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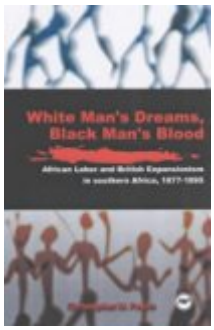
Christopher M. Paulin. *White Men's Dreams, Black Men's Blood: African Labor and British Expansionism in Southern Africa, 1877-1895.* Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001. viii + 258 pp. $84.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-86543-928-3.



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A New Thesis of Labor-Hungry Imperialism? The Scramble for Southern Africa

This is a study of British imperialism in late-nineteenth-century southern Africa. The book discusses the tangled course of events leading to the expansion of the British empire into the southern African interior in the wake of the discoveries of diamonds and gold in South Africa--from the British annexation of the South African Republic in 1877 to the failed Jameson Raid of 1895.

The book's title tells us something about its theoretical concerns. The author, Christopher M. Paulin, aims at studying the connection between "White Men's Dreams" and "Black Men's Blood," or, more precisely, "the birth of the mineral industries in southern Africa and the conquest of virtually every independent African polity in the African sub-continent," to quote the cover page. Such an interest in the nexus of "economic history" and political-imperial history, together with an Africanist thrust, would place the study in the (perhaps now defunct) revisionist or radical school of historiography of South Africa. But its contention is, one hastens to add, highly unique and problematic even within that school. Its fundamental argument is that the need for cheap African labor played a decisive role in generating and patterning British expansionist policies in the region--a much more decisive role than earlier writers, be they revisionists or not, have suggested.

According to Paulin, the African labor question was not merely an issue that spasmodically intruded upon the early phases of South African history (as so treated in Etherington's study on the British annexation of the Transvaal).[1] Nor did it start to assume significance only in the industrialized twentieth century, when the African wage labor system came to operate in full force (as Shillington suggests in his discussion on the British acquisition of southern Bechuanaland in 1885).[2] Instead, labor was a perennial issue for British circles from the early days. Particularly after the discoveries of minerals, the pre-colonial indigenous communities were increasingly seen as something to be tapped as a source of labor, and the notion came to be so firmly fixed in the imperial-colonial mind that it colored and influ-

enced the events that punctuated the late-nineteenth-century expansion of the British empire--conquest wars, the restriction of chiefly power, land alienation, confining the Africans to small reserves, the imposition of taxes, etc. Underlining the labor issue as a motive factor in the establishment of British hegemony and racialist order in the region, the author holds, in agreement with Tim Keegan [3], that the twentieth-century ideology of racial supremacy known as apartheid is by no means exclusively an Afrikaaner/Nationalist phenomenon, since its roots went as far back as the formative era of the British empire in the subcontinent (pp. 8-9).

In specifying the motivating force(s) for British imperialism, scholars have often been polarized into two camps, those focusing on the metropole (strategic concerns, etc.), and those on the periphery (colonial interests, etc.).[4] From the "labor perspective," however, Paulin sees less of a dichotomy: "London either directly initiated or acceded to the conquest of the southern African lands," then proposed or agreed to the policy of prodding Africans into the labor market (p. 8). Here, the author's position may be seen as echoing a growing body of recent scholarship which treats colonial processes as a key factor, yet without de-emphasizing their interactions with the metropole (although Paulin's thesis apparently has little in common with the recent culturalist discourse).

How does the book cast the evidential net? As primary sources, it appears to be based for the most part on correspondence, reports, memoranda, and other official/private documents deposited at the Public Records Office in the United Kingdom--indeed, the book's minute accounts of intra-official communications, as well as discussions between "men concerned," make most interesting reading. For obvious reasons, the sort of materials the book uses has typically provided ready evidence for the "diplomatist" interpretation of imperialism, which revolves around personalities, politics, and strategy. Paulin, on the other hand, draws a conclusion of a very different nature by using the same type of materials, with this "twist" being yet another intriguing aspect of his book.

White Men's Dreams, Black Men's Blood comprises six chapters, bracketed by a short introduction and conclusion. The first two chapters look at an aggressive phase of British policy following the discovery of diamonds: chapter 1 primarily concerns the annexation of the Transvaal, which is explained as a British reaction to, above all, a labor crisis caused by the Transvaal legislation and practices. Chapter 2 discusses the "small wars" against African states (the Xhosa, Pedi, Tswana, Zulu, and Sotho) in 1877-81, arguing that a cardinal theme running through these wars was the desire to remove that which was thought to be inhibiting Africans from entering the labor market. Chapter 3 addresses itself to the readjustment phase of 1881-83, which saw the reassertion of independence by the Transvaal, raids by Boer "freebooters" against African communities, the establishment of Stellaland and Goshen, etc., all posing in one way or another a threat to labor supplies to the Kimberley mines. The revival of British expansionism after 1884 is the subject of the remaining three chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on the London Convention, the Warren expedition, and the annexation and division of Bechuanaland in 1884-85, a process which is explained as being essentially a British attempt to secure and stabilize labor supplies from the interior region. Chapter 5 turns to the "land settlement" in the newly-established British Bechuanaland which, it is said, gave Africans only limited lands in order to create a surplus population. Chapter 6 looks at the formation and early activities of the British South Africa Company, which the author describes as "the new engine of British expansion and conquest of cheap potential labor" in the north (pp. 11-12).

