

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL THEORY

The Moving Location of Empire: Indirect Rule, International Law, and the *Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment*

LUIS ESLAVA*

Abstract

Between 1935 and 1937, the International Missionary Council conducted the *Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment*. The objective was to produce silent educational films and screen them to ‘native’ people via mobile cinemas in the British territories in East and Central Africa. Embracing the principle of ‘indirect rule’, and its role in training colonial subjects in economic self-sufficiency and political self-rule, as then advocated by leading colonial figures and the League of Nations, the films strived to capture ‘the native point of view’ through an ‘ethnographic sensitivity’ towards local cultures, concerns and needs. Hoping to educate the natives from ‘within’, they used local actors, familiar locations and pedagogical instructions that were believed to meet the target audience’s cognitive capacity. Though in many respects unsuccessful, the experiment cemented the use of cinema in the late colonial project and, more importantly, embodied the clear move at the time towards a more dynamic and disaggregated, yet perhaps never fully post-imperial, international order. I argue in this article that the *Bantu Experiment* is thus a telling instance through which to examine both the mobility and multiplicity of late imperial locations and the system of modern international administration that emerged during the interwar period. I suggest that this mobility and multiplicity continue to characterize the workings of today’s international order, indicating the key role that ‘indirect rule’, as a silent principle of international law, still plays in its functioning today.

Keywords

Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment; imperialism; indirect rule; international law; League of Nations

Law has to be rendered visible . . .
Goodrich, ‘Screening Law’ (2009)

I. THE EXPERIMENT AND ITS WORLD

Between 1935 and 1937, the International Missionary Council conducted the *Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment* (the *Bantu Experiment*). It received financial support

* Senior Lecturer in International Law and Co-Director of the Centre for Critical International Law (CeCIL), Kent Law School; Senior Fellow and Visiting Scholar (January–June 2018), Melbourne Law School [l.eslava@kent.ac.uk]. I must thank Rose Parfitt, Emily Haslam and the reviewers for their invaluable comments, James Parker for drawing my attention to Goodrich’s *Screening Law*, and Eric Loefflad for his usual meticulous research assistance. Needless to say, all shortcomings of this text are entirely mine. The photographs used in this article were included in Notcutt and Latham, *infra* note 1. I use the photographs with the permission of the World Council of Churches (the successor of the International Missionary Council).

from the Carnegie Corporation and the Colonial Development Fund and was carried out in co-ordination with the British Colonial Office and the colonial governments of the British protectorates and mandates in Tanganyika (today Tanzania), Kenya, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (today Zambia and Malawi). Headed by John Merle Davis, an American Congregationalist missionary, author of an influential report on the effects of mining on Central African societies, *Modern Industry and the African* (1933), and director of the International Missionary Council's Department of Social and Industrial Research, the *Bantu Experiment's* objective was the production of silent educational films to be screened to 'native' people in mobile cinemas with commentary in local languages, either with the help of pre-recorded disks or local translators.

The films aimed to familiarize colonial subjects with modern techniques of agricultural production and public administration, public health issues, the nuances of modern sociality and emotions, the value of savings and economic proficiency, and the glory of the British Empire, all through unchallenging, familiar faces and locations.¹ To this end, they used local actors and settings, and their pedagogical content was selected and delivered according to the presumed needs and cognitive capacity of 'natives'. Their intentionally formulaic plots endeavoured to capture 'the native point of view' by resorting to what I identify here as an 'ethnographic sensitivity' towards local cultures and concerns.² As the project's motto – included on its official letterhead – made clear, the aim was to produce 'Films of Africans, Made in Africa, for Africans'.³

In embracing this ethnographic sensitivity, resulting from a recently developed attention to 'native culture' within anthropological and colonial administrative circles, the project saw its films as articulating and advancing the ethos of the international order inaugurated after the First World War.⁴ This post-colonial order in gestation aimed to shape, through culturally attuned norms and institutions, the daily life of peripheral peoples in terms of emerging ideas of economic self-sufficiency and political self-rule. These ideas were clearly evidenced in the League of Nations' Mandates System and in more general discussions about the need to move away from old forms of imperialism during a time of great global reconfiguration. As Antony Anghie has argued, the objective during this time became not 'merely' to qualify the rights of subjects, but to actually create sovereign entities, both individual

¹ For a complete list of films produced by the *Bantu Experiment*, as well as its rationale and the places where the films were made and displayed see the final report of the project, published under the title: L.A. Notcutt and G.C. Latham, *The African and the Cinema: An Account of the Work of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment During the Period March 1935 to May 1937* (with a foreword by J. Merle Davis) (1937).

² International Missionary Council: Production and Circulation of Educational Films for Natives of South, Central and East Africa (1937/1938), CO 323/1421/11 (1937).

³ Ibid.

⁴ See especially, *Bantu Experiment: The Bantu Kinema Experiment – Origin and History*, CO 323/1316/5 (1935). See on the turn to 'culture' in the context of colonial cinematography, L. Grieveson, 'The Cinema and the (Common) Wealth of Nations', in L. Grieveson and C. MacCabe (eds.), *Empire and Film* (2011), 73. See more generally on the encounter between anthropological and colonial administrative agendas in the interwar period, in particular what Luongo calls the 'anthro-administrative complex' that emerged at this point, K. Luongo, *Witchcraft and Colonial Rule in Kenya, 1900–1955* (2011); F. Foks, 'Bronislaw Malinowski, "Indirect Rule," and the Colonial Politics of Functionalist Anthropology, ca. 1925–1940', (2018) 60(1) *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35.

and collective.⁵ Importantly, this was an order that had to work now, as much as possible, from *within*. As Davis put it in his funding request to the Carnegie Corporation, '[s]ince the actors would be native, the speech native, the setting and motifs native, the lessons they are to derive from the films would come naturally and not from without as something imposed by the foreigner'.⁶ Thirty-five films were produced during the two years of the *Bantu Experiment*, of which only three survive.

Although it failed to raise new funds for its continuation after 1937 and was criticized for not using local (human or financial) resources to their fullest potential, the experiment was extremely successful in many other respects. Apart from mobilizing a large number of key stakeholders, governmental entities at various levels, and funding sources dispersed across the globe for its film production, it screened these films to thousands of local viewers spread out over thousands of kilometres (see [Figures 1](#) and [2](#)). The experiment also left a detailed archival legacy of its practices and techniques, and a trail of positive evaluations showing how its films had been perceived by 'different classes of natives – the educated, the semi-detribalized and the raw villagers'.⁷ The result was to consolidate an intense interest, among colonial authorities throughout Africa, in cinema's 'enormous possibilities for education and healthy entertainment'.⁸ This interest soon generated an abundance of publicly funded films intended to train a new type of colonial subject and to counter what was believed to be the 'often distorted presentation of the life of the white races' in the American and European commercial films already circulating in Africa.⁹ The *Bantu Experiment* thus inaugurated the official use of cinema as an 'instrument of modernization' in late colonial administration, an effort which had started in the 1920s but was only formalized and expanded by the British Colonial Film Unit between 1939 and 1955. The eventual end of the Colonial Film Unit, and of formal colonial cinematography more broadly, came to signal the moment when old imperialism was finally superseded by the decolonization movement, which broke away from yet closely followed the vision and forces underpinning the *Bantu Experiment*.¹⁰ As Davis wrote when he first approached the Colonial Office about the *Bantu Experiment*, '... in addition to the service which this project would render Bantu Africa, the

⁵ A. Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (2004), 133.

⁶ J. Merle Davis, *An International Study of the Cinema* (Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Room, Carnegie Corporation Grant Files, Box 186, Folder: IMC/Study of Cinema), 2, cited in G. Reynolds, 'The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment and the Struggle for Hegemony in British East and Central Africa, 1935–1937', (2009) 29(1) *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 57, at 60.

⁷ International Missionary Council: Production and Circulation of Educational Films for Natives of South, Central and East Africa (1937/1938), CO 323/1421/11 (1937).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Since its beginnings, cinema accompanied the operations of the British Empire. See on the early use of films in colonial administration and the expansion of the British Empire, I. Christie, "'The captains and the kings depart': Imperial Departure and Arrival in Early Cinema', in L. Grieveson and C. MacCabe (eds.), *Empire and Film* (2011), 21. See on the role of the *Bantu Experiment* in the development of instructional cinema in Africa: F. Okiremuete Shaka, 'Instructional Cinema in Colonial Africa: An Historical Reappraisal', (1999) 27(1/3) *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 27; G. Reynolds, *Colonial Cinema in Africa: Origins, Images, Audiences* (2015), 171–96. See generally on colonial cinematography in African as an 'instrument of modernization': R. Smyth, 'Film as Instrument of Modernization and Social Change in Africa: The Long View', in P.J. Bloom, S.F. Miescher and T. Manuh (eds.), *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa* (2014), 65.

