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The historiography of British Imperial education policy, Part II: Africa and the rest of the colonial empire

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Part II of this historiographical study examines British education policy in Africa, and in the many crown colonies, protectorates, and mandated territories around the globe. Up until 1920, the British government took far less interest than in India, in the development of schooling in Africa and the rest of the colonial empire, and education was generally left to local initiative and voluntary effort. British interest in the control of education policy in Africa and elsewhere lasted only from the 1920s to the 1950s, as territories assumed responsibility for their own internal affairs as a prelude to independence. Nevertheless, critics were not slow to attack British direction of colonial education in the 1930s and thereafter. In retrospect it is clear that colonial education policy was fraught with much confusion of purpose and lack of resources, apathy and hostility. The literature has ranged from close scholarly studies of education policy in individual countries to passionate and more theoretically based critiques of colonial schooling. But as immediate passions surrounding demise of the Empire have receded, alternative analyses have begun to emerge.

Part I of the historiography of British imperial education policy—included in the previous issue of this journal—first outlined the difficulties associated with Britain's imperial responsibility for the education of indigenous peoples of widely varying race, culture and religion. This was followed by an examination of British education policy in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the varying reactions to it as voiced by a variety of both supportive and hostile critics. Part II of this historiographical study examines British education policy in Africa, Britain's other great imperial domain, and the myriad of relatively small crown colonies, protectorates and mandated territories literally scattered across the globe from the New World of the West Indies and South America, through the Mediterranean, to the Middle East, the Far East and the Pacific. Unlike India, the crown colonies were all administered as separate units each with its own governor, but all were ultimately under the control of the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Colonial Office located in Whitehall.

Prior to the First World War, the Colonial, as distinct from the India Office, took only a fitful interest in the development of schooling in Africa and the rest of the far-flung colonial empire, mainly because the development of most colonies was still in the early stages and education was generally considered a matter for local initiative and voluntary effort. Most colonial governments confined their educational activities to the routine and largely unimaginative disbursement of local revenues to voluntary agencies, which in most instances meant the various Christian missions. In the 1920s this attitude underwent a marked change in response to the new League of Nations' concept of trusteeship and the growing native demand for education, especially in Africa. In 1923, the Colonial Office established the Advisory Committee on Native Education in British Tropical Africa, later renamed the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, to examine how best to

tackle what proved increasingly to be a complex problem.¹ As the Rt. Hon. W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore (later Lord Harlech), the Advisory Committee's Chairman, said at the Committee's inaugural meeting in January 1924, there were obvious lessons to be learnt in Whitehall from the Indian experience where it was freely admitted that mistakes had been made in shaping education policy.²

The primary concern was to maintain more direct control over the spread and content of education, especially at the secondary level. What colonial governors were keen to avoid at all costs was responsibility for the creation of an intellectual proletariat or 'babu' class such as had bedevilled India. Even in remote Fiji, the governor refused to support the development of English secondary education for young Indians in the 1930s for fear of educated but idle unemployed youths roaming the streets of Suva.³ To overcome the problem emphasis was placed on developing primary vernacular education and limiting the spread of English secondary education in line with genuine employment opportunities. There was also widespread agreement both in Whitehall and amongst colonial officials serving in the colonies on the need to adapt the curriculum in African schools to bring it into line with the local environment and culture. As L.S. Amery, the Colonial Secretary, remarked at the Imperial Conference in 1926, it was the policy of the British Government to substitute a purely literary education, which was really only suitable for the environment of somewhere like Great Britain, for a type of education that would give the native an understanding of his own environment and cultural setting.⁴ Not surprisingly, many Africans, especially in the 1930s, rejected the adaptation argument as a ploy to 'keep them in their place'. There was an argument that was difficult to refute although there are sound reasons for claiming that British policy was motivated more by the Indian experience than by any premeditated desire to subjugate Africans. Moreover, by the 1920s, government officials were far more aware, as a result of the Indian experience, of the problems engendered by culture conflict. In Whitehall and in Africa there were widespread fears amongst colonial officials that African tribal society might collapse in the face of Western influence. It was, therefore, thought important to control and if possible slow the process of socioeconomic change.