The main, and perhaps the most informative, part of Paulin's work seems to be chapters 4 and 5, which concern Bechuanaland. Here are some of

the points of interest. First, the revival of British aggressiveness after 1884 has commonly been explained in reference to the German factor (the possibility of a German-Transvaal alliance, etc.). [5] However, such a change in British attitude was noticeable by early February 1884, when Lord Derby, the Colonial Secretary, hardened his stance towards Kruger and decided to dispatch a resident commissioner to the disputed area in Bechuanaland. At the time, Whitehall was still figuring out Bismarck's agenda in southwestern Africa; thus the German threat cannot be considered to have materially influenced the issue at this stage (pp. 120-123).

Second, the British policy was in fact very much based on the advice of Hercules Robinson, the High Commissioner, who informed London that the road to the north, which served as a passage for migrant workers, "had equal value for the Cape and London alike" (p. 114), and that the British could not afford to lose the labor-supplying Khama's country and the apparently gold-rich Matabeleland to the Transvaal. The London Convention of February 1884, then, can be seen as the exchange of suzerainty (giving back independence to the Transvaal) for labor (securing the interior road) (p. 118). This view makes a sharp contrast with Schreuder's "strategist" interpretation, namely, that London, caring little for the Tswana and even less for the frontiers, only wanted to control the Transvaal's foreign relations.[6] According to Paulin, further British involvement, such as the Warren expedition, the annexation of British Bechuanaland, and the declaration of Bechuanaland Protectorate, can also be understood in the same light, as the convention solved nothing.

Third, to illustrate his point, Paulin uses archival records of the 1885-86 land commission in British Bechuanaland, which recommended that large tracts of land be assigned to the whites, while the Africans be confined to reserves. On the logic behind this proposal, Edward Fairfield, a dissenting official of the Colonial Office, commented:

"If Sir S. Shippard's [administrator and chief magistrate for British Bechuanaland, and chairman of the land commission] views are secured about artificially restricting the supply of land for native reserves, in order to create a wage-earning class, they would apply equally as well in Zululand as in Bechuanaland. Labourers are wanted for the Natal sugar estates and for the Barberton Gold Fields, just as much as Rhodes' Mines at Kimberley.... Sir Hercules Robinson is as strong as Sir S. Shippard in his opinions that the Restriction policy of the Land Commission should be up held, and shares Sir S. Shippard's phrase about this being in the 'best interest' of the Natives" (p. 160).

The ideas of Shippard and Robinson were not isolated: the new colonial secretary, Lord Knutsford indicated to Fairfield that "Shippard's scheme implied no new digression in imperial policy," and "indeed, encouraging Africans to become wage laborers had been British practice in southern Africa for some time" (p. 161). At any rate, the Imperial government accepted Shippard's land settlement in its entirety in 1886. All this weakens the validity of Shillington's account which points to the ambiguities of the "official mind" at the time.[7]

Paulin repeatedly warns readers of the complexities of the topic and reminds them that his thesis is by no means a mono-causal one, but at times I cannot help thinking that he himself betrays these words. On the British march into the north of the Limpopo, he writes that "Rhodes' company conquered Mashonaland and Matabeleland not only for gold but also for labor" (p. 12), and that in granting a charter to the BSAC "Whitehall gave Cecil Rhodes the opportunity to establish a monopoly on the supply of labor for his diamond and gold mining interests" (p. 180). I think that these assertions are unconventional enough to demand thorough clarification. But one finds little evidence advanced to specifically support

the point. His discussion in chapter 6 is almost exclusively about labor as a "production factor" under colonial capitalism (as detailed by Mackenzie, Phimister, and others), not about labor as a key motif for British expansionism.[8]

Yet, in at least one point an attempt is made to link labor with enlargement. In 1893, London postponed approving the introduction of a hut tax proposed by the BSA Company. This Imperial attitude, says the author, prompted Rhodes to turn to a plan of doing away with the Ndebele power. "He could have his tax if Matabeleland was quieted: quieting Matabeleland required war," and "Rhodes began a propaganda campaign that would set the stage for the company's invasion [of] Matabeleland and conquest of Lobengula" (p. 198). The fact was, however, that Rhodes already had his own tax, as the BSA Company, disregarding legality and formalities, had been collecting tax from Shonas since May 1893, or perhaps a little earlier.[9] It may be said therefore that the labor/hut tax issue did not carry weight in the way Paulin suggests in Rhodes's decision to invade Matabeleland.

White Men's Dreams, Black Men's Blood is highly polemic in nature. Insofar as it is not much concerned with presenting an overall or balanced picture, perhaps it cannot be recommended for first-time students and general readers. But Paulin's book is full of challenges, both theoretical and evidential, to conventional wisdom, which certainly demand serious attention from specialists in relevant fields. It will also provide food for thought for students working on the history of southern Africa.

Notes

[1]. N. A. Etherington, "Labour Supply and the Genesis of South African Confederation in the 1870s," *Journal of African History*, 20 (1979), pp. 235-253.

[2]. K. Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana 1870-1900* (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1985), p. 168.

[3]. T. Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).

[4]. Among the latter group and closely related to our subject is P. Maylam, *Rhodes, the Tswana and the British* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980).

[5]. See for example R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, with A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 206-208; and K. Shillington, *A History of Southern Africa* (Harlow: Longman, 1987), p. 110.

[6]. D. M. Schreuder, *Gladstone and Kruger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 392.

[7]. Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana*, p. 186.

[8]. J. M. Mackenzie, "African Labour in the Chartered Company Period," *Rhodesian History*, 1 (1970), pp. 43-58; and I. Phimister, *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe 1890-1948* (London: Longman, 1988), chapter 1.

[9]. J. S. Galbraith, *Crown and Charter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 325.

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