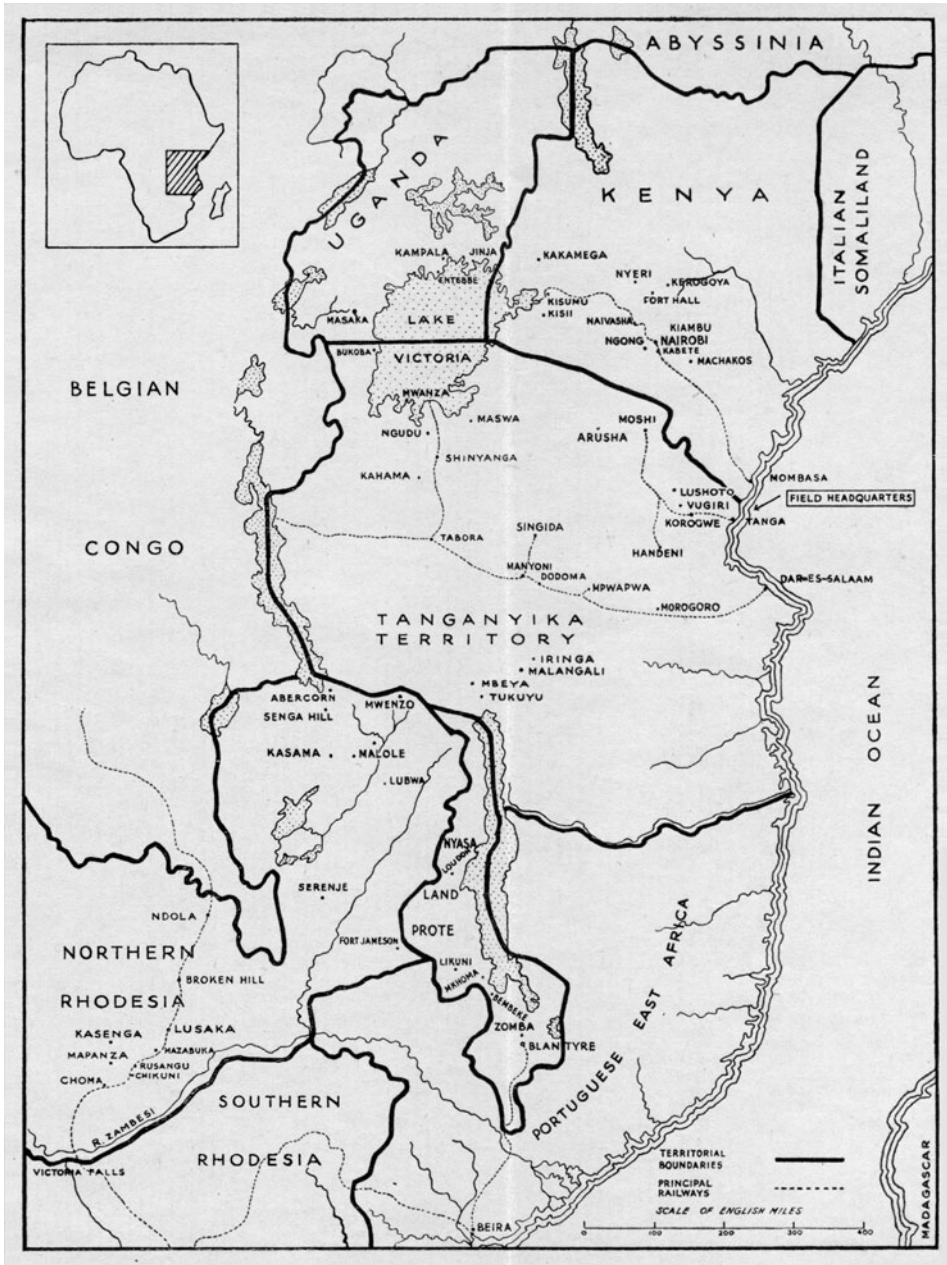


Figure 1. Places at which films were made and displayed. Source. Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema* (1937), Appendices. Pull-out map.

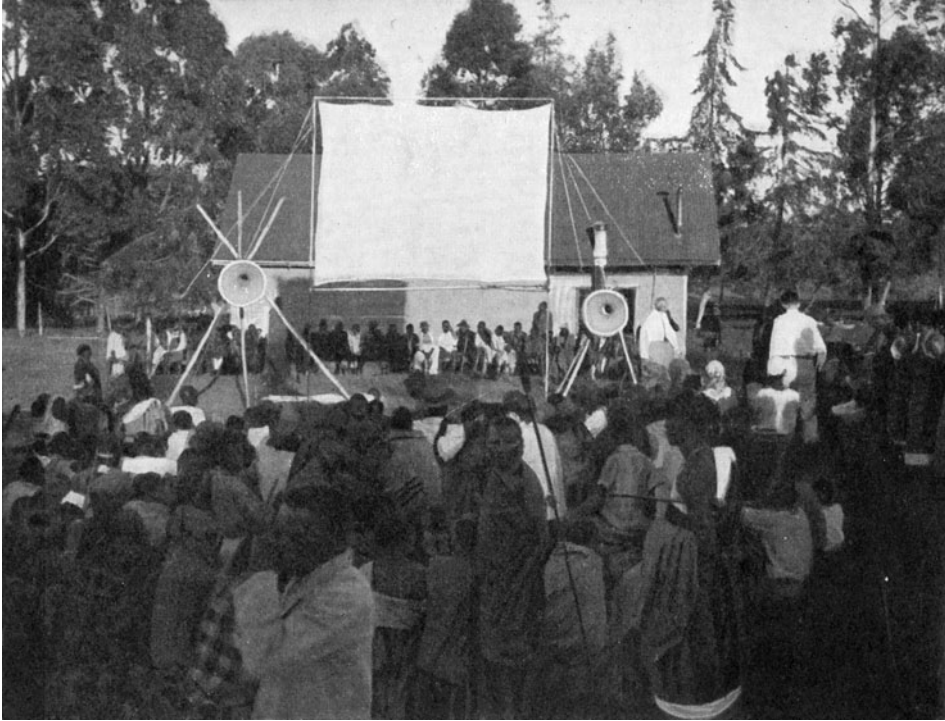


Figure 2. Show at Ngong, near Nairobi. Source. Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema* (1937).

results of [it will] have a bearing on the problems of the development of backward people in many other parts of the world'.¹¹

In this article, I approach the *Bantu Experiment*, therefore, as a telling instance through which to examine – and to see and experience – the mobility and scattered nature of late imperial locations. I suggest that this mobility and geographical multiplicity invites us to think beyond static and bounded understandings of the spatial and human dimensions of late imperialism and its past and present history. The dynamic, disaggregated mode of imperialism embodied and transmitted through the *Bantu Experiment* exemplifies the system of modern international administration that emerged during the interwar period. No longer predicated on formal top-down mechanisms of control over neatly defined territories and peoples, this system used versatile and decentralized forms of rule that were to be internalized by subjects who, along with their territories, were now immersed within an ‘international’ order. The premises and operation of this system continue to characterize the workings of today’s global order, indicating the key role that ‘indirect rule’ continues to play in its functioning.

¹¹ J. Merle Davis, Letter to R.V. Vernon, Esq. British Colonial Office, Downing Street (10 October 1934), Attachment, CO 323/1253/5 (1934).

As I have mentioned, the *Bantu Experiment* was conducted at the very moment at which European empires were refiguring their operations in the aftermath of the First World War. In this context, the idea of using local variables to infuse practices of self-rule in peripheral subjects – later transformed into the exercise of self-determination – emerged on the normative and political horizon. As we shall see, the *Bantu Experiment* encapsulated with this the principle of indirect rule and the oblique, more dispersed and individually-based forms of international administration this idea came to support. Indirect rule – the idea of administering colonial territories and subjects through their own authority and volition, from *within* as it were – was powerfully advocated by, among many other influential colonial figures, Sir Frederick Lugard (1858–1945). Born in Madras and raised in Worcester, Lugard was a soldier, mercenary and explorer in Africa before serving as military administrator of Uganda (1890–1892), high commissioner of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (1900–1906), governor of Hong Kong (1907–1912), governor general of Nigeria (1912–1919), British representative to the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission (1922–1936), founder and long-term chairman of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (today the International African Institute) (1926–1945)¹² and chairman of the *Bantu Experiment*. In all these posts, in particular in Nigeria and then at the League, at the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures and in the context of the *Bantu Experiment*, Lugard was able to advance and render into pedagogical form his view on how to update colonial relations, via indirect rule, in the modern world.

In light of all this, as the following pages suggest, the *Bantu Experiment* and its films should be seen as part of the *theatrum juridicum* – a rendition of the law, as Peter Goodrich would put it – that marked late imperial practices and the system of modern international administration that resulted from them.¹³ Indirect rule emerges from this reading as a resilient but often unrecognized feature of international law – a ‘silent principle’ of our non-imperial yet perhaps never fully post-colonial international order.

Using the *Bantu Experiment* as a lens, in the sections that follow I explore three interrelated and enduring features of the international order that emerged during the first half of the twentieth century. First, I discuss what the experiment reveals about the diversity of interests, actors, jurisdictions and levels of government that the idea of indirect rule brought together for the purpose of operationalizing a ‘modern’ international administration in the inter-war period. As we shall see, through the *Bantu Experiment* it is possible to grasp the hugely important role that indirect rule came to play at this time, in particular in synchronizing a vast and fast-changing imperial assemblage for the instruction of ‘native’ communities and individuals in the conditions of self-rule. During the interwar years the question of imperial rule became, as Sir Edward Twining, governor of Tanganyika from 1949 to 1958,

¹² Lugard established the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, also in association with the International Missionary Council, in 1926. See on the broader landscape surrounding the establishment of the Institute Foks, *supra* note 4.

¹³ P. Goodrich, ‘Screening Law’, (2009) 21(1) *Law & Literature* 1.

eventually came to put it, ‘when [to] pass out from the phase of control into the phase of influence’.¹⁴

The next section describes how the *Bantu Experiment* throws into sharp relief the rationale, as well as the tensions, involved in the construction of colonial peoples as self-ruled subjects. At this level, the experiment demonstrates how the very idea of self-rule came to be born into a landscape mined with profound asymmetries of political, economic and cultural power. Using one of the experiment’s three surviving films as an example, I discuss how indirect rule made this already jagged situation an even more treacherous condition from which to try to escape.