In India, the missions never enjoyed a sustained and close working relationship with British government officials because the latter were forever fearful that the proselytizing activities of the missionaries would provoke adverse Hindu and/or Muslim reactions.⁵ In Africa, by contrast, the missions established schools in Africa long before the British Government took a systematic interest in education and they were anxious to preserve their influence. They were able to exert strong pressure in the corridors of Whitehall and it was largely through their initiative that the Advisory Committee was established. It was not surprising, therefore, that the first major document produced by the Advisory Committee should endorse a policy of close cooperation between the missions and the British Government in the establishment of schools based on the grant-in-aid principle, and strong support for the inclusion of Christian worship in schools to facilitate the development of

1 For the establishment and work of the advisory committee see the author's article 'The Advisory Committee on Education in the (British) Colonies 1924–1961', *Paedagogica Historica*, XXVII/3 (1991), 385–421.

2 Minutes of the Advisory Committee's first meeting, January 1924. See Sir Christopher Cox Papers, National Archives, Kew, Ref. CO 1045/1

3 Despatch from Governor of Fiji, No. 48 of 13/2/30, Box 226, Joint International Missionary Council/Conference of British Missionary Societies Archives. For more detail on the problem of secondary education for Fiji Indians see the author's article 'Education and the "Indian Problem" in Colonial Fiji 1920–45', *Education Research and Perspectives*, 8/1 (June 1981), 76–88.

4 *Imperial Conference 1926. Appendices to the Summary of Proceedings*, Cmd 2769, p. 123.

5 For more detail on this point see the author's recent article, 'The Christian Missions and the origins of the Indian Education Commission 1882–83', *Education Research & Perspectives*, 31/2 (December 2004) 120–136.

character.⁶ It is noteworthy, however, that Christian missions were not allowed to operate in northern Nigeria, which was a predominantly Muslim region.

The lessons of India can be seen at work in the founding of African universities. In the first place there was a great reluctance to establish them until the quality of secondary schooling was sufficient to provide an adequate pool of potentially successful students. When the first African universities were eventually built at Ibadan and Lagos after the Second World War, they were based on the unitary teaching and examining model akin to that at Oxbridge rather than on that of separate affiliated teaching colleges as prevailed a century earlier at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay respectively.⁷ The constant problems involved in maintaining teaching standards in numerous private colleges, long associated with the University of London and its hybrids, were not to be repeated in Africa.

There was also another respect in which there was a strong sense of continuity between Indian and colonial education policy. In 1909, Edward Giles, the officiating Director-General of Education in India, stated that in educational matters the influence of the Government of India did not tend to excessive rigidity or uniformity. On the contrary, there was every desire to comprehend local conditions, and to facilitate local developments. He claimed that the Government of India laid down general principles to be observed but that it did not insist on uniformity for all the Provinces, and fully recognized the desirability, indeed the necessity, of development in accordance with local needs and conditions.⁸ William Meston, the missionary historian, likewise referred to the flexible nature of government education policy in India. It was, he suggested, essentially a statement of principles, capable of application to changing conditions, yet not themselves requiring to be changed.⁹ The Colonial Office adopted a similar approach in developing colonial education. In highlighting the far-flung nature of the Colonial Empire and its diverse nature, Arthur Mayhew claimed that no Secretary of State was unaware of this and consequently none was anxious to adopt too definite an education policy. He is traditionally content, claimed Mayhew, with a few assumptions and a statement of general principles, and is not surprised if these principles in their local application are adapted with the utmost elasticity to local conditions.¹⁰

British interest in the control of education policy in Africa and elsewhere in the colonial empire was of relatively short duration. It started in the early 1920s but was fast waning by the 1950s as various territories assumed increasing responsibility for the conduct of their own internal affairs as a prelude to independence. Nevertheless, critics were not slow to attack British direction of colonial education in the 1930s and thereafter. Much of the criticism focused on the concept of adaptation and the claim that it was a means of keeping indigenous peoples in their (subservient) place.¹¹ Other criticisms were levelled at the slow pace and scope of educational development. By 1939, schooling

6 *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa*, Cmd. 2372, March 1925.

7 For more on this subject see E. Ashby, *Universities: British, Indian, African* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966) and the author's article, 'The "two-way pull" and the establishment of university education in British West Africa', *History of Education*, 16/2 (1987), 119–33.

8 *Report of the Royal Commission into Decentralization in India*, No. 1, 1909, Cd 4360, p. 127.

9 W. Meston, *Indian Educational Policy: Its Principles and Problems* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1936), 135.

