INTRODUCTION

Crisis, Colonial Failure, and Subaltern Suffering

> No matter where it starts, an economic crisis does not stop at the water's edge. It ripples across the world.
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> —*Gordon Brown, prime minister of the United Kingdom (speech to joint session of U.S. Congress, March 4, 2009)*

In November 1933, W. R. Crocker, a British colonial district officer, traversed Idoma Division, a remote district of colonial Northern Nigeria, raiding villages and hamlets and confiscating the food, livestock, and property of tax defaulters. As his haul of goats and chickens increased—and the owners did not come forward to redeem them—Crocker wondered what to do with "the livestock that remains on my hands" and the property he would yet confiscate from other villages in default. He could auction it but, as he conceded in a rare moment of colonial frustration, "the people haven't enough currency to pay their tax let alone buy extra goats."[1]

The Idoma soon began a defensive campaign. They hid from the raiding parties in bushes and forests, set booby traps for the tax gatherers, and concealed their livestock. Colonial officials responded with more desperate and severe acts of social punishment, setting residential huts afire and destroying foodstuffs. Crocker's successor, H. P. Elliot, was more emphatic in his own moment of frustration, blaming the Great Depression and its effect on farmers' income for the embarrassing condition of British colonialism in Northern Nigeria.

This vignette portrays a weak, ineffective colonialism, a colonial project temporarily unable to extract profits and surpluses from Northern Nigeria, and which, as a consequence, resorted to financially unrewarding and politically embarrassing confiscation of property at the colonial grass roots. For scholars long used to the image of a powerful, ruthlessly effective colonial system, Northern Nigeria during the Depression decade (1929–39) is a puzzle. It was a weak colonial state that belied the notion of the colonial state as an omnipotent, all-conquering genius of exploitation, a notion that has informed much of

African colonial studies.[2] Exploitation is presented in this dominant narrative as a given, and the possibility of its absence, if only temporary, is discounted.

Economic exploitation presupposes and requires a consistent production of surpluses and profits that can be appropriated without harming the production capacity on which the regime of exploitation itself depends. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, imperial conquerors, as producers and exploiters of surplus value, were not interested in eroding the productive capacity or disrupting the social organization of their subjects, since these elements were crucial to colonial capitalist accumulation.[3] It is true that this commitment to the preservation of the existing forces of production and the social cohesion of subject communities was rarely tested during years of economic boom. But, as has been demonstrated with regard to various colonial contexts, colonial intentions and calculations rarely survived the unforeseen turbulence of colonial and world markets and the survival strategies of the colonized. I contend that this colonial economic orthodoxy came under severe strain in times of crisis, when a dearth of surpluses and profits compelled colonial authorities to deplete rural productive capacities and to undermine existing social organizations in the name of generating revenue and maintaining law and order. This is precisely what happened in Northern Nigeria during the Great Depression.

Arguments about colonial intent to remove surpluses while preserving the productive institutions of colonies are founded on the notion that colonizers were efficient capitalists and power wielders, capable of ensuring the uninterrupted production of profits and surpluses. Like Hardt and Negri, several scholars of Africa's colonial history assume that surpluses and profits always existed or that colonial regimes were capable of squeezing out a surplus where none existed.[4] Implicit in this assumption is a notion of colonial power as all-controlling and all-powerful, a view of colonialism that has already been challenged in the political arena.[5] Because of these assumptions about the abilities and linearity of colonial power formations, periods of collapsing produce prices and dwindling profits—like the Great Depression—have not received much attention in the historiography of colonial Africa. Consequently, the important lessons that such periods hold regarding the limits and constraints of imperial power, the inversion of colonial paternalism by Africans, and the sociopolitical implications of imperial economic crisis remain largely overlooked.

The question that seems to drive assumptions about the consistency of colonial economic exploitation is, what happened when Europeans encountered or directed an African economy with profit-producing capacity? Rarely posed but equally important is the question of what happened when colonial powers suddenly found themselves ruling over an African territory with a collapsed export trade and an inability to generate surpluses and profits. In other words, what did colonial authorities do *to* their African colonies when they could no longer—by fiat or suasion—eke out nonexistent export profits? How, in turn, did Africans respond to this momentary absence of colonial exploitation? How did the British seek to manage an economy that could no longer be exploited, and how did Northern Nigerian colonial subjects react to this new regime of colonial economic management?

These are some of the questions that drive this book. Such questions should force us to rethink the possibilities for colonial exploitation across time and space and to more seriously consider the limits of colonial power, the importance of African agency in shaping colonial destinies, and the many unforeseen factors—global and local—that complicated colonial aspirations and goals. I will implicitly argue against the paradigmatic assumption that colonialism was consistently about exploitation and that colonialists were always successful in exploiting their African subjects.

Scholars have sought in other geographic contexts to explain how colonial authorities reacted to economic crises in their domain and what they did *to* colonial subjects in the process of responding to such crises. Catherine Boone contends, for example, that in Senegal the "Depression cast the economic weaknesses of the . . . [state] in sharp relief" and forced French colonial authorities to deepen the implementation of imperial preference, which denied African subjects access to competitive prices for their exports and manufactured imports, causing widespread impoverishment.[6] As the incomes of peasants fell and the prices of imported consumer goods rose in francophone Africa, colonial authorities responded by taxing Africans even more heavily in a classic colonial strategy of economic self-insulation and in the spirit of transferring the burdens of recovery to colonial subjects.[7] In Burundi and the Belgian Congo, colonial authorities' insistence on balancing their beleaguered budgets at the expense of Africans' economic well-being sparked revolt among the peasants of both colonies.[8]

Such strategies of imperial economic self-cushioning at the expense of subjects' welfare and even survival were neither novel nor invented by the guardians of the new empire in Africa. Their dramatic fallouts and the violently instructive local reactions they elicited had precedents in earlier imperial encounters. As Mike Davies informs us,[9] the British in India had, a few decades earlier, perfected the imperial strategy of responding to famines, depressions, and other economic disasters in ways that, while absolving Britain of the financial responsibilities of recovery and relief, exacerbated colonial subjects' suffering while leaving death, disease, and despair in their wake.

Through the prism of a debilitating economic crisis, I shall trace the unpredictable and volatile unraveling of colonial power and claims in Depression-era Northern Nigeria, with particular focus on the consequences of such crisis-driven projects. The Great Depression was one period that highlighted the inability of the British to effectively exploit their African colonial subjects, maintain social order, and preserve the myths of British colonial paternalism. The impacts of this momentary colonial inability to exploit Africans were profound. This decade-long failure to exploit, as well as the responses of Northern Nigerians and British colonialists to the resultant economic shifts, were just as serious and instructive as were the consequences of colonial exploitation in years of economic boom.