Finally, I examine how the *Bantu Experiment* can help us conceptualize not only the inherent mobility and multiplicity of late imperial locations but also the larger relation between international law and imperialism that still exists today. The mobility and multiplicity of locations promoted through the *Bantu Experiment* were compounded by the production and circulation of films during the late 1930s and 1940s, and especially during the transition to decolonization through the work, for example, of the Colonial Film Unit. As with the *Bantu Experiment*, these later films enable a sort of reversed ethnography, or what we might call a critical ethnography. They offer us a gaze that we can direct at the official ‘ethnographic sensitivity’ which the makers of these films understood them to be embracing. As I will show, this late colonial cinematography, and the use of radio and then television during the following postcolonial period, reveals less about the (post-)colonial subjects who were their direct object of attention than about the metropolitan ideas and geopolitical and economic interests and institutions that came to create today’s expansive, indirectly ruled international order. If we pay attention to such mediums, and those that have come later, it is possible to appreciate how today’s modern subjects, belonging now to ‘self-ruled’, ‘self-determined’ and ‘sovereign’ nation-states, remain the moving, always somehow entrapped, locations of empire.

2. THE EMPIRE OF INDIRECT RULE

One of the most salient features of the *Bantu Experiment* was the large number of actors, institutions and governmental entities brought together for its design and execution. Religious and philanthropic organizations, private agents, local communities, ‘native chiefs’, the Colonial Office, the British Film Institute, the colonial governments where the experiment was conducted and the League of Nations’ Permanent Mandates Commission (especially in the case of Tanganyika, a British mandate from 1922 to 1946) all played important roles in the project. In a letter of 5 November 1935 to the UK’s Colonial Office on Downing Street, Davis reported with great enthusiasm from the field on this plurality of actors and their active collective efforts towards the implementation of the experiment’s first stage:

¹⁴ Twining to Gorrell Barnes, 12 November 1956 CO 822/912, *BDEEP – Conservative Government 1951–1957*, Part II, 272, cited in W.M. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Decolonization’, (1994) 22(3) *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 462, at 508.

Letters received from Major [Leslie] Notcutt and Mr [Geoffrey] Latham [respectively the project's field director and educational director] indicate that the Bantu Kinema Experiment has made an excellent start . . . By the end of August the first experimental programme was completed and on September 5th [the educational director] and four native assistants, set out with lorry and trailer on a 3,000 mile display tour through Tanganyika, N. Rhodesia and Kenya. Mr Latham reports that widely differing types of native audiences received the pictures with enthusiasm. The attention of the primitive, as well as the sophisticated, natives is instantly caught and held by films portraying black men and women in the familiar medium of African life. On the Copper Belt audiences numbering as high as 1,900 natives gave the closest attention to the pictures and followed every detail with interest . . . [I]nvaluable assistance has been given by Government officials, missionaries, planters and native Chiefs, in the planning and setting-up of sets for filming, in working out details of scenarios and in lending natives for acting.¹⁵

The multiplicity of sites of interest and people involved in the *Bantu Experiment* speaks to the growing complexity of colonial relations after the First World War. The reasons for this more complex system included the League of Nations' call for self-rule and its institutionalization of colonial administration through the Mandates System, the emergence of colonial peoples as active political and economic subjects both in colonial discourse and in effective terms (for example, as workers and tax payers), the European 'civilizing mission' being updated by the US with its growing geopolitical interests, a more general 'internationalization' of global relations, and a widespread preoccupation with the financial cost of imperial administration.¹⁶ In response to these changes and concerns, lay colonial subjects and 'chiefs', together with missionaries, technicians, funding bodies and colonial officers, became part and parcel of one large imperial assemblage.

Regardless of the number, jurisdictional hierarchy and diverse range of interests of the actors involved in the *Bantu Experiment*, however, the aim of instructing Africans in modern standards of civility and productivity was what brought them all together. In particular, their efforts were synchronized by centring their attention on the African 'native': a subject understood as being in need of a specific kind of instruction, locally furnished yet European in outlook (see Figures 3 and 4). Crucially, this instruction was conceived not only as a scientific and pedagogical task but as a universal and legitimate duty towards peripheral populations. For Davis this was clear:

The frankly experimental nature of the project, with its endeavor to adapt scientific technique and educational content to peculiar tastes, values and patterns of life seems

¹⁵ J. Merle Davis, Letter to R.V. Vernon, Esq. Colonial Office, Downing Street (5 November 1935), CO 323/1316/5.

¹⁶ The literature on these topics is vast but see, for example, on the League of Nations, the Mandates System and the question of 'self-rule': S. Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (2015), 1–16, 45–76; on the emergence of colonial subjects as political and economic actors: F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (1996), 1–56; on Europe, America and the reorganization of the colonial project at the beginning of the twentieth century E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (2009), 3–54; on the 'internationalization' of global relations: D. Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (2014), 1–18; and on the financial cost of imperial administration, M. Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (2009), 1–65.



Figure 3. Checking exposure before shooting a close-up. Source. Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema* (1937).

to possess a universal value wherever illiterate peoples are faced with the complicated task of understanding and participating in the life of the modern world.¹⁷

The directors of the *Bantu Experiment*, Notcutt and Latham, shared this reading of the African subject. For Notcutt (who had begun experimenting with educational films as a plantation manager in East Africa in the mid-1920s) and Latham (a former director of native education in Northern Rhodesia), the need to instruct Africans about Western developments through African customs and variables, and in their own languages and their own communities was obvious. For both men, the mobile cinema offered an ideal way to maintain 'native' institutions and norms which, like many other colonial officials, missionaries and intellectuals at the time, they saw as indicators of a kind of 'raw' civility or 'consciousness' and, in this sense, as useful containers to be refilled, surrounded and guided by European principles.¹⁸

As Glenn Reynolds has noted in his detailed study of colonial cinema, there was a shift in thinking among colonial authorities in the interwar period. They began

¹⁷ J. Merle Davis, 'Foreword', in Notcutt and Latham, *supra* note 1, at 13.

¹⁸ See on the use of the metaphor of consciousness in the inter-war period, Anghie, *supra* note 5, at 133–4.



Figure 4. The prize winner from using modern agricultural practices. Scene from *Improved Agriculture*. Source. Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema* (1937).

to react against the old demonization of tribal ways, embracing instead modern science, particularly an anthropological sensitivity, in the education of ‘natives’.¹⁹ ‘The 1920s and 1930s’, as Frederick Cooper has stressed, ‘were the golden age of ethnography’.²⁰ This was the spirit behind the desire of Notcutt and Latham, like that of Davis, the British Colonial Office and other colonial governments involved in the *Bantu Experiment*, to offer ‘natives’ a constructive cinematic experience through familiar modes and themes. Their aim was to inculcate ‘modern’ attitudes while counteracting what they saw as the contamination of otherwise good and productive African minds by migration to urban areas (in particular mining towns) and the rapid arrival of commercial films all over the continent.²¹ In the words of Notcutt and Latham:

If . . . governments would take control before it is too late and see that cinema is used constructively for the benefit of the African, then there is no limit to the influence for

¹⁹ Reynolds, *supra* note 10, 174. See on the intense conversations and different positions at this time on the value of ‘native’ cultures and the role and function of anthropology in the colonial project, W. James, ‘The Anthropologist as Reluctant Imperialist’, in T. Asad, *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter* (1973), 41.

²⁰ F. Cooper, ‘Development, Modernization, and the Social Sciences: The Examples of British and French Africa’, in M. Bandeira Jerónimo and A. Costa Pinto (eds.), *The Ends of European Colonial Empires: Cases and Comparisons* (2015), 15, at 19.

²¹ Reynolds, *supra* note 10, at 172–3.

good which this great force could wield ... [R]eflection will convince any unprejudiced person that, with backward peoples unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood, it is surely our wisdom, if not our obvious duty, to prevent, so far as is possible, the dissemination of wrong ideas ... We can prevent the destructive use of the cinema and we can use it constructively in a hundred ways.²²

This understanding of the nature of colonial subjects and the role of cinema in the modernization process reflected new ideas about the proper conduct of colonial administration. Of particular importance was the incorporation of the idea of indirect rule into legal and institutional practices at the international level: the principle of governing and educating colonial subjects through their own authorities and laws and according to their own will and 'stage of development' – as Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations described it.²³ For example, the International Institute of Educational Cinematography (IIEC) – a League of Nations body that operated in Benito Mussolini's Rome between 1928 to 1937 – shared Notcutt and Latham's view that cinema had a key instructive function to play, especially in the 'intellectual and spiritual elevation' of 'backward races'.²⁴ Films could achieve this, according to the IIEC, by embracing and mobilizing the nuances of local cultures for the service of colonial instruction.²⁵ Julien Luhaire, director of the League's Institute of Intellectual Cooperation – which oversaw its educational and cultural matters – had expressed a similar faith in the value of cinema for the advancement of a new international order in 1924. According to Luhaire: 'This new and extraordinarily efficient instrument of intellectual action is intrinsically international'.²⁶

By the time the *Bantu Experiment* began, the idea of indirect rule was already rooted in the lexicon and practice of international administration. It had been a component of British imperial administration since at least the final quarter of the nineteenth century. By the mid-1930s it had been adopted by France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy and Japan, each in their own distinctive way, in response to the challenges of administering colonial territories and to a changing set of ideas about the nature of colonial rule and native development, as outlined above.²⁷ Although still contested

²² Notcutt and Latham, *supra* note 1, at 22–3.

²³ See especially, Anghie, *supra* note 5, at 115–95.

²⁴ L. de Feo, Director of the International Educational Cinematograph Institute to Rheinallt Jones, Wits. SAIRR, B.61.3 (8 March 1933). Cited in Reynolds, *supra* note 10, at 169–70.

²⁵ See especially, Reynolds, *ibid.*

²⁶ Cited in Z. Druick, 'The International Educational Cinematograph Institute, Reactionary Modernism, and the Formation of Film Studies', (2007) 16(1) *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 80, at 82.

