

On Imperial Spectacle: The Dialectics of Seeing in Colonial Nigeria

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Critical studies of visual culture have established profound connections between capitalism, state power and the “scopic regimes of modernity” (Jay 1988). As the dominant philosophical leitmotif of the European enlightenment, visibility characterized the domain of reason and truth, modeling both the clear and distinct ideas of Continental rationalism and the sense-based epistemology of British empiricism. Compelling in its “given” transparency, the rhetoric of vision continually conceals the historical conditions of its production. Indeed, as Marx first stated in the 1844 manuscripts, the history of seeing belongs to that political economy of the senses so deeply embedded in historical materialism (Marx 1978:89). Critical models of visibility and spectacle, however, remain largely overdetermined, either as bourgeois forms of consumption and display (Debord 1977; Richards 1990), strategic stagecraft serving political ends (Edelman 1988; Falasca-Zamponi 1997; Scott 1998), or as hegemonic forms of objectification incorporating citizens and subjects into the discursive armature of modern states and empires (Crary 1990; Diehl 1986; Foucault 1995; Morris 1982; Mitchell 1988; Coombes 1994:63–108).¹

This essay develops a more dynamic approach to framing the visual in imperial spectacles, following Poole’s innovative emphasis on “the diversity of visual subjectivities at work in any given ‘image world’” (Poole 1997:20). Focusing on conventions of both seeing and being-seen in colonial Nigeria, in a variety of staged contexts ranging from photography and entertainment to sports, durbars, coronations and Empire Day ceremonies, I identify a stratified field of spectatorship that mediated colonial relations on the ground and extended throughout the British Empire. Attending to various points of articula-

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tion and contestation within this field, I characterize its features and dimensions in order to track the movement of visual conventions across the status groups and racial boundaries that were distinguished and refashioned by indirect rule. What this mimetic movement reveals is how elite forms of imperial spectatorship brought "native" and "European" ceremonies and traditions into dynamic relations of recognition and implication, framing critical moments and changes in colonial policy and perspective "through the looking glass" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:170–97) of the colonial encounter.

My approach follows Benjamin's dialectics of seeing, a "materialist pedagogy" (Buck-Morss 1993:287–330) that deploys the flotsam and jetsam of industrial culture *against* its master narratives of progress and modernity. Like Taussig (1993), I extend this method to the colonies, which developed in reciprocal co-determination with their imperial centers. I begin with the very material of colonial memory: the memoirs, diaries, and photo albums of colonial officers and their wives. This material speaks to different moments and levels of visual objectification within the political ontology of imperial spectacle. It provides a critical inventory of "techniques of the observer" (Crary 1990) in the production of empire on stage and behind the scenes.

PHOTOGRAPHING THE FETISH

... the photograph allows the photographer to conceal elusively the preparation to which he subjects the scene to be recorded (Barthes 1977:21).

In 1898, the young Alex Braham of Birmingham joined the executive staff of the Royal Niger Company and set out for the interior reaches of its coastal protectorate as district agent of Anambra Province. During these early days of British colonization, the hinterland areas of the Niger delta represented West Africa's heart of darkness. Largely unexplored, they promised untapped riches though direct access to inland ivory and palm-oil markets. Serving British industry and science, the intrepid Mr. Braham opened up the area to commerce and reason. His "Pictorial Episode in the Life of Alex J. Braham, 1898–1902" documents his triumphs and tribulations at the most remote of colonial outposts, where the civilizing mission met unmediated heathenism.² Or so it appeared. In a series on "Ibo fetische [sic] dances," Braham penetrated the heart of darkness with a camera, combining trickery and technology to capture native traditions, including the forbidden image of the "Leopard God." As his annotations explain:

The dance illustrated in these two photographs is one of the least important in the series. Even women are permitted to view this 'God' and applaud his performances. On the other hand the 'Leopard God' on the next page is far more feared and venerated. No woman is permitted to look thereon. Before this 'Ju Ju' leaves his 'robing room' a bell is rung through the village, whereupon every woman goes into retirement of her own hut and does not leave it whilst there is the vestige of a chance that she should encounter the Ju-Ju...

If Braham's initial commentary establishes an indigenous visual frame along gendered lines, noting special restrictions on the female gaze, he himself violated this frame through ethnographic espionage. Explaining his strategy and tactics: "These photographs were obtainable only by trickery. Accommodated with a tent, I previously pegged the ground whereupon the dance was to take place. I focussed [sic] the lens of the camera through a concealed slit in the tent, and worked with two foot of tubing the bulb being in my hand. My boy (a missionized individual) was trained to change the slides every time he heard the camera click."

Followed with the precision of a military operation—of "reconnaissance" in both senses of the term—Braham violated a visual prohibition, if not against seeing as such, certainly against photographic "capture." We don't know the specific reasons of this prohibition. Typical accounts would mention fear of the camera stealing the spirit's power or person's soul. Given the Royal Niger Company's policy of "destroying the idols" by burning sacred groves and juju houses to eliminate cannibalism and promote "free" trade (Mockler-Ferryman 1892:29), local fears may have been more directly associated with anticipated punitive repercussions. Or the measure could have been taken to keep the restricted field of spectatorship intact. After all, a photograph of forbidden images could fall into the wrong gaze, angering the spirits and polluting the community. What we lack in specific content, however, is subsumed by the violation of a visual prohibition in a work of colonial documentation.

Braham's photographic subterfuge represents the optical violence of colonial appropriation as a form of visual abstraction. His pictures tell a familiar story of how superstition yields to reason, heathenism to Christianity (note the mission-educated "boy"), and the African to the Englishman as darkness gives way to light (see Ryan 1997:30; Brantlinger 1986:166). In a secondary elaboration of gendered di-vision, the photographs of dances both open and closed to women were themselves captioned in gendered terms, establishing an implicit contrast between serious male tradition and frivolous female custom in Braham's album. When Braham carried these images home, incorporating them into a heroic narrative of imperial progress, he captioned them accordingly as "A harmless Holiday Making Dance, Igarra Women" and "dreaded Leopard fetish" (Figures 1 and 2). In this fashion, photographic capture and captioning transformed the gendered field of spectatorship into gendered objects of imperial vision and knowledge.

Through the slit of his tent, Braham's surreptitious line of vision characterizes the unseen conventions of photographing fetishes, presenting images of "native custom" as autonomous objects of knowledge.³ Like the commodity fetish, which conceals its productive relations and inverts the material relationship between objects and their values, photographs of native custom in the early days of colonization in Nigeria effected a double displacement, hiding the violence of the "shot" within visual rhetorics of timeless tradition while con-

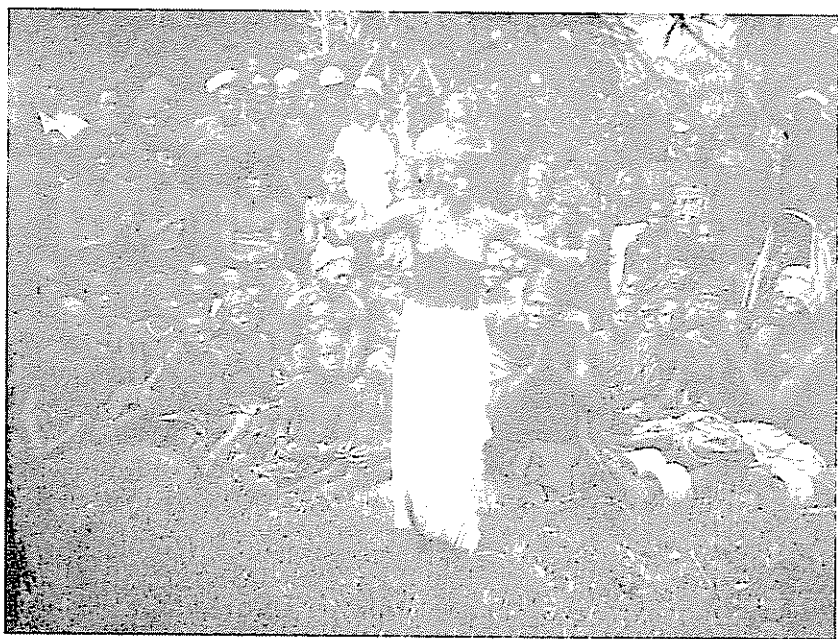


FIGURE 1. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 2288/1 P. 21 Lower Right.

