

Lessons from African History: between the deep and the shallow ends of social theory and historical empiricism. Interview with Frederick Cooper

In the first week of December 2013, Fred Cooper was in Leiden to participate in the conference 'South Asia and the long 1930s: appropriations and afterlives.'¹ Iva Peša and Alicia Schrikker caught him on the day that he was giving a public lecture on his current work, entitled Beyond Empire: France and French Africa in the Post-World War II Context. The interview took place in the chilly mediaeval dungeons of Leiden, now one of the more fancy conference locations of the university in the historic city centre. Fred Cooper is well known for his work on African history and his studies of colonialism and empire.

Your early work was on Eastern Africa. How did you become interested in the region?

Well, going back to the beginnings... I studied African history because of the Vietnam War, paradoxical as that may sound. This was in the late 1960s when the Vietnam War was a hot topic and a source of mobilisation amongst the students, certainly at Stanford University in California where I was studying. I naïvely thought that Southeast Asia was becoming a total mess because of American imperialism. South America was a mess because of its class system, but Africa seemed open, with a future ahead of it. Young leaders there were taking the initiative on behalf of their nations who had come out from under the yoke of colonialism. By the time I got halfway through my first course on African politics I learned that this was a very naïve perspective, that Africa was constrained like any other part of the world. But by then I was hooked.

So that is how I started out as an undergraduate in the late 1960s, and my interest in Africa has not stopped ever since. The work I am doing now focuses on open political possibilities and the way these get narrowed down over the course of conflicts over the consolidation of power in certain regimes. But there is always the chance that these political possibilities

might open up again. Ever since the late 1960s, I have been interested in exploring these possibilities and constraints at different historical moments in Africa.

So when did you first travel to Africa? Was it while you were an undergraduate student? We read in one of your articles that you spent a year at the University in Nairobi in the late 1970s.

My first trip to Africa was in 1970 after my first year in graduate school, so I was committed to African history before I had seen the place. I went back for dissertation research a couple of years later and back again in the late 1970s. The first time I was mostly on the Kenyan coast doing fieldwork and archival research. The second time I was mostly in Nairobi working in the archives; but I also spent much time at the university.

The 1970s was an interesting time to be there. There was a very lively academic community among historians, and in particular among political scientists. This was just after Jomo Kenyatta had died and people hoped vainly, as it turned out correctly, that there would be an opening in Kenyan politics. When I was there the writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o² was released from detention. I was there when he made his speech to the students and faculty at the university after he came out. There was a sense of an opening occurring. Over the course of the early 1980s, the Moi regime³ cracked down on universities. This resulted in professors being detained and student demonstrations being broken up. Again, constraints outweighed possibilities. But in 1978–79, when I was there, that was an exciting time.

What became known in Africanist circles as the Kenya debate began in that period.⁴ Left-wing political scientists and historians tried to conceptualize the relationship of the Kenyan state to capitalism. Those were intellectually very stimulating times to be in Africa.

But this did not lead to disappointment? You say you kept returning to the themes of openings and constraints.

I think these are continuous tensions. Kenyan politics has been in a difficult situation pretty much ever since the late 1970s. There have been periods of hope, certainly when Moi finally quit the presidency, and during some of the elections. But then the 2007 election was clearly rigged. There was cheating going on and very few people had confidence that the outcome represented the real choice of the Kenyan people. After the last elections, many people were disappointed with the results, given the involvement of the leading candidates with the conflict and, as a result, violence ensued. On the other hand, people still try, and there are Kenyans who have been

trying to open up politics. There have been people of strong will and good conscience, genuine democrats. So that is why one cannot give up.

Since the 1980s, I have been doing my research in Senegal. Senegal has had two elections in which the incumbent lost and accepted his defeat, in 2000 and 2012. So politics and citizenship in Africa has not disappeared. What these governments have yet to demonstrate is what they can do with the mandate that they have gotten from the electoral process. That is what remains to be seen. But real citizenship mobilizations in African countries have never really stopped. There have been periods during which they have been eclipsed, but they have never disappeared from the scene entirely.