²⁷ Until the 1970s there were intense debates about the differences between British 'indirect rule' and French 'direct rule', with the latter described through ideas of association or assimilation. This distinction has been problematized in recent decades on the basis of the widespread use of local structures for the spread of colonial interests across empires, as well as attention to how the ethos of indirect rule came to percolate into international institutions and the international legal order during the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. See as an example of literature arguing for the differences between British and French rule, M. Crowder, 'Indirect Rule: French and British Style', (1964) 34(3) *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 197. See as an early example of literature problematizing this distinction, J. Derrick, 'The "Native Clerk" in Colonial West Africa', (1983) 82(326) *African Affairs* 61. See especially on the widespread use of indirect rule in Africa, M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996); K. Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (2010); Cooper, *supra* note 16. See in the case of Japan, for example, K.L. Camacho, 'The Politics of Indigenous Collaboration: The Role of Chamorro Interpreters in Japan's Pacific Empire, 1914–45', (2008) 43(2) *The Journal of Pacific History* 207.

by adherence of more traditional versions of imperial rule (as advanced, for example, by many white settlers) this turn to less 'direct', more pedagogical and more oblique forms of administration came to be crystallized in the Mandates System and in the broader 'Wilsonian' spirit that the League of Nations came to symbolize.²⁸ The new prominence of the US in international affairs after the post-First World War geopolitical reshuffle only reinforced this trend.

The Mandates System set up 'native' self-rule as the ultimate objective of imperial presence, and indirect rule was an ideal framework for colonial administrators to materialize this objective. The aim was to make it possible for colonial peoples, again following Article 22 of the Covenant, 'to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world'.²⁹ While in principle established for mandates overseen by the League, this objective came to reflect an increasing sense of what the road ahead should be for other colonial territories in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Behind this insistence on self-rule lay not only the League's Wilsonian spirit but also, and perhaps more importantly, the concept's enthusiastic reception by local political figures across the colonial world.³⁰ Crucially, this turn was not monopolized by the US and its vision for the world; self-rule, and soon self-determination, was also espoused by other central powers, especially Bolshevik Russia, although not necessarily with the same political intentions.³¹

It was in this context that indirect rule became a key referent of colonial intellectual and practical discussion during the first half of the twentieth century, both implicitly and explicitly.³² Lugard, who systematized and promoted indirect rule in British territories and at the international level through his position at the League's Permanent Mandates Commission, offered his most thorough account of the principle in his book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922).³³ As a celebrated colonial administrator and diplomat, Lugard gained first-hand knowledge of both the daily running of the British Empire and the internal mechanics of the Mandates System, on which he came to exercise a great influence.³⁴ His book – more than 600 pages ranging from his reflections on Britain's acquisition of colonial territories, to anthropological annotations on the nature of colonial subjects, to views on economic development, taxation, labour, trade and land tenure in the colonies – is

²⁸ See, e.g., Manela, *supra* note 16, at 3–54. On the question of white settlers, see Foks, *supra* note 4.

²⁹ 1919 Covenant of the League of Nations, 27 LNTS 350, Art. 22.

³⁰ See, e.g., Manela, *supra* note 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*, at 3–54. See also, in terms of the intellectual underpinnings of Russia's position at this point, V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* [1917] (2013).

³² See on the larger and older background of indirect rule, K. Mantena, 'Law and "Tradition": Henry Maine and the Theoretical Origins of Indirect Rule', in A. Lewis and M. Lobban (eds.), *Law and History: Current Legal Issues* (2004), Vol. 6, at 159. See also M. Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native a Political Identity* (2012); G.N. Uzoigwe, 'Indirect Rule, Africa', in T. Benjamin (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450* (2007), at 629.

³³ F. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922). See also Lugard's earlier work, *Political Memoranda, Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative 1913–1918* [1906] (1970).

³⁴ See for a biographical account of Lugard's service to the British Empire, G. Calchi-Novati, 'Lugard, Frederick John Dealtry', in T. Benjamin (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450* (2007), 738. See also Lugard's autobiographical text, *The Rise of our East African Empire: Early Efforts in Nyasaland and Uganda* (1968). See particularly on the role of Lugard in the League of Nations, Pedersen, *supra* note 16, at 107–94; Gorman, *supra* note 16, at 130–4.

one of the most complete *exposés* of the institutional dynamics of late colonial and modern international administration.

In *The Dual Mandate*, Lugard draws out what he, like many others, saw as the reciprocally beneficial nature of colonial administration. This double benefit – this ‘dual mandate’ – understood Europeans to be bringing civilization and modernity to the colonies (their ‘mandate’ towards the colonized world), and as being for this reason morally entitled to extract the raw materials needed to expand their own metropolitan industries and open colonial markets to the rest of the world (the second part of the mandate, ‘owed’ to their own metropolitan citizens). In Lugard’s account, this was a legitimate transaction based on Europeans’ historical duty to ‘civilize’, develop and train the colonial world for self-administration while ensuring the efficient running of homeland economies and the welfare of their populations. This arrangement, he writes, was supported by the international legal framework set up by the Berlin Conference (1885), the Brussels Conference (1890) and, most thoroughly, the League of Nations.³⁵

For Lugard, indirect rule – through local chiefs, laws, decentralized administration, co-operative relations with natives, and models of education, taxation and labour relations geared towards generating self-disciplined individuals and self-governing territories – was the most appropriate and efficient way to administer colonies and ‘natives’ within the framework of this dual mandate. In his words, the British commitment to the liberty and development of native populations and of British subjects could be best secured by ‘leaving [natives] free to manage their own affairs through their own rulers, proportionately to their degree of advancement, under the guidance of the British staff, and subject to the laws and policy of administration’.³⁶

Lugard saw indirect rule, as a result, as the most suitable vehicle for solving contemporary questions about the practical impossibility of ensuring an even imperial presence across the vast colonies, managing the growing costs associated with running the Empire, and overseeing the proper welfare of ‘natives’. In *The Dual Mandate* he argued, for example, that his proposals were able to address recent concerns raised by the Labour Party that:

“the white man’s burden” was already growing too heavy for [Britain] to bear, that the British taxpayer was being called on to support the ambitions of chauvinists, and that the native races were misgoverned and robbed of their lands and their proper profits by the greed of exploiters.³⁷

Lugard felt instead that the Empire had been ‘the greatest engine of democracy the world has ever known’³⁸ and British control of the tropics, rather than ‘a charge on the British taxpayer’, had been ‘a source of very great gain’.³⁹

³⁵ Lugard, *The Dual Mandate*, *supra* note 33, at 1–31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, at 94.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, at 608.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Lugard is citing here Sir C. Lucas.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Against this background, indirect rule emerged as a new form of ‘colonial governmentality’, as Mahamood Mamdani has put it.⁴⁰ As a new logic of government, its associated ideas and institutions reinterpreted the history of colonial peoples in a way that sought to make them agents, no longer just objects, of the colonial project. Difference between colonizers and colonized was thus no longer something to be overcome but to understand and manage. For this reason the advent of indirect rule widened rather than narrowed, somewhat counter-intuitively, the scope and degree of colonial intervention. The aim now was to ‘shape the subjectivities of the colonized populations and not simply of their elites’.⁴¹

In the context of official colonial and international discourse, then, self-rule – or ideas of self-determination and sovereignty – did not erupt as a radical call for ‘self-definition’.⁴² On the contrary, its objectives were confined within a particular and already existing ‘order of things’.⁴³ The practices of indirect rule can be understood, from this point of view, as testament to the re-articulation and transformation of old imperial formations and modes of extraction, at the start of the twentieth century, into a plethora of oblique administrative practices that used ‘native’ lands, bodies and political structures as units through which to channel the circulation of foreign forms of authority and the expansion of global economic relations. The *Bantu Experiment*, as a didactic articulation of indirect rule, expressed this significant turn in colonial administration, which started to use native ‘culture’ as a new open-ended space of intervention (see Figure 5).⁴⁴

The *Bantu Experiment* put into practice, in this sense, what Bronislaw Malinowski, one of anthropology’s founding fathers, and others at the influential International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (as mentioned above, also founded and directed by Lugard), understood as a ‘practical anthropology’: a ‘scientific’ approach to the ‘facts’ of native life aimed at advancing colonial interests.⁴⁵ For Malinowski, as for Lugard, David, Notcutt and Latham, ‘a scientific study of facts . . . would reveal clearly that “direct rule” means in the last issue forced labour, ruthless taxation, a fixed routine in political matters, the application of a code of laws to an entirely incompatible background’,⁴⁶ in other words, ‘the making of the African into a caricature of the European’.⁴⁷ With this in mind, only indirect rule and culturally attuned exercises of colonial administration could succeed. The *Bantu Experiment* was inspired then by the Malinowskian and Lugardian idea that ‘it is infinitely preferable to achieve [social development] by a slow and gradual change coming from *within*’.⁴⁸ This

⁴⁰ Mamdani, *supra* note 32, at 6–8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See especially G. Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (2004), 79.

⁴³ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1994).

⁴⁴ Grieson, *supra* note 4, at 73. See also James, *supra* note 19.

⁴⁵ See especially B. Malinowsky, ‘Practical Anthropology’, (1929) 2(1) *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 22. See on the context that surrounded Malinowsky’s proposals and their similarities to, and some important differences from, Lugard and the broader anthropological and colonial administrative community, Foks, *supra* note 4.

⁴⁶ Malinowsky, *supra* note 45, at 24. See also, on how indirect rule was a shared concern of Malinowsky and Lugard, G.W. Stocking, *The Ethnographer’s Magic: And Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (1995), 258–61.

⁴⁷ Malinowsky, *supra* note 45, at 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (emphasis added).



Figure 5. Kikuyu chief consulting an agricultural officer. Scene from the film *Marketing Export Native Maize*. Source. Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema* (1937).

reflected, in turn, the larger principle that ‘the government of any race consists ... in implanting in them ideas of right, of law and order, and making them obey such ideas’ – an exercise that required controlled calibration and ethnographic knowledge and patience to achieve change in the inner-self of colonized individuals.⁴⁹ For the directors of the *Bantu Experiment*, as well as for the cinematographic community around it, the movies it produced were inspired by this rationale: one that sought to train colonial audiences in self-rule rather than relinquishing rule altogether. For Latham indirect rule permitted a ‘balance ... between the competing enthusiasms for western culture and for African customs and traditions’, the final aim being ‘to absorb all that is best in western culture into a culture evolved from all that is best in the mental and spiritual make-up of the African’.⁵⁰ The British Film Institute’s famous magazine, *Sight and Sound*, endorsed this approach in its review of the *Bantu Experiment*:

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ G.C. Latham, ‘Indirect Rule and Education in East Africa’, (1934) 7(4) *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 423, at 430.