This work is set against an academic climate of intense debate over whether or not, or to what degree, colonialism was exploitative—a debate that often revolves around the unspoken issue of how Africans and other colonized peoples fared under European colonialism.[10] It is important to transcend the simplistic premise of these contentions by stressing that British colonialism was just as disruptive to Africans' lives when it failed to exploit them as it was when it did. The temporary absence of exploitation did not mean a temporary absence of African suffering. Both sides in the debate often assume, wrongly, that only colonial exploitation and its coercions caused hardship to Africans and underwrote violent intrusions into their lives—or that subaltern suffering occurred only in the context of exploitation—hence the vigor of the debate over whether or how exploitative colonialism was. This erroneous assumption fails to recognize the range of policies and behaviors that colonial officials brought to bear on Africans because of the absence of profits and surpluses and their effects on local institutions and livelihoods. It also ignores Africans' many strategies of surviving and coping with such novel colonial policies. As I shall demonstrate, the fleeting colonial failure to remove profits from Northern Nigeria authorized policies and practices that caused suffering and dislocation in many communities. The colonial frustration and anxiety arising from the dearth of profit and surplus inspired far-reaching colonial interventions that generated as messy an outcome and had as profound an impact on Africans as did colonial exploitation in economically favorable times.

The story of a colonial failure to exploit is intimately connected to the consequent recourse by colonial authorities to politically risky low-level exactions and ineffective administrative behavior at the colonial grass roots. Rattled by its financial troubles, the Northern Nigerian colonial state insisted on collecting taxes and other fiscal exactions from local economies already stripped of profits and surplus. These exactions produced devastating outcomes for Northern Nigerians. As one reflective British official noted at the height of the Depression, "taxation of non-existing profits is a rank poison."[11] This book is an exploration of the far-reaching political, social, and economic fallouts from these novel colonial responses to economic crisis.

The new British colonial order that the Depression produced in Northern Nigeria was more modest in its claims, rhetoric, and goals. But British colonialism was also made more violent by the collapse of the Northern Nigerian economy and became committed merely to the nurturing of a semblance of British control—to the maintenance of British colonial pride. The economic crisis of the 1930s did two interrelated things. It exacerbated the violence, protectionism, and strategic elimination of Africans' choices often inherent in the British colonial order; and, more interestingly, it focused attention on colonial routines that often went unchallenged and undebated in normal economic times.[12]

Contrary to what some scholars have argued regarding this period in Africa, the contraction of the goals, ambitions, and rhetoric of British colonialism during the economic crisis does not imply an intensifying exploitation.[13] Rather, it illustrates the collapse of preexisting infrastructures of exploitation and the British attempt to adjust accordingly. The commitment of British colonial technocrats to the mere preservation of the British presence did not lead to stagnancy or to a lull in economic and political encounters between Northern Nigerians and the British. As colonial encounters became more volatile and politically charged, Northern Nigerians' practices of self-preservation intensified, further straining colonial power relations. In fact, the British attempt to freeze previously declared colonial ambitions, obligations, and responsibilities pending economic recovery generated local protests, demands, and violent attacks that, together, make the Depression an important period in the history of colonial Northern Nigeria and Africa. The anticolonial expressions of this period, the labor troubles, and the violent confrontations between disgruntled locals and edgy British officials are important backdrops for understanding the origins of the nationalist struggles after World War II.

NORTHERN NIGERIA AND COLONIAL CAPITALISM

The Great Depression of the 1930s was not the first worldwide depression to affect Nigeria. The economic depression of the 1870s ultimately led to the conquest of Northern Nigeria (1900–1907). The downturn cut deeply into European profit in the Niger River trade and heightened competition among European traders. The ensuing rivalry between small and large British firms on the one hand and between British traders and African middlemen and German traders on the other contributed to the conquest of Nigeria. It informed the proactive and perhaps preemptive British effort to "protect" the interest of British traders by buying out non-British European firms and bringing Africans in the Niger area under the jurisdiction of the British crown.[14]

Nonetheless, three key differences mark the way in which the two depressions affected Nigeria. First, the ramifications of the depression of the 1870s were limited to the coastal areas and areas in the hinterland directly connected to coastal trade. The depression of the 1930s and the subsequent reaction of the colonial state affected the entirety of Nigeria, as British rule had already been fully established and consolidated throughout the country. Second, the depression of the 1930s prompted the British to initiate an economic recovery program. The social, political, and economic crises triggered by that program constitutes the central concern of this book. Third, while Nigerians did not participate in the political conversations that preceded and followed the depression of the 1870s, they did join in the robust public debates and discussions of the government's economic recovery policies of the 1930s (see chapter 4). While the British reacted to the depression of the 1870s unilaterally—realigning their interests and involvements on the Niger River to protect their economic foothold—they had to temper their unilateralism in the 1930s with their need for African cooperation and support for a controversial economic recovery program.

With the unilateral British effort to alter the commercial status quo on the Niger came the "pacification" of territories on both sides of the river. But British colonial economic reengineering in Northern Nigeria did not end with the conquest; in many senses the conquest marked the beginning. Under Frederick Lugard, the first British high commissioner of Northern Nigeria, the British venerated the socioeconomic and administrative model of the precolonial Islamic Sokoto Caliphate, especially its elaborate system of taxation and economic regulation and sought to preserve and extend it to other parts of Northern Nigeria. In addition, the British sought to organize, codify, document, and, where necessary, modify the fluid and malleable systems of land tenure, agricultural production, and revenue that existed in the protectorate. These spheres and practices attracted profound British intervention.

The British tried—with little, or at best mixed, success—to create an economic *system* that was discernible, coherent, and codifiable.[15] Lugard sought to create a land tenure system in which ownership was vested in chiefs, a supposed continuity with the precolonial past that would enable an agricultural aristocracy—and agricultural wage labor—to emerge. His successor, Sir Percy Girouard, reversed Lugard's land tenure reform, articulating and codifying a land tenure system vesting control in the state and only supervision in African rulers. This system took hold and engendered the emergence of an export-oriented agricultural peasantry in the former territories of the Sokoto Caliphate.[16]

In the revenue domain, Lugard's Native Revenue Proclamation of 1906, which imposed a variety of taxes and levies by invoking the discourse of continuity with antiquity, helped codify a system of colonial revenue for Northern Nigeria. Subsequent modifications of that system preserved the core principles and types of exaction that inhered in the original legislation.[17] Agricultural production was similarly reengineered where possible. The British Cotton Growers' Association set out to promote cotton cultivation, and the increasing demand for butter substitutes in Europe transformed groundnut cultivation in Northern Nigeria into an export-oriented agricultural system, with the colonial government using a mixture of incentives and coercive measures to promote their cultivation.[18]

Although founded largely on ecological and ethnographic data collected on the Sokoto Caliphate, the British applied these economic reforms to the entire Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, disregarding the history and cultural divergence of the significant population of noncaliphate peoples in the protectorate.[19] The outcomes of the economic reforms differed markedly from district to district, and the degree to which they were implemented varied from province to province. But the British never gave up their effort to create a local agricultural economy suitable for colonial economic objectives.

