Colonial Concessions in Africa

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Wheeler Institute for Business and Development

Team

Composition and Tasks

Team Composition:

- Economists, Historians, Political Scientists, Cultural Anthropologists.
- Europe, Americas, UK and Africa [e.g., Namibia, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia]

Tasks

- Data collection and History. Archives in Europe and Africa, secondary sources
- Map digitization, Data Processing and Cleaning
- Country Reports (standardized)
- Auxiliary Duties. Preliminary Statistical Analysis

Team

Workload

- **Supervision and Management**. Irene Diaz [law, business], Till Trojer [anthropology], and John Kegel [history]
- **Country Analysis. Data Collection, History, Reports**. Till Trojer [Ethiopia, Somalia, North and South Sudan]; John Kegel [Rwanda, Burundi, Belgian Congo]; Anais Da Fonseca [Guinea (Conakry), Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast]; Alfred Tembo [Zambia and Zimbabwe]; Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei [The Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone]; Jose Maria Alvarez Hernandez [Mozambique, Angola]; Estefanía Ochoa Del Castillo [Ghana, Senegal, Mali]; Ilona Nietosvaara [Tanzania, Zanzibar, Kenya]; Philippa Burton [Gabon, Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Chad]; Lucia Perez Alfaro [Malawi] ; Bernard C. Moore [Namibia]; Rafael Thiebaut [Madagascar and Comoros]; Barnaby H. Parr [Uganda]; Lucas Lamby [Cameroon]
- **Auxiliary Tasks**. Tanner Regan, Julian Marenz [commodity prices, colonial violence], Lucia Lamas, Camila Nuñez
- **Map Digitization**. Clara Minigutti, Agustina Diaz, Sara Sant'Anna, Gianfranco Lamorte, Mathias Rey, Rodrigo Gonzales, Victoria Gadea, Victoria Casaravilla.

Presentation Structure

1. **Introduction**
2. **Colonial Concessions. Classifications, Operations, & Practices**
3. **A New Economic-Institutional Mapping of Colonial Africa**
4. **Conclusion. Ongoing Research**

Introduction, Motivation, Questions

Section Structure

1. **Motivation**
   - Historical. Concessions were the main conduit of imperial rule
2. **Questions and Approach**

Unbundling Colonization. Organizing the Colonial State

Institutions, Investments, Violence

- **Direct rule**
- **Native** (Indirect) **Rule**. Local authorities, chiefs, kings
- Outsourcing to **Private Concession Companies**

Private Colonization

Outsourcing Colonization. Examples

- Congo Free State. King Leopold's Ghosts
- Colony of Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe]. British South African Company (BSAC)
- Northern Rhodesia [Zambia]
- Firestone. [Liberia]
- Mozambique Company

Definition

Historical Approach

- "**Concessions**" refer to formal legal arrangements by which land is temporarily demarcated for specific uses. (Harding 2011: 115-116).
  - *De jure*: formal legal acts defining spatial units where companies operate, as well as investments, operations, and key functions
  - *De facto*: social and economic activities, even boundaries, may not coincide with contracts

Berlin and Other Conferences: Partitioned Africa

Countries' Competition



The Scramble for Africa, cont.

Private Sector Competition

- Private colonial companies present since early 1800 in Africa [in many instances before European states]
- Colonial powers needed to consolidate their presence on the assigned territories post-1875. [*effective occupation*]
- Constrained by limited financial resources
  - Colonizing states employed chartered companies as those institutions that were concretely exerting colonial power over the colonies.
- Main objectives:
  - facilitate the extraction of resources
  - generate revenues for colonial state and minimize investments
  - maximize profit of their investment, in most instances, by using coercive labour practices and co-opting local chiefs.

Private Concessions. Wide-spread Phenomenon

Used by All Imperial Powers. Great Britain and France

- **British Empire**
  - Royal Niger Company
  - Imperial British East Africa Company
  - Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company
- **France**
  - Societe Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain
  - Compagnie Francaise de l'Afrique Occidentale.

Private Concessions. Wide-spread Phenomenon, cont.

Used by All Imperial Powers. Belgium, Germany, Portugal

- **Belgium**
  - ABIR
  - Anversoise
- **Germany**
  - German West African Company
  - German East African Company
- **Portugal**
  - Nyassa Company
  - Moçambique Company

Colonial Business in Africa

Some Investors

- Cecil Rhodes [BSAC]
- Baron Nathan de Rothschild [BSAC]
- William Lever, 1st Vicount Leverhulme [Uni-Lever]
- German houses [Namibia]
- French soap industry [Ivory Coast]

Questions

- **Impact**. Local and economy-wide [spatial spillovers]
- **Legacy**. Economy, polity, culture
- **Unbundling**. Sizable variation
  - extraction, violence, forced labor, authoritarianism
  - investments
  - economic activities and operations
- **Organization**. Agency, business, relations with administration, local communities, chiefs

Approach

Our Ambition

- Move beyond case studies; chief given heterogeneity
- Move beyond local effects; externalities, economy-wide implications, inter-connections
- Trace evolution; decompress history
- Detailed, granular mapping of colonial economy, business, investments, and institutions

This Project

Understanding medium and long-run consequences of colonial concession on the African economy, politics, and society

- Multi-disciplinary and Pan-African approach
- Record, map, classify, and provide quantitative information for all main concession firms in colonial Sub-Saharan Africa
- Data collection and digitization of primary/secondary sources
  - Country expert collecting information on companies (activities, practices, finance, operations)
  - Visits to more than 20 colonial archives in 9 countries
  - (ongoing) digitization of 1500ish concession companies from 1800 maps spanning 24 African countries
  - Validation by scholars in Africa and outside the continent