The first task is to help the African community to an intelligent adjustment to modern life ... This will be done by using African actors, scenes and backgrounds, and by relating the new regime to the old in an intelligible sequence.⁵¹

In hindsight, of course, the subjects resulting from this exercise were far from being factual holders of self-rule. They, and the many others targeted by similar practices of indirect rule at the time, became carriers instead of a post-imperial promise enacted within the confines of a system crisscrossed by increasingly oblique forms of control and profound asymmetries of power. The countless disaggregated subjects that resulted from this exercise were the new moving locations of empire.

3. THE AGONIES OF INDIRECT RULE

African Peasant Farms, the eighteenth film of the *Bantu Experiment*, provides a good chance to observe in motion the workings and tensions of indirect rule.⁵² Made in 1936, *African Peasant Farms* (or *Peasant Holdings*, as it is referred to in the project documents) narrates the story of a nameless African man exploring a farming scheme undertaken by the government of Tanganyika in Kingolwira, a settlement near the city of Morogoro, in the southern highlands of today's Tanzania. The Kingolwira scheme, set up in 1933 with financial aid from Britain's Empire Cotton Growing Corporation and conducted under the supervision of the Tanganyikan Agricultural Department, aimed at clearing out the tsetse fly (the carrier of sleeping sickness) by assigning 14-acre plots of land to locals who had to follow, in return, close instruction from colonial officers on what types of crop to cultivate and their distribution.⁵³

Kingolwira, like similar experiments set up at the time in Tanganyika (for example, in Uzinza and Ukiriguru), was part of the emergence of 'cooperatives' in the changing terrain of colonial administration as indirect rule arrived.⁵⁴ According to Lugard, '[t]he fundamental principle of the (cooperative) system [was] identical with that of Indirect Rule – which could be better named "Cooperative Rule" – the essential aim of both being to teach personal responsibility and initiative'.⁵⁵

The Kingolwira scheme requested that holders plant an acre of cassava around each hut, as a famine crop, and four acres of pasture when the area was tsetse-free. The rest of the land (nine acres) was to be used for cotton production on a mixed-farming basis. The aim of this system of land distribution and use was to ensure that the soil remained productive, reduce expenditure on labour and manuring, and

⁵¹ 'Films for Africa' (1935) 4(13) *Sight and Sound* 41.

⁵² Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment, *African Peasant Farms – The Kingolwira Experiment* (Director, L.A. Notcutt, 16mm Film, 9 minutes, 308 ft, Black/White, Silent, 1936). Held by the BFI (ID. 11274). Available through the catalogue of the project: *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*. www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/230.

⁵³ See especially the review of *African Peasant Farms* by T. Rice (2008) included in the project: *Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire*, available at www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/230.

⁵⁴ B. Swai, 'Tanganyika and the Great Depression 1929–1936', (1980) 9 *Transafrican Journal of History* 192, at 199.

⁵⁵ Lord Lugard, 'Foreword' to C. Strickland, *Cooperation in Africa* (1933), cited in *ibid.*, at 206.

make cotton an increasingly 'homogeneous part' of local agriculture, which was the final aim of the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation.⁵⁶

Colonial subjects' internalization of imperial public health concerns, the promotion of modern techniques of mixed farming and the mainstreaming of cash crops beneficial for the Empire's economy were thus all issues woven into the Kingolwira scheme and, in turn, into *African Peasant Farms*. In focusing on the instruction of 'natives', the scheme and the film brought together the agendas of several different actors. Following the overarching strategy of the *Bantu Experiment*, *African Peasant Farms* advanced the interests not simply of the government of Tanganyika and the pedagogical agenda of the International Missionary Council, but also of the League of Nations, at that time paying great attention to sleeping sickness in East Africa.⁵⁷ The film also advanced the interests of the Empire Growing Cotton Corporation. Established in 1921 and empowered through the British Cotton Industry Act of July 1923 to collect a levy on all cotton purchased by spinners in Britain in order to develop fields across the empire, the Corporation had been 'clearing and laying out the land' for experiment stations in Tanganyika and investing in the production and commercialization of African cotton.⁵⁸ These actions were part of the Corporation's ambitious plans for Britain to control the global production and trade of cotton, in particular by increasing the internal supply of raw materials. The US Senate was made aware of this plan as early as 1925, when it was reported that:

the British spinning industry, which is an important part of the economy itself of the nation, is dependent for a large proportion of its raw materials upon a foreign nation, while large areas within the Empire are suitable for growing cotton, and the particular types of cotton which would do much to relieve its dependence upon the American crop ... For at least 20 years [therefore] the English have been making an organized effort to lessen their dependence upon [us].⁵⁹

All these agendas, as well as the ethos of indirect rule, underpin the content and cinematic effect of *African Peasant Farms*. The 9-minute film opens with the statement that in the Kingolwira scheme 'agriculture is adapted to native tradition, but improved methods are introduced by stages'. Following this, in the first scene, the main 'native' actor encounters a signpost indicating the way to Kingolwira, which he follows, walking with an efficient modern pace and dressed in standard civil colonial clothes of matching khaki shorts and tucked-in shirt. On his way, however, he is stopped at a fly-post where a native official inspects him, eventually finding a tsetse fly on his back and readily catching it with a handheld net. After this episode,

⁵⁶ 'Empire and Cotton Growing', *The Times*, 17 February 1936, at 9, cited in Rice, *supra* note 53. See also on the interest on mix-farming by the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation, H.E. Armstrong and A. Howard, 'Humus Manure', *The Times*, 27 January 1936, at 16.

⁵⁷ H. Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950* (2011), 169–216.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., 'Cotton Growing in The Empire', *The Times*, 27 July 1935, at 4; 'Cotton Growing in The Empire', *The Times*, 21 May 1936, at 10. On the early interest and use of experiment stations by the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation, see 'Empire Cotton Research Station', (1925) 16(7) *Journal of Textile Institute Proceedings*, 235.

⁵⁹ Empire Cotton Growing Corporation. Letter from the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission submitting in response to Senate Resolution No. 317, 68th Congress, 2nd Session, 27 January 1925, a report regarding the development, method, and activities of the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation, a British firm. 26 February (calendar day, 28 February) 1925, at 3.

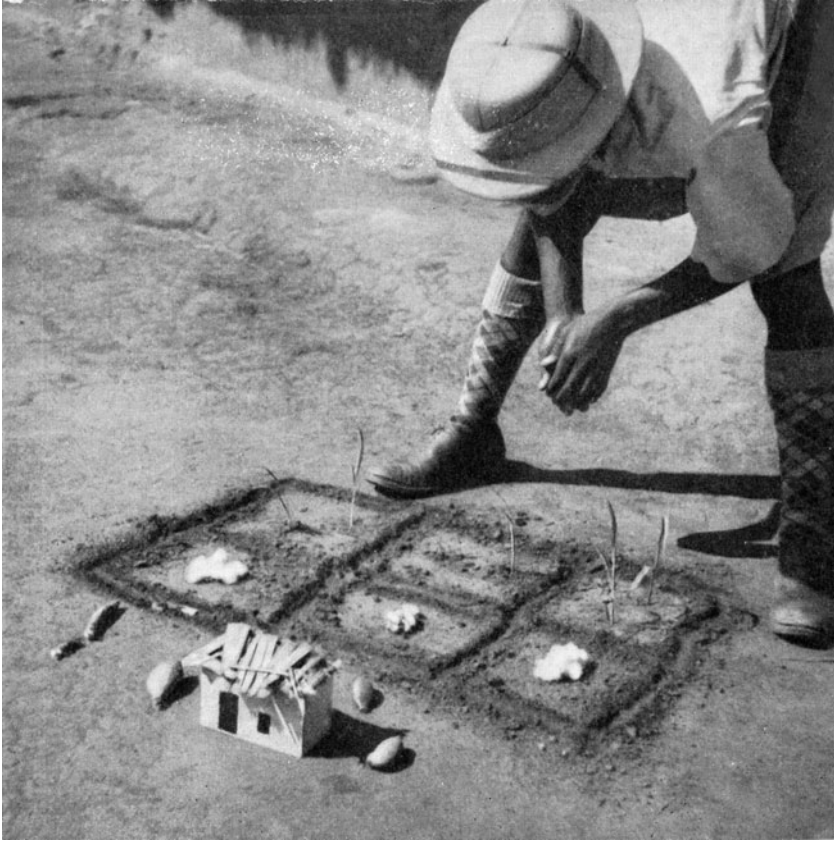


Figure 6. Map drawn on the ground illustrating the layout of farm holdings and rotation of crops. Used in three films. Source. Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema* (1937).

the protagonist arrives at Kingolwira, where he meets a white European officer, evidently in charge of the scheme, who invites him to take a look around. The film then takes the viewer step by step through the stages then being used in Kingolwira to introduce locals to cotton production and mixed farming. First, the protagonist visits a new settler who shows him his recently made hut. The settler informs him that he received free materials to build his hut and that setting up a latrine was compulsory. Then the protagonist, taken to see another settler who has started farming, is informed that free food is issued until the first crops are harvested and that land is cleared communally, with beer as a reward. Visiting this settler, the protagonist notices that his house is different – apparently because he is from a different tribe. The settler also takes the time to demonstrate, by drawing on the ground, how land should be distributed and the logistics of crop rotation as taught by the scheme's officers (see [Figure 6](#)). After this, the protagonist checks a plot of land that has been already cleared of tsetse flies and that is in the process of cultivation and production, taking a special interest in how the soil is being tilled by oxen. He then witnesses brick-making, the construction of cattle sheds, efficient transport and use of manure,

and a communal dispensary. After completing his visit and appearing convinced of the project's value, the main character is seen back at the entrance of Kingolwira applying to the European officer for a farm of his own. The final scene shows the satisfied officer taking a notebook out of his pocket and noting down the man's request.