10 A. Mayhew, *Education in the Colonial Empire* (London: Longmans, Green, 1938), 33.

11 A major influence in Whitehall's adoption of the theory of adaptation as a guiding principle in colonial schooling were the two reports on education in Africa prepared by the Phelps-Stokes Fund of New York. See *Education in Africa* (New York, Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1922) and *Education in East Africa* (New York/London, Phelps-Stokes Fund, 1925). For a brief but perceptive analysis of the leading critics of colonial education in the interwar years see P. Hetherington, *British Paternalism and Africa 1920–1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1978) chapter 7.

extended to only a minority of children in most colonies and most of that was confined to the primary stage. It was claimed that colonial administrations deliberately neglected education for both political and economic reasons. One especially outspoken critic was Professor Victor Murray who challenged various aspects of British colonial education policy including adaptation.¹² Others critics who also berated the British included Professor W.M. Macmillan,¹³ Leonard Woolf,¹⁴ Norman Leys¹⁵ and Leonard Barnes.¹⁶ They accused the British of not extending the benefits of European civilization, including education, to Africans in the spirit of the trusteeship principle enshrined at Versailles. Macmillan also argued strongly against 'Indirect Rule' and for more recognition in government and administration of educated Africans: 'Whatever education we may have given them, the one lesson they have never been allowed to learn is responsibility. They have been allowed to talk and discuss, but never to do things for themselves, least of all to deal with money.'¹⁷ The two Phelps-Stokes Reports of the early 1920s were also critical of education in Britain's African colonies, mainly because of the acute lack of schooling and the strong literary nature of the curriculum.¹⁸ The Phelps-Stokes Fund, under the leadership of Thomas Jesse Jones, strongly advocated that the African colonies should adopt the manual/vocational type of curriculum that had been developed for ex-slaves in the American southern states after the civil war.¹⁹

In more recent times Stephen Ball criticized the Carnoy-type analysis of colonial schooling for placing too much emphasis on the economic functions of colonial schooling but he still took colonial officials to task for using schooling for overt political purposes. By 'denying' education to Africans, Ball claimed that the British achieved social control. He also believed that the lack of access to secondary education for Africans throughout East Africa in the 1930s had racial overtones because it was linked to the implied intellectual inferiority of Africans. Nevertheless, Western education sowed the seeds of the demise of colonial rule as it did in India. Western concepts of freedom and human rights only served to highlight the contrast between the theory and practice of colonial rule and its outward display of power and intolerance.²⁰ Ball's criticisms were mild, however, compared with those of the African historian P.G. Okoth, writing about British education policy in Uganda in the period prior to 1939. In what can only be described as an angry verbal diatribe in the tradition of men like the late Walter Rodney, Samir Amin and Abdou Moumouni, he accused the British of deliberately pursuing forms of cultural and ideological domination to destroy or paralyse the cultures of the Ugandan people. In this exercise, he claimed that Western education played a crucial role.²¹ Ugandans who passed through the schools were 'brainwashed' to discard their own cultures and embrace Western cultures, which were supposedly superior. This resulted in a culture of dependency, mental enslavement and a sense of inferiority. In short, the minds of Ugandans were

12 A. V. Murray, *A School in the Bush* (London: Longmans Green, 1938).

13 Macmillan, W. M., *Africa Emergent* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938).

14 L. Woolf, *Imperialism and Colonization* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928)

15 N. Leys, *A Last Chance in Kenya* (London: Hogarth Press, 1931).

16 L. Barnes, *The Duty of Empire* (London: Gollancz, 1932).

17 W. M. Macmillan, 'The Importance of the Educated African', *African Affairs*, January (1934), 139.

18 *Education in Africa*, op. cit. and *Education in East Africa*, op. cit.

19 By far the best and most comprehensive study of the influence of the Phelps-Stokes reports is by K. J. King, *Pan Africanism and Education: a Study of Race Philosophy and Education in the Southern States of America and East Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

20 S. J. Ball, 'Imperialism, Social Control and the Colonial Curriculum', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 15/3 (1983), 237-63.

