

**Lord Lugard in the Present:
Indirect Rule and Present-day Struggles over Autochthony and Exclusion**
by Prof. Peter Geschiere

In my research I stumbled upon Lord Lugard at an unexpected moment and place: in the context of post-World War I debates in Southern Cameroon (which had just been incorporated into Nigeria) on what to do with the rich German plantations on the slopes of Mt Cameroon that had been conquered by the British in 1914. D.O.s on the spot took it for granted that the plantations would be split up and returned to local landowners for cash-cropping – according to what they saw as the very cornerstone of British colonial policy (the ‘Gold Coast’ option). However, Lugard decided to maintain them in their existing form. Would this mean that the D.O.s would have to accept the abhorred German practice of forced labour to recruit the required work force? After a few years, Indirect Rule appeared to have solved this problem. A consequence is that, especially since democratization, the area has become a hotbed of struggles over ‘autochthony’ and the exclusion of ‘strangers’ who have become so numerous that they might outvote the locals in the new-style elections.

What is striking is that other versions of colonial rule had similar implications for the recent upsurge in issues of belonging and exclusion in many parts of the continent. The French *politique des races* – presented as the opposite to Indirect Rule – implied, in principle, a similar preference for the ‘true’ locals but, in practice, the French administrators also favoured immigrants whom they saw as more dynamic and enterprising than the autochthons. There is a direct link between these colonial paradoxes and the fierce struggle over belonging and exclusion that has erupted across the continent as an unexpected effect of neo-liberal reform since the 1990s. A more historical view of the present-day upsurge in autochthony is directly linked to the theme of this conference.

However, it is important also to emphasize that such tensions are not specific to (post) colonial Africa and to place them in the broader context of a ‘global conjuncture of belonging’ which, according to Tanja Murray Li, has become the flip side of recent processes of intensifying globalization, also in the industrialized countries of the North. It is indeed striking that – in contrast, for instance, to the parallel discourse on ‘indigenous’ – the autochthony discourse can so easily bridge the gap between the South and the North (cf. its recent popularity with the New Right in some parts of Europe). A brief excursion to classical Athens, the cradle of the autochthony notion, might be interesting since its protagonists (Plato, Euripides) exposed, apparently unwittingly, some of its inherent tensions, notably between its promise of basic security and its everyday obsession with unmasking ‘false’ autochthons, traitors on the inside.

Clearly the issues of belonging, raised by both Indirect Rule and *politique des races*, have had a truly global history right up to the present day.