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ABSTRACT

British colonizers relied on chieftaincies as civilizing partners to implement indirect rule in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. A major explanation for the British preference for chieftaincies surrounds how colonizers interpreted recent decades of Muslim intermarriage in the savannah. The arrival of Muslim chiefs to the savannah produced a handful of chiefly led communities. These relatively few groups had loose cultural similarities with European society. The British interpreted the commonalities as signs of human progress in the savannah. Conversely, the British rejected the African communities without Islamic traditions because they did not have recognizable or centralized forms of political leadership. Furthermore, depicting non-chiefly groups as wildly different from European society reinforced the modern and progressive identity of Britain while simultaneously representing non-chiefly groups of the protectorate as socially static or infantile. Believing in the superiority of Muslim-based chieftaincies and the inferiority of non-chiefly groups reflected the Orientalist literary depiction the British began in travel and diplomatic correspondence from and about the savannah. This early intelligence gathering from the nineteenth century produced vivid judgments about the relative value of chiefly and non-chiefly communities for colonizers. The British saw the existence of Muslim-derived chieftaincies as proof that Africans required outside intervention to experience change. Consequently, the view justified British imposition and the civilizing mission. This thesis examines a variety of interlocking British documents—travel and diplomatic literature, colonial administrative reporting, and early anthropological studies—to highlight the positive British discourse representing chiefly groups of the Northern Territories.

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