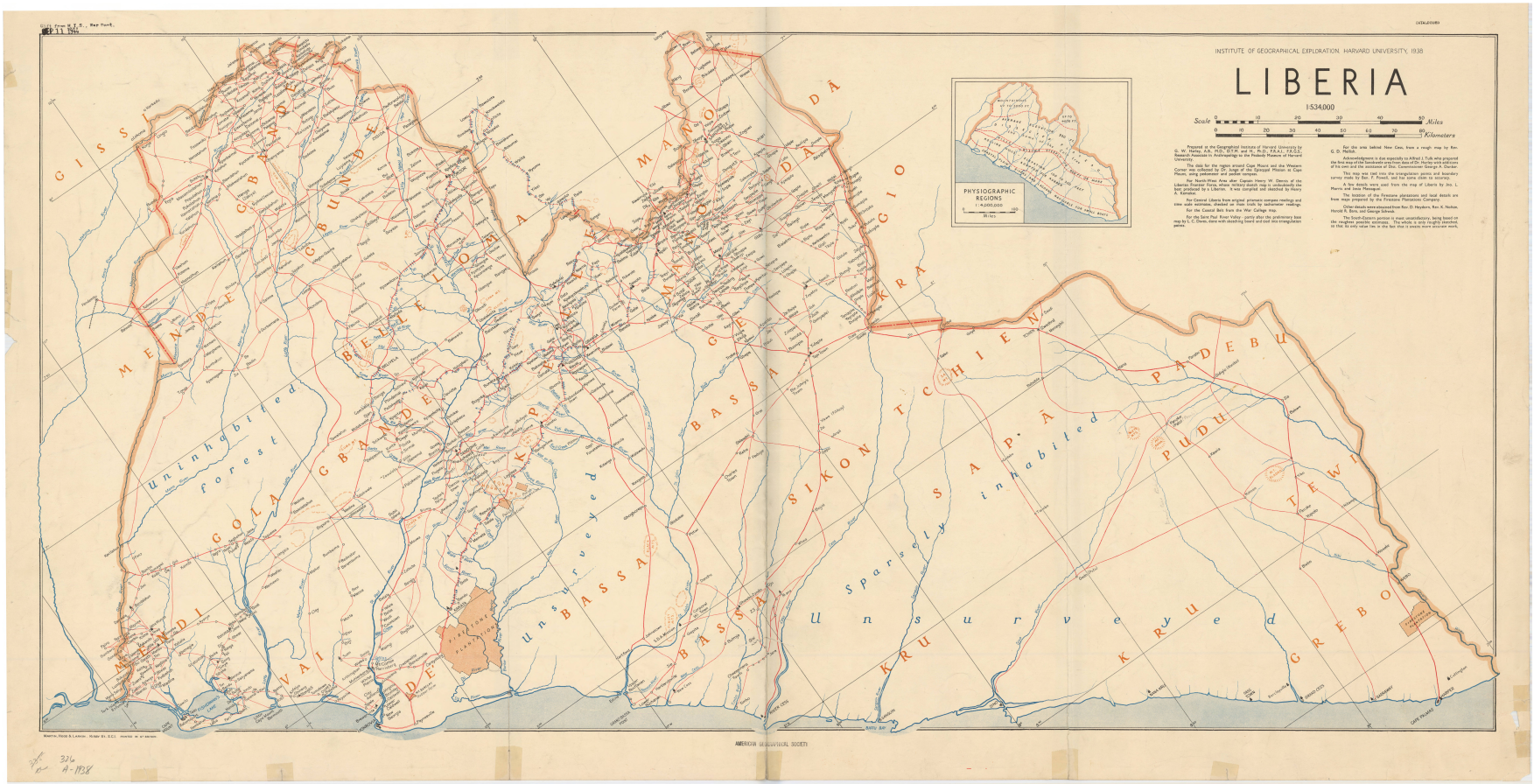
This Project

Outputs

- **New Geospatial Data**
  - Private Concessions. Boundaries, operations, and practices
  - Other aspects of colonial economy and polity.
  - Publicly available. applications, dedicated website
- **Concessions' Impact and Legacy**
  - Local across *all* concessions
  - Heterogeneity; mechanisms
  - Spillovers and aggregate effects
  - Organization and Agency
- **Country Reports**. Standardized

