

Politics in
Francophone Africa

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The Colonial Context

The history of France's penetration of and influence in Africa is so large a subject that even the official government historians of French colonialism have done little more than scratch the surface. The analytical problems are daunting: reasonable examination of the subject entails not only disentangling the main lines of the story from the morass of official French mythology, but also relating that story to the history of European, Asian, Arab, and U.S. activities on the continent. Michael Crowder has made an excellent start for the West African region,¹ but the French part of the story has yet to be told fully in its proper contexts.

This is not to say that the literature on French colonialism is sparse; far from it. There exists an impressive array of encyclopedias, books, monographs, studies, and so on by French, British, U.S., and other scholars, officials, explorers, missionaries, and travelers.² Official histories abound: shelves of books dealing with "*l'oeuvre français*," "*la mission française*," and "*la colonisation française*," reveal a continuing preoccupation with the apologetics of colonialism in its French variants. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the French produced most of the studies of their own colonies. During the second half of the twentieth century, however, in the spirit of postwar anticolonialism or simply in the interest of scholarship, non-French academics have joined French scholars and publicists in beginning to challenge the established and largely self-congratulatory wisdom of French colonial historiography.³ The facts of French colonialism in Africa, then, must be seen without blinders and in context.

Enter the French

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, French activities in west and central Africa were almost exclusively coastal in nature, as were those of the other colonial powers. The French roamed freely up and down the

coast, establishing trading posts and "factories" (agencies), and competing with Portuguese, English, Dutch, Danish, Brandenburger, Hamburger, Swedish, Spanish, and later (during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), U.S. mercantile interests. From the latter part of the fifteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century the great maritime nations of Europe practiced what could be styled beachhead colonialism. They operated from small trading bases, floating hulks, minor forts, and petty settlements, and brought out gold, ivory, gum arabic, spices, palm oil, and, most important, the human treasure of the slave trade, which after 1492 fed the plantation economies of the New World for some three hundred years.

The first French traders to operate along the African coast came from Dieppe, and their successors from other French ports such as Rouen and Bordeaux. They probably began to sail south to Cape Verde and beyond during the fifteenth century. Reluctant to challenge the Portuguese, who were already established as the major naval power in the area, they touched land along the Senegalese coast at the mouth of the Gambia River and along the Dahomean beaches, and some may even have gone as far south as the estuary of the Congo.

It was not until the seventeenth century, on the initiatives of royal ministers Cardinal de Richelieu (1585–1642) and later Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1661–1683), that the French state began granting trading charters in specified areas as part of the attempt to extend France's power and wealth. The first venture was private in nature. In 1626 the *Compagnie Normande de Sénégambie* was founded in Rouen, and following an unsuccessful attempt in 1638 to establish a trading base near the mouth of the Senegal River, the company relocated within the sandbar at the river's estuary in 1659, where it founded the fort and trading post of Saint-Louis on the island of N'Dar. Saint-Louis de Sénégál, together with the small island of Gorée, captured from the Dutch in 1677, became the nexus of growing French activity along the coast. During the nineteenth century the settlement was the base from which the French expanded throughout West Africa, but until that time the Senegalese outpost was no more than a beachhead—strategically important and commercially profitable, to be sure, but a beachhead nonetheless.

In 1687, the French established a small post at Assinie, on the Ivory Coast, putting ashore an advance party of a half-dozen traders and a priest. The Assinie colony lasted until 1705, when it was abandoned after considerable attrition due to disease and Dutch attacks. The fate of the Assinie post illustrates neatly the vicissitudes encountered by all the European traders operating along the West African coast: climate, disease, and occasional violence by African and European neighbors often made settlement and trade a difficult, unpredictable, and perilous affair.⁴ Nevertheless, the French persisted, and during the eighteenth century they gradually estab-

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lished a spotty presence along the coast, setting up trading posts at Grand Bassam, Whydah (Ouidah), and Porto Novo on the Ivory and Dahomean coasts. French traders visited the delta of the Niger, the mouth of the Sanaga at Douala, and the Congo estuary, as well as several islands, bays, and other river mouths at which small trading communities operated under constantly changing European flags. The failure of French commercial and political ventures along the East African coast, centered about Kilwa and Zanzibar during the eighteenth century, in part explains the attention the French concentrated on Senegal.⁵ The Senegalese base ultimately proved most successful, and as a result it became the launching pad for France's West African activities.

Whatever the fortunes of the French commercial ventures along the Guinea coast, Senegal remained the key to France's colonial future in West Africa.⁶ Initially, French activity in the area varied considerably: exploration; some privateering, particularly against the Portuguese; trade in gum arabic, ivory, gold, and spices, and the occasional quick profit in the growing slave trade. Saint-Louis gave the French access to the gum arabic of the Mauritanian forests even though the principal intermediaries in the trade, the Trarza Maurs, often preferred to deal with the Dutch along the coast to the north rather than with the French at Saint-Louis. On the coast south of Cape