As this description illustrates, *African Peasant Farms* wholeheartedly embraced the idea of indirect rule with its attempt to train colonial subjects from within: producing their internal realization, with the help of a didactic tone and pace, of the benefits of modernity. Articulating this through local imagery and referents, the film underscored the idea of re-centring the colonial project on 'natives' themselves, with the aim of transforming them into able modern subjects. The paramount role played by education in this task had been explained by Lugard few years earlier:

In Africa the object in view is to enable the African to 'find himself' – to emerge from the habit of mind which has through centuries marked him out as the slave of other races; to show him the higher rungs of the ladder which lead from mere obedience to co-operation, from servile imitation to individual initiative and a sense of personal responsibility – in short, 'a new way of life,' higher standards of duty and of efficiency. This ... is no new creed ... What may perhaps be claimed as new is the effort to translate the creed into terms of practical action.⁶⁰

The idea that 'natives' should be taught the details of Western sociality and economy in a locally attuned and incremental manner was, of course, an expression of specific assumptions about the cultural specificity and cognitive capacity of African individuals. In Kingolwira individuals were brought together, for example, in a productive 'community' because they were considered essentially 'communalistic' and thus wishing to live in such a way.⁶¹ Benchmarked against Europeans, local populations were also judged to be cognitively immature and culturally unfit, a reading that corresponded with the still-prevalent discourse of European civilizational superiority and African racial inferiority.⁶² This was a theme that had also occupied Lugard for many years and that he had tackled in his infamous essay 'The Colour Problem'.⁶³ Institutionally, as we saw above, these ideas were expressed by the League of Nations in the context of the Mandates System, through the more sanitized discourse of 'stages of development' and the role of indirect rule in calibrating colonial administration according to these 'stages'. Interestingly, this language had already penetrated colonial cinema more generally by 1931, when the Colonial Office asked the Rockefeller Foundation to help the British government assess the effects of educational films in the colonies, on the basis that films 'have been

⁶⁰ F. Lugard, *Education in Tropical Africa* (1930).

⁶¹ Swai, *supra* note 54, at 199.

⁶² See generally on the standard of civilization and international law, L. Obregón, 'The Civilized and the Uncivilized', in B. Fassbender and A. Peters (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of International Law* (2012), at 917.

⁶³ F. Lugard, 'The Colour Problem', (1921) 233(476) *Edinburgh Review* 267. See also F. Lugard, 'Education and Race Relations', (1933) 32(126) *Journal of the African Society* 1; F. Lugard, 'The Principle of Trusteeship for Backward Races', (1925) *Church Congressional Report* 151.

shown with valuable results to native races at various stages of development'.⁶⁴ The Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies still possessed this interest in cinema's capacity to negotiate the 'backwardness' of 'native races' in 1936, and saw the *Bantu Experiment* as a leading illustration of the possibilities for incremental, 'self-determined' education.⁶⁵

This understanding of how to most effectively approach the civilization of 'natives' (by stages) was accompanied by deep-rooted assumptions about what types of knowledge and political economy were valid in the colonies.⁶⁶ In the case of *African Peasant Farms*, we can observe, for example, a call for traditional agricultural practices to be replaced by Western cultivation techniques and the mainstreaming of cash crops.⁶⁷ Behind these options lay broader, and older, colonial policies that aimed at economic specialization, increased productivity and continuing white political rule.⁶⁸ In the Kingolwira scheme, driving communities towards cotton production was thus a far cry from being a neutral bet on 'progress'. The reorientation it fostered directly served the interests of the Empire Cotton Growing Corporation and the British colonial administration, which was thirsty to engage more 'natives' in producing 'taxable' cash crops, especially after the Great Depression hit commodities prices.⁶⁹ The co-operatives system, of which Kingolwira was a part, was hence an economical way of widening colonial presence across Africa while increasing colonial subjects' contribution to the maintenance of the Empire.⁷⁰ In the long run, this system linked local communities to an economic system that eventually drove them to full monoculture farming and total reliance on export crops.⁷¹ As colonial film historian Tom Rice has argued in a review of *African Peasants Farms*, the end result was land erosion, widespread malnutrition and increasing vulnerability in the agricultural sector, contributing to devastating famines in the 1920s and the 1940s in Tanganyika.⁷² Making local communities look and behave like 'moderns' involved, as Arturo Escobar, James C. Scott, Timothy Mitchell and Tania Murray Li

⁶⁴ J. Burns, 'American Philanthropy and Colonial Film-making: The Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation and the Birth of Colonial Cinema', in L. Grieveson and C. MacCabe (eds.), *Empire and Film* (2011), at 55–64. See also Reynolds, *supra* 10, at 166–7.

⁶⁵ Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies – Minutes of 15th–95th meetings (Government Papers, The National Archives, Kew, 1934–1939). CO 885/41. Minutes of the 68th Meeting. 28 May 1936, 62.

⁶⁶ See especially on knowledge, agriculture and the colonial project, M. Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (2002).

⁶⁷ See on the German colonial origins and long-term effects of labour and agricultural colonial policies in Tanganyika/Tanzania, W. Biermann, 'A Survey of Generative Factors in Poverty: Colonialism and Politics of Transformation', in W. Biermann and H.P.S. Moshi (eds.), *Contextualising Poverty in Tanzania: Historical Origins, Policy Failures and Recent Trends* (1997), 33.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., on the long and wide history of economic specialization, R. Tucker, *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World* (2000); S. Beckart, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (2015).

⁶⁹ See especially Swai, *supra* note 54.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See in this sense how export crops contributed to the 'underdevelopment' of Tanzania, B. Bowles, 'Export Crops and Underdevelopment in Tanganyika, 1929–61', (1976) 1 *Utafiti* 71.

⁷² Rice, *supra* note 53. See also B. Swai, 'Crisis in Colonial Agriculture: Soil Erosion in Tanganyika During the Interwar Period', (1980) 5 *Utafiti* 27.

have phrased it, 'enframing' local life in terms of a system that was not necessarily compatible with their interests.⁷³

In stark contrast to the story of individual self-realization, economic productivity, technical progress and racial harmony narrated in *African Peasants Farms*, the actual operation of indirect rule in the *Bantu Experiment* films involved, therefore, not just the reaffirmation of long-standing prejudices towards Africans but also the implementation of problematic economic and social policies. Significantly, the very fact that these prejudices and policies were articulated under the heading of indirect rule created a new and peculiar set of harms. For example, essentialist views about non-European individuals came increasingly to be discussed as 'scientific facts', as in the language employed by Malinowski. As 'scientific facts', various social traits, laws and worldviews, as well as communities' needs and political difficulties, became amenable to classification, intervention and experimentation, all conceived as a depersonalized, objective exercise for the service of humankind – a 'duty' as Lugard explained in *The Dual Mandate*. Ultimately, in keeping with this turn to the legitimizing language of science, the *Bantu Experiment* was indeed an experiment. Conceived as such, it was allowed to trial its views *about* 'natives' *with* 'natives' and *on* 'natives' during the production and screening of its films. The outcome at an institutional level was a spiral of self-reinforcing views about Africa and Africans, with little room for self-criticism or more detailed insights into the nuances of local life. Official reports of the project's reception focus either on bulk emotional responses, misunderstandings and apprehensions on the part of 'natives', or what VIP white settlers or educated Africans – invited to screenings, in effect, as the project's external examiners – thought of these 'native' reactions.⁷⁴ As G.C. Baker put it in his review of the official summary of the *Bantu Experiment* for the journal *Africa*, although the project had an 'unsuccessful conclusion', it 'advanced a concrete scheme [for] the future development [of colonial cinema] for which [it] had cleared the way'.⁷⁵ Herbert Blumer, a US sociologist and leading figure of social constructionist and symbolic interactionism, echoed Baker's endorsement of the experiment's final report in his review for the *American Journal of Sociology*:

Those responsible for [this experiment] felt that cinema might be employed in an illiterate population as an effective device to make clear to the native different phases of their life and the new world which was confronting them. [Although much] attention is given [in the report] to the difficulties encountered in this undertaking . . . there seems to be substantial agreement on the part of administrators, mission people and interested observers that the venture holds great possibilities . . . While, unfortunately, it does

⁷³ See especially on the idea of enframing, T. Mitchell, 'Everyday Metaphors of Power', (1990) 19 *Theory and Society* 545. See also A. Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (1995); J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998); T. Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (1988); T. Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (2007).

⁷⁴ Notcutt and Latham, *supra* note 1, at 101.