You mention Senegal; this has become a second regional specialisation of yours. When and why did you become interested in Senegal?

It came out of a sequence of historical projects. My earlier research was on slavery, slave emancipation and agriculture in coastal Kenya and Zanzibar. I wrote a couple of books coming out of that research.⁵ Then the research I was doing in the late 1970s was on dockworkers in Mombasa, and after finishing that project, or really before I had finished writing that book,⁶ I came to the realization that even doing a micro history—there were only about 4,000 dock workers in Mombasa; it is a history of a small number of people—what shaped that history could not be limited to Mombasa. One important side of that history was the imperial actors, and for the people in London Mombasa was a very small part of a very big empire, and this influenced their perspective on how the colonial government should act and how to change its policy.

That book was really about a considerable change in labour policy. But the overall perspective of one set of actors was very much at the level of empire, whereas another set of actors, people in Mombasa, had a very different framework in which they were thinking—not necessarily confined to the local area, but quite a different one.

By the mid-1980s or even the early 1980s, when the book was still in gestation, I was thinking that the pendulum in African history had swung so far away from looking at anything colonial. It was so much focused on doing a history that was indigenous that one was actually not able to understand fundamental elements of how the history was actually unfolding and that one had to do both [indigenous and colonial history]. And having been very much part of a movement towards a very African approach to African history, I increasingly came to see that this had to be complemented by studying the shifting nature of colonialism in more

complexity and not to see it just as a background, a force against which people were pushing, but as something that is itself historically shaped and changing.

And that is how I started thinking about African responses to colonialism and colonial responses to African mobilization. When I tried to figure out how to go further in that kind of a project I did not want to get stuck in assuming that the British colonial thinking could stand in for colonial thinking in general. I did not have the linguistic capacity to do everything, but I did have a good knowledge of French, and France and Britain were the two biggest colonial powers in Africa, so the next phase of what I wanted to do was to do a comparative study.

I wanted to study labour and development together and I pretty much did that. In the end the focus became more on the labour side, so I ended up writing a comparative study of labour and decolonization in French and British Africa, which was published in 1996.⁷ I had done a lot of research in British Africa—in Kenya—and sources in Great Britain, so what I had to do was to bring my work on French Africa to a comparable level and so I spent a lot of time doing research in France and Senegal. And since then, that has been the axis of my research. I have continued to work on this and what I have done recently is specifically on French Africa.

Can you enlighten us more about the art of doing comparative history? Did you find it problematic to work with such different sets of written sources, oral traditions, and memories? How did you approach your material? For instance, we imagine that your ideas and questions had been shaped already by what you had read in the British archives or in Kenya.

At the most abstract level of methodology the problem is quite simple. It is similar for historians all over the world. It comes down to a critical analysis of your sources. Both oral and written sources have to be read in the context in which they were produced, read in a way that is sensitive not only to what one's line is at the time, but to what arguments were in their own time, to see the framework in which people were operating. The big danger is always to follow one thread as if it were the only possible course of history and not to deal with alternatives that people tried to pursue. So at that level of abstraction the methodology is similar, whether you do British or French or Asian history.

But there are a lot of specifics; there is a lot of detail. You have to find out how archives are organized, and that varies not only by colonizing party, but it varies according to individual archives. And in some archives

it is very hard to get to what you want. Archives are not necessarily obvious in the way you have to get through to the material you need. And so I had to learn again. But I got a lot of help; lots of people were there before me and people were generous in providing advice, and I got quite early several Senegalese historians who tutored me in the nature of historical scholarship in Senegal, particularly Mamadou Diouf,⁸ Mohammed Mbodj,⁹ and Babacar Fall,¹⁰ all of whom I saw a great deal of when I was in Dakar for the first time in 1986. And I have been in touch with them ever since.

Do you think that there are certain topics that lend themselves better to parallels, perhaps across space or time, than others?