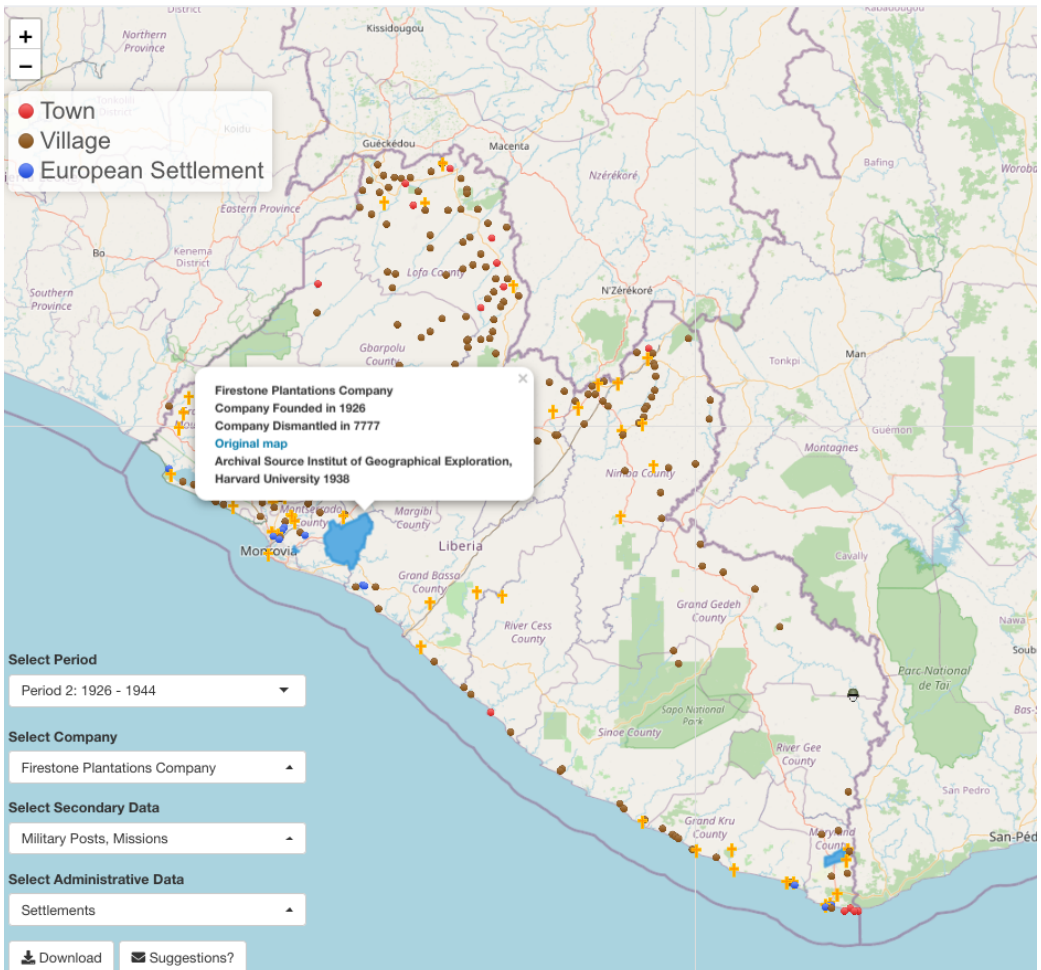
Maps and Digitization's Example: Firestone

Boundaries of Firestone in Liberia



Maps and Digitization's Example: Firestone

From Scanned Maps to Data, Firestone



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Colonial Concessions. Classifications, Operations, & Practices

Section Structure

1. **Phases and Time-Frame**
2. **Types. Operations**
3. **Practices**

Periods

With Heterogeneity

Activities and practices of concessions companies varied across the colonial period. Roughly, three periods (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1976)

1. Phase (1). 1884-1914: military and administrative conquest
2. Phase (2). 1920-1940: economic exploitation
   - Post Great War. 1920s
   - Great Depression
3. Phase (3). 1945-1960: Post WWII, pre-decolonisation

Phases. International and Imperial Power Considerations

External to Africa Developments

1. **First Wave of Globalization**. 1870-1890. Soaring Commodity Prices, linked to industrialization [e.g., wild rubber, cotton, palm oil]
2. **The Great War**. Labor depletion (military conscription). War-related commodities
3. **Roaring 1920s in Europe and the US**
4. **Great Depression.**
   - Plummeting commodity prices, bankruptcies
   - French West Africa, "French Transvaal". Return of Gold Standard
   - Mercantilism. Cotton Concessions post-1930 in Mozambique
5. **World War II.** Goods and Conscription
6. **Decolonization.** late in Portuguese Africa

Types of Colonial Concessions

Classification (some overlap)

1. Plantations [rubber, palm-oil, sisal, cotton]
2. Mining [gold, silver, diamonds, copper], incl. ivory
3. Trading companies [monopsony, monopoly rights and privileges]
4. Forestry
5. Pure Infrastructure [e.g., Railway concessions]