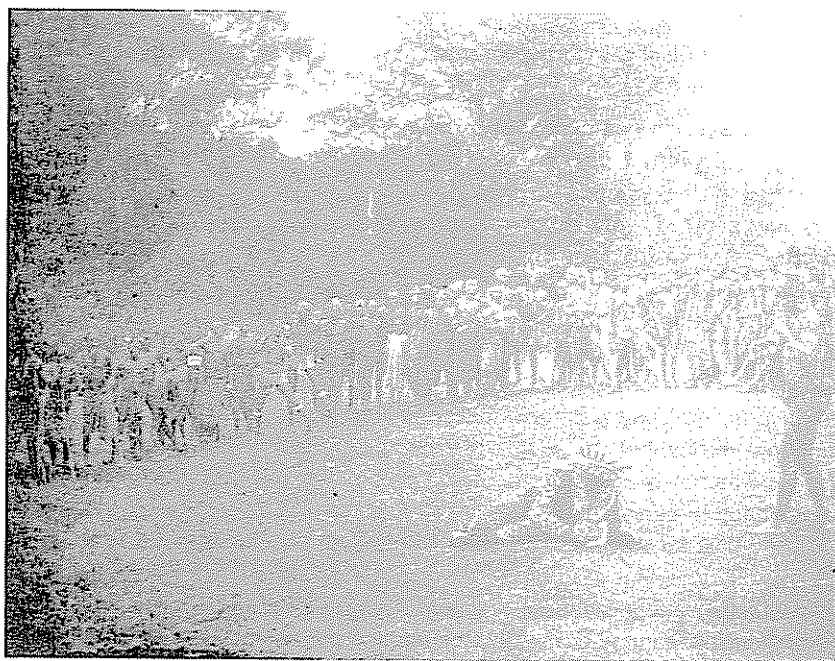


FIGURE 2. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 2288/1 P. 21 Upper Left.

ferring upon culture itself the objective value of documentation. Establishing the ground of colonial conversion and cultivation, native custom was idealized into pristine principles that in many areas along the southern coast were to be restored from European contamination and adulteration.⁴ Indeed, the hinterland region was seen as the heartland of native custom, providing models of cultural rehabilitation through indirect rule.

I will return to the logic of native administration in due course. Here we can appreciate how Braham's visual vignette typified an early genre of objectification and appropriation. It appears repeatedly in colonial letters, scrapbooks, and memoirs. Thus a similar violence of photographic selection and abstraction is found in the light-hearted reportage of Violet Cragg, the wife of a district officer stationed in the north during the heyday of indirect rule. Resorting less to trickery than to forthright command, Cragg photographed a forbidden scene from a boy's initiation ceremony in Benue Province. Located within the picturesque landscape of an imperial vista (Pratt 1992), the scene is literally expropriated from its restricted cultural context:

After tea we went for a long walk with Willie and got a marvelous view all down the valley which looked very fine, with bush fires burning in the fading light. Willie sent for some boys who are now doing their period of initiation in the dense forest (Kurumi) so that I could photograph them. They are not allowed by this custom to show their faces in public and came along the road in a crouching position with their hands covering their faces. They were spotlessly clean and dressed in ropes and ropes of beads and cowries and skins round their waists and carried sticks . . . round their necks. They wore bells at the back. Their Chief gave them permission to stand up to be photographed, so I hope this unique picture will come out, there were 12 or 14 of them.⁵

The picture did in fact come out (Figure 3), and what is so striking about its very typicality is that the coercive context is nowhere to be seen. Violet Cragg's passage describes not just the violation of public taboo, and the self-effacing measures adopted by the neophytes to remain secluded along the road, but also the almost whimsical fancy of her privileged desire. We don't know whether the Chief's cooperation was simply ordered or financially sweetened, but such specifics aside, the photograph *per se* conceals the direct violation of a local visual field. Taken out of ritual seclusion and subjected to the public gaze, the neophytes posed for a portrait of tradition within an emerging field of cultural production. Violet's roving and indeed perceptive eye recorded vignettes and traditions throughout Benue Province and beyond. Her wide travels by "bush taxi" and monowheel bear further testimony to the political relations of cultural reportage (Figures 4 and 5).⁶

I have thus far discussed the colonial photograph as a fetish of visual productive relations, but what of the recorded events themselves? Here the logic of commodification establishes exchange relations between political and economic forms of capital. Diana Bridges, another colonial wife, described the political economy of cultural production while on tour in the bush. Her account

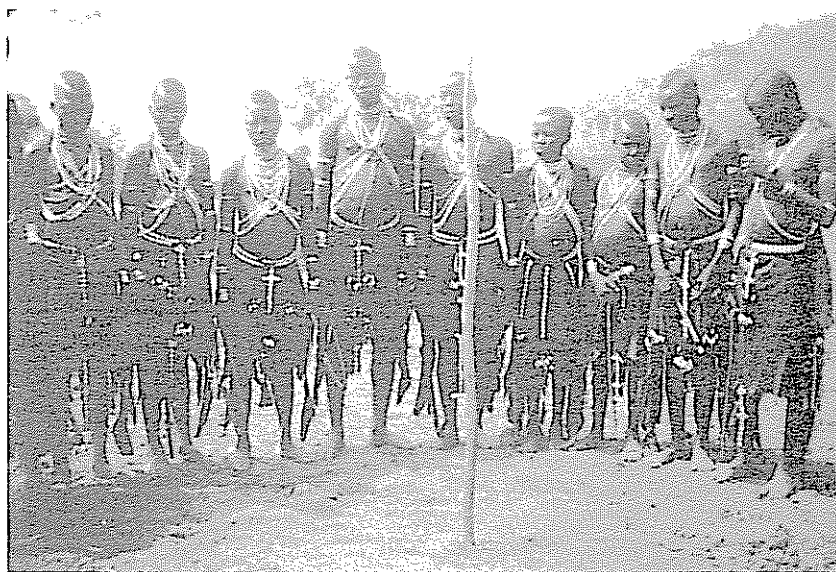


FIGURE 3. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 1588/1 P. 238 Lower Right.



FIGURE 4. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 1588/1 F. 110-112 no. 110.

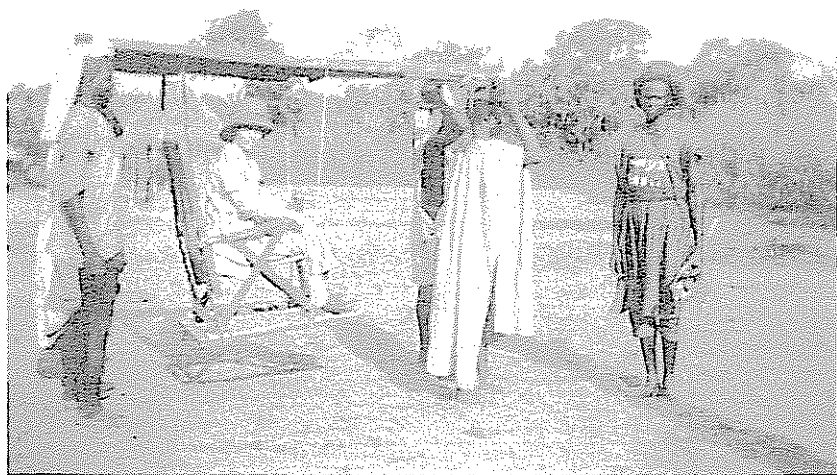


FIGURE 5. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 1588/I F. 159-176 no. 169.

shows how traditional dances were produced as "entertainment" for traveling officers, generating objectified forms of cultural value:

It was taken as a friendly gesture if we asked for dancers to entertain us. With exceptions, the dances were not co-ordinated, if a man got tired he dropped out for a while. tremendous strength was needed for set dances such as the Guinea Fowl dance. Some of the professional dancers were well known and in great demand, wearing grass skirts, anklets of shells, headdresses and, for some specific dances, masks. The drummers worked themselves up to a frenzy while others used rattles and calabashes filled with cowrie shells, sometimes a clay pot held under the arm having a hole on one side of the neck over which the performer struck his hand, the other hand being passed over a second hole at the side, thus changing the tone. Women were forbidden to watch certain of the men's dances, their own were dull affairs consisting of shuffling round in a circle or line, but once we saw a unique performance by a troupe of young girls on stilts. While they danced their muscles were quivering throughout their bodies, in certain areas men danced on stilts but we had never before, or after, seen such a clever performance by girls. We were not told the meaning of this dance . . . ⁷

The "friendly gesture" associated with the request belies the loaded political playing field on which such events took place, mediating many frictions and tensions. The passage reveals variable degrees of choreographic flexibility as dancers dropped in and out; the existence of set pieces, like the Guinea Fowl dance, which served to formalize the domain of culture; and the prior existence of professional dancers with a market for their skills. It is thus important to note that certain elements of cultural production and commodification were already in place when the colonials arrived. Ritual specialists and dancers were re-

warded for their skills in local political and cultural contexts, with associated visual conventions and restrictions governing their performances. Like Braham, Diana Bridges describes a gendered field of spectatorship excluding women from viewing certain male dances, a prohibition which may have extended to colonial wives, depending on how race articulated with sex. And also like Braham—with the exception of a girls' stilt dance—Bridges contrasts vibrant male dancing to the "dull affairs" of women. But the key transformation of African culture under European eyes occurred through formalized closure. Bridges recalls: "Once the dancers were thoroughly obsessed by the dance it was difficult to stop them, fortunately it was not thought rude for the Assistant District Officer (A.D.O.) to end the performance by getting up and giving them a present of money, then they would go away and continue in their own village." Thus we see not the colonial production of culture *tout court*, but in a general form, invested with commodity value as an object of cultural entertainment and exchange. The payment of money—misrecognized as a gift—closed the performance and sent it into the village, where it continued unseen by Europeans. Clearly relations of mutual recognition and endorsement formed the complex subtexts of these entertaining "plays," with the threat of violence never far away. The "present of money" by the A.D.O. represents an investment in political capital, with appearances kept up on both sides. But the epistemological effect of this political investment was a new form of cultural objectification, a severing of the object from its relations of production *with a price*, endowed with autonomous value.