Of course, it is important to realize that not all topics lend themselves to parallels. But I think that it is important to have a certain empirical openness to it. If you suspect connections, do they exist? Are people talking to each other; are they reading each other's work? Which places are connected to which?

You do not want to start with assumptions that some topics produce parallels and others do not, because then you can find parallels only where you are looking for them. These types of questions certainly come up when you are studying political movements that take place at the same time in different parts of the globe: are they connected or are they not? I think that one needs to be open to look for connections, but not presume them. At the same time, one should not presume that particular politics are self-contained, because they might turn out not to be.

You have been successful in linking these specific empirical case studies to a broader theoretical framework. What you have been telling us just now, about issues of capitalism, citizenship, seeing these through the micro case of perhaps the 4,000 workers in Mombasa, how do you link the specific to the more general?

Well, I think there is an interplay between issues of theory and issues of historical practice, and I have always been interested in social theory. I started doing bits and pieces of it as an undergraduate, and one of the virtues of the American undergraduate education system is that you do not just do one subject. So as a history major I did a fair bit of political science and anthropology. I continued to do some of that in graduate school as well. I then started to read more and more, in particular Marx.

So as an undergraduate, I was not just taking African history, but I was also taking European and US history. I was particularly influenced

by a course I took on the history of the American South. This was in the late 1960s, when scholarship on slavery in the US got really interesting. People like Eugene Genovese,¹¹ whose early work was published at the time, and Professor David Potter had us read this kind of work and read C. Vann Woodward's brilliant book about reconstruction after the war—about slave emancipation and what happened after that.¹² So eventually, after a couple of years in graduate school, I started my Ph.D. dissertation about slavery. I already knew some of the literature on slavery in other parts of the world and at that time the slavery topic—the study of slavery in Africa—barely existed. A whole bunch of work came out in the 1970s, but when I started there was very little.

So, I was very much influenced by the study of a topic, slavery, in a completely different context, that of the cotton-growing South and the sugar-growing Caribbean islands. So right from the start, my thesis was comparative, and that was really the result of the kind of education I had, and particularly that the system in which I was educated encouraged us to study more than one thing. What I did was to keep pursuing that in one way or another, and I spent a lot of years working in the slavery field and keeping in touch with the literature in different parts of the world, and with more theoretical material that kept coming out and which eventually I was contributing to.

Once I got on to a different topic, I repeated, in a way, what I had done as a younger student, and I tried to read about that topic in other parts of the world. When I did that project on dockworkers in Mombasa, I read everything I could at the time on dockworkers in other parts of the world, which was actually not very much. It has since been quite a lot. In fact, a number of years ago I went to a conference at the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam about the comparative history of dockworkers, which has since produced two quite fat volumes.¹³

But that also got me into theoretical work—or this was even earlier, when I was doing work on post-emancipation and agriculture in Zanzibar and coastal Kenya. That is when I got very interested in the Marxist analysis of agricultural transformation, partly because there was a lot of implicit Marxism in the British colonial office of people who understood something about what it took to make a wage labour economy and they could not get their way. They could not do what they wanted to do, and that poses the questions in a very interesting way—in the way that we cannot write the history of capitalism by studying England or Germany or even more recently Japan, where we see the transformation going forward quite radically.

We have to see what happens when people try to push the economy in a capitalist direction but it does not get there. We have to have the negative side or otherwise the positive side does not mean a whole lot. So the theoretical approach seems to me important as a two-way street both in getting insight into a certain body of empirical material I was generating through research in archives and interviews, but also in using empirical research to interrogate the theory and see how one can think in richer terms theoretically. So that was the work I was doing from my second book, which was on post-emancipation agriculture in East Africa, through to the dockworkers book, and the comparative study of labour in French and British Africa. All were very much inflected by theoretical work on the nature of capitalism.¹⁴

How does your work with Ann Stoler fit in this picture?