Types of Colonial Concessions. Examples

Plantations



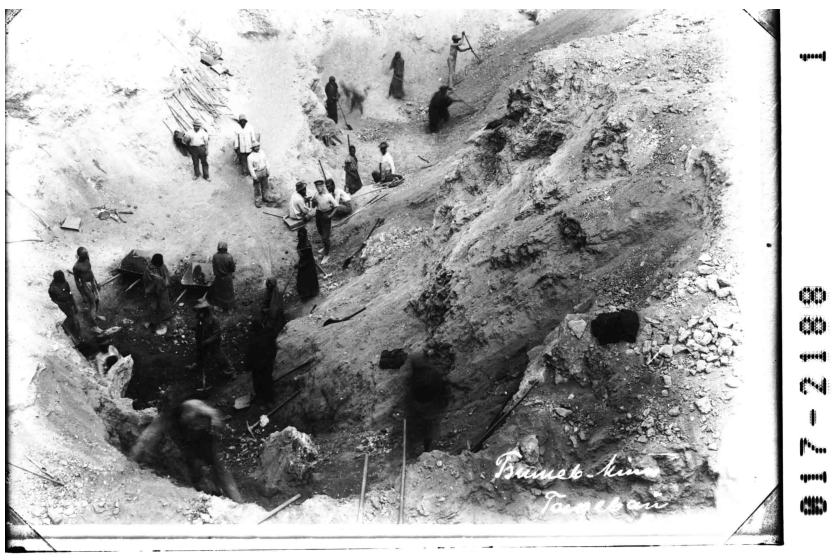
Sisal Plantation, Tanzania



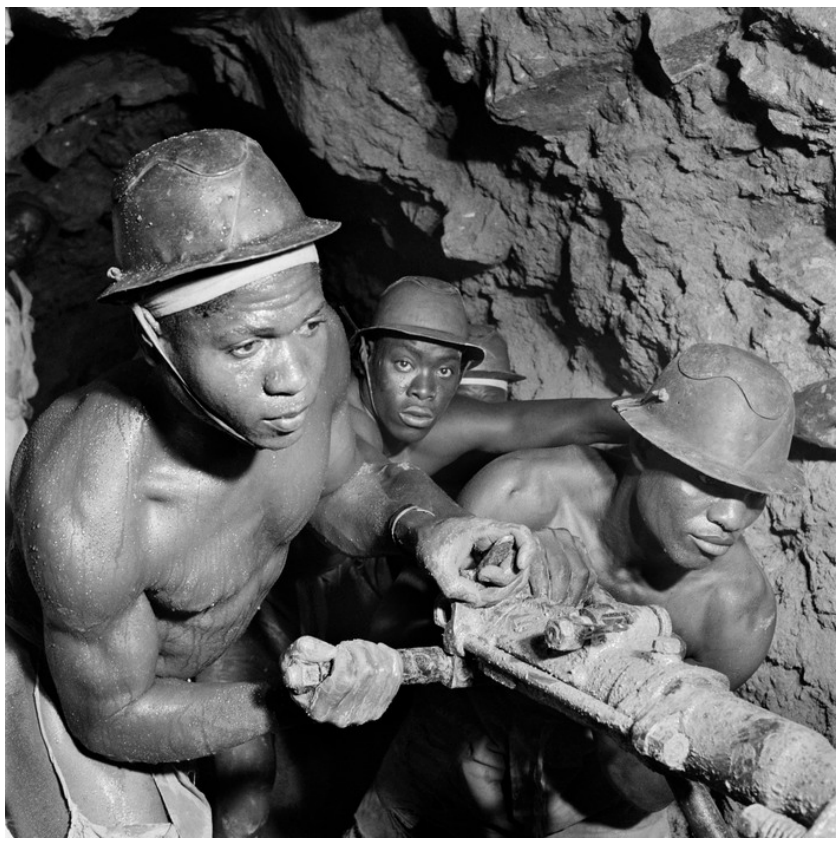
Cotton. Gezira. Sudan

Types of Colonial Concessions. Examples, cont.

Mining



Mining, OMEG, Namibia



Diamond, Williamson mine, Tanzania

Types of Colonial Concessions. Examples

Trading. Monopsony and Monopoly Rights



Trading Post, SCOA, Senegal



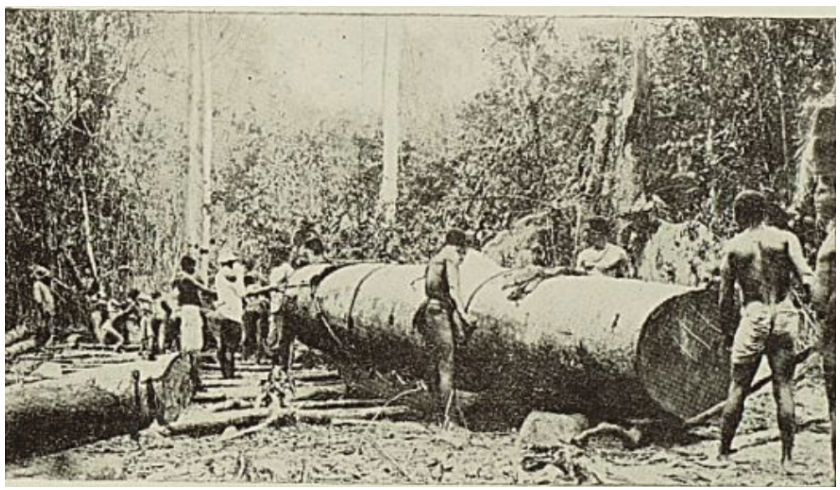
Trading Post, SCOA, Ghana

Types of Colonial Concessions. Examples, cont.

Forestry



Timber cutting, UAC, Nigeria



Logging, Ivory Coast

Concession Companies Relations

Administration, Imperial HQ, Investors, Communities, Local Elites

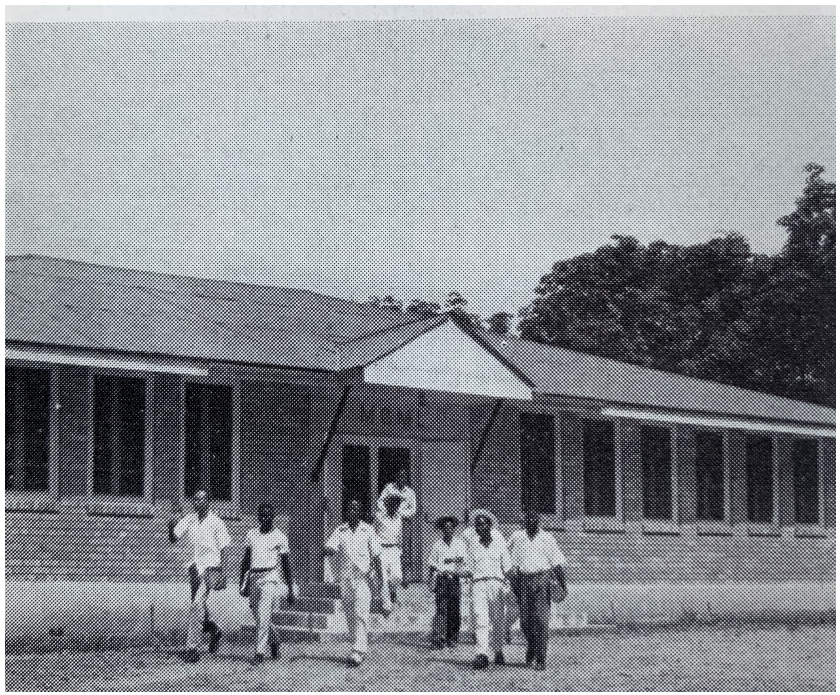
- **Administration**. collaborative, equity stakes, royalties, taxes
- **Chiefs and Local Elites**. Often working for European firms, formally (wage) and informally (taking a cut)
- **Local Communities.** Violence, extraction, some investments