LOOKING BACK

The need to appropriate a gaze, a look that has objectified different groups in different ways, and the need to claim a place, a location from which to deploy that gaze, are the real issues at stake (Rogoff 1996:191).

Thus far I have discussed the visual penetration and objectification of Africans by Europeans, illustrating how the transparent recording or staging of custom concealed both the relations of its production and the violence of its abstraction from local visual frames and political fields. The process gave rise to an autonomous field of culture, an object of anthropological knowledge and value serving as the natural ground of the colonial project. In the developing ideology of indirect rule—largely imported from colonial India—the "native races" of Nigeria were hierarchically arranged according to their different inherent capacities. The northern Fulanis, seen as mixed-blood Hamites, were the most advanced, their elite literate in Arabic and skilled in statecraft unlike the "primitive hill pagans" whom they dominated. The western Yoruba areas were ranked next, with centralized kingship and vibrant markets, followed by the eastern Ibo and associated acephalous peoples who, lacking centralized authority and clear principles of clanship, occupied the bottom rung of the regional hierarchy. In this naturalized image of indirect rule, colonial subjects doubled as objects of imperial vision and knowledge. Surveyed, mapped, counted, inspected, and

above all incorporated into the administrative machinery of indirect rule, native races could be cultivated to realize their full potentials. With a little sorting out by the British, local culture would flourish, benefiting both British industry and African peoples according to Lugard's dual mandate.⁸

But if colonial incorporation produced a politics of seeing, it also introduced conventions of being seen. The spectacles of initial amalgamation in the north generated a dynamic field of visual relations in which Europeans and Africans played active roles. To be sure, the ceremonial arrivals and departures of governors and officers in sartorial splendor, the finery of the drill sergeants inspecting African troops, the presentations of arms, with associated colors, military bands, and retinues all formed part of the pomp and pageantry of empire, and were clearly designed to inspire loyalty and respect among its African subjects (Callaway 1987:55–79). But a politics of perspective was also in play. In the most formal arenas of colonial incorporation—the durbars, investitures, and British coronation ceremonies—Europeans took center stage on viewing daises, special elevated platforms for overseeing and being seen.

How then did Africans look back? How were they framed in visual relations of mutual recognition, and how did they disrupt these frames? I do not mean to reduce the dialectics of seeing to a binary opposition between Africans and Europeans, since one of my goals is to complicate this visual field. But the African-European opposition formed an important visual axis that would emerge and recede under different conditions as one among several dominant relations of visual engagement. Thus during a durbar staged for Governor Richards when he visited Jos in 1944, the Birom “pagans” used the ceremonial limelight to lampoon colonial authority in carnivalesque defiance. As explained on a photograph by John Gwilym Davies, a colonial officer then at the scene, they “painted themselves white and put on long penis sheaths, to the great amusement of the crowd,” mirroring, in the image of His Excellency’s nakedness the very diagnostic features of primitive man (Figure 6). There are many meanings invoked by this phallic display, including a condensed history of colonial fixations on the genitalia of the colonized, but here I will restrict my reading to the split screen, as it were, of this “heterotopic disruption” (Jay 1994:413). By implication if not in actual fact, since we do not have the precise data to determine the empirical point, the Birom insinuated themselves into the Governor’s visual field, an imperious gaze by definition as the eye of command, inspection, judgment, and confirmation. Assembled at such colonial durbars were equestrian Emirs with their entourages from the relevant districts, representatives of the West African Frontier Force and police constabularies, and the “naked” hill pagans, formerly raided as slaves, whose very presence at such gatherings provided ocular proof of colonial progress. The European gaze, embodied by the governor, was thus radically inclusive, incorporating, together with its military machine, formerly autonomous Emirates and enemies into the native administration of indirect rule. But if the governor with his aides and officers witnessed



FIGURE 6. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 310(1) no. 20.

the offending Birom, so did the crowd of assembled Africans, whose "great amusement" united them as a body in laughter. The Birom display thus cut both ways—in toward the imperial center and out to the assembled periphery, testing the limits of colonial humor. As Davies noted with resolute finality, "this particular satirical joke will not be seen again and is now history."⁹

As the transgressive tactics of the Birom reveal, even when the sight lines of colonizers and colonized were racially opposed they were not unidirectional but refracted in multiple directions. Nor did both sides form homogenous groups, since each was internally stratified by religion, gender, race, and class. We can attend to these categories more closely by returning to the *darbar* as an historic visual field.

Elsewhere I have traced the genealogy of the Nigerian *darbar* from colonial India and the Islamic Emirates of the Sahel, fusing Victorian pageantry with the equestrian *jafi* charge of the desert (Apter 1999). Designed in large part by Frederick Lugard to incorporate northern Emirates into indirect rule, *darbars* were typically described as "dazzling spectacles," featuring traditional rulers, caparisoned entourages, and regimented colonial fighting forces. An unusually rich description by Lugard himself of a *darbar* staged in 1913, however, reveals not just the aesthetics of imperial authority, but a deeper visual logic of mutual recognition which brought the structures and categories of the colonial encounter into negotiated alignment. In a dispatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lugard reported:

On the morning of the 1st January a review had been arranged. All the Emirs and Chiefs with their retinues and horsemen were disposed on the great Kano plain in an oval one mile and a quarter round. In the centre of this the troops, including Artillery, Infantry and Mounted Infantry, to the number of 823, were drawn up in review order. After an inspection of the troops and the usual 'March past'—in which the gallop past of the Mounted Infantry was particularly striking and well done—each Emir with his horsemen and followers in a dense mass walked past a stand which had been erected on the ground. Each unit was entirely distinct and separated from the one which preceded and the one which followed it, and each was entirely distinct in the dresses and characteristics of the individuals who composed it. Many Bornu horsemen were entirely clad in chain armour; the trumpets and other instruments of music or noise varied with each. Some had Court jesters in fantastic garb, mounted or unmounted, who capered and danced around the Emir, others had bands of led horses caparisoned in gorgeous clothes of fold &c. The equipment and colouring were as varied as they were picturesque. Not the least interesting and instructive—albeit extremely amusing, were the bands of almost nude Pagans who danced past, yelling and brandishing clubs, and engaging in mimic warfare, half frenzied with excitement and delight. That these men should have left their fastnesses and come unarmed to join in a Fulani gathering without fear, could not fail to arrest the attention and strike the imagination. Such a thing was not possible or even conceivable a few years ago. The number of horsemen who took part in this spectacular display is estimated by some at 15,000, by others as high as 30,000. The multitude of footmen it is impossible to guess at.¹⁰

The passage is worth reproducing at length because it provides a running sequence of visual frames and relations.¹¹ Held on the occasion of Lugard's return to Nigeria after an extended stay in Hong Kong, the durbar was in some sense a welcoming back ceremony, reestablishing Lugard's "rightful place" as Governor-General of Nigeria. Beginning with a grand review on the Kano plains at the dawn of the New Year, the colonial order was effectively consecrated by the formalized protocols of visual inspection. With the Emirs and chiefs arranged in a vast circle, looking inward toward the center, they initially served as witnesses to that initial viewing which itself was an act of visual repetition—a review. Drawn up in "review order," constituting the military chain of authority and command, the 823 troops—Lugard's precision was legendary—were seen in both passive and active modes, first at attention and inert as the governor and presiding officers walked past, and then in march pasts, on foot or galloping on horseback, as the artillery and infantry filed past the viewing stand. With the core of colonial firepower and authority visually established, the imperial circle of activity widened to include the colonial subjects as objects of vision. Following the military inspection, the Emirs proceeded in a mounted march past of their own, regimented into clear and distinct units, each with its special courtiers, armor and devices to mark its relative political autonomy within the field of visual command. And sustaining the parallel military and political orders, the "almost nude" pagans followed on foot like hapless infantry, brandishing clubs in "mimic warfare" to celebrate their protection under colonial eyes. As observers observed, the African contingents of native administration were thus brought to the central viewing stand where they were officially recognized by the colonial state "in order of importance."

If recognition was the order of the day, it was mutual rather than one-sided. The long procession of native units past governor Lugard was followed by the characteristic *jafi* salute of the desert, otherwise executed during the Sallah celebrations of Id el Fitr (and Kebir) and on royal installation ceremonies. Lugard's description continues:

... each Emir and Chief, with a band of selected horsemen numbering from a score to a hundred, formed up facing the stand to proffer his salute in the manner of the desert. Charging down at full gallop in a whirlwind of dust, with cries of triumph and of salutation, they drew up their horses on their haunches a few yards or feet in front of me. The Emir dismounted—the principal Emirs, with a refinement of courtesy, taking off their shoes—and prostrated himself *with his face on the ground*, speaking his words of greeting and welcome meanwhile. Mounting again, he led off his men and was replaced by the next wild charge of horsemen. Finally the Pagans, in imitation of their quondam slave-raiders, executed the same, leaping high in the air and displaying extraordinary agility (my emphasis).