That project in turn developed into a more specific engagement with colonialism. I was not trying to reduce colonialism to a narrative about capitalism, because I do not think that reduction works. But I was trying to think of colonial societies as an object of analysis in and of themselves. Both Marxist and other approaches and recent theoretical models coming out of South Asian scholarship are all relevant to such a view. It was at that time that I met Ann Stoler, an anthropologist whose first work was on Sumatra and who worked on agriculture as well.¹⁵ And we realized that we had written very similarly-framed books, with mine on East African agriculture and Ann's on plantations in Sumatra, and both of us had moved in the same direction.

The puzzle we were left with was the colonial side of the picture. So that is when we started to compare notes, to develop a project and to have these conferences about history and anthropology. It took years to organize and it took years to digest. Eventually we first published some of the papers in the *American Ethnologist*,¹⁶ and then we decided to put together a rather different collection of essays, and that became *Tensions of Empire*.¹⁷ But what we were doing later was trying to develop a research agenda and ways of posing problems about the history and anthropology of colonialism.

We were doing this while I was simultaneously working on the book on the comparative study of labour and decolonization, which became *Decolonization and African Society*. So, I was doing this project with Ann Stoler, which was very much oriented towards theory and conceptual issues, and I was doing my empirical work at the same time. And this was producing two very different kinds of writing, different kinds of books.

Doing these two at the same time was mutually informative; it fed both ways, and certainly the fact that both Ann and I have a commitment to doing empirical work kept us from going off the theoretical deep end. We wanted to deal with concepts that were useful and not to write about abstractions in relationship to other abstractions. On the other hand, you can go off an empirical shallow end and pretend that facts speak for themselves, which they of course do not. So, the interplay of the two I found very fruitful.

This reminds us of your introduction to your Colonialism in Question, where you discuss the problem of concepts starting to live a life of their own. When we were preparing this interview, we were thinking, where should we place Fred Cooper, if we were to label him? Of course, we know that this is something that you are very much against, but still... How should we label you? Where do you fit in?

I think you are right, as regards labelling. There is no purpose to be served by labelling me. I am certainly influenced by Marxist theory, but it is a particular thread of Marx, very different from what other people who consider themselves Marxists would do. And I was very much influenced by a lot of people besides Marx. But I haven't given up on the relevance of the Marxist analysis and capitalism. I think it is still highly useful as a start of investigation.

I think one of the important lessons that you see when doing the history of different parts of the world is that people push back. And that invoking capitalism doesn't mean you've got it. There may be some mechanisms that operate with some human understanding, but go beyond it—beyond an understanding of what is going on. But identifying their importance is not the same as seeing them as the truth. And going in that direction leaves room for empirical analysis, but that kind of thought does not leave you with empiricism that is empty of other kinds of considerations.

So one of the difficult questions is, then, the scale on which you analyse phenomena. On the one hand you have very good reasons to follow what European historians have called *microhistoire*, but on the other hand you have people who talk about global history, whereas most history occurs somewhere in between the two. The microhistorians are more likely to recognize that, but a lot of the talk about global history actually misses that point, that connection. The more interesting and more difficult task is to find ways to deal with historical processes that are big but finite, to see how the actions operate in different parts of the world. That is a study

of the limitations of the exercise of power, as much as it is a study of the extent of the deployment of that power.

Does this mean that you would rather not call yourself a global historian? Would you rather opt for historian of Africa?

I think in one sense we are all global historians; but then to say that we are all global historians doesn't mean very much. The term is used in two senses. One is that the framework of history is global, and that that is the only framework and everything is on a global level. And that is basically not true. The other one is true, which is that most histories connect two or more places. And it is in that sense that everybody is a global historian. But you can also say that everybody is a historian. So I would not identify myself as a global historian, but I am certainly interested in being a historian of connections, connections across space among others. And I am interested in both the limits and the extent of these connections.