Types of Colonial Concessions

Para-Administrative Role



Railway. BEAC. Kenya



School. Firestone. Liberia

Types of Colonial Concessions

Relationship and Impact on Local Population



Forced Labor. Benin



Migrant workers. Kolmanskop, Namibia

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New Economic-Institutional Mapping of Colonial Africa

Section Structure

1. **Colonial Concessions Sample. Mapping and Data**
2. **Economic Activity. Descriptive**

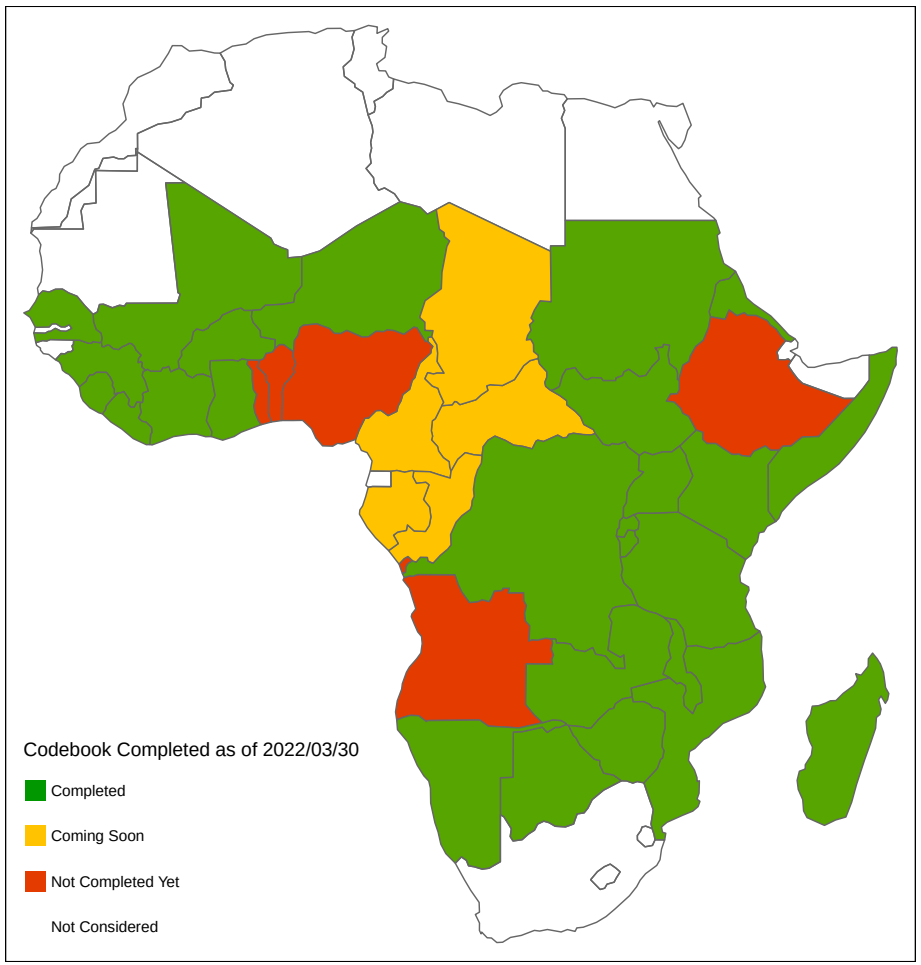
New Dataset. Ongoing and Preliminary

1454 concession companies in 24 Sub-Saharan countries

- Life-cycle (e.g., start year; MA)
- Economic Activities (e.g., main/secondary product; monopoly)
- Ownership and Financing (e.g., shareholders; capitalization; nationality)
- Para-administrative functions (e.g., tax capacity; private army; provision of public goods)
- Relation with local population (e.g., land acquisition, sharecropping agreements, incl. violence, repression)
- Labour (e.g., number of workers, working conditions)
- Special support from administration (e.g., infrastructure, financial support)

