history in the Gambia/Casamance borderlands: refuge, settlement and Islam from c. 1880 to the present’, *The Journal of African History*, 48:2 (2007), 221–43.

² C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (rev. edn, Cambridge, MA, 1992). By the ‘war and taxes formula’, I mean Tilly’s claim that, in European states, ‘war made the state, and the state made war.’

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* Nugent argues that it was mostly because elites in each country wanted it that way, because it best served their economic interests. See chapter 11, ‘Barnacle states and boundary lines: states, trade and urbanism in the Senegambia’.

In addition to Tilly's work, Nugent intervenes with that of some of the most influential Africanist scholars in recent decades to make a number of important sub-arguments. First, Nugent eschews Crawford Young's choice between metropolitan and peripheral interpretations of the late-nineteenth-century 'new imperialism' and Mahmoud Mamdani's argument about the 'bifurcated state' in colonial Africa.⁵ He points to a longer, more comprehensive, systemic, and fluid history in these two borderlands to consider developments in the metropole, the colonial capital, and the 'frontier' as part of a fluid whole.⁶ By doing so, Nugent joins scholars who have argued for greater African 'agency' in state-making processes at the same time that he supports cultural arguments about the 'creolization' of identities in the Atlantic world.⁷ Second, Nugent reemploys some of his previous work on cross-border smuggling to argue that Frederick Cooper's conception of the 'gatekeeper state' fails to account for the weakness and the vulnerability of the colonial gate, as well as of those who were allegedly keeping it.⁸ Finally, Nugent argues contra James C. Scott's 'seeing like a state' thesis that African 'colonial states did not opt for maximum surveillance and optimal extraction, but typically followed the line of least resistance' (23).⁹ In other words, Nugent 'mixes it up' with some of the best-known scholarship to show how West Africans 'mixed it up' with all comers to these Trans-Volta and Senegambian borderlands. Indeed, mixing was an essential process that enabled these West Africans to avoid or escape some state control at the same time that they participated in it and 'made the state' on the geographical margins.

In terms of sources and methods, Nugent has spent a great deal of time in Agotime and Ewe villages in the Trans-Volta and in Jola and Mandinka villages in or near the Casamance. (Oral sources come from over two decades of field work in towns and villages across each subregion). Beyond this 'field time', he balances his source base with a number of colonial and national archives and with a focus on festivals, especially in Chapter Thirteen, 'Boundaries, Communities and "Re-Membering": Festivals and the Negotiation of Difference', as cultural sources that reveal much about communities in the past. After so much about states and taxes and trade, this cultural history in the final chapter comes as a welcome respite.

Nugent's book is a big bite to digest all at once (544 pages of text), but it will certainly be useful for undergraduate and graduate courses focused on spatial histories of colonialism. It will also prove to be a gold mine for researchers interested in comprehensive political and economic histories of colonialism in the two subregions. Nugent performs an impressive feat by covering so much history in the Trans-Volta and the Senegambia in such detail with so much theoretical and interpretive finesse. This book will be a gem to the Africanist community and to others interested in colonial political economy, state-making, borderlands, and cultural history for years to come.

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⁵C. Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, 1994). See also the distinction between urban and rural frames of this history in R. H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Policies* (Berkeley, 2005 [1981]). M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, 1996), 16–32.

⁶I. Kopytoff (ed.), *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington, IN, 1987).

⁷For a few influential works on African 'agency', see J. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 1998); and D. Eltis, P. Morgan, and D. Richardson, 'Agency and diaspora in Atlantic History: reassessing the African contribution to rice cultivation in the Americas', *American Historical Review*, 112:5 (2007), 1329–58. For Atlantic 'creolization', see P. Mark, *'Portuguese' Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington, IN, 2002); J. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); H. Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington, IN, 2013).

⁸Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens*; F. Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), 156–61.

⁹J. C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).