Identified as the distinguishing feature and defining moment of the Nigerian durbar, the *jafi* salute combined the threat of potential rebellion with an act of ultimate fealty. The "wild charge of horsemen" brought a simulated military attack to an abrupt standstill, just a "few yards or feet" in front of His Excellency himself, followed by a dismount and prostration. In this respect, as I have argued elsewhere (Apter 1999:233), the colonial durbar was a ritual of rebellion signaling potential opposition while confirming allegiance to authority—in this case either the governor or his representative officers standing in. But it is the visual dimensions of the *jafi* salute, following the march past of regimented native units, which bring the dialectics of recognition into bold relief. For in the threatening cavalry charge, it was the Emirs and chiefs who recognized the state by their very acts of ultimate subservience. Moreover, as Lugard's description implies, such recognition was signaled by a radical rupture of reciprocal sight lines. From the center, the governor—presumably without flinching—faced his ceremonial attackers directly as they charged to a precipitous halt. From the periphery, the native contingent approached "in a whirlwind of dust," with the Emir breaking his visual line of attack by prostrating "with his face on the ground," changing frames in what was literally a choreographed face-off. As a visual exchange, the state recognized the "native rulers" and their capacity to rebel, receiving their recognition in return through acts of fealty and averted eyes. To say thus that such recognition was mutual does not imply a level playing field. Grouped at the center with His Excellency were the armed regiments and Maxim guns of the West African Frontier Force, strategically stationed in case the staged attacks got out of hand. To be sure, political hierarchy was built into the visual logic of recognition, in the spatial relations of center and periphery and the processual ordering of newly ranked contingents. But if not equal or equivalent, such forms of mutual recognition were reciprocal, sustaining possibilities of inversion and reversal that animated the production of colonial consent.

In terms of the deeper dialectics of recognition and interpolation, the Europeans and Africans traded places. Historically, before the arrival of the British, it was the Emirs who stood at the center of the *jafi* salute as their war chiefs charged in mock attack. The colonial durbar put the British officer in the Emir's position, reproducing the ceremonial structure while replacing the turban with the British crown. Thus installed, His Excellency in some sense saw and was seen as the new commander of the faithful, with the sultanistic power to appoint, depose, and rerank northern chiefs. If this deeper level of visual interpolation can be sustained, with the crown representative seen as an African Emir, then in what sense did the Africans see as Europeans? How did they come to occupy the subject-positions of the European gaze?

Those Africans who looked back through European visual frames—which by the 1920s included goggles and field glasses—formed an emerging northern Nigerian elite which stratified the field of spectatorship into colonial status categories based on “traditional” offices and roles. As Smith (1960) has so rigorously demonstrated, if the form and structure of the Nigerian Emirates endured, their content changed, infused with the greater functional and procedural specificity of the colonial bureaucracy, particularly with respect to punitive sanctions, legal appeals, tax collection and the administration of native treasuries. The new elite of traditional Emirs and their functionaries under indirect rule were not only co-opted into emerging colonial status hierarchies, receiving medals, honors, and even knighthoods in recognition of good works and loyal service; they appropriated colonial forms of seeing as well. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than on the northern Nigerian playing fields—at the races, on the polo fields, at the cricket and tennis matches, and even the garden parties, where the growing European community displayed its sport and social graces (Kirk-Greene 1985, 1989). If racially the European and African social clubs and sports events were kept apart, the latter developed mimetically, appropriating social power by reproducing the divisions and distinctions of the former down to codified refinements of etiquette and dress. Thus among the European elite, the viewing stand at the “racecourse” became the central stage of elite spectatorship, featuring the highest officials and families, with clients and ladies in the wings. Viewing was simultaneously a mode of being viewed, demanding the sartorial insignia of imperial standing—chaps, white tie, bowler hats and pith helmets for men, evening dresses with handbags and hats for women—magnified, as it were, by the binocular extensions of field glasses and goggles (Figure 7). In Violet Cragg's photo album of the Kano races and polo tournament in 1923, we see no less than Sir Hugh Clifford, then governor of Nigeria, at the center of the grandstand, scrutinizing the field through powerful lenses (Figure 8).¹² Equally indicative of such scopic intensity is the “Judges Box on the Racecourse,” where officers could monitor the finish line with intimate accuracy (Figure 9). Such viewing stands were important mechanisms for establishing the visual frames and site-lines through which “the theatre of empire” (Callaway 1987:55–57) in Nigeria was staged.

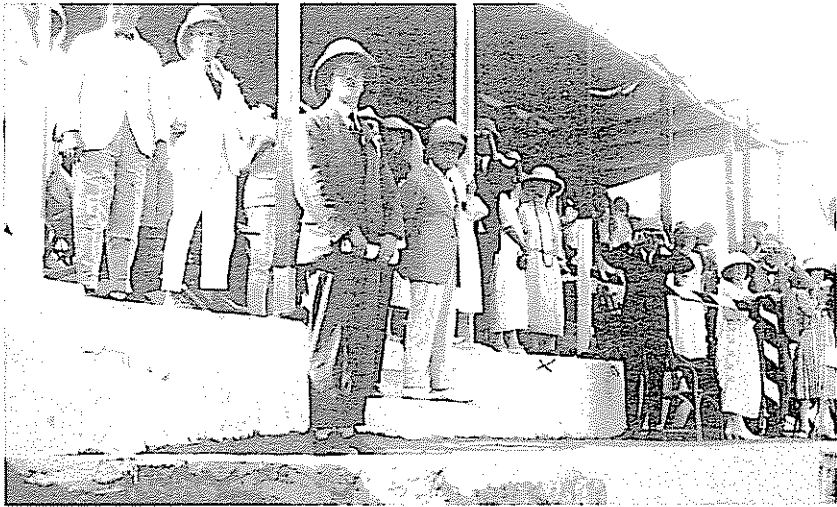


FIGURE 7. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 1588/1 F. 202-234 P.219r M.

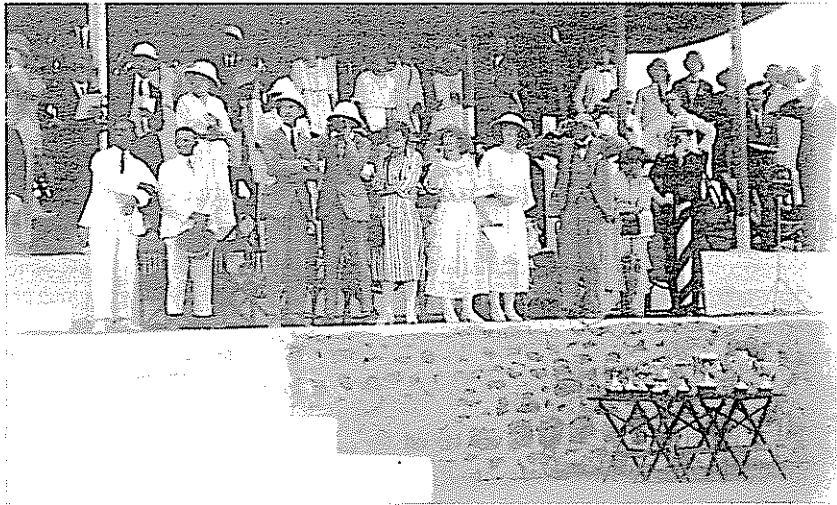


FIGURE 8. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 1588/1 F. 202-234 P.219r L.

The incorporation of Africans within these central frames and viewing stands occurred in two ways. As Kirk-Greene (1989) reports, the polo playing fields established one of the earliest contexts where African and European social barriers were crossed, bringing Fulani horsemen into the games and African teams into the tournaments. Indeed, an Emir's status would soon be linked to the number of polo ponies in his possession. And if Africans mixed with whites on the playing fields, they also entered the viewing stands as exceptional guests and

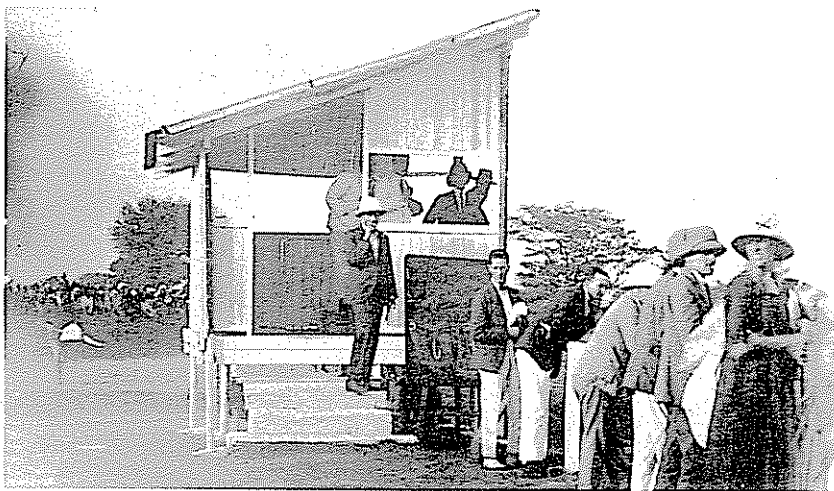


FIGURE 9. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 369 P. 32 Upper Left.

insiders. But the real extension of visual frames occurred in the domain of native sports, more in parallel than mixed modes, during durbars, coronation ceremonies, and the elaborate festivities of Empire Day. Such sport is often downplayed as secondary or marginal to the serious ceremonial of durbars and royal installations, but I would suggest that it was central to the emerging colonial stratification system, for here is where Africans adopted elite forms of spectatorship.¹³ Let us return to the sports following the *jafi* salute described in Lugard's new year's dispatch:

In the afternoon native sports had been arranged. The Emirs and principal Chiefs sat together on their carpets and mats in a semi-circle, while thousands of their horsemen and followers thronged the plain and lined the course. Horse races for representative horsemen of different Emirates, camel races, and foot races for Pagans were arranged, and were followed by various very picturesque dances, and acrobatic displays by troupes from different provinces, accompanied by trumpets, horns and music from scores of unnamable instruments. The dancing women of the Shehu's Court in Borgu were followed by the picturesque Hoe dancers of Zaria, and naked groups of Pagans and others formed circles of their own and carried on their own particular form of African dance. Contortionists and acrobats from Ilorin, and wrestlers and pugilists from the Dass and Angass tribes gave exhibitions and were rewarded liberally with the greatly valued kola nuts. At sundown the great hosts drew off and returned to their quarters.