By the eve of the Great Depression, the peoples of Northern Nigeria had found their place in the British imperial economy—and by extension the world economy. They produced primary products and sold cotton, groundnuts, palm produce, and, to a much smaller extent, beniseed (sesame) to British industries through British merchant firms. Completing the colonial economic configuration of Northern Nigeria, the region emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century as a major producer of tin, a product that, because of its use in the ammunition industry, had been classified by the U.S. Department of State as a strategic product after World War I.

CRISES AND COLONIALISM

The onset of the Depression in Northern Nigeria, as early as December 1929, first manifested in the form of falling export prices for crops and tin, and in declining trade profits and revenues, as British firms either ceased importing European manufactures or sought tax relief. These developments took an immediate toll on the income of Northern Nigeria's peasant cultivators—the majority of the region's population. Declining revenue rattled a colonial state long accustomed to balancing its budget, extracting agricultural raw materials and minerals cheaply and profitably, and accumulating "reserves" in London from the taxes of colonial subjects.

In response to these signs of crisis and to the directives issued from the Colonial Office in London, the Northern Nigerian colonial authorities crafted a broad policy of austerity resting on pay cuts, retrenchments, broadening taxation, an aggressive revenue drive, and the suspension of public works. Other aspects of the economic recovery policy included expansion of export crops, direct money transfers to Britain, and, to a smaller extent, price controls. Lastly, the British vigorously enforced imperial preference, a system of tariffs designed to discourage both the sale of colonial raw materials to non–British Empire buyers and the importation of manufactured goods from outside the empire.

A people's integration into the world market neither sufficiently explains their vulnerability to the vicissitudes of global interconnections of trade and finance nor is it an automatic channel for the distribution of economic crisis. Thus, I will first examine the convoluted ways in which the Depression traveled to Northern Nigeria's peasants and to the colonial financial bureaucracy. I then examine the economic recovery policies put in place by the colonial state, their messy and volatile implementation in colonial urban centers and at the grass roots, their multilayered repercussions, and the reactions of chiefs, workers, peasants, and elites to those policies.

I posit three interconnected theses in this book. First, the Northern Nigerian colonial government's response to the Depression aimed to promote export by incorporating more Africans into the export economy, but it ended up alienating colonial subjects already disillusioned by the instability of that economy, forcing them to seek alternative socioeconomic platforms of survival. Second, my analysis suggests that instead of viewing the Depression (and the interwar period) simply as an era of stagnancy, unbridled exploitation, and colonial inactivity, the volatile colonial encounters of the period should be understood as catalysts for the seminal anticolonial struggles of the Post–World War II era. Third, the events, incidents, and encounters described and analyzed in these chapters point to one inescapable conclusion: in spite of appearances to the contrary, the Northern Nigerian colonial state, like its counterparts in other parts of Africa, was fundamentally weak and its politico-economic sway over Africans tenuous at best. The British resort to familiar-but-heightened and novel forms of coercion to extract revenue and control subjects during a time of economic hardship and uncertainty illustrates this contention about colonial power.

The stories told here advance an understanding of Africa's incorporation into the global economy that takes into consideration the simultaneous manifestation of events and processes that exacerbated and threatened incorporation. Specifically, during the Depression the British colonial authorities implemented a contradictory policy of both incorporation and imperial closures—of colonially mediated globalization and deglobalization. Colonial authorities urged Northern Nigerians to either participate or increase their participation in the world market through export-crop production and by patronizing and complying with colonial economic institutions and obligations. But an aggressive campaign of imperial preference reduced, for instance, the flow of cheap Japanese textiles into the region. As a result, Northern Nigerians had to bypass the colonial state to both insert themselves in desired and beneficial economic processes and remove themselves from state-imposed connections to the global economy. These local strategies of self-preservation entailed a selective participation in both the global trade system and the colonial economic bureaucracies that mediated it.

The incorporation of African peasant producers into the world market has typically been seen as one of the most successful colonial policies, removing millions of Africans from the comfort and stability of subsistent and semi-subsistent production and placing them in the web of an uncertain, volatile, and exploitative world market. This perception has been sustained largely by the discourse of dependency, underdevelopment, and allied concepts, which denote the systematic subjugation of raw-material producers to the forces and vagaries of the world market.[20] Seen within this paradigm, the Depression experience in Africa represents a deepening of the incorporation of African producers into the world market.[21]

These conceptual understandings, whether they are articulated in the form of unequal exchange, structural-Marxist core-periphery inequities, and similar dualisms, ignore the power of actual, on-ground colonial relations and colonial struggles in the making of economic experiences.[22] They also seem to ignore how the incoherence of colonial power and periodic colonial anxieties, as well as the quotidian decisions and actions of colonial personnel and those of African subjects, shaped the ways in which African peasants experienced and engaged with the world economy. Also sidestepped in these notions of structural determinism are the ways in which the proactive and reactive actions of Africans and others located outside the developed world constrained the workings of the world capitalist system.

Although radical historians quibble with neoclassical economic analysts of colonial capitalism about whether colonial policies spread poverty or prosperity in African colonies, the two groups of scholars unwittingly agree on one point. Both are invested in the notion of colonial economic success, the notion that colonial power formations consistently created and removed surpluses and profits from African colonies. They differ only on the question of who benefited from this economic "success." This unlikely consensus assumes a linear trajectory for colonial economic policy implementation and a structural coherence in the formulation and pursuit of colonial economic priorities. More important, it overlooks the creative and disruptive agency of Africans and their strategies of economic self-preservation in the face of colonial economic schemes.

The concept of a subaltern economic and political experience already (and consistently) determined and constrained by the forces of the global and imperial economy ignores the struggle, negotiation, and mobilization that sudden changes in colonial policy often unleashed. Colonial extractive policies during the Depression contracted an economy where the circuits of colonial economic activity were already functioning badly and in which Northern Nigerians were trying to develop alternative strategies of economic survival. Such novel forms of extraction (and the problems that inspired them) did not result mechanically from the relationship of Northern Nigerian agricultural peasants to the world economy. Rather, they emanated largely from on-ground British responses to the crisis as well as from multiple maneuverings and struggles among and between African farmers, trade brokers, laborers, chiefs, and British merchants and officials.

