



Glasman Joël. *Les corps habillés au Togo: Genèse coloniale des métiers de police.* Paris: Editions Karthala, 2015. 328 S. paper, ISBN 978-2-8111-1218-9.

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Joël Glasman's book, published by Karthala in the collection "Les Afriques", offers a social history of police forces (civilian and military) in Togo, from the German colonial period in the late 19th century until the 1963 *coup d'état* that ousted Sylvanus Olympio a few years after the country's independence. Glasman has published numerous important articles on the bureaucratization of police forces in colonial Africa. See for instance, Joël Glasman, *Unruly agents: police reform, bureaucratization, and policemen's agency in interwar Togo*, in: *Journal of African History* 55 (2014), pp. 79–100. He has forged and contributed, along with a few other scholars, to a new research agenda focused on the study of colonial policing in the French empire. See among other: Emmanuel Blanchard / Quentin Deluermoz / Joël Glasman, *La professionnalisation policière en situation coloniale: détour conceptuel et explorations historiographiques*, in: *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés* 15 (2011), pp. 33–53 ; Jean-Pierre Bat / Nicolas Courtin (eds.), *Maintenir l'ordre colonial: Afrique et Madagascar (XIXe–XXe siècles)*, Rennes 2012.

Glasman's book, based on his PhD dissertation, provides for and intervenes at a crucial juncture. Indeed, even if colonial policing was at the core of the imperial project, the study of it has remained a marginalized and under-theorised topic in the francophone historiography. The author looks at the creation, the organization and the gradual bureaucratization of the enforcement of-

ficers – *les corps habillés*. Even if the number of police forces in Togo was rather low (500 men during the interwar period), their strong public identity (depicted in novels, pictures, public debates and the like) reflects their crucial place in the political field. They played a decisive role at the interface between the colonial administration and local population.

In this dense and persuasive social history of police forces and law enforcement in Togo, Glasman bases his analysis on an interesting blend of local archives and oral testimonies gathered in the field, as well as on scholarly literature indebted to the classics of European sociology and social theory. The core of the book focuses on the tension between the strategies used by colonial officials to discipline and subject the police forces themselves, as well as the ways in which these men in uniform deployed their own positions and resources, the "martial capital" as Glasman calls it, to negotiate and circumvent these colonial administrative techniques.

The book offers nine chronological chapters that can be read independently since each of them takes on a specific topic. The first chapter is a general overview of how policemen and soldiers claimed their professional space, especially through their uniform. Attire was indispensable in signifying the social boundaries of their profession. More than a symbol of obedience to colonial order, Glasman analyses the uniform as a re-

source used by police forces to distinguish themselves within their own hierarchies and from the rest of the population. The second chapter focuses on the creation of the first colonial “Polizeitruppen” in the late 19th century, when Togo was ruled by the German colonial administration. The author shows how the organization of the first police squads in German Togo was unstable and sometimes haphazard, rather than a consistent and rational project. The third chapter is at the core of the main problem of the book. Glasman analyses the strategies put in place by colonial authorities to keep policemen in line on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, the tactics formulated by police agents, who negotiated, contested and created for themselves a room for maneuver. The fourth chapter deals with the question of ethnicity within the colonial police forces. Ethnicity is understood not as a cultural essence but rather as a result of the power relations between the professional place of policemen and the colonial state. Chapters five and six shed light on two specific spaces that were central to the shaping of the urban geography of law enforcement: the camp and the police station. The camp appears as a heterotopia of colonial officials. On a Foucauldian sense the camp was not only a space that obeyed precise and specific organizational rules, but also an enabling place where both professional and kinship relations could take shape. In chapter six Glasman analyses how the creation of police stations appears as a consequence of the profound reforms launched by French colonial officials in the early 1930’s. These reforms led to the emergence of a civilian police force, in rupture with the previous “indigenous” troops (*garde indigène*). In the next chapter, the author sheds light on the materiality of law enforcement. He scrutinizes the gradual emergence in the professional field of new ways of registering, filing and documenting (finger prints, statistics, official reports, and the like). These techniques changed the professional resources of policemen in various ways. In chapter eight, Glasman turns to the bureaucra-

tization of police forces and highlights the conflicts that gradually emerged between civilian police forces and soldiers. Following this transformation, the author, in the last chapter, looks at the transfer of the police forces from the colonial administration to the newly independent state of Togo. Taking the context of the emerging tensions between civilian police forces and the military into account, Glasman offers an original interpretation of the coup that took place in 1963, when Sylvanus Olympio was assassinated by Togolese soldiers. More broadly, in Glasman’s book, the analysis of practices and resources of police forces and the tensions and uncertainties that have punctuated the history of colonial policing in Togo reminds us that the colonial state was not a monolithic and all-powerful administrative apparatus but was above all based on empirical and sometimes contradictory decisions.

One can only regret that Glasman does not examine the important role of violence that was at the core of everyday colonial rule. Petty acts of violence, often unspectacular, occurred as a matter of everyday routine along the many interactions between police forces and the population. Beating, threats, slaps in the face, extortions and all kinds of normalized violent practices organized to varying degrees by police forces would help to highlight the informal nature of colonial practices that Glasman argues towards. Such practices would not count or be seen in a Weberian frame of legitimate and rationalized violence. This is only a small criticism of the book itself, and is also a suggestion for future research. Glasman offers a rich empirical and conceptual basis upon which to build further inquiries.

Glasman’s persuasive and extensive study offers more than an analysis of police forces in Togo. It is an original contribution to the history of the construction of the political in Africa. One can only support and heed to his call in the conclusion for a double trivialization of the history of policemen in the continent (p. 308): trivialization

of police forces as a profession that needs to be studied like other professions, and trivialization of the African continent that should be scrutinized with the same tools as any other continent. For all these reasons, *Genèse coloniale des métiers de police* is an indispensable reading for all scholars interested in colonial policing and the historicity of the state in Africa.

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