As far as being an African historian, I remain true to that endeavor. I am perfectly well aware that Africa, America, Europe and Asia are all problematic constructs, but they are constructs that people live with and that are important for people's lives. I think one can be aware of the constructed and problematic nature of these concepts, whilst still sharing the use of them. The area concept, whether it is African, South Asian, East Asian or whatever, remains very useful. It is important to know something about some place. The way I think about the history of other parts of the world outside Africa is very much shaped by my being a historian of Africa.

I have worked with Jane Burbank, who is a historian of Russia who thinks about empire in a quite different way than I do, coming from a different place, and I think that makes collaboration particularly interesting.¹⁸ An important thing for people at the earlier stages of their career to consider is that it really helps to start with your feet on the ground. It is very hard to do research that covers long distances. Certain research has to, but you can actually use micro-historical methods to study macro-historical processes. But what is important is to know something about some place. That place may be in motion and there may be problems in doing research that traces the motion, because the researcher has to move too. But the best argument for area studies is the one that goes back to its early days, namely that one has to know something about some place.

For you, the level of empire has proven a fruitful unit of study, more than the nation state or globalization or the microstudy?

Yes, empire works better for me than any of the ones which you just named, but still it poses a limited set of questions. One should not pretend that it is a new framework that is going to replace other frameworks. I came to the study of empire with a couple of new perspectives in mind. One of them quite directly was that I found the analysis of colonialism, colonial studies, very interesting, but it had reached its limits. The colonial unit of study, which posits a strong dichotomy between metropole and colony, has limitations within itself (and this is one of the themes of *Empires in World History*). But it has further limitations in that the spectrum of imperial power itself is much wider than the colonial form.

The construction of colonial empires at the end of the nineteenth century existed in parallel with other forms of empire, such as the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc. All of these were coexisting in the nineteenth century and some of them had very long histories. The Ottoman Empire goes back to the fourteenth century, etc. And one doesn't want to narrow the spectrum from the start. And a great deal of very interesting work that has been done is limited in focus on the Western European empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Now I think in the last ten years this has changed. There has been a great deal of scholarly interest in different empires. Jane Burbank draws on a lot of this scholarship. One of the very specific moves we made was to emphasize that broader category of empire, broader than the Western European colonial empire, and emphasizing the fact that they coexist. There is an interplay between them; it is not that one is a successor of the other. And there are new forms of empire too, the Nazi, Soviet, and the Japanese, these are all different forms of imperial power. So all of these need to be analysed in relationship to each other.

That said, one has to talk about limitations. Now some argument about the nature of limitations is internal to the discussion on empires. Empires are big but they are finite. They exist in relation to the places that empires try to incorporate, but these push back; and they exist in relationship to other empires, which prevents infinite expansion. And they have all sorts of complications in how you run an enterprise that is big but spread out and has all kinds of counterforces and people who resist in very different ways. So, the logic of empire is about expansion and it is about power, it is about long-distance reach. But it is also about the limitations to all of those.

Then the topic is limited in another sense, in that empire should not be seen as determinate of all long-distance relations. A trading relationship may develop in the context of empire, but it cannot be reduced to the study of empire. Ideas may have imperial circuits, through acculturation or through the movement of people in an imperial context, but ideas also cross imperial lines and some of them may long outlive the empire. Just to take one example, early Islam is very much an imperial project, the caliphates were very much an imperial structure, but you cannot talk of the history of Islam as the history of empire. It transcends that, although it is very much connected to it. Even within the context of the caliphates and the Ottoman Empire, one cannot reduce the history of Islam to the history of empire. Each has to be studied in its own way.

And I think you can say that, too, about a lot of networks. There is a real tension in the way in which you write history between how you write the history of world economic relations and the history of empire. You cannot reduce one to the other, and that goes in both directions. You don't want to subordinate the history of empires to the history of global economy. That doesn't work, and it certainly doesn't work in the opposite direction.

If you are going to have a comprehensive history of processes that connect the world, you have to do this along different lines. One line might tell you a lot, but it is not going to tell you everything that you need to know. I think the empire perspective has told us a lot, but I don't think that one should be under the illusion that this is the law of all historical practice.