This analysis broadly echoes the works of anthropologists who insist that on-ground colonial encounters, the actions of local peoples, and local institutions could and do remake and complicate the workings and forces of the world economy, and that "the varied responses to the penetration of capitalist institutions of work, consumption, and leisure reveal a variety of strategies not predictable from the imposed system."[23] The story here depicts how colonial politics, local culture, and individual and group choices constrained the Depression experience in Northern Nigeria and produced outcomes that neither Africans nor British colonialists could have predicted.

Another important point along these lines is that a contradictory duality underlay the encounters of British economic recovery agents with Northern Nigerian peasants. While the colonial state, as part of its program of economic recovery, sought to increase the production of agricultural exports by bringing nonexport farmers into the export system (and by extension into the world market), its aggressive implementation of imperial preference took Northern Nigerians out of global economic interactions by circumscribing them in rigged imperial ones. However, this duality cannot simply be explained by an invocation of the concept of colonial exploitation. For what was happening during the Depression was not an expansion of the colonial economy or of African participation in it. Rather, the economy was contracting and many Northern Nigerians rejected its tightening strictures. The agricultural economy of Northern Nigeria underwent a variant of what Clifford Geertz calls "involution"[24]—increasing peasant crop production with extra labor but ultimately harming the value of produce and the capacity to produce. The Northern Nigerian colonial economy decreased in size because it was feeding on its own productive capacity. It was not supporting what would seem on the surface to be an unprecedented level of colonial exploitation.

The concept of colonial exploitation has been a terrain of vigorous debate. It has become a retrospective designation for a range of practices that colonial powers across Africa engaged in. However, such "exploitative" practices were part of missions that were authorized by political doctrines that deny or rationalize exploitation. Most scholars of colonial Africa, especially those who seek to write colonial African history from an African perspective, flatten a variety of ideological and practical colonial projects into the concept of colonial exploitation. To read exploitation backward into the economic policies of colonial states is to sidestep the discursive formations and ideologies of rule that authorized some of these policies. It also refuses to acknowledge the mutual coexistence of what we call exploitation and what colonial powers saw as a civilizing mission.

The term *colonial exploitation* is often deployed as a stand-in for complex social and economic practices and realities of the colonial period. Indeed, even my assertion that exploitation, in its strict definition, was almost impossible in Depression-era Northern Nigeria employs a notion of colonial exploitation that is ahistorical. I use *exploitation* purely as a point of departure, a heuristic device to illustrate how the concept breaks down when juxtaposed with real colonial events. For not only did colonialists not call what they were doing exploitation, the outcomes of "exploitative" policies did not always bear out official economic expectations.

The British concept of the dual mandate of colonialism and the French doctrine of *mise en valeur* encapsulate, however problematically and at least in theory, the colonial disavowal of unbridled exploitation as an overarching strategy of colonial economic management.[25] The British often formulated economic and social policies on the theoretical and rhetorical premise that such policies would advance both the colony and the metropole and that they would improve Africans' standards of living enough to keep them from revolting. The French, as Alice Conklin has argued, went even further in trying to erase the incongruity between French republican ideals and coercive exploitation. Mise en valeur, or rational economic development, represented a French attempt to advance development and social uplift as the foundation of colonial rule in French West Africa.[26] These two colonial doctrines represent an ideological acceptance, however shrewd, of the impracticability of unbridled, unabashed exploitation.

The notion that colonial peoples could and should be rationally ordered toward social improvement, even through coercion and compulsion, never actually departed from the vocabulary of colonial policy, French or British. When the British therefore sought to increase the production of export crops in Northern Nigeria in the midst of the Depression, and engaged in an unprecedented and violent revenue drive, they did so not simply on an extractive premise. Such self-interested colonial exactions also occurred in the context of a protodevelopmentalist conception of colonialism—what Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch calls "predevelopmentalist colonialism."[27] This precursor to the so-called developmental colonialism of the post-Depression period was, to be sure, accompanied by intrusion, repression, and violence. But it was explained within the imperative of progress, not of exploitation.[28]

The dual mandate of British colonialism was pursued with more theoretical fervor than with practical enthusiasm. Often the British employed dual-mandate rhetoric as a defense against charges of unconscionable exploitation and not as a platform for colonial policy. In fact, at certain junctures colonialism embraced "civilization" and "development" only because the pressures of African activism and demands (see chapter 4) and metropolitan politics required it. Nonetheless, the dual-mandate philosophy of British colonial rule cleared a limited space theoretically for African participation in the advertised benefits of the colonial project. The dual-mandate consensus of the pre-Depression era also recognized that, although permissible, excessive coercion and violence had an endpoint after which it was counterproductive. The unprecedented use of violence to pursue colonial economic recovery aims during the Depression must therefore be understood as a desperate departure from the norm. Of course, the dual-mandate rhetoric rarely interfaced with policy and practices on the ground, but it meant that crude plunder was rarely permitted. What happened before the Depression was therefore not the unbridled exploitation and plunder advanced in orthodox African colonial history but a necessarily limited effort by Britain to appropriate surplus produce and profits from Northern Nigeria in a period when both expanded.

This basic point about pre-Depression limitations of colonial exploitation makes the argument that the Depression caused a temporary break in the ability of the British to exploit the resources and profits of Northern Nigeria's export agriculture easier to comprehend. The failure to exploit was a shift rather than a rupture. Moreover—and this is the overarching point here—exploitation as an all-explaining concept occludes the effects of colonial "exploitative" schemes on average Africans at the colonial grass roots, for it almost forecloses discussion on the microlevel of African engagements with colonial policy. These grassroots receptions of colonial policy are much more important and productive to investigate than the restrictive and reductive concept of exploitation. The Depression marked an important period in African colonial history, not so much for how or whether colonial responses to it led to the exploitation of already impoverished Africans as for its diverse socioeconomic implications for different segments of the African population. As a consequence, the crisis produced diverse responses and engagements from Africans. These differences in predicaments and responses reveal infinitely more interesting insights than does the blanket question of whether—or how much—exploitation accompanied the government's economic recovery policy.