21 P. G. Okoth, 'The creation of a dependent culture', in J. A. Mangan, *The Imperial Curriculum* (London: Routledge, 1993), chapter 9.

colonized in the best Carnoy tradition! Limitations of space preclude any rejoinder to these claims but even Stephen Ball was quick to point out that Western academic schooling was not forced on Africans. Indeed, the reverse was the case. It was the Africans who demanded the same type of education as their colonial overlords because they readily saw its economic and political advantages. Ironically, it was British anthropologists, not Africans, who expressed grave fears for the future of traditional African culture.

In retrospect it is clear that colonial education policy was fraught with much confusion of purpose and lack of resources throughout the interwar years. It is also true that education officials both at home and abroad fought a constant uphill battle against Colonial Office apathy and even the open hostility of some colonial officials. As W.E.F. Ward later remarked, 'The basic problem was the lack of any real interest on the part of the British people in the welfare of colonial peoples. If only we had known, above all, that people cannot learn from other people's mistakes but only from their own.'²²

More favourable accounts of colonial education policies, which actively sought to highlight the manifold problems in colonial education, were provided by Lord Lugard in a very influential chapter on education in his *Dual Mandate*,²³ Arthur Mayhew²⁴ in his book *Educational Policy in the Colonial Empire*, and H.S. Scott, a former Director of Education in Kenya, who wrote various journal articles and book reviews, and who was also responsible for the long chapter on education in Hailey's *An African Survey*.²⁵ C.T. Loram, the South African who later became a professor at Yale, also wrote extensively on the education of indigenous peoples and provided further support for the theory of adaptation.²⁶ Another significant writer was Julian Huxley whose book *Africa View* highlighted the confusion of purpose in native education policy in Africa.²⁷ H.S. Scott, writing in 1938, thought it had probably been too late to reform African education in the 1930s. To have refused Africans access to Western education would have been widely regarded as a deliberate attempt to deny them their right to ultimate self-determination as enshrined in the League of Nations trusteeship principle. It would hardly be an exaggeration, Scott claimed, to say that the African, especially the educated African, recognized no form of education other than that in Western garb.²⁸

The Second World War saw the emergence of the USA and the Soviet Union as the world's two superpowers and the end of an era dominated by European imperialism. The change in the world order had far-reaching implications for British colonial policy. Increasingly it became evident that it was not possible, nor was it in Britain's national interest, to attempt to maintain its far-flung empire. Prime Minister Clement Attlee was determined to grant India its independence and thereafter the process of decolonization gathered momentum. In the Colonial Office there was a major change in policy with the abandoning of Indirect Rule, i.e. the policy of ruling indirectly through existing indigenous tribal rulers assisted by British agents. Henceforth, British officials 'on the spot' were encouraged to work with the hitherto spurned Western-educated African

22 Ward as quoted in E.W.D.H. Earle, 'The development of education in pre-independent Ghana', Oxford Development Records Project, No. 10 Rhodes House Library, 58.

23 F. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood & Sons 1929) chapters XX1, XX11. Lugard drew heavily on the British experience in India in his two chapters on education. *The Dual Mandate* was the bible for British colonial administrators in the interwar years.

24 A. T. Mayhew, *Educational Policy in the Colonial Empire* (London: Longmans, 1938).

25 W. M. Hailey, *An African Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938).

26 C.T. Loram, *The Education of the South African Native* (London: Longmans Green, 1917).

27 J. Huxley, *Africa View* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931).

28 H.S. Scott, 'The development of the education of the African in relation to western contact', *The Year Book of Education* (London: Evans Bros, 1938), 697-98.

intellectuals, who had often been the most virulent critics of colonial rule, to promote self-determination.²⁹

Gone too, was the cautious approach towards the expansion of Western-style schooling. Within a decade of the war's end most colonies, large and small, had 10-year development plans in place in which education figured prominently. Far from being accused of neglecting the spread of schooling, colonial administrators were increasingly engaged in a headlong rush to prepare for independence. Primary and secondary schooling was rapidly expanded, although the supply of trained teachers lagged far behind student numbers, and universities were established in West and East Africa, the West Indies and the Far East. In 1961, when the Colonial Office formally relinquished responsibility for education, most colonies had either acquired or were fast approaching independence, and all, however small or remote, were by then responsible for the day-to-day running of their schools. There were still many problems associated with the development of education—maintaining acceptable standards of quality in a period of rapid expansion underlay most of them—but there was no doubt that if former colonies were to survive as independent states they must produce more Western-educated people with the technical and administrative skills to run them on modern lines.³⁰ For all practical purposes the old concept of imperialism, with its strong element of paternalism and the widespread belief that it would last well into the future, was gone for ever but the brief postwar period of colonial rule still gave rise to vehement criticism of many aspects of colonial rule including education, from left-wing or neo-Marxist writers.