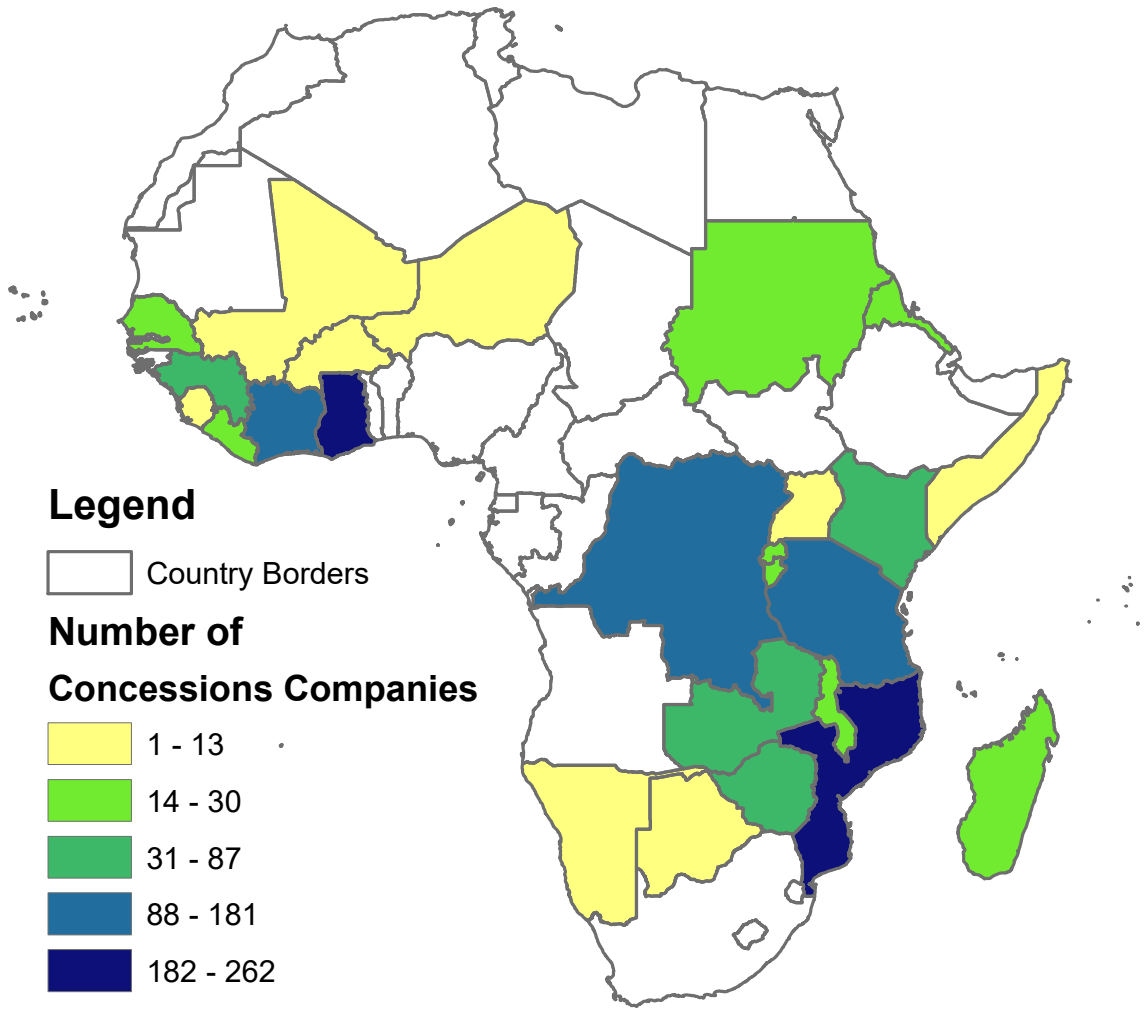
Sample Countries (Colonies, Protectorates)