To problematize and historicize colonial exploitation is not to deny its analytical utility. But by unpacking the concept and pointing to its recent origin in discourses of colonial critique and anticolonial struggles, one gets a better sense of its temporal and spatial limitations. Such a reflection also helps illustrate the fact that a colonial economic project already circumscribed by pragmatic concessions to Africans (and by colonial doctrine) could not have become more exploitative during the economic crisis of the 1930s. The cessation of public works and of socially beneficial projects by the

Northern Nigerian colonial government—despite growing local clamor for these colonial benefits (chapter 4)—does not indicate an intensifying colonial exploitation. Neither does the collapse of the colonial educational project in Idoma Division (chapter 5). The colonial state cited a lack of funds as the reason for these retreats from the dual mandate of exploitation and development. To the extent that pre-Depression colonial social projects—limited as they were—operated with the surpluses and revenue extracted from local peasants, the dwindling of these social projects during the economic crisis indicates that surpluses, profits, and revenue extracted by the state contracted rather than increased. The dual-mandate principle rested on the rationale that beneficial social projects would offset or mitigate the pains of colonial exploitation on the minds and bodies of Africans. The relative absence of profits and surpluses to exploit during the Depression removed the need for the second, constructive part of the dual mandate—the need to fund schools and build social infrastructure like roads, bridges, clinics, and dispensaries. A nuanced understanding of the limits and problems of colonial exploitation recognizes the effort of Africans who, as groups or individuals, complicated and sometimes defeated the envisaged outcomes of colonial economic policies.

The diverse engagements of Africans with the self-cushioning economic strategies of colonial authorities during the Depression and the combustive interaction of Africans' strategies of self-preservation with European colonial recovery schemes contradict the dominant scholarly representation of the 1930s and by extension the interwar period in African history. A number of Africanist economic and social historians have posited that the Depression decade represents a "lost period" marked by an unremarkable stagnancy and unprecedented exploitation of African resources.[29] It is further argued that retrenchments and pay cuts as well as the availability of surplus labor led to a decline in African laborers' bargaining power and permitted various forms of worker abuse and exploitation during and after the economic crisis.[30] The Depression years have, therefore, been rightly described as the worst years for African colonial workers.

One could untangle the fates of various social segments of the African population under the Depression and make accurate observations about how they fared under the colonial state's economic recovery policies. But Africanist historians have often shunned such a fine-grained analysis in favor of a holistic representation of the Depression years as a period when nothing happened—a period to be skipped in the chronology of African colonial history in order to get to the more interesting and consequential period of World War II and beyond. This historiographical orthodoxy has colored the way that African colonial history is taught in African and Western colleges and graduate schools.

Arguing against the unprecedented exploitation paradigm, the narratives and analyses presented here shift the focus from absence to presence. The absence of colonial projects and the scaling back of colonial infrastructural ambitions did not lead to a lull in the colonial encounter between Africans and the British in Northern Nigeria. On the contrary, it opened the way for important struggles and encounters that made colonial power somewhat more pervasive and intrusive, not less. The Depression was a tumultuous period characterized by monumental struggles, tensions, labor troubles, and multiple maneuverings that collectively transformed British colonialism in Northern Nigeria, Britain's most populous and elaborately governed colony in Africa. Therefore, to understand the succeeding periods of African history—World War II and the postwar period—one must understand what happened in colonial Africa in the 1930s.

The 1930s also represent a pivotal moment for understanding the nature and operations of the African colonial state. Scholars of state power in Africa have provided invaluable insights into the evolution and unraveling of power formations across Africa. Mahmood Mamdani and Achille Mbembe have offered illuminating documentary excursions into the patterns and constants of colonial power and its operation in Africa.[31] The economic turmoil of the 1930s and the additional anxieties of control and extraction that it placed on Northern Nigerian colonial authorities led to a stripping away of some of the civil pretensions of colonial power. British colonialism in Northern Nigeria became even more colonial, and indirect rule—the British policy of ruling Africans through their own institutions and symbols of authority—more direct and coercive. The emergence of a more direct and coercive form of indirect rule during the economic crisis—the baring of the fangs of colonial power—had far-reaching consequences for African colonial subjects at the colonial grass roots in Northern Nigeria.

The stories in chapters 3, 5, and 6 bring these fallouts of the Depression into sharp relief. At an epistemological level, the analysis of the reemergence and legacies of coercive colonialism reinforces Mamdani's and Mbembe's postulations about the ambitions and illusions of ubiquity that colonial power formations often harbored. It also demonstrates the shifting contours of colonial power ambitions and control mechanisms and how those shifts tended to correspond to crisis and fractures in the colonial system as well as to the degree of discontent and strain in grassroots colonial power relations.

The stories in these chapters demonstrate the weak and tenuous condition of colonial state power. An understanding of this fundamental colonial ineptitude allows us to view the weaknesses and failures of the contemporary African state as a product of economic and relational dynamics and not of a radical break with a supposedly strong and coherent state structure inherited from colonialism. This understanding should also complicate the view that colonial states were focused, determined, and powerful, and that those qualities enabled them to be consistently successful in achieving colonial economic objectives. Both neoclassical and dependency theorists of African colonial economics subscribe to this flawed notion of colonial power.

Postcolonial African states inherited some of the fundamental failures and weaknesses of the colonial state, especially in the area of mismanaging Africans' economic expectations, anxieties, and aspirations. Many African states portray a picture of stability while the predatory appropriation of revenue and surpluses remains undisturbed, only to be unsettled and exposed by economic crisis. As in colonial times, it sometimes takes economic and social crisis to highlight the tenuousness of the state's power. Like colonial regimes, postcolonial African states are often unaccustomed to dwindling revenue and incomes and the resultant discontent, demands, criticisms, and disappointment of citizens. With the illusion of paternal omnipotence discredited by deteriorating economic conditions and growing citizen unrest, many postcolonial African states have resorted, like their colonial predecessors, to more exactions, brutality, and crudely direct forms of exercising power and engineering consent among the populace.

THE STORY IN BRIEF

The vigorous enforcement of imperial preference curtailed the economic choices of Northern Nigerians and hampered Northern Nigeria's economic recovery by restricting the sale of the region's most lucrative export, tin, to British and British Empire buyers. However, protectionism as a mechanism of economic recovery was counterproductive in a contracting productive space with little or no economic incentive. It reflected more the economic anxieties of the state than it did an economically sound commitment to recovery. Protectionism failed to cure the problem of collapsing prices and contracting trade. Other elements of the colonial state's economic recovery policy also provoked reactions and engagements that were both unexpected and harmful to British interests. The self-cushioning actions of Northern Nigerians contributed substantially to these complicated outcomes.