Perhaps the most influential was Martin Carnoy, whose book *Education as Cultural Imperialism*, published in 1974,³¹ strongly condemned colonial education everywhere as part of a deliberate policy to perpetuate colonial rule. Carnoy argued that considerations of power and conflict are central to all educational processes. By definition he believed that imperialism implied the control of the weak by the strong. It followed that the educational objective of imperialism was to colonize the intellect of the ruled in the interests of those who ruled over them. Mary Jean Bowman challenged his theoretical standpoint in a review of his book³² but many writers readily accepted his theory and still do. Another equally damning indictment of British colonial education policy was contained in a doctoral study by the American scholar D.G. Schilling, who traced the development of African education policy in Kenya during the years 1895–1930.³³ He argued that education policy was rooted in the political and economic realities of life in Kenya, which were influenced primarily by the British settlers' aim to create 'a white man's country'. It followed that native education policy should ensure that Africans knew their place in the social hierarchy. Schilling's criticisms might equally have been levelled at native education policies in both Southern and Northern Rhodesia where 'white' settlers sought to maintain their superior status. It is equally true, however, that the British government, obliged to uphold the League of Nations' concept of trusteeship with its clear emphasis on protecting the interests of indigenous peoples, thwarted the political and economic ambitions of the European settlers. Schilling's study provides support for Carnoy's thesis but it might equally be argued that the white settler colonies of East Africa were not

29 There is a profusion of books dealing with decolonisation in postwar Britain. See esp. John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-war World* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

30 See W.E.F. Ward, *Educating Young Nations* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959).

31 M. Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York, Longman, 1974).

32 M.J. Bowman, 'Review', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 24 (July 1976), 833–41.

33 D.G. Schilling, 'British policy for African Education in Kenya 1895–1939', PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972.

typical of most British colonies. The strength of Schilling's argument was reduced by his attempt to extend it to include the activities of the much esteemed Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, based in London. He claimed that in attempting to avoid the earlier mistakes made in India, including the uncontrolled expansion of Western academic schooling via the medium of English, the Committee had an overtly political objective: to stifle African nationalism in order to perpetuate British rule. A detailed study of the Committee's activities extending over many years has failed to provide this writer with any substantive evidence to support Schilling's claim.

By far the most scholarly critic of British colonial education policy was Trevor Coombe, who completed a PhD at Harvard University in the early 1960s on the origins of secondary education in Zambia, the former colony of Northern Rhodesia. The study was subsequently published as three consecutive and lengthy articles (1967–68) in the journal *African Social Research*.³⁴ His study, based on extensive archival research in the Zambian national archives, was designed to highlight what he claimed were the deliberate moves on the part of the colonial administration in Northern Rhodesia in the 1930s and thereafter, to limit the provision of secondary education for Africans. As a result, when independence was achieved in October 1964, the country's supply of educated manpower was utterly inadequate to run the country. To quote Coombe, the provision for secondary education 'was begun late, advanced hesitantly, encountered frequent and exasperating delays, and (until the last years of colonial rule) was marked by a dawning and fitful sense of urgency'. The scholarly analyses by Schilling and Coombe contrast strongly with the passionate and often vitriolic criticisms levelled at colonial schooling in the 1970s by colourful and ardent neo-Marxist writers like the late Walter Rodney,³⁵ Samir Amin,³⁶ Ivan Illich,³⁷ Albert Memmi,³⁸ Paulo Freire,³⁹ Franz Fanon⁴⁰ and Abdou Moumouni.⁴¹ Their outspoken criticisms were often a reflection of intense anti-colonial passions stirred to boiling point by the prospect or onset of independence but their views exerted a strong influence on academic writing about imperialism in the late twentieth century.

It is a central contention of this paper that a more dispassionate and objective assessment of colonial education is now called for. As the American historian, H.A. Gailey, has argued, British imperialism should be judged by the standards and aspirations of the period and not by the beliefs of present-day society⁴² or, one might add, the contemporary climate of political correctness. This is no easy task in an age in which history is so often written or interpreted to suit vested political interests.