⁷⁵ *Africa* has been the official publication of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, today the International African Institute, since 1928. Malinowski's 1929 article 'Practical Anthropology', discussed above, was also published in *Africa*.

not contain much information on the experience of the natives as they witnessed such pictures, occasional hints thrown out point to very interesting facts of acculturation.⁷⁶

The 'scientific' approach adopted by the *Bantu Experiment*, and the prejudice and objectification of Africans this enclosed, was further reflected in the mostly rudimentary quality and low cinematographic value of the films produced. Notcutt and Latham were well aware of these shortcomings, but considered them important variables associated with the task of determining an adequate cinematic experience for 'natives'. Given that the experiment's starting point was their inferior intellectual capacity and limited exposure to cinema, it had intended to produce unpretentious films: films able to transmit a discrete yet important message within budget and according to the audience's presumed cognitive abilities. When discussions arose about the need to produce better films, they were framed, as a result, in terms of the experiment's main objective: not to entertain but to reorganize the 'within' of 'natives'. According to Notcutt and Latham, 'the people who know more about the African peasant and less about films were not worried by the admitted technical imperfections'. Moreover, in their experience they had found:

that the rural native at present takes very little account of quality. Provided the picture is sufficiently good to be intelligible, the subject and the method of presentation are all that really matter. This a very important point when considering the methods and economics of production for the future.⁷⁷

In the view of Notcutt and Latham, therefore, the subjects of indirect rule did not necessarily deserve a fully rounded modern cinema experience.⁷⁸ A watered-down cinematography, and a more generally watered-down version of modernity, as Olufemi Taiwo has put it, was assumed sufficient to help Africans to jump on the train of progress.⁷⁹ This logic, of course, only reinstated old asymmetries between colonized and colonizers, this time, however, mobilizing a 'scientific' assessment of the function and value of local cultures and their relation to individuals' intellectual capacities.

Finally, the idea of indirect rule also shaped the solutions to Africa's problems that were offered through the *Bantu Experiment* films. Given that the operative logic of the experiment was the transformation of 'backwards' peoples into 'modern' and hence 'self-ruled' subjects, the pre-set answer to local problems – in terms of health, education or living standards – was that subjects comply, by their own volition and through locally rooted variables, with colonial policies.⁸⁰ These policies

⁷⁶ H. Blumer, 'Review Work: The African and the Cinema by L.A. Notcutt and G.C. Latham', (1938) 43(6) *American Journal of Sociology* 1031.

⁷⁷ See especially Anghie, *supra* note 5, at 103–4.

⁷⁸ A similar reading was shared by some reviewers of *The African and the Cinema*, *supra* note 1. For example, in a review for the *Journal of the Royal African Society* it was stated how '[t]he adventures of [Notcutt and Latham] make excellent reading. But more important than their adventures, or than their pictures (which are frankly experimental) are the experience and knowledge which they have gained and made available for all who care to profit by them'. H.M. 'Reviewed Work: The African and the Cinema by L. A. Notcutt and G. R. Latham', (1938) 37(146) *Journal of the Royal African Society* 127.

⁷⁹ O. Taiwo, 'Reading the Colonizer's Mind: Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism', in S.E. Babbitt and S. Campbell (eds.), *Racism and Philosophy* (1999), 157.

⁸⁰ See especially Anghie, *supra* note 5, at 133.

were presented as the roadmap to progress, and the possibility that they may have produced the problems they purported to solve did not arise. The films contributed with this to the naturalization of a very particular political and economic structure not just over, but also around and within, these colonial subjects. As Reynolds has argued, the *Bantu Experiment's* driving assumption was that 'Western education had to be adapted to fit the needs of traditional societies, but spectators were also expected to absorb the lessons of the West, and ultimately, to adapt comfortably to the dictates of modernity'.⁸¹

This arrangement generated multiple forms of resistance, as I will discuss in the next section. However, the strategy of communicating the promise of self-rule through local actors and scenes in the very locales where it was to be instituted was powerful. Davis, the experiment's director, knew this well. For him, colonial cinema was successful because it used 'the flank rather than the frontal attack'.⁸² Getting to subjects' minds indirectly, it was possible not only to reinstate standard colonial views about Africans and advance a particular political economic model, but also to insist that peripheral subjects had to re-organize their larger horizon of possibilities in a particular way. For example, all *Bantu Experiment* sessions concluded with a clip of various 'scenes of life in Great Britain', which 'arouse immense interest' in the native public.⁸³ According to Notcutt and Latham, 'pictures of the Royal Family, Buckingham Palace, scenes of London streets and buildings, or of large crowds of white folk – all [were] in demand',⁸⁴ and for that reason, their last report recommended that these clips continue to be produced and screened across the Empire. Though fragile and contested, the exercise of indirect rule helped, in this way, to slowly sediment a world order over, around and within colonial (soon to be postcolonial) subjects.

4. EMPIRE ON THE MOVE

In the previous section, we saw how looking back with a critical eye at colonial films like *African Peasants Farms* demonstrates that the terrain of collective and individual emancipation set up by indirect rule was deeply contradictory. This reverse ethnographic function enabled by colonial cinema demonstrates how indirect rule promised individual and collective recognition not only in political terms, but also in economic and cultural terms. This promise was advanced, however, while at the same time seeking to control subjects through increasingly circuitous forms of bodily discipline, political supervision, and economic and cultural subservience. In leaving European standards and political and economic interests in place while promising emancipation, indirect rule emerged in this process as a sort of 'conduct of conduct', in Foucault's language – as a logic of governing from 'within' populations

⁸¹ Reynolds, *supra* note 10, at 172–87.

⁸² *Ibid.*, at 175.

⁸³ Notcutt and Latham, *supra* note 1, at 183.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

and places now located in large structures of governance.⁸⁵ ‘Indirectly self-ruled subjectivity’, if we can identify it as such, was an enabling formula that came to organize a dynamic, multi-located international system that was neither imperial nor fully post-colonial.

This apparently convoluted arrangement was embodied not just in the *Bantu Experiment* but in the wider use of cinema during and after the Second World War, by which time rethinking imperial formations had become imperative. In 1948, for example, Kenneth William Blackburne, director of information services at the Colonial Office, affirmed at a British Film Institute conference entitled ‘The Film in Colonial Development’ that ‘[t]hroughout our Colonial Office policy we are working at one main thing ... trying to teach the people of the Colonies to run the show themselves and doing precisely that thing in the film world as in every other field’.⁸⁶

This position mirrored the mandate of the Colonial Film Unit, which after 1939 institutionalized the efforts commenced by the *Bantu Experiment*.⁸⁷ Initiated as part of the wartime British propaganda machine, the Colonial Film Unit soon began to concentrate its energies on setting up and training film units in the territories of the British Empire. According to Rice, its work, like the wider efforts to decentralize functions and responsibilities from London to colonial administrations at this time, evidenced a ‘moment of transition, one marked by ... the alacrity and extent to which power would be transferred’ a few years later in what was increasingly understood as the unstoppable process of devolution to the colonies.⁸⁸ After the war, when the objective of ensuring African support for the Allies’ efforts on the battlefield waned, the Colonial Film Unit thus clearly came to mirror ‘the broader processes of decolonization’ through a more decentralized administrative organization and its films’ insistence on the modernity achieved by many Africans.⁸⁹

Interestingly, the events depicted in these later colonial films promoted ‘an increasing autonomy in African political life’, but still within a ‘largely traditional formal structure’, revealing the ‘still tentative and reactionary nature of the British government’s moves towards decolonization’.⁹⁰ In this sense, these films again reveal the ambivalences that accompanied the closing of formal imperialism and, most importantly, the beginning of what Louis and Robinson have identified as the ‘imperialism of decolonisation’.⁹¹ Facing US financial and military power and its preference for “‘independence” and covert influence over colonialism’, the USSR’s attempt to expand its influence over the South, and the intensification of resistance

⁸⁵ M. Foucault, ‘The Subject and the Power’, in H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1982).

⁸⁶ Cited in T. Rice, ‘From the Inside: The Colonial Film Unit and the Beginning of the End’, in L. Grieveson and C. MacCabe (eds.), *Film and the End of Empire* (2011), 135.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, at 136.

⁹¹ Louis and Robinson, *supra* note 14.

in the colonies and at the level of the UN General Assembly, imperial officials in Britain and beyond came to accept that '[i]t was increasingly urgent to exchange colonial control for informal empire'.⁹²

Amid rapid decolonization, especially from the mid-1950s, European empires still made every effort to maintain possession of at least some of their colonial territories – France clutching on to Algeria being perhaps the most iconic case.⁹³ In Britain, the emergence of the Commonwealth of Nations formally constituted in the London Declaration of 1949, exemplifies the hesitations accompanying decolonization. For Queen Elizabeth II, the Commonwealth was a significant development for re-organizing international relations, since the UK would now be an equal partner to the other nations involved. Yet there were still territories and subjects considered backwards, not ready for independence and therefore still in need of training, cinematographic and otherwise, in the routines of self-government.⁹⁴

But such was the force of decolonization and the promise of self-rule, now clearly identified with self-determination and national sovereignty, that the European empires dissolved rapidly. The decolonization movement demonstrated that colonial subjects had the capacity to revolt against orderly historical transitions and exercises intended to numb their political impulses – as colonial cinema and more controlled diplomatic calls for independence had clearly attempted. According to Latham and Notcutt, for example, one objective of the *Bantu Experiment*, and colonial cinema in general, was to pacify the nationalist claims present across colonial territories:⁹⁵

One of the greatest hindrances to peace is the ignorance of one another which blinds the peoples of the world. If they could know the ways of living of other peoples and realize that in the mass they are simple peace-loving humans beings like themselves instead of the vampires and thieves that “nationalist” propaganda makes them out to be, the prospects of peace would be much brighter. Well-thought-out films are the best means of countering such propaganda and of spreading the necessary knowledge, especially among the illiterate populations of Africa and Asia.⁹⁶

Decolonization shook the foundations of this entrenched European hubris. However, as many have argued, it was still a story of continuation. This is particularly the case when we take into account how the postcolonial nation-state and its elites came to often be seen and used as new vessels of indirect rule, although no longer identified as such.⁹⁷ In the late 1940s, British and US officials agreed, for

⁹² Ibid, at 485. See also J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', (1953) 6(1) *The Economic History Review* 1.

⁹³ See, e.g., A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962* (2006); M. Evans, *Algeria: France's Undeclared War* (2013).

⁹⁴ See especially W. Webster, 'Mumbo-jumbo, Magic and Modernity: Africa in British Cinema, 1946–65', in L. Grieveson and C. MacCabe (eds.), *Film and the End of Empire* (2011), 237.

⁹⁵ See especially how this was evidenced in the petitions made by colonial elites before the League of Nations, Pedersen, *supra* note 16, at 77–103.