In theory, economic recovery measures were designed to cushion the colonial state and to enable it to support recovery in Britain. Those measures, however, produced their own set of dilemmas. Those dilemmas required careful handling as they threatened the viability of British rule. Pay cuts, when applied to chiefs, curtailed their commitment to vigorous collection of taxes and proved to be an incentive for extralegal exactions and extortion (chapter 2). Those extortions eroded the legitimacy of chiefs and undermined indirect rule. British officials disciplined and removed chiefs who sought to make up for the pay cuts by extorting money from their subjects, further damaging British authority, destroying the relative harmony between superintending British officials and African rulers, and heightening local resentment of British rule. Chiefs who were seen by their subjects to be working too hard to help the colonial state collect revenue became the targets of local wrath.

While helping in the transfer of some wealth to Britain, aggressive revenue drives at the grass roots caused food shortages and full-scale famines in several districts, the fallouts of which hardly seemed worth the meager rewards of such invasive revenue expeditions. Famines devastated whole villages as the agents of an avowedly bankrupt state watched helplessly. This colonial paralysis in the face of local suffering called into question in Africans' minds the paternalism at the heart of the dual-mandate ideology of British rule. As tax raids became more sustained and more uncompromising, in tandem with deepening state fiscal anxieties, they inevitably eroded the productive base of local agriculture in several Northern Nigerian provinces, leading to several violent antitax revolts that targeted local chiefs, scribes, and other local agents of the state's economic recovery efforts. These uprisings undermined what the British had always taken for granted: the loyalty of subjects and the legitimacy of chiefs.

Retrenchments similarly had a multipronged unintended consequence. Retrenched workers congregated on tin mine compounds on the Jos Plateau and on the railway, engaging in a wide array of criminal and subversive activities, including the sale of children, child labor trafficking, and the stealing and vengeful sabotaging of railway track components. These disgruntled colonial subjects also helped spread practices that bordered on "criminal self-help," such as currency counterfeiting and uttering. More important, some retrenched workers began to radicalize workers retained on the mines and on the railway, initiating, for the first time in Northern Nigeria, labor organizing and strikes and heightening the volatility of the economic situation in the region. Many retrenched workers returned to their villages of origin with no money or economic hope, straining food resources and family finances. No longer accustomed to farming, many of them became a burden to wives, mothers, and other female relatives who had become both breadwinners and tax payers. Women's expanding role in the management of household economies underscored the precarious position of males in the Depression-era economy. As some of the retrenched men began to migrate to Lagos and other commercial centers in search of paid employment, they relied on female relatives for initial sponsorship money and for the maintenance of the household in their absence. Women also had to increasingly engage with ruthless colonial tax gatherers, devising and perfecting strategies of child concealment, among other trickeries, to reduce household tax obligations. What seemed like a period of unintended empowerment for women in fact produced novel burdens for them. The social crises caused by these local reactions to retrenchment—and the time, money, and material devoted by the British to fighting these local acts of defiance—outweighed the fiscal benefits of retrenchments and increased exaction.

Economic hardship made Northern Nigerians innovative as retrenched workers sought economic reprieve in gold prospecting. Similarly, farmers took steps to wean themselves from dependence on the world market by cultivating more food crops. The state encouraged these innovations, touting traditional self-help, communal support, individual resourcefulness, and the exploration of latent resources as bulwarks against destitution and as a stand-in for a hoped-for—and costly—governmental welfare intervention. While these innovative strategies of economic self-preservation on the part of some Northern Nigerians, and the state's support for them, succeeded in boosting the economic hopes of these groups of colonial subjects, the increasing refusal by new gold-prospecting entrepreneurs and innovative farmers to let the state regulate, monitor, and tax their activities further heightened tensions in colonial power relations. In the end, the state's support for African innovation and self-help, while fiscally wise, essentially undermined British power. It inadvertently encouraged Northern Nigerians to wean themselves off state control and to escape the formal economy and the fiscal nodes through which the state sustained and replenished itself.

Women weavers led one of the most significant innovative enterprises in response to the economic crisis. Historically dominated by women, the Kabba and Okene cloth industries had always maintained a small market for itself in the face of cheap European and Japanese textile imports. The persistence of ceremonies, rituals, and other performances requiring the wearing of local cloth kept the women weavers of the Okene-Kabba axis employed. During the economic crisis, the prices of imported textiles increased, remained at their pre-Depression levels, or decreased by only a slight percentage not commensurate with the sharp drop in local incomes. As this disparity registered with Northern Nigerians, and as colonial officials enforced a ban on the importation of cheap Japanese textiles as part of the policy of imperial preference, Northern Nigerian consumers turned increasingly to Kabba and Okene cloth for their clothing needs. The women cloth makers expanded production to satisfy this demand, and new female entrepreneurs rose to take advantage of this new economic reality. Throughout the 1930s, the Kabba and Okene cloth industries experienced steady growth, with colonial officials urging more expansion and commercialization in the hope that it would ease the financial anxieties of locals, whose purchasing power had been diminished by the pervasive cash crunch. Although such hopes never fully materialized, the growth experienced in the sector and the wealth accumulated by women textile makers in a period of acute financial crisis inaugurated a new, if fleeting, psychology of female economic empowerment.

The reactions of different groups of Northern Nigerians confounded the simplistic economic assumptions of anxious British officials, as locals increasingly focused on the quotidian dimensions of the economic crisis in disregard of the grandiose imperial economic projections of British colonial crisis managers. Members of Northern Nigeria's embryonic elite—many of them retrenched from their positions in the colonial civil service and from British mercantile companies—responded to their plummeting personal finances and loss of patronage and privileges by turning against the colonial system. They articulated a strident anticolonial and nationalist rhetoric through newly established anticolonial newspapers and petition writing.

In Northern Nigeria's best-known colonial backwater, Idoma Division, where the institutions of colonial economics—currency, export-crop production, taxation, and trade—were tenuous at best at the onset of the Depression, the implementation of the state's economic recovery policy was particularly fraught with crisis and mutual recrimination between colonizers and the colonized. As the British moved away from an expensive project of preparing the "backward" Idoma for indirect rule through missionary education, the Idoma, to the dismay of colonial administrators, demanded schools and more government investment in Western education as a pathway to economic stability. Unable to squeeze cash out of Northern Nigeria's economically least viable and most depressed zones, colonial authorities raided villages for goats, chickens, grain, and any other items of stored wealth they could find. The raids devastated the Idoma countryside, causing social dislocation and demographic chaos. But the raids also helped the Idoma to perfect their skills of escaping colonial control and exaction. To resist and reject these invasive economic harassments, the Idoma hid themselves, their chickens, goats, and other valuables in Idoma Division's thick forests, away from raiding parties. They also began to aggressively disobey colonial directives and to reject the institution of colonial taxation as a whole.