Writers like Carnoy are difficult to refute because they assume certain basic first principles as irrefutable truths. As Bowman said in her review of Carnoy's book, just what sort of evidence would Carnoy conceivably accept as running counter to his central argument and what policies would he endorse today as having other than a socially pernicious effect on all but a privileged few?⁴³ Perhaps the best way to challenge theorists like Carnoy is to

34 T. Coombe, 'The origins of secondary education in Zambia', *African Social Research*, No. 3 (June 1967), 173–205; No. 4 (December 1967), 283–315; No. 5 (June 1968), 365–405.

35 W. Rodney, *How Europe Undeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle L'Ouverture Publications, 1972), 264, 275, 281.

36 S. Amin, 'What education for what development?', *Prospects*, V/1 (1975), 51.

37 I. Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York, Harper & Row, 1971).

38 A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

39 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

40 F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

41 A. Moumouni, *L'Education en Afrique* (Paris, Francois Maspero, 1964).

42 H.A. Gailey, *Clifford: Imperial Proconsul* (London: Rex Collings, 1982), 185.

43 M.J. Bowman, 'Review', *Economic Development and Culture Change*, No. 24 (July 1976), 833–41.

engage in more detailed case study work. Almost invariably this type of research highlights the complex nature of the socioeconomic and political conditions in which education policies were/are determined. This was the conclusion reached by J.C.E. Greig in his doctoral study of education policy in the Gambia and Malawi in the interwar years. He claimed that there was no central policy emanating from Whitehall 'only general guidelines ... and these guidelines were worked on, very much like raw material, by local factors, forces and pressure groups to produce systems of education that while bearing a superficial similarity to each other were, in reality, often quite different'.⁴⁴ Detailed case studies also frequently substantiate Sir Christopher Cox's claim that educational outcomes are often determined less by the initiators of policy than by those to whom the policy applies. For example, a variety of critics have accused the British of blatant cultural imperialism because colonial schooling was tied so closely to British subject syllabuses and examinations. British models were certainly followed but not because they were deliberately imposed on colonial schools but rather because Africans and other colonial subjects insisted on them. Anything less would have been considered second rate. It was for this reason that the policy of adaptation, so popular with colonial educators in the interwar years, failed. Africans, in particular, wanted a carbon copy of British education and qualifications acceptable for admission to British universities and University of London external degrees. A study of the classics may have made little practical sense in tropical Africa but Latin and Greek were part of the European educational gold standard to which Africans aspired.

By the early 1950s, any initiative that the Colonial Office might have exercised over the direction and content of colonial education had passed. As Sir Philip Morris said in opening the Conference on African Education at Cambridge in the summer of 1952, 'It is in the territories themselves that education policies must be framed, their costs calculated and provided for, and the understanding and cooperation of organisations and people sought and secured'.⁴⁵ There was never any published statement of postwar policy objectives in colonial education although a paper prepared for the Conference of African Governors, held in London in November 1947, focused on a rapid expansion of education at all levels and the training of as many African men and women as possible for senior posts in government services, the professions and in business.⁴⁶ Given the overwhelming condemnation of colonialism by the United Nations Organisation after the Second World War, it is hardly surprising that the literature on colonial education has been very one-sided. W.E.F. Ward sought to explain many of the practical problems associated with developing education in the colonies in his book *Educating Young Nations*⁴⁷ and also earned much respect as a British delegate to various UNESCO meetings by his straight talking in defence of British policy, but he was the exception rather than the rule. Alan Pifer, a prominent American official who worked closely with the British in developing African education in the late 1950s and 1960s, also gave the British credit for their

44 J.C.E. Greig, 'Decision-making in Educational Administration: a comparative study of the Gambia and Malawi during the period 1925-1945', PhD, Institute of Education, University of London: 1978, 5. For further detailed case studies reinforcing this point see the author's *Education in Fiji Policy, Problems and Progress in Primary and Secondary education, 1939-1973* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981); M. Bray, *Universal Primary Education in Nigeria: A Study of Kano State* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), and A.E. Sweeting, 'The Reconstruction of Education in Post-War Hong Kong 1945-54: Variations in the Process of Policy Making', PhD (unpublished) University of Hong Kong, 1989.

45 *African Education* (Oxford: Nuffield Foundation/Colonial Office, 1953), 183.

46 'Education policy in Africa', unpublished paper No. 7, prepared for the African Governors' Conference, Westminster, November 1947. National Archives, Kew. Ref. CO 847/37/47242/1947.

