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On Braun on Bertrand Taithe, *The Killer Trail: A Colonial Scandal in the Heart of Africa*.  
[MWSR 2010.06.02.]

Response by Bertrand Taithe, The University of Manchester (bertrand.taithe@manchester.ac.uk).

I am grateful for the review Dr. Braun has written of my book *The Killer Trail*. I acknowledge that this is a book about a French scandal and what makes a scandal at the turn of the century rather than a study of the African context or a general history of Africa at the turn of the century. While I feel the reviewer has been mostly kind and fair, there are nevertheless a few factual points that I would like to respond to. Firstly, I have not taken “tribal” identities as a given and I have indeed devoted entire pages to explain how these identities were perceived at the time and the context of the conquest. I am sorry if I have left any doubt on this matter. Secondly, the figures on slavery I quoted are far from being quoted uncritically since I expose how they were used for the purpose of propaganda by the anti-slavery movement in France. Finally, African actors appear regularly in this story as resistants and participants in the cruelty of the mission. There are very severe limitations of sources since much of the archive material has been lost or purposefully destroyed. Nevertheless, the main protagonists of the end of Voulet and Chanoine are African soldiers and I discuss at length the difficulty of retrieving their voice. While my book deals primarily with how the French narrated their colonial ventures and engaged with its excesses, I also discuss the fascination of French officers for their enemies. This is a book that is particularly anxious to present this story as the product of complex and conflicting narratives and I am sorry if this has not always come through.