Going back to African history and global parallels and connections—you told us at the beginning that you were inspired by historiography of the American South to study slavery in Eastern Africa. What does African history have to offer for historical practice elsewhere?

Well, you cannot understand capitalism if you don't understand capitalism in relation to Africa. That is true in relation to all the obstacles that people encounter in relation to capitalist action in Africa, and it is also true in relation to the rise of the slave trade in relation to the rise of the Atlantic economy. So you can't study that without studying Africa. There are a number of other ways in which it comes into different kinds of history. Can you understand the twentieth-century world without understanding the different kinds of politics in colonial situations, of which Africa is an important example, but so, too, are India and Indonesia?

One can come back to an argument which was very important to Leopold Senghor, both in his earlier writings about negritude and in his political writings from the 1950s. If you want to consider the way the world is, you have to consider multiple civilizations, and none of these civilizations exists in isolation.¹⁹ Now, the word civilization is in some ways problematic. But what is not problematic is that history is not the history of isolated populations; it's an interactive history throughout, and all parts of the world are important in that. Nothing is determined by the course of a particular history. In that sense there is no European history, there is no African history; there are Euro-African histories and there are Afro-Asian histories. And if you are going to take that perspective seriously, then one has to study all parts of the world. We can't do original research in all parts of the world, but one has to be sensitive to the fact that history is interactive in all parts of the world. There is no pristine history; one should not see history as something that one possesses. And certainly, the study of Africa helps remind people of that.

I like your idea that studying capitalism in places that are not considered as being at the centre of capitalism can teach us more about capitalism itself than studying investors in Manhattan. Joan Robinson said that 'the only thing worse than being exploited by capitalism is not being exploited at all.' Well, that tells you a lot about African history.

What stands out from what you have been telling us so far is that you are very good at choosing unfashionable topics, such as colonialism in the 1980s. But another thing that strikes from your Colonialism in Question is that you dislike research that is led by historical 'schools'—for example, people who say that 'we are now all "cultural turn" and we are turning that way.'

I don't like choosing what I am going to do based on the fact of going against the grain—or following it for that matter. I certainly have been influenced by trends in historical scholarship. I started out very much influenced by scholarship on slavery. Particularly people like Eugene Genovese,²⁰ David Brion Davis,²¹ Emilia Viotti da Costa²²—people who were very much at the centre of a historical trend when I started out. So being influenced by what other people are doing is perfectly fine, the question is what one does next—whether you want to jump on a bandwagon because it's a bandwagon, or to see where it takes you and to jump off when the time has come to jump off it.

And that's why I don't like the concept of 'cultural turn,' or even 'imperial turn,' although in a way one could easily classify my work as

‘imperial turn,’ because I work on empire. And I think Ann Stoler and I started to write about colonialism a little before other people started to do it, but other people were doing it for reasons that had absolutely nothing to do with Ann and me. They were doing it because it was interesting.

But the idea that everybody should be moving in one direction I find rather frightening.²³ And people complain that the only topics students want to do with regard to French history or British history have to do with empire. There are a lot of interesting topics with regards to French and British history, and if one wants to interrogate what ‘French’ and ‘British’ actually mean, that is quite useful. But one can do that in all sorts of ways.

It is certainly not a good idea for everybody to do everything simultaneously. Because, for example, the notion of a ‘cultural turn’ was a reaction to people going into excess in seeing social and economic history as the type of history everybody should be doing. And then some people said, let’s go beyond the cultural turn. In some ways people were saying, well let’s go back to do the kinds of things that used to be done to excess, but let’s do them again.

Well, let’s do good history, and whether that is cultural, social, economic, or intellectual, those are not particularly interesting categories. There are no reasons to keep turning from one to the other. The only reason why one turns in one direction is because one previously turned in another direction, I think. And this is particularly striking to a scholar of Africa, where our colleagues have worked under considerable constraint both material and political.