⁹⁶ Notcutt and Latham, *supra* note 1, at 113.

⁹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the nation-state, indirect rule and the process of decolonization see L. Eslava, 'The Developmental State: Independency, Dependency and the History of the South', in J. von Bernstorff and P. Dann (eds.), *The Battle for International Law in the Decolonization Era* (forthcoming).

example, that the best strategy for Western powers was to ‘keep out of the limelight’ and ‘pull the strings whenever necessary’.⁹⁸ Economic dependence after political independence now became the new underlying logic of imperialism and a clear, although silent, re-enactment of indirect rule. As the official US-UK paper ‘Combatting Communist Influence in Tropical Africa’ put it, dependencies had to evolve ‘towards stable self-government or independence’ as rapidly as possible ‘in such a way that these [successor] governments are willing and able to preserve their economic and political ties with the West’.⁹⁹

So just as the directors of the *Bantu Experiment* had dreamed, ‘newly independent’ peoples found themselves locked into precisely the ‘modern’ legal and economic structures they had been offered as their next stage of development. We now know that the next step for these people was not necessarily living in pacified communities, gradually modernizing, ruled by their own laws while following their metropolises. Instead of this outcome, suggested by classical readings of indirect rule and the ‘standard of civilization’, history still brought for populations of the Global South the nation-state form and its promises of citizenship and ‘development’, both part of a very particular legalized and institutionalized international order. We can see a clear testament to this in the UN’s *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples* of 1960.¹⁰⁰ Although remarkable in its call for ‘recognizing the yearning in all dependent people and the decisive role of such peoples in the attainment of their independence’, it embraces the nation-state, international legal structures and the language of ‘development’ as the means through which to secure these peoples a place in a new (post-colonial) world order. The training in self-rule offered by the *Bantu Experiment* was transformed, through this process, into evaluations of peoples’ capacity for ‘successful’ statehood, now increasingly benchmarked by developmental metrics like Gross Domestic Product, Unsatisfied Basic Needs or today’s Fragile State Index and Sustainable Development Goals. Sundhya Pahuja has explained the agony involved in this turn of events:

The price of audibility [paid by decolonizing societies after independence] was ... the nation state form and, crucially, the universal historical narrative in which that form was situated. Beyond the nation state form, this narrative limited the possible outcomes of independence more generally, and opened the way for the project of the wholesale transformation of the decolonizing societies to be both internationalized and institutionalized through the concept, discourse and machinery of development.¹⁰¹

International institutions and increasingly formalized mechanisms and expert knowledge such as sovereign loans, IMF conditionalities, monitoring schemes and

⁹⁸ Anglo-American official talks, Washington, 12 September 1949, FRUS, 1949, VII, Part 2, 1199, cited in Louis and Robinson, *supra* note 14, at 472.

⁹⁹ Agreed US-UK paper, ‘Means of Combatting Communist Influence in Tropical Africa, 13 March 1957’, FRUS, 1955-1957, XXVII, 759, cited in Louis and Robinson, *supra* note 14, at 487.

¹⁰⁰ Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, UN General Assembly Resolution 1514(XV) (1960).

¹⁰¹ S. Pahuja, ‘Decolonization and the Eventness of International Law’, in F. Johns, R. Joyce and S. Pahuja (eds.), *Events: The Force of International Law* (2011), 91 at 92.

trade pacts came, in this way, to replace the 'old' imperial discourses and structures, leaving peripheral societies and lands inscribed within a newly recharged international order.¹⁰²

The transition from colonial subjects and territories to citizens and nations can accordingly be seen as the fulfilment of the idea of a world order organized according to the logic of indirect rule. The modern form of international administration that emerged in the interwar period, and that drove the *Bantu Experiment*, was in this sense very successful. It eventually brought into being a world in which direct commands have largely been replaced by a plethora of tightly supervised processes of social and territorial self-disciplining, which are increasingly decentralized, localized and individualized. At the same time, it generated an increasingly dynamic and multi-located system in which relations of command continue to occur, but in such way that the chains of causality have become more difficult, if not impossible, to define.¹⁰³

Interestingly, the rationale for shutting the *Bantu Experiment* down speaks to this long-term success. Towards the end of the project, Lugard, Davis, Notcutt and Latham applied for more funds, insisting on its great achievements. Yet the Colonial Office argued that the experiment had not achieved all it could have had it only been more dynamic, more locally rooted and, in this way, even more discrete and more permeating.¹⁰⁴ The clunkiness of the films and the difficulties of moving around the display units (see Figure 7), together with the project's amateurish inability to secure funding and support from local authorities and companies, were used as evidence that a more versatile system was needed to bring 'natives' into the realms of modernity. At this point, it also became evident that commercial films were gaining prominence not only as preferable entertainment but as expressions of an empire more interested in producing and accumulating capital through trade and circulation, and the rise of an increasingly urbanized and consumerist culture in the colonies. Openly pedagogical projects like the *Bantu Experiment* were thus confronted with the reality of an international (economic, legal and cultural) order where traditional distinctions between public and private, and the political and the economic, were quickly fading.

Colonial subjects emerged in this transition even more clearly as economic subjects, whose needs and desires had to be understood and attended to in order for capital to continue expanding and for their nations to start 'developing'.¹⁰⁵ This was precisely the task assigned now to postcolonial national bureaucracies and the 'ethos' that core nations and international institutions wanted to instil in them

¹⁰² See, e.g., A. Orford, 'Constituting Order', in J. Crawford and M. Koskenniemi (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to International Law* (2012), 271.

¹⁰³ See especially L. Eslava, 'Istanbul Vignettes: Observing the Everyday Operation of International Law', (2014) 2(1) *London Review of International Law* 3; L. Eslava, *Local Space, Global Life: The Everyday Operation of International Law and Development* (2015).

¹⁰⁴ Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies – Minutes of 15th–95th meetings (Government Papers, The National Archives, Kew, 1934–1939). CO 885/41. Minutes of the 78th Meeting. 22 July 1937.

¹⁰⁵ Grieveason, *supra* note 4, at 73.



Figure 7. The travelling display unit in trouble in Tanganyika. Source. Notcutt and Latham, *The African and the Cinema* (1937).

via the ‘education’ of their elites and the delivery of ‘technical advice’.¹⁰⁶ Formal imperialism further contracted, during these years, as ‘it had once expanded, as a variable function of integrating countries into the international capitalist economy’.¹⁰⁷ Through this process, the old imperial system became ‘nationalized’ and ‘informalized’, and the remnants of top-down centre-periphery relations were replaced by a new system of ‘alliances’, with ‘free’ trade and ‘free’ institutions as their new mediators.¹⁰⁸ In the agitated scenario of the Cold War, some countries aligned with the Soviet bloc, but the US and its Western allies remained largely in control of this new order of things.

The response to the need for a medium of mass communication and instruction equal to the challenge of this post-1945 imperial environment came in the form of radio and, not long afterwards, television.¹⁰⁹ The job of the *Bantu Experiment* was thus taken up, via these new technologies, throughout the British Empire but also

¹⁰⁶ See, e.g., S. Stockwell, ‘Exporting Britishness: Decolonization in Africa, the British State and Its Clients’, in M. Bandeira Jerónimo and A. Costa Pinto (eds.), *The Ends of European Colonial Empires: Cases and Comparisons* (2015), 148; J. Dülffer and M. Frey (eds.), *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (2011).

¹⁰⁷ Louis and Robinson, *supra* note 14, at 495.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., M. Chikowero, ‘Is Propaganda Modernity? Press and Radio for “Africans” in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi during World War II and Its Aftermath’ and P.J. Bloom, ‘Elocution, Englishness, and Empire: Film and Radio in Late Colonial Ghana’, both in P.J. Bloom, S.F. Miescher and T. Manuh (eds.), *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa* (2014), 112 and 136.

by governments of newly independent states all over the world during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.¹¹⁰ As the new post-Second World War international order was consolidated through the actions of the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions, new national – as well as private – broadcasting companies emerged in the postcolonial world to proliferate the discourse of development and modernization, as well as the logic of consumption that came to mark the second half of the twentieth century.¹¹¹ The task of these new public and private radio and television stations was to help national governments and elites educate national citizens into the routines of nationhood and industrial production – a task even present in the Soviet model, although with different undertones and horizons.¹¹²

This process has continued to this day, although in new mediums and forms, and not just in the Global South.¹¹³ We – the viewers of these images, on the television, on billboards, on screens and mobile phones – are the moving locations of a world order that is neither imperial, nor perhaps fully post-imperial. Yet images, and their accompanying soundscapes, remain multifarious, contradictory and contested – perhaps today more than ever. They embody our current complex global order and, for this reason, they are part of our own *theatrum juridicum*.¹¹⁴ But these images can also speak, in the way they have always spoken, of many other possible worlds. This other history of images, alternative internationals and post-imperial worlds must be told elsewhere.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., S. Anderson and M. Chakars (eds.), *Modernization, Nation-Building, and Television History* (2014).

¹¹¹ S. Strasser, C. McGovern and M. Judt (eds.), *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (1998).

¹¹² See, e.g., E. Widdis, 'Socialist Senses: Film and the Creation of Soviet Subjectivity', (2012) 71(3) *Slavic Review* 590; N. Tsvetkova, 'International Education during the Cold War: Soviet Social Transformation and American Social Reproduction', (2008) 52(2) *Comparative Education Review* 199.

¹¹³ See, e.g., R. Goldman and S. Papson, *Landscapes of Capital* (2011); F. Stadler and O. Birk Laursen (eds.), *Networking the Globe: New Technologies and the Postcolonial* (2015).

¹¹⁴ Goodrich, *supra* note 13.

¹¹⁵ See on glimpses of this other history, of alternative post-colonial and post-imperial use of images, T. J. Demos, *Return to the Postcolony: Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (2013).