The choice of Idoma Division as a case study reflects the need to extend the analysis beyond the Muslim provinces and divisions—the most visible targets of British economic and political policy. The discussion of the Idoma experience of the Depression illustrates the effects of the state's economic recovery policy on a colonial administrative unit largely neglected in previous colonial schemes because of what officials saw as the extreme backwardness and insularity of its people. The people of the division had, before the Depression, neither fully adopted the British currency nor joined the export-oriented agricultural economy of Northern Nigeria. Because of that prior British attitude toward the division, the Idoma area provides a site for a particularly intriguing Depression experience.[32] The Depression-induced attempt to integrate the division into the revenue generation schemes of the Depression produced instructive encounters and lessons in colonial power relations.

THE GLOBAL, THE IMPERIAL, THE REGIONAL, AND THE LOCAL

The conjuncture of global economic and political forces, imperial decisions, regional colonial peculiarities, and local colonial encounters presents major structural and analytical challenges for a work like this. It is difficult to bring together and sustain within the same analytic frame the global, imperial, regional, and local forces and events that shaped the Northern Nigerian Depression experience, given that these various elements were always in conversation and in creative tension with one another throughout the Depression. But I have sustained this vertical alchemy of forces in my analyses.

This important analytical choice helps capture the several levels on which the economic crisis manifested, as well as its messy and convoluted trajectory. These geographically disparate forces of global, national, regional, and local socioeconomic and political dynamics appear through all the chapters to demonstrate how they reacted with one another in shaping Northern Nigerians' experiences of the Depression. The crisis did not trickle down in a linear trajectory from the centers of the world economy to Northern Nigeria and its various districts. Rather, it is my contention that because of the incoherence and inconsistencies in British colonialism, and in the face of local maneuvering and strategies of survival, the effects of the Depression and of imperial economic recovery schemes were a lot more incoherent, convoluted, and a lot less predictable than officials at the imperial metropole might have hoped.

Similarly, the Depression experience in remote districts of Northern Nigeria and the implementation of the economic recovery program of the government in those districts did not always conform to the economic and political calculations of regional colonial authorities in Kaduna. This differential manifestation of the crisis originated with the economic, ecological, and cultural realities in each district. It was also a backlash against the homogenizing idealism of British economic recovery polices and the ignorance and arrogance of petty British grassroots officials.

Idoma Division represents a key illustration of the grassroots backlash. The division did not conform to the dominant export-oriented colonial agricultural economy of Northern Nigeria. The cultivation of food crops was the mainstay of the Idoma economy. The division was indirectly and tenuously connected to the regional, imperial, and global economies—through intermittent food and labor export to the Jos tin mines. At the inception of colonial rule in the division in the 1910s, the British undertook a campaign to bring the division within the economic and administrative mainstream of Northern Nigeria. They even imported a class of Hausa Muslim political and economic colonials to help spread the colonial message of trade, export-crop production, and indirect rule among the Idoma. When all these efforts failed to transform the production, exchange, and leadership configurations in Idoma Division, the British retreated into a rhetoric and practice of regarding the division and other non-Muslim administrative units of Northern Nigeria as a periphery of the "core" North—a domain to be left to the devices of weak local rulers and unfortunate British officers. This disengagement however included a determined program of cultural uplift conceived through a colonial missionary desire to educate as many Idoma as possible.

During the Depression both the policy of constructing Idoma Division as an economic and political periphery and that of culturally civilizing the Idoma people through colonial missionary education came back to haunt the British. The move complicated the implementation of the state's economic recovery program and caused unprecedented friction in colonial power relations, constraining the Idoma experience of the Depression. This became painfully obvious as the British sought to rediscover the economic utility of Idoma Division as a revenue-yielding domain, while applying the full force of colonial austerity to the division.

The fall in produce prices and the government's rather novel revenue campaign dramatically, if not uniquely, affected Idoma Division. In the ensuing engagement with the state's economic recovery actions, some segments of the Idoma sought to make sense of the economic difficulties and to weather them by reinventing the concepts of settler and stranger. These restructured concepts acquired valences that enabled them to function more and more as tropes of economic, political, and ethnic exclusion. The Idoma blamed the fall in produce prices and the resulting hardship on the involvement of non-Idoma "settlers" and "strangers" in local agriculture, substituting this local explanation for the globality of the economic crisis. The reinvention of these categories during the Depression has continued to have implications for interethnic relations in Northern Nigeria's Middle Belt. More important, it illustrates the ways in which a global economic crisis informed local dynamics that in turn fed on preexisting social and economic tensions and ultimately but inadvertently helped to discursively decouple the global and the local.

These remote consequences of the Depression illustrate the uncertain trajectory of economic and political crisis. The economic disaster of the Depression in Northern Nigeria could not have been discerned or predicted from its manifestation at the colonial metropole. Its socioeconomic implications for Northern Nigeria and for the colonial experiences of Northern Nigerians were shaped by colonial economic recovery policies and by vigorous local reactions to them.

Local reactions to the government's economic recovery measures did not break down neatly along gender, ethnic, and class lines, although differing fortunes dictated somewhat different coping strategies. But the Depression brought women into the forefront of colonial engagements. Before the crisis, the British and their African auxiliaries had dealt with women through a Victorian prism—as entities incidental to colonial economic and political calculations and schemes. The Depression changed that perception temporarily in the non-Muslim zones of Northern Nigeria, where women historically took on more central roles in the household than in the Muslim zones. As males were displaced by economic turmoil or chose migration and transience over the harassment of tax collectors, colonial officials increasingly had to deal with women—wives, sisters, mothers, grandmothers—who became, for a moment, household heads and breadwinners. For instance, tax collectors increasingly had to deal with women's inventive effort to reduce tax obligations through the strategy of child concealment, which reduced a household's assessed tax.

This is only one example of the way in which, once economic crisis travels, it sets off struggles that play out dramatically in the context of preexisting relational, political, and economic dynamics. At the heart of the Northern Nigerian Depression experience lay tensions, fissures, and assumptions of colonial and household relations preordained by colonial priorities and ideologies of rule. Northern Nigeria's experience in the Depression is, in the final analysis, a crisis of colonialism and of the difficulty of maintaining colonial control in the face of crisis and translating colonial paternal idioms into workable policies at the colonial grass roots.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY AND GENDER

Much of this book is written from a close textual reading of a variety of colonial documents, Nigerian newspaper articles, petitions to colonial authorities, and oral interviews. At the onset of my research, I set out to produce a significantly oral-historical work. My preliminary inquiries convinced me that that was practically impossible. In the research field I found that remembrances and memories of the Depression were scattered, chronologically unreliable, and too general to be used specifically to recover the suffering and encounters of the 1930s. As a result of low life expectancy in Nigeria, poor health, and illiteracy, I had little success in locating Northern Nigerians old enough to remember or who kept mental notes of the specific events and problems of the Depression.

