

ity but a “basic exercise in common sense” (p. xiii). Falola concludes that violence in contemporary Nigeria continues to mediate the relationship between rulers and citizens.

Many of the episodes of colonial violence discussed in this book such as the Egba revolt of 1918, the Aba women’s war of 1929, and the Ekumeku revolt have been recounted in other studies. The strength of this book is its refreshingly holistic analysis of events in terms of the structural violence of colonialism. Falola goes beyond familiar episodes of direct violence and examines subtle forms of structural and institutional violence within the colonial state. Chapters focus on anti-tax violence but also on gendered violence, verbal violence, and resistance to violence in the form of radical nationalist and militant critiques of the colonial order.

For all the insight it offers, however, some readers will be disheartened with Falola’s use of “resistors” and “collaborators” as analytical categories. He states, for instance, that colonial authorities sought “collaborators” among Nigerians who would subvert resistance. Falola argues that colonial invaders offered the benefits of trade, Western education, and Christianity and were able to obtain the loyalty of a number of Nigerians who interpreted British imperialism from “a narrow and self-interested point of view” (p. xii). Nigerians who served in colonial armies are also described in terms of their “collaboration” (p. 23). The debate over the pitfalls of the resistor vs. collaborator dichotomy in analyzing African response to colonial imposition is an old one. The binary categories of resistors and collaborators, some would argue, stand in the way of understanding how ordinary people saw their circumstances, made their choices, and constructed their ideas about a changing society.

Overall, this book brings a refreshing angle to a familiar subject. The cases of resistance and violence discussed reveal how fragile the colonial state in Nigeria really was. The framework of violence particularly allows us to see both the power and limitations of the colonial state and in so doing, marks an important contribution to the broader scholarship on British imperialism in Africa.

BONNY IBHAWOH  
McMaster University

BONNY IBHAWOH. *Imperialism and Human Rights: Colonial Discourses of Rights and Liberties in African History*. (SUNY Series in Human Rights.) Albany: State University of New York Press. 2007. Pp. xv, 226. \$60.00.

This well-researched and thoughtful book differs from others in the field because it does not examine how the British colonial state fell short of its own liberal agenda in Africa; instead it explores how the language of rights became central to the colonial project in southern Nigeria under British colonial rule and focuses on the complexities surrounding the use of rights language by different groups. These earlier traditions of rights dis-

courses are relevant to understanding current debates about human rights in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

Bonny Ibhawoh shows that there were different rights discourses at different phases of the British colonial project in Nigeria, and that rights talk was one of many discourses Africans adopted as a means of articulating and promoting their interests within colonial society. Early colonial missionaries, for example, worked to ensure that African converts were not encumbered by the restrictions and limitations of pagan laws and customs. Although there were “racial” limits, Africans responded by seeing Christianity as a means to escape the restrictions imposed by local customs and the colonial order.

Law was an important arena where Africans and Europeans engaged one another to contest relationships of power and authority, interpretations of morality and culture, and access to resources such as land and labor. By the 1890s the colonial legal agenda had moved beyond trade and politics to embrace social concerns. An English-style legal system, introduced in the newly established Southern Nigerian Protectorate, and various ordinances were effective ways of maintaining control through fines in cash, produce, and labor.

A growing class of elite, educated Africans along the coast supported a Native Administration in the interior provinces but strongly opposed colonial efforts to bring this system to Lagos, on the grounds that it would interfere with their rights as “British subjects.” Lagos barristers also protested their exclusion from the Native Court system. Southern Nigeria Protectorate African elites deployed the language of rights to oppose the colonial state at the turn of the twentieth century, but also used rights language to promote their own class interests when they conflicted with those of other groups of Africans.

Nigeria also developed a tradition of robust media debate. Early newspapers occasionally challenged colonial policies but mostly supported British colonialism, arguing that “The English are acknowledged to be the best colonizers, and the secret to their success lies in the great consideration invariably shown by them to the people, whom they undertake to govern, affording them at the onset the full liberties and privileges of British subjects” (p. 71). However, by 1900 a vigorous and articulate class of educated Africans controlled the local press. Newspapers advanced the nationalist cause and became the voice of opposition to the excesses of colonial rule.

Press freedom—seen as one of the most valuable privileges of British colonialism—posed a dilemma for colonial officials who were ambivalent over whether to censor the press or allow unrestricted criticism and deal with agitation. By the 1930s, press freedom was seen by many colonial officials as a way to reduce tensions through the nonviolent public expression of grievances.

Land tenure also engendered African challenges to the colonial state and reinforced the anticolonial movement. By 1910 the colonial state changed its attitude

toward land tenure and moved away from individual tenure toward greater state control.