Company codebooks, sectoral data, and country reports

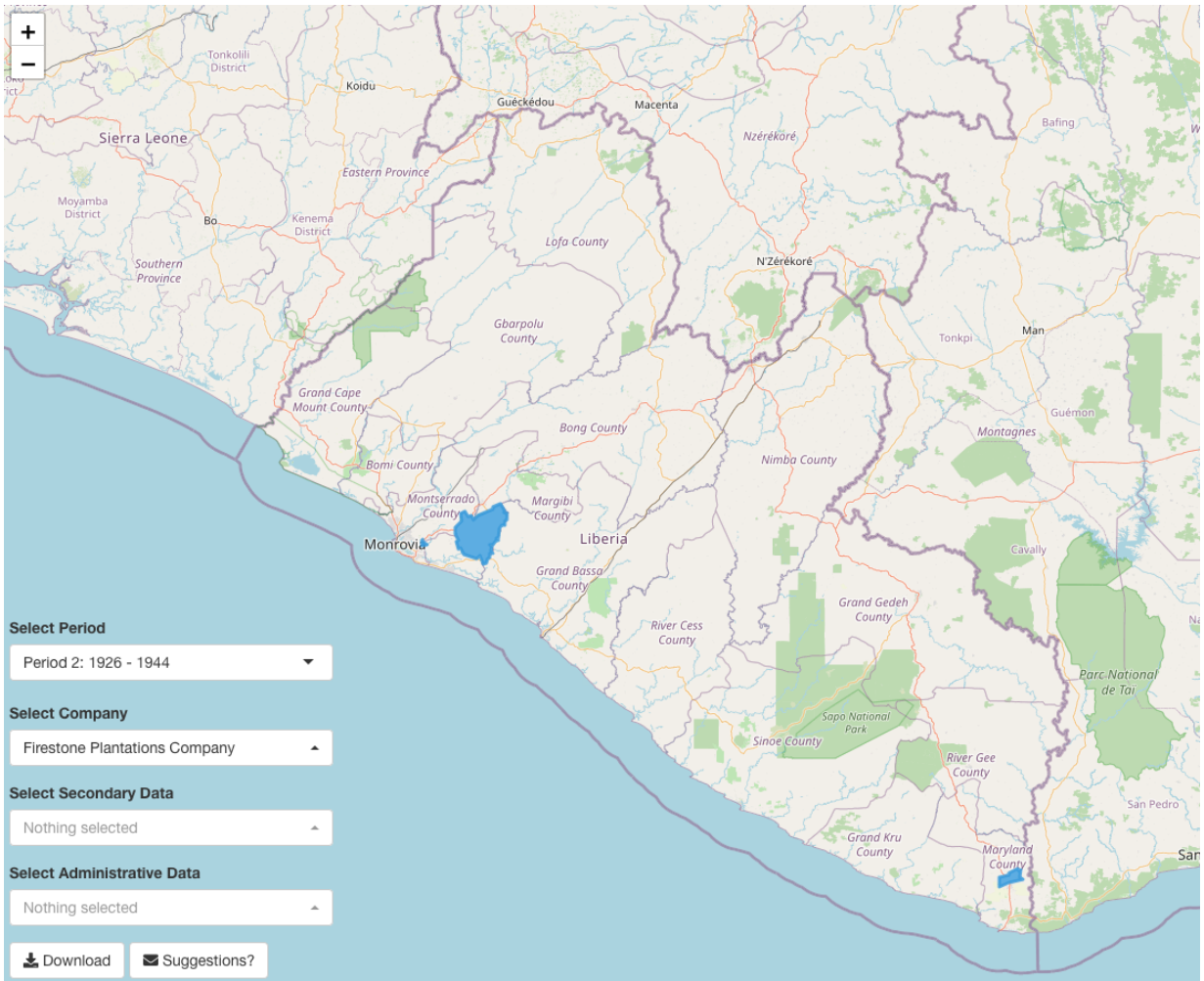


Companies by Countries

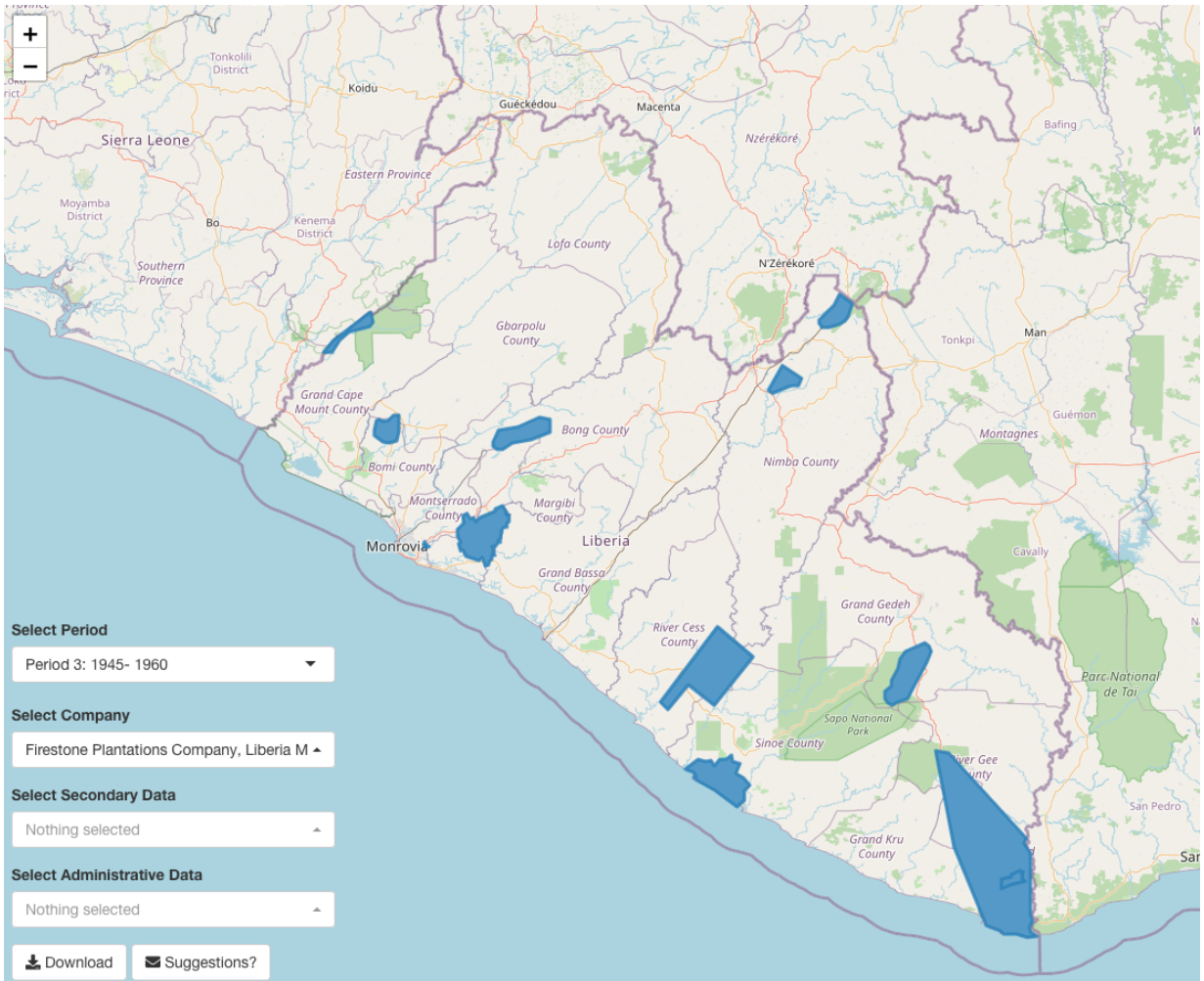
Codebook. Operations, Practices, Maps



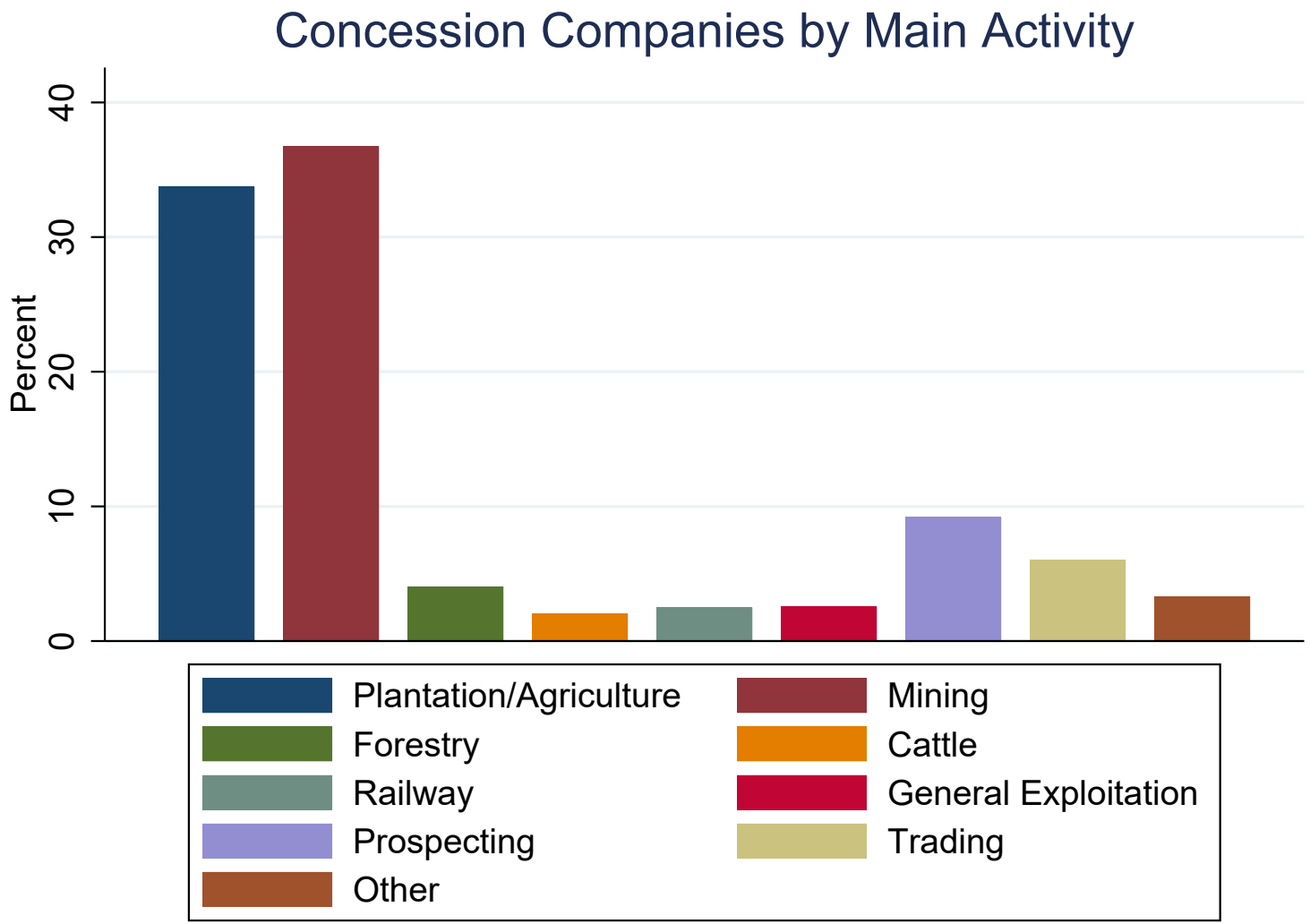
Example. Phase 2, Liberia [1926-1944]



Example. Phase 3, Liberia [1945-1960]



Main Economic Activities. [1,454 companies]



Main Product of Economic Activities. Pecking Order

Number of Colonial Concessions

- **Agriculture**
  - Rubber
  - Cotton
  - Sisal
  - Sugarcane
  - Coffee
- **Mining**
  - Gold
  - Copper
  - Diamond
  - More than one mineral
- **Trading**
- **Infrastructure** [mainly railroads]

Production and Market Structure

- Capacity to process products on the ground (e.g., cotton gin) [715 companies]
  - Mainly in agriculture (68%) and mining (14%)
- Monopoly rights [1039 companies]
  - Common practices both in agriculture (29%) and mining (25%)
- Monopsony rights [943 companies]
  - Present in agriculture (34%) and non-existing in mining.

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Discussion and Way Forward

- Experience of colonial concession companies is common to many African nations
- Important spatial and time variation in both the presence and intensity of concessions activities
- New dataset to start investigating the impact on concession at (quasi) continental scale
- Open the way to answer new/old questions with new data

Ongoing Work

- **Finalize countries**. Codebook, maps, and reports
  - French Central Africa, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Nigeria
- **Data Completion.** Double-entries, errors, inconsistencies
- **Feedback.** Country experts, historians [*please email us*]
- **Website, App**
- **Analysis**.

Persistence

- The long-lasting effect of concessions through different channels
  - Cultural
  - Institutional
  - Historical
- Persistence of concession activities

Persistence of Concession Companies. [939 companies]