Here we are in Western Europe or the United States, where we have an incredible amount of freedom to say what we want to say and do the kinds of research we want to do. We should take advantage of that, and we shouldn’t impose conformity on ourselves as academics. Yet I think that there is a very strong tendency in academia towards conformity, despite the fact that we are not constrained to conform.

So far we have spoken about your research and writing, but part of your work also involves teaching, in New York and presumably in Africa?

I’ve done some short teaching in Africa. I have given talks and lectures in Africa, but I have never taught a course. The kind of job I have had was typical of American professors; it involved both researching and teaching, and it did not involve a sharp separation between the two. It is, in a way, a very privileged position, in that it is very fruitful. Being a teacher forces you to think about how you can explain something to people who don’t know anything about the topic. As a researcher you might write things for

the ten people who are closest to what you do in terms of research; as a teacher you can't do that.

The book that Jane Burbank and I did on empires came out of teaching. The course was not a consequence of the book project; the book was a consequence of the course. It is a two-way street and I think that is a fruitful connection. In fact, I like ideas to come from the students. I do not like to lean on students to do particular kinds of projects. When teaching I like to react to what they propose. The structures that exist in some countries of separating the research track from the teaching track is not a very good idea in my opinion.

In relation to African academia, you were mentioning that the 1970s was an exciting period and you have been going back since, giving talks, etc. Do you think that digitization and globalization of scholarship impacts African academia in a positive way?

The heyday in the field of African history was certainly in the 1960s and 1970s. There are real strong efforts to bring this back. The organization CODESRIA [Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa] has been trying since the 1980s to do that. It is a difficult struggle, because of funding reasons and also politics. South African universities have become strong and have attracted faculty members from other African countries, but it's an on-going struggle.

Digitization has potential. After all, it is very hard to duplicate a library, while it is not so hard to set up a computer with access to digital resources from elsewhere. It requires the right equipment, but also involves intellectual property rights. The technical side is feasible; the big obstacle is the copyright. Also the owners of the rights of dissemination of publications insist that they get their cut and that others do not get them. It is a real problem that most African libraries have few means. It is for this reason that I support Open Access.

What are your plans for the future?

Well I have had two books coming out in 2014. One is this one I have been working on for twelve or thirteen years on citizenship in France and French Africa from 1945 to 1960, and then another one that is a series of lectures that are basically a reflection on Africa and the world. That is the title of the book and also the title of the lectures that I gave at Harvard a few years ago.²⁴ After that, the next big project I think I will do is a book about the end of empires, with a question mark.

Notes

- 1 For a report on this conference see C. Stolte and S. Sunderason in *IIAS Newsletter*, spring 2014: <http://www.iias.nl/the-newsletter/article/south-asia-and-long-1930s-appropriations-and-afterlives>.
- 2 His most famous novels are *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977). He fell into disgrace with the Kenyatta regime after writing the critical play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (1977). He was detained without trial and his books were forbidden. After his release he taught at various universities in the US.
- 3 Daniel Arap Moi ruled as president between 1978 and 2002. For a history of post-independence Kenya, see Daniel Branch, *Kenya between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
- 4 G. Kitching, 'Politics, Method and Evidence in the Kenya Debate,' in H. Bernstein and B. Campbell (eds.), *Contradictions of Accumulation in Africa: Studies in Economy and State* (Berkeley: Sage, 1985).
- 5 Frederick Cooper, *F–1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
- 6 Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
- 7 Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Also in French translation.
- 8 Mamadou Diouf is now Leitner Professor of African Studies at Columbia University.
- 9 Mohammed Mbodj formerly taught at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar and is now at Manhattanville College in New York.
- 10 Babacar Fall teaches at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, part of the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar.
- 11 Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and the Society of the Slave South* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1965).
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 - 16 See *American Ethnologist* 16:4 (1989). Contributors were, apart from Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, Partha Chatterjee, John L. Comaroff, Randall M. Packard, Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Scot Atran.
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