47 W.E.F. Ward, *Educating Young Nations* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959).

educational achievements in Africa: 'When one considers the difficulties that they have faced—native apathy, religious opposition, superstition, hazardous and arduous transport, the multiplicity of native vernaculars and the rigours of a debilitating climate, no tribute is too strong to pay to the courage, foresight and tenacity of those who have laboured to build African education'.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, Sir Christopher Cox, the man who might best have countered left-wing critics and provided a balanced and informative account of British colonial education policy after 1940, remained a government servant until he was 70 years of age. By then he was too old for scholarly writing but he did acquire during 30 years as Educational Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies an enormous collection of official, semi-official and private papers, now housed in the National Archives at Kew, which constitute an essential source for any serious study of British colonial education. The Cox Papers⁴⁹ supplement and enrich the voluminous Colonial Office records also housed at Kew. The Rhodes House library at Oxford also contains a valuable collection of semi-official and private manuscript material on colonial education including many personal recollections from former serving officers derived principally from a special records project conducted in the 1980s. A comprehensive and valuable collection of annual reports from colonial education departments and other miscellaneous material is also housed in the library of the London Institute of Education. Another useful source, the former library of the Royal Commonwealth Society, is now housed at the University of Cambridge. The national archives of former colonies can also be a rich source of material but many have been culled by over-zealous officials or damaged by the ravages of war, fire, insects and a tropical climate. In some cases access to such records may also prove time-consuming and difficult to obtain. Two extensive missionary archive collections—the Combined British Missionary Societies Archives (CBMS) and the Joint International Missionary Council/Conference of British Missionary Societies Archives (IMC/CBMS)—are also an indispensable source of research material; the original files are housed in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London but both collections are also available on microfiche.

It was the late Dame Margery Perham, writing in the early 1960s, at the height of anti-imperial sentiment, who claimed that a time would finally arrive when a younger generation of British people, born after the demise of the British Empire, whose impressions had been shaped in large part by the fact and fiction derived from the popular press and films, would want to know the truth about the empire.⁵⁰ A promising start was made when Professor D.K. Fieldhouse published *Colonialism 1870–1945*, in 1981.⁵¹ In reviewing it Lucy Mair, the renowned anthropologist, suggested that it was written in the hope that it might suggest that there was a viable alternative to the Marxist view of modern colonialism. She claimed that Fieldhouse had written a book refreshingly free of slogans and single-cause theories, which highlighted the fact that decisions about British imperial expansion were made in the light of the assumptions prevailing at the time and that these changed with the passage of time.⁵² A more recent attempt to put British

48 A.F. Pifer, *Forecasts of the Fullbright Program in British Africa* (US Educational Commissioner in the UK, 1953), 21–2.

49 National Archives, Ref. CO 1045.

50 Foreword to Sir James Robertson, *Transition in Africa: From Direct Rule to Independence: a Memoir* (London: C. Hurst, 1974).

51 D.K. Fieldhouse, *Colonialism 1870–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

52 L. Mair, 'Review', *African Affairs*, 80/320 (July 1981), 425.

colonial education policy into a more balanced historical perspective is also provided in the author's chapter in *Benefits Bestowed* (1988).⁵³

Whatever judgements are made of British attempts to educate colonial subjects, one should never lose sight of the words of Violet Markham (1872–1959), the long-serving liberal activist and public servant:

Any idea that education makes people nice and amenable and grateful to those who provide its benefits is a childish illusion. Education, in its first impact, is a disruptive social force and that fact, if better recognized, would save many heart-burnings. Teach people to think for themselves and to use their minds freely and there is little chance they will think on lines agreeable to established authority.⁵⁴

It is appropriate to conclude this paper with a quote from William Roger Louis, the Editor-in-Chief of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*: 'Though the subject remains ideologically charged, the passions aroused by British imperialism have so lessened that we are now better placed than ever before to see the course of the Empire steadily and to see it whole'.⁵⁵ His remarks apply equally to British efforts extending over more than a century to educate indigenous people in India, Africa and elsewhere in the former colonial empire.

Select reading list

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53 C. Whitehead, 'British colonial education policy: a synonym for cultural imperialism?', in J.A. Mangan (ed.) *Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 211–30.

54 V. R. Markham, *Return Passage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 50.

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