The preponderance of written sources in this book is a product of this early methodological disillusionment. I made a choice after my pilot research. Instead of writing an oral history of the Depression, I would make up for the dearth of useful African memories of the Depression by using as many colonially generated and African-generated written sources as possible and incorporating oral testimonies where and when they were available. The preeminence of written sources in this book is therefore a methodological necessity. I have, as much as possible, made up for the sporadic presence in this work of unmediated African voices with a determinedly critical reading of colonial documents, as well as a consistent attention to contradictions within and between these documents. I have teased out substantive dissonances between colonial rhetoric and policies and the on-ground grassroots encounters and intrusions into Africans' lives that they authorized. I also probed the policy idioms, propaganda, and the claims of Northern Nigerian colonial authorities on the economic crisis vis-à-vis their interventions in Africans' lives and Africans' strategies of evasion and self-preservation. The use of the ultrasecret colonial intelligence reports, in particular, helped me access self-indicting colonial admissions outside the official, publicly communicated rhetoric. These reports provided an unvarnished representation of African suffering and colonial exaction.

My main focus in all this effort is to provide a context for a central thrust of the book: the strategies of survival, resistance, and self-interested engagement devised by Northern Nigerians during the crisis. But it was difficult to fully capture the peculiar experiences of Northern Nigeria's different demographic groups in the economic crisis. While I covered the experiences of chiefs, laborers, farmers, colonial auxiliaries, and the unemployed to the extent allowed by the specificity and experiential differentiation in the sources, in many cases the sources did not mention women. This presented a methodological and interpretive problem. In my analyses of women's experiences and encounters during the crisis, I therefore resorted to recovering their struggles and strategies of coping by deduction and inference. Because colonial authorities dealt mostly with men, the colonial archive mostly reflects that gender bias, obscuring the role of women in stabilizing the household, in sponsoring husbands migrating to earn cash, and in creatively protecting what was left of family wealth from the predation of colonial revenue hunters. I based my analyses of women's experiences in these events as much on a reading of silences in the archive as on a vigorous extrapolation of presences. Only in one instance—the economic empowerment of female textile entrepreneurs in the Okene-Kabba axis—did a fortuitous convergence of direct oral testimony and colonial sources enable me to make a definitive, evidence-based analytical statement about the experiences of Northern Nigerian women in the Depression.

I intend these methodological disclosures and disclaimers not just as a guide but as an explanation of the methodological and analytical choices that underpin this book. They should also broach the methodological dilemma that continues to face Africanist social historians, who, on the one hand, value direct African voices and consider them integral to social historical reconstruction but, on the other, must be pragmatic enough to accept the chronological limitations of accessing such voices for distant colonial events and periods. Social historians also have to reconcile themselves to the fact that the sociopolitical strictures of colonialism mediated, constrained, and still constrain many African voices. Finally, their quest for African voices, for the early and mid-colonial periods especially, is often undermined by the political economy of memory recovery, which in Africa is often determined by issues of health, poverty, life expectancy, and illiteracy. Readers will notice that I wrestled, at several junctures, with these tensions and problems.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Each of the six chapters deals with a separate issue or set of issues relating to the Depression experience in Northern Nigeria, although themes and arguments overlap considerably among them.

Chapter 1 analyzes the vehicles through which the Depression traveled to Nigeria, the crafting and initial implementation of a national colonial economic recovery policy aimed at cushioning a fiscally challenged state, and the early African receptions of these policies. It argues that the economic anxieties of Nigerians were incidental to the economic recovery schemes and that as Nigerians groaned and complained under the weight of the new policies, official discourse justified them with the rhetoric of African traditional self-help and nativist communalism. Chapter 2 details the implementation, contradictions, and consequences—intended and unintended—of the state's economic recovery program in Northern Nigeria. It argues that the aggressive enforcement of revenue generation—a cardinal plank of the recovery measures—was ultimately self-defeating, as it undermined indirect rule by eroding the legitimacy of chiefs and their ability to persuade their subjects to pay taxes and levies.

Chapter 3 deals with two issues in the Depression experience in Northern Nigeria. I first examine the phenomenal rise in crime in the 1930s, which was linked to the policy of retrenchment and pay cuts adopted by the colonial government and British firms. I argue that the crime wave, the rise in vagrancy and militancy on the railway, and the escalation of currency counterfeiting created new social challenges for the state and are a window into the widespread adoption of criminal self-help, subtle subversion, and labor agitation as strategies of self-preservation. Second, I consider the range of creative economic responses and innovations that Northern Nigerian women and men devised to cope with the Depression, arguing that these strategies served both to create islands of wealth creation and to wean their proponents from the formal colonial economy.

Chapter 4 analyzes the rhetorical strategies adopted by the emerging Northern Nigerian elite to criticize the colonial state's economic recovery policy, highlight its unsavory consequences for Northern Nigerian colonial subjects, and decry what it saw as the state's neglect of its social obligations to an impoverished and suffering people. I contend that in articulating a strident anticolonial critique founded on the hardships brought on by the Depression and the government's responses to it, members of the Northern Nigerian elite were driven as much by their own anxieties about the momentary cessation of colonial exploitation (which paradoxically provided them jobs and patronage in pre-Depression times) as by the imperative of indicting the economic failures of the state.

Chapter 5 examines the Depression experience in Idoma Division. I argue that the incongruence between colonial efforts to reorganize Idoma Division in the interest of revenue generation and a strategic colonial disavowal of earlier obligations and promises drew a backlash as the Idoma demanded roads, bridges and, more importantly, colonial missionary schools that they thought would give Idoma men and women a path to a more stable economic existence. I also argue that the Idoma took their own economic recovery into their own hands, migrating to the relatively solvent cocoa-producing regions of Western Nigeria to earn cash, a migratory flow which ultimately spurred the development of wage labor in Idoma Division.

In chapter 6, I analyze the violent encounters between the Idoma and the British as the latter pursued revenue generation through tax raids in the Idoma countryside. Particularly, I examine the use of tax raids and property confiscations by petty colonial officials to exact revenue. I argue that the sheer unfamiliarity of the tax raids unsettled the social fabric of the Idoma countryside, engendering fear but also eliciting crafty strategies of escape and concealment that frustrated the revenue expeditions. Rather than bring the Idoma into the vortex of colonial revenue generation, the tax raids antagonized and alienated them further from the institutions of colonial control, underlining, once again, the paradoxical fundamental weakness of a desperate, violent, and invasive colonialism in a period of hardship.