There is more than meets the eye in this summary description of native sports, not least of which was the displacement of competitive politics between Emirs into the less perilous arena of the playing fields, inverting, as it were, the colonial administration of "native races and their rulers" into a celebration of native rulers and their races (see Kirk-Greene 1989). But it was precisely by directing the eye through visual frames that such scenes could stage-manage the unseen,

producing forms of competitive and cultural recognition which misrecognized the political conditions of their objectification. Arranged in a semi-circle, the principal Emirs and chiefs were foregrounded as native rulers, seated on carpets and mats below the colonial officers elevated on their dais, but set apart from the other natives who "thronged the plain and lined the course." A political topography of indirect rule was thus spatially defined, giving form to the new hierarchies and boundaries of native administration in the visible register of native sports and culture. Unable to resist their ordering into an overarching administrative hierarchy, the Emirs, who were formidable political rivals, could win symbolic compensation by excelling in the races. Riding horses and camels, the Emirs or their representatives could out-perform their counterparts, winning governor's cups and prizes which marked alternative ordinal rankings within the field of sport and culture. At the bottom of the hierarchy, the pagans raced on foot. Highlighting the presumptive autonomy of this field, native dancers and performers exhibited their traditions and skills, receiving kola nuts in recognition of their excellence and value.

Thus some measure of flexibility was displaced into the parallel domain of culture and sport, and if new lines of administrative hierarchy were only temporally redrawn, they were symbolically fixed by the Governor's Cup and other trophies that served as enduring icons of distinction and recognition. Lugard's concluding claim in his dispatch that "such an assembly as this has never taken place before in the recorded—nor probably in the unrecorded—history of the country, and its significance is great" underscored the cooperation of so many rulers and peoples formerly at war. From the perspective of empire, the successful durbar provided visible evidence of the successful implementation of indirect rule. The 1913 Near Year's durbar in Kano, however, was not the



FIGURE 10. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 369 P. 38 Upper Left.



FIGURE 11. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 369 P. 35 Upper Right.

first of its kind. In 1911, a durbar held in Zaria celebrating the coronation of King George V brought a similar pattern of salutes and festivities into view, with inspections, march pasts, charges, races, and dances orchestrated under the commanding watch of Acting Governor C. L. Temple.¹⁴ Photographs from the album of William C. Fitz-Henry, Chief architect and engineer of the Baro-Kano Railway, provide visual precedents of each of the major events in Lugard's Kano durbar. We see a presentation of arms (Figure 10) by the West African



FIGURE 12. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 369 P. 36 Upper Right.



FIGURE 13. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 369 P. 21 Lower Right.

Frontier Force, followed by the Maxim Guns (Figure 11), a *jafi* charge (Figure 12), the Kadara hill pagans (Figure 13), and the winner of the native race receiving the coveted Governor's Cup (Figures 14 and 15). These photographs document the close relation between political ceremony and native sport already in place before Lugard's triumphant return—forming what MacAloon (1984:259) calls a “ramified performance type” that was further elaborated in Empire Day festivities. Such interconnections between imperial ritual genres



FIGURE 14. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford. Ms. Afr. s. 369 P. 40 Upper Right.

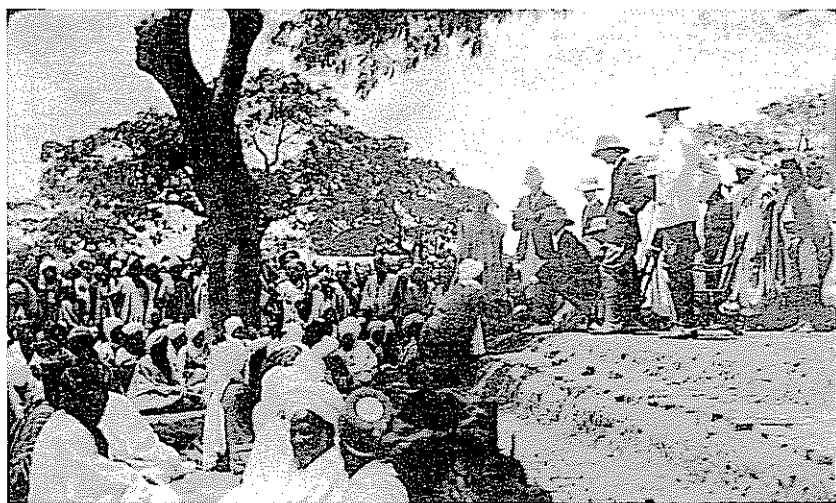


FIGURE 15. Bodleian Library, Univ. of Oxford, Ms. Afr. s. 1588/1 P.226v Bottom.

establish a generative template within the visual ontology of colonial culture more generally. Here I will pursue the specific connection of imperial spectacle with polo and horse racing.

Earlier I discussed how the new Nigerian elite acquired its position in some degree by entering the polo playing fields and assuming the viewpoint of privileged spectatorship. Here I will emphasize the politics of being seen, not just as African polo players, but also as a special "breed" of sportsmen—and I have in mind the English variety. Kirk-Greene has argued that the good man and good chap in colonial Africa was above all a good sport, a distinguished sportsman. Sport was at the center of the imperial culture of distinction that accorded His Excellency real admiration as a leader and afforded his aspiring officers access to the top. "It is clear," Kirk-Greene (1989:237) writes, "that the sportsman's badge of office, invisibly yet influentially worn by so surprisingly many of Their Excellencies throughout the Empire, often reflected what was then widely held to represent, in social terms, 'the best of the British.'" The implicit parallel with the native sports and races held during *durbars* and Empire Days emerged, in the north, as a visual extension of British sportsmanship itself. The competitive races held for Africans brought out from among them the best of the British, identifying them within the approving gaze of the British community as one of their own. Indeed, as the ideology of indirect rule developed, the "Hamitic" Fulani were seen as natural aristocrats among the pagans, ruling over lower races just as the British were ordained to rule over Africans. Lugard felt specific affinities with the Islamic Emirs, admiring their sophistication in politics and war. The Governor's Cup, extended to the natives, represented, above

all else, the interracial recognition of a privileged affinity and identity "in kind." Ineffable as the substance of sportsmanship remained, it was ultimately recognized by those who possessed it. It is hardly surprising that if the racecourse of the polo fields provided the visual model of seeing and being seen in the durbar, it doubled as its actual venue as well. In Kaduna, Kano, and Zaria, the great northern durbars were held in the actual "racecourse" arenas.

If a stratified field of spectatorship thereby developed in the northern emirates, it did not travel easily. To suggest, historically, that such visual conventions simply migrated from the north to the rest of Nigeria would miss the complexity of the political fields and the delicacy of the negotiations that governed the process. The western and eastern political contexts of indirect rule differed markedly from the north, and as an administrative and ideological framework its extension was uneven and problematic. In the east, where the absence of horses and formal rulers provided a double challenge for the political culture of indirect rule, the onus fell on the officers in the field to work things out. In his memoirs, A.F.B. Bridges, then an A.D.O. stationed in Iboland, recalls how the stratified fields of spectatorship and sportsmanship collided in unpredictable ways, revealing an uneven playing field for Europeans as well as Africans:

We had gone into Onitsha to buy prizes for the forthcoming Empire day sports, including some scarlet tam o'shanter which I thought would go down like hot cakes but which proved a flop as the wearers thought they made them too conspicuous. . . . The Empire Day Sports passed off very well, all things considered. It was rather like the race in 'Alice in Wonderland' as everyone expected a prize, and, after all, wasn't everyone doing it to satisfy the curious ideas of the A.D.O.? No one had ever taken part in such going's on before and the teachers thought nothing of joining in the race and carrying their pupils to the winning post, although they were officially acting as judges and starters. The final race was to have been for the police but they refused to take part as they thought they would be lowering their prestige. I had ordered a challenge cup and Hodgson, the Methodist Missionary, who had organised the whole thing, decided that Agbani school had won it. The idea of a challenge cup was of course also entirely new and had to be fully explained. I was surprised later to be told that I had given great offence to the Director of Education and his department by presenting a cup. It was, it seemed, presumptuous of a mere A.D.O. to do so such a thing, being one of the prerogatives of Lieutenant Governors and Heads of Departments. What was the world coming to! But it was a very long time before I came across any cup presented by such eminences. In the meanwhile the Agbani Cup was being competed for annually and as far as I know, it still is.¹⁵