Earlier colonial ideas about promoting the rights of African women—once used to legitimize colonial rule—had to be toned down for political expediency once they met with elite African protest. This book is about the paradox of the colonial state's commitment to rule of law as a guarantee of individual rights and its coercive use of law. At the same time, African elites, chiefly authorities, and ordinary people appropriated and deployed the discourse of rights to fulfill their sometimes contradictory objectives.

The Idumuashaba petitions of 1937 show that long before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the language of rights was a dominant feature of entitlement claims within the colonial state. The political reforms of the late 1940s signaled that the decolonization process had begun, but at the time of independence in 1960, rights talk—used effectively to challenge colonial domination—was thrust aside by nationalists once they attained power. Opposition groups and antigovernment critics adopted the language of rights, but by 1966, authoritarianism and repression were firmly entrenched. Ibhawoh shows that rights talk in Nigeria is today, as it was in the colonial period, a means of winning political legitimacy.

ALEX VINES  
Chatham House,  
London

BERTRAND TAITHE. *The Killer Trail: A Colonial Scandal in the Heart of Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2009. Pp. xii, 324. \$34.95.

Bertrand Taithe purports to tell the tale of a French colonial atrocity during the European “Scramble for Africa.” It is the real-life story of the extreme violence of two French army captains, Paul Voulet and Julien Chanoine. They left the French West African colonial coastal capital of Dakar in late 1898, forging into Central Africa to set up borders with the British in what would become Niger and Chad. The mission degenerated into extreme colonial violence and cruelty. This reviewer expected to read a French West African counterpart to Adam Hochschild's highly acclaimed *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998), concerning the nineteenth-century genocide in the colonial Congo, but instead discovered the book to be a treatise on French social and intellectual history. It is not primarily engaged with African history; this is not surprising as the author is editor of the *European Review of History*. In actuality the author's thesis is that what made this colonial tragedy important was its association with key figures of the Dreyfus Affair. The association ensured that the episode was eventually hushed up and that inquiries about it were buried in the archives. The strengths of Taithe's book lie in its masterful research and the fact that this is perhaps the first to report on French colonial violence in West Africa on such a scale. It identifies many instances of the cruelty and savagery left in the wake of Voulet

and Chanoine's campaign, for which neither was held accountable. Yet it is not clear, according to the author, how many Africans died at the hands of these two violent French officers. Ironically, both lost their lives at the hands of fellow army officials.

It is extremely important to refer to the preface continuously, for without doing so the reader would not be able to follow the book at all. The first chapter tells the story of Voulet and Chanoine, their mission, and the crimes they committed. Chapters two and three reflect on what the mission tells us about European misunderstandings of colonial encounters in Africa. Chapters four and five examine the nature of colonial warfare in an era when humanitarian campaigners portrayed the conquest of Africa as the last crusade against slavery. Chapter six relates the Voulet-Chanoine scandal to the Dreyfus Affair, which convulsed France at the time and aroused passions worldwide. Chapters seven and eight seek to understand the fuller meanings of the Voulet-Chanoine episode and map the traces that this bloody conquest has left. These chapters ask what, if anything, can be learned from such traumatic stories.

Although this study is not directed primarily toward historians of Africa, it offers a useful set of comparative perspectives. First, it is unlikely that the acts of violence exposed to view by the Voulet-Chanoine scandal differed greatly in nature or degree from the comparable but largely invisible activities of other colonial forces, French and otherwise, during the course of the “Scramble for Africa.” Second, it is significant that Voulet and Chanoine seem to have in some sense patterned their behavior according to precedents set by France's great opponent in this part of West Africa, Samory Touré. The atrocities of colonial conquest may perhaps be seen as but one manifestation of deeper and wider historical processes

The sources upon which historical understandings of the Voulet-Chanoine expedition ultimately depend are primarily narratives, smoothly crafted to persuade. The author takes great pains to deconstruct these tales and exposes the diverse biases of both the authors of the narratives themselves and of the governmental or journalistic forums in which public discussion occurred. His determination not to replace old narratives, however, has produced a book that is awkward in organization and difficult to read.

STEPHANIE BESWICK  
Ball State University

NEIL KODESH. *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. 2010. Pp. xi, 264. \$45.00.

Over the past several decades the study of precolonial African history has steadily declined. Doctoral students, made wary of oral traditions and dazzled by alluring new archives, are increasingly pursuing research on postcolonial history. Neil Kodesh's book is therefore a cause for celebration, for it promises to resuscitate the field of precolonial history. Kodesh focuses on the cen-