Compared to Lugard's lofty reportage, the passage conveys a lighter tone, playing the imperial sublime of Empire Day against the Looking Glass quality of colonial *faire croire*.¹⁶ More importantly, the boundaries between seeing and being seen break down. The theatrical props and "tam o'shanter" of imperial theater in the colonies are overstated, misfiring as delusions of grandeur and thus making their wearers uncomfortable. The introduction of competitive sports, with their status associations and rules of fair play, did not resonate with local conditions and understandings but translated instead into colonial eccentricity, performed more for the local officer than the system which he repre-

sented. Moreover, the hierarchy of winning by dint of superior performance was thwarted by the more populist expectation of prizes for all. Teachers acting as judges and starters broke the framework of official observation to join in the fray, carrying their students past the posts in acts of collective leveling. So effective was this dismantling of hierarchy that the police boycotted the final race on the grounds that participation would *lower* their prestige. Clearly the visual matrix of northern colonial spectacle could not be exported to the east without modification. Nor was the problem restricted to Africans. By introducing the challenge cup and presenting it to the winners, Bridges exceeded his authority, assuming powers of *official recognition* reserved for his superiors. Later in his memoir we learn that this black mark on his record cost him dearly, delaying his eventual promotion to District Officer and finally to Resident by many years. In terms of the dialectics of seeing, Bridges' violation illustrates how imperial spectacles involved status hierarchies among British officers and different branches of the service as well as local social conditions and distinctions among Africans. If the powers of recognition were contested among the former, the honor of being seen remained dubious among the latter, lowering as well as raising prestige in the game of accumulating social and political capital. To appreciate the standardization of visual frames in imperial spectacles throughout the colony, and the ontological transformation of the real that they effected, we turn, in our final section, to the topography of royal tours in Nigeria's regional centers.

EXHIBITING EMPIRE

The Chinese, the Japanese, the Koreans, the Africans, the Indians, the Pacific islanders—they were all there, and with them samples of all the whites that inhabit the wide reach of the Queen's dominions (Twain 1897:19).

During his West African tour in 1925, the Prince of Wales visited Kano, the commercial capital of the northern region, where he took center stage in an elaborate durbar honoring his arrival. In addition to the Nigerian durbar's signature *jafi* salute, in which "fierce looking warriors in helmets and chain armour or cloaks and turbans . . . gallop[ed] furiously almost up to the Royal stand before they abruptly reigned in their flying steeds and wheeled aside," the "Emirs and Chiefs were conducted to the dais and presented in order of precedence by the Resident . . . [where] the Prince addressed them and the assembly at large."¹⁷ An official photograph of the Emirs "making their obeisance to the Prince at the Durbar" reveals the vertical dimensions of colonial authority. The prince, leaning down from his throne on the dais, shakes the hand of the Sultan of Sokoto, which stretches up as he prostrates with two Emirs behind him on the ground—fealty with a personal touch. This helping hand of colonial overrule had growing horizontal implications as well, because—like Lugard's affair discussed earlier—it was through the durbar itself that greater regional integration and awareness was achieved. But if the dazzling demonstration produced an in-

clusive vision of sovereign authority and regional solidarity, it is another feature that I would like to emphasize in this and other examples of imperial spectacle—what we might call its reality effect. In his discussion of *le spectacle* at the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris, Mitchell (1991:21–33) identifies a revealing optical illusion whereby an exhibited Egypt produced in the West became more real and authentic than the land and people themselves. This inversion of simulacrum and original—a kind of commodity fetish writ large—characterizes the imperial ontology of the world-as-exhibition, in which the framing devices of models and plans became political realities with perceived truth-effects. The “real” Africa would be thus uplifted—abstracted and idealized from local contexts, regimented into races, exhibited, rationalized, even civilized, according to the administrative logic of indirect rule. Following Mitchell’s argument, the durbar would attain greater reality as imperial representation than the Emirates and those Africans whom it brought into view.

That such an ontological reversal appeared to take place is evident in a variety of colonial sources that elevate the spectacular effect to a greater cause.¹⁸ Criticizing his fellow officers for being out of touch with the natives, C. L. Temple, Lugard’s second in command, grasped the logic of the illusion with remarkable precision: “An officer in the Secretariat, Treasury, Customs or Railway departments . . . who has spent his whole official career in an African Protectorate may easily, nay very probably, be no more in touch with the natives than an official of a Government department at home who has never been within thousands of miles of Africa, but who has visited the various shows and pageants in which natives figure in London,” adding that “once in a blue moon at a railway station or at an official durbar, he may see a gathering of natives assembled to meet a Governor, but he could see almost as much as that in London” (Temple 1968 [1918]:188–89). Temple was unusual in seeing such optical illusions for what they were, but he knew what he was talking about. His own role as Acting Governor awarding the Governor’s Cup during the 1911 Coronation Durbar is documented in figure 15. For the Prince of Wales in 1925, simulation was the order of the day. Returning to his Kano durbar, with the ontology of the imperial exhibition in mind, we can appreciate what happened in the following two evenings.

In her travel diary, Violet Cragg witnessed the Kano durbar with passing curiosity, revealing greater interest in the dinner and two evening balls. Unable to attend, she extracted some gossip from Byng Hall—the oldest member of the West African Frontier Force at the time—who was seated at the prince’s side:

Of course I wanted to hear all about the dresses, but all B. H. said was they were lovely at the ball, and the Prince *only* danced with Mrs. Dimolene all the evening the first night, and the second with a Mrs. Bridger from Southern . . . B. H. said it was a magnificent show, a reproduction of an Emir’s palace, mud gateways and wall (open to the sky) a sunken ballroom, gorgeous floor and lake beyond . . . and rustic bridge across, sloping gardens, and all lighted by electricity. So one can realise how the £30,000 was

spent. The Prince insisted on a second drive through Kano when all the natives were about, and suddenly they came upon a corpse in the middle of the road, one of the mounted dogari had just bashed in a man's brains, and the Prince is reputed to have said 'Now I really feel I *have* seen the real thing, this is what I expected a Durbar to be like.'¹⁹

What this privileged glimpse of the inner colonial circle reveals is, first, the extravagance of the evening ball in simulating an Emir's palace, replete with elaborate stage props, gardens, and electrical lighting to the exorbitant tune of 30,000 pounds sterling. Secondly, we see the prince's impulsive drive through town where his sense of reality was momentarily challenged. Seen against the Kano durbar, indeed as its refined extension, the evening ball foregrounded the imperial production of colonial reality in Nigeria, abstracting the image of traditional authority in an idealized reproduction of an Emir's palace, illuminated by electricity as if to further emphasize the pure form of spectacle itself. But it is the near-puncturing of this illusion that ultimately underscores its power. Escaping the ballroom for the theater of "real natives" at night, the prince encountered a corpse with bashed-in brains, allegedly the work of a mounted *dogari* (bodyguard). The prince expressed not horror but satisfaction—he had finally *seen the real thing*. Initially, the reality of a cavalier killing exposed the durbar as grand illusion, but ultimately, I would argue, the durbar survived this crisis of representation, not only by structuring the prince's expectations but also by assimilating "the real" to its ceremonial frame. Thirty-one years later, in 1956 when the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh took part in a durbar held at the Kaduna "racecourse," this ontology of the world-as-exhibition remained firmly in place. There, a miniature village was added to the durbar grounds for royal viewing and entertainment. As a captioned photo-op of the Queen explained: "Miniature huts were laid out and in the village street children carried on the normal village occupations as Her Majesty walked around."²⁰

Indeed, the formal frameworks of imperial spectacle established a kind of metropolitan *a priori* that structured colonial experience, rendered it reproducible, and afforded opportunities of recognition and enlightenment. As Temple's indictment of fellow officers reveals, the colonial spectacles in Nigeria traced back to pageants, shows, and expositions in London. Beginning with London's Crystal Palace of 1851 and extending to museums and popular theater, these exhibits staged England's civilizing mission in Africa, producing knowledge of the territories for domestic consumption while exporting models and even materials of trusteeship abroad (see Coombes 1994).²¹ When her husband was finally promoted to Resident in Calabar, Diane Bridges noted that the official residence in Nigeria was transported out in sections from London, where it "had been built as a model bungalow for West Africa and was shown at the Hyde Park Exhibition in the reign of Queen Victoria." Emblematic of how a career officer's final destination in Africa (short of governor) entailed a return to the source, the model bungalow attests to the materialization of imperial truth-effects. Or consider Anne Macdonald's vivid impressions of Empire Day

in Warri, c. 1932, where, amid cultural dances, school sports, parades and even fireworks, she linked the European officers to their thespian counterparts at home: "The European police officers were in khaki and carried swords as did the administrative officers, most of whom were resplendent in white uniforms with gold braid, so that *they looked exactly like the empire builders with whom we are becoming familiar in English theatre*. It was a relief that they did not behave as such. The picture of officialdom was completed by the judge in robes and wig, an inadequate protection, I thought, against the tropical sun" (my emphasis).²²

Indeed, the picture of officialdom, like pictures at a colonial exhibition or scenes on stage, could offset the sublime with tones of the ridiculous, particularly from the seasoned perspective of a career officer's wife.²³ But the portraits, images and paraphernalia of empire remained deadly serious, even when laughable, because they established the foundational fictions of the real, transcending empirical reason like Platonic forms, particularly if it was fettered by ignorance and superstition. In this latter capacity, colonial ceremonies and exhibitions were understood as instruments of African edification and enlightenment. Africans attending imperial spectacles would "see the light" of imperial reason, recognizing, within their ranks, models of the metropole and its immanent order of truth and progress. In his visit to Creek Town in 1923, A. E. Murray encouraged the local chiefs to attend the forthcoming empire exhibition held in Calabar—an unusually direct transposition of the "exhibitionary complex" (Bennett 1996) into colonial territory. Murray's intentions were explicitly didactic.

At 8:30 I held a meeting of the Obon and Chiefs in the Native Court House, where various matters were discussed. I commenced by explaining to them about the British Empire Exhibition, its objects, linking up of the Empire, encouragement of agriculture, crafts and manufactures, what each of them could and should do for the Empire by cultivating to the utmost his own portion of land, etc. I advised as many as could to go and see it, and to send in their names to be without delay in order to secure certain accommodation.²⁴

But if the exhibit was designed to raise native production, it also presumed to generate self-consciousness through the methodical staging of cultural tradition, recruiting native dances from local areas to reproduce them on a "higher" level. Following the ontology of imperial representation, what might initially be seen as cultural "re-enactment" was really a refinement of meaning and form, and thus an abstraction of inner essence or truth. Thus the exhibited cultural tradition rose up from its local performative context to transcend the original as its prior condition. Local tradition, in the end, was ultimately ratified by its exhibition on an imperial stage.²⁵

This latter aspect of cultural ratification is reflected in Murray's account of the Denwa dance, associated with Bokiya female initiation and put on for the traveling district officer's entertainment. In his detailed report to the Resident,

Murray filters the dance through the categories of western drama, pre-adapting it for the imperial stage:

The Play consists of a number of . . . acts, in between each of which the music stops and the actresses disappear behind a screen (consisting of a large blanket behind the scenes): there is a large selection of steps, which vary according to the Act though of course there is a great deal of the usual phallic or shimi motion. In the last Act the singers strike up "ebiribada-ai-aya-owi," and Demwa and Omirinya appear with cloths tied round their waists and dance "idoya": as they dance they choose two boys and dance a sort of quartette with them until the end, when they each give the boy they have chosen a penny . . . The Play and its rules comes [sic] from Bokiya in the Ikom District.²⁶

As a play with acts, screens, and explicit stage directions for its cast, the Denwa represents culture as theater, an idiom adroitly "recognized" by Murray as worthy of elevation. Responding to his report, the Resident concurred: "The account of the Denwadanu is splendid. I wish you could personally conduct it to the British Empire Exhibition." In truth, the imperial *a priori* prevailed, projecting a staged Africa from London into recognizable conventions of native custom *as such*.

* * *

I began this essay by invoking Walter Benjamin and the relevance of his materialist historiography to imperial spectacle, and I now return to his dialectical vision to attempt just the sort of closure that he himself avoided. Benjamin's method was in some respects surreal (Leslie 2000:20–26), selecting the remains of capitalism and its collective fantasies in such works of documentary juxtaposition as "One-Way Street" and *The Arcades Project* that sought radical political and epistemological ruptures. His sensitivity to regimes of value, advertising, modes of consumption and world exhibitions belonged to a more general critique of imperial culture and its forms of historicity. But if Paris figured as the capital of the nineteenth century for Benjamin (1989), it was a bourgeois capital in an era of empires that would soon divide and colonize Africa. It is thus the concrete objects of imperial vision and knowledge and the implicit mechanisms of their production and reproduction that I have examined in colonial Nigeria, to grasp the importance of spectacle in developing indirect rule.

Beginning with the camera and the fetish, we saw how Alex Braham's photographic trickery and Violet Cragg's more forthright reportage produced an ostensibly natural object-domain of native African custom and tradition that established the anthropological ground of indirect rule. Invested with variable forms of social, political, even economic capital, the sphere of traditional culture which came into focus quite literally eliminated its colonial relations of production from view by reducing them, as it were, to the viewpoint itself. That such a fetishism of fetishes occurred routinely in dances and entertainment for traveling officers does not relegate the camera to a secondary influence on primary events, but rather highlights its role in transforming such events into ab-

stracted and reproducible icons of tradition. Such a politics of the camera is of course hardly news, as Geary (1988), Lutz and Collins (1994), Pinney (1997), Poole (1997), Ryan (1997) and others have already shown. But less obvious and more relevant to our argument is the subtle transformation into spectacle that it effected (see also Pinney 1992). Opening restricted performances to a new public sphere and recasting them as tradition and entertainment, the emergent sphere of cultural production "elevated" rituals and festivals into tokens of cultural types. The process is captured by MacAloon's insight that "'exotic' rituals may be perceived as spectacles by outsiders who happen upon them—explorers, tourists, or anthropologists" and who "commit a 'genre error' analogous to what Gilbert Ryle has called a 'category error' and Clifford Geertz an error in 'perspective'" (MacAloon 1984:243). Indeed, keeping with Saussure's dictum that "the viewpoint creates the object," we can appreciate how the colonial perspective on native rituals and traditions transformed them into spectacles through categorical reframing, altering the context and projecting the object into wider spheres of circulation by means of photographic "capture" and reproduction.²⁷ Having identified this transformation of ritual into spectacle, how best can we characterize it?

In his famous essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin (1976) identifies the effect of aesthetic commodification as a depreciation of the "original" and a loss of its "aura." The original work, identified with primordial ritual functions, is restricted to the hidden and sacred domains of what he calls the cult, where its "cult value" predominates. Through reproductive techniques, he argues, the object—through its images—is emancipated from ritual to enter a new regime of "exhibition value" modeled on expansive bourgeois commodity circulation.²⁸ "To pry an object from its shell," he writes, "to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction" (Benjamin 1976:223). That such sundering of objects from "the fabric of tradition" could lead to fascism or communism, depending on whether it aesthetized politics (futurism) or politicized art (constructivism, socialist realism), need not direct the process itself, whereby the "use-value" of the cult object gives way to the "exchange value" of the work on display. As the distinctive aura of the original receded, and the exchange value of the reproduction took over, ritual gave way to spectacle.²⁹

Like most of Benjamin's insights and arguments, the transformations of mechanical reproduction occur on many levels, and if they demystify an original "aura" it is only to be remystified in exhibitionary terms. The relevance of this formulation to colonial Nigeria, however, lies in its almost literal depiction of events on the ground. As if rendering Benjamin's theory concrete—a move that Benjamin himself might have welcomed—the colonial observers and recorders of tradition transformed local ritual practices into spectacles of culture, pene-

trating into restricted arenas to enlighten the natives and bring their superstitions to light. Such sanitized traditions under the secular sign of science clearly compromised their efficacy when staged and reproduced for European audiences, and in this respect they quite literally lost their aura. As exhibition value subsumed and surpassed cult value, however, a new form of commodity fetishism emerged which inverted the relation of original and copy, in what we have called the imperial *a priori*. Here the expositions and imperial pageants of the metropolises produced images and categories that shaped the very structures of recognition in the colonies. Through the aura of exhibited empire rising up as a transcendental frame, such ontological reversals were witnessed by the public and implicitly assimilated to an imperial point of view.

Thus framed, I have sketched the limits of imperial spectacle as it developed between metropole and colonial frontier. Just as the hidden fetishes of the Nigerian hinterland were brought back to the center, in photographs, jubilees, imperial pageants and museum displays, so the center exported its models of savage tradition to the colonial officers and natives in the field. By identifying the rise of imperial spectacle with the emergence of a field of cultural production, however, I have also examined the mediations of the "middle ground" to disclose the dynamics of the field itself in *durbars*, coronations and Empire Day ceremonies. Here we saw how the dialectics of recognition framed the incorporation of native authorities through a stratified field of spectatorship, in which Europeans and Africans negotiated new social and political relations. In the northern Emirates, where the ideology and architecture of indirect rule took shape, Fulani elites entered the exclusive sight lines and playing fields of British society, rubbing shoulders and even trading places at deeper levels of visual interpolation. As social, political, and racial boundaries were redrawn, combining British and African ceremonial genres in "ramified performance types," the Northern Protectorate took shape, seen not only in full glory but also from differentiated points of view on the ground. That this visual matrix of colonial incorporation was not easily extended to the Southern Province, as A.F.B. Bridges discovered in Iboland, attests not only to different local conditions in Nigeria but also to political and status differentials among officers.

So what do we gain by opening up the middle ground of imperial spectacle, located, as it was, between center and margin? At the very least, we can deepen the debates about structure and agency, adding a stratified field of spectatorship to the determination of signifying practices (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), structuring structures (Bourdieu 1977) and the "pluralized field of colonial narratives" (Thomas 1994:8); that is, bringing the visual to bear more directly on the dialectics of the colonial encounter. But, as Lévi-Strauss (1963) has said of totemism, slaying the Hydra of a monolithic discourse only to resuscitate its severed heads is not in itself a productive strategy, and here I would emphasize the enduring connection between imperial spectacle and the logic of capital, not reducible in any vulgar sense but visually implicated in its forms of

valuation. Imperial spectacle, I have argued, extended beyond pomp and pageantry to encompass the entire field of cultural production that it brought into view. How it took shape in the colonies was, above all, a matter of perspective.

NOTES

1. I do not mean to reduce these theoretically rich and innovative studies to such banal and simplistic propositions, but rather to characterize the dominant orientations within which they fall. For a nuanced collection of perspectives on scopical regimes of surveillance and desire, see Brennan and Jay (1996), with special reference to de Bolla's (1996) discussion of Adam Smith's theory of spectatorial subjectivity. For a more dialectical approach to visual economy, applied to visual images in the Andes, see Poole (1997).

2. Braham's "Pictorial Episode," which includes newspaper clippings, photographs, and copious diary entrees and marginalia, is deposited at the Rhodes House Library, Oxford, under Mss. Afr. s. 2288.

3. Braham's trickery illustrates—with paradigmatic clarity—how colonial photography occluded its productive relations with a fetish of transparent and objective value, a position elaborated by McClintock (1995:122–26 *et passim*) with respect to panoptic time. For a more psychoanalytic rendering of the colonial photographic fetish, see Copjec's discussion of G. G. de Clérambault (Copjec 1994:65–116).

4. Such colonial disdain for creolization on the coast, perceived as cultural degeneration, is well expressed by a district officer in the Ibo and delta areas:

Unlike the Mahometan [sic], the pagan negro has no institutions of which he is proud and jealous; he is being moulded like wax by his European teachers; he is as imitative of them as a simian and will retain little of his pre-twentieth century self but the vices which are inherent in the negro character to which are being added those of his conquerors. . . . Chiefs who a few years ago could hardly boast of the possession of a decent garment to cover their nakedness now dress in the latest European style complete with sun helmet to patent leather boots and drive about in their own motors.

Falk, Edward Morris. "Report on Native customs in Aba Division . . . 1920." In his Papers as District Officer, Nigeria, 1910–1933. Box. 1, p. 56. Mss. Afr. s. 1000. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

5. Cragg, Violet E. "Trekking Benue Province, 1926–1927." Mss. Afr. s. 1588 (3). Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

6. Ryan (1997:11) notes that "photographs of white men or women being transported in rickshaws, palanquins and carrying chairs across all kinds of colonial terrain by 'native carriers' were common icons of the style of the British Empire."

7. Bridges, Diana, "Black and White Notes: Nigeria, 1927–49," (memoir, typescript ms. 100 pp.) Mss. Afr. s. 1634. Rhodes House Library, Oxford. For more on her work in the colony, see Callaway (1987:191–92).

8. Classic expressions of such "racial" ordering within Nigeria and British Africa at large include Temple (1968) and Lugard (1965).

9. Davies, J. W. "Papers of John Gwilym Davies." Mss. Afr. s. 310, CAT. A 1057. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

10. Lugard, F. D. "Kano Durbar. 1 Jan. 1913. Northern Nigeria, Governor's Despatch No. 5 of 5 Jan. 1913." Rhodes House 723.17 s.11/1913 (3).

11. For a more "jaundiced" description of this event by I. F. Nicolson, see Callaway (1987:59). See also Perham (1960:449–50) and Nicolson (1969:199).

12. The shift from a monocular to binocular subject emphasized by the specialized glasses of staged viewing heightens the importance of perspective in the making of spec-

tacle, foregrounding the relation between viewer and viewed. In his memoir, Sir Rex Niven recalls how this exalted viewer was also viewed: "On a memorable day in March 1922, Sir Hugh Clifford gave the Battalion its new colours . . . Clifford was a great man for ceremonial, and I can never forget the sight of those lines of scarlet zouave jackets and khaki shorts and puttees and glittering bayonets . . . Clifford, in blue uniform and feathers, was at his best" (Niven 1982:32, quoted in Callaway 1987:61).

13. One of the most striking illustrations of how Africans were incorporated into the most commanding of elite perspectives—exemplifying "the 'high altitude' thinking of this scopic regime" (Jay 1988:10)—occurred at the 1937 Coronation ceremony for King George VI in Minna. Here a group of twenty-two Europeans and Africans boarded two Vincent aircraft from the R.A.F., including "the Gwari Chiefs, a member of the Emir of Bida's Council, the Headmaster, Assistant Masters and two boys from the Bida Middle School, the Sergeant-Major of Police and the Chief of the Gwari Native Administration Police," Logan, Robert. "Souvenir of the Coronation Celebrations at Minna on the 12th of May, 1937." In his Papers as District Officer, Nigeria, 1928–1937. Rhodes House Mss. Afr. s. 1033.

14. He was the author of *Native Races and Their Rulers*—see note 8.

15. Bridges, A.F.B. "So We Used To Do" with foreword by the Right Hon the Lord Milverton, G.C.M.G. Governor of Nigeria, 1943–47. Mss. Afr. s. 1881 (1), pp. 89–90.

16. For a brief description of ethnic stratification in a 1921 Empire Day ceremony in Nigeria—"by dazzling the eyes of the Jemaa proletariat"—see Callaway (1987:61–62).

17. See the unpaginated section of Adock (n.d.) called "Nigeria, and Crossing the Line."

18. A French variation of this ontological reversal is highlighted and problematized by Michel Leiris, whose exposure to Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* at an early age continued to inform his Africanist ethnography with an anxiety that the former remained more real than the latter, which followed as a trace of the staged "original." This is my reading of his *L'Afrique fantôme*, supported by Leiris (1992a, 1992b:xxiv, 1998).

19. Cragg, Violet E. "A Year's Trek in Northern Nigeria, June 1924—June 1925. Extracts of Letters written to her Mother." Rhodes House Mss. Afr. s. 1588 (2), pp. 70–71.

20. Royal Tour of Nigeria, 28 Jan.—16 Feb. 1956. Federal Information Service, Lagos, 1956. For a revealing account of how the *jafi* salute before the Queen nearly erupted into violence, see Smith (1968:103–5).

21. After its Great Exhibition of 1851, the Crystal Palace remained a site of imperial exhibitions until its demise in 1936. Thus in 1911, during the coronation of George V, the Crystal Palace produced the "exemplary center" of an imperial ritual field by reproducing—as it were—the empire in miniature, "complete with three-quarter size replicas of the Parliament buildings of all the Commonwealth countries . . . their exteriors architecturally complete to the smallest detail," with exhibitions of their products on view inside. The final touch was a miniature railway on which visitors could tour the model "Empire" (Beaver 1970:132). Here we see not only the technical apparatus of an imperial ritual or ceremonial field, but also the logic of displaced origins and mechanical reproduction at its center.

22. Macdonald, Anne. *African Roundabout: A Description of a Voyage Round Africa with Visits to Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda, 1932–1935*. (Diary) Rhodes House Mss. Afr. s. 980, p. 65.

23. One wonders whether it was the light opera of Gilbert and Sullivan or Kipling's adaptations for stage that Mrs. Macdonald had in mind—both were performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre built for imperial troops, as evidenced by program bills.

24. "Visit to Creek Town on November 8th:1923." In "Diaries of Travels by Political Officers in the Old Calabar Division, 1921-27." Rhodes House Mss. Afr. s. 1498.

25. For a francophone variation on this theme in Central Africa, see Fabian (2000:120-27) with reference to Coquilhat 1888:126-27). Fabian emphasizes both the military theatricality of the colonial enterprise in general, and the specific perception of an African "presentation" through the prism of Greek tragedy. He also shows that the travelers distinguished between "superstitious ceremonies" and their theatrical "imitations" put on for entertainment, not as genuine versus spurious traditions but as signs of primitive mimesis.

26. Murray, A. E. "Travelling in the Oban District. But including Visits to Ekankpa (in the Uwet area, Calabar District) and Esuk Aye (in the Akpabuyo area, Calabar District) 6/12/1923." In "Diaries of Travels by Political Officers in the Old Calabar Division, 1921-27." Rhodes House Mss. Afr. s. 1498, p. 261.

27. Such a trajectory from "event" to photograph does not necessarily imply a uni-directional movement from authentic to staged contexts, since, as Geary (1998) reveals in her work on African postcards, many images of putatively authentic native life were initially photographed in world's fairs and colonial expositions, and were subsequently reissued as scenes from the "bush" minus the original captions from the expositions themselves.

28. For a paradigmatic illustration of such conversions of African artifacts into exhibition-values, see Coombes's discussion of the Stanley and African Exhibition (Coombes 1994:63-84), with particular reference to the exhibition cases (70-73) and souvenir postcards.

29. Working within this critical tradition, McClintock (1995:123) explains how colonial photography "provided the cultural equivalent of a universal currency . . . promis[ing] from the outset to embody a universal language" which "shifted the authority of universal knowledge from print language to spectacle." For a rigorous explication of Benjamin's aesthetics of power, see Koepnick (1999). See especially Poole (1997:10-13 et passim), who relates the fetish value of the photograph to the exchange value of the image-object in her brilliant study of vision, race and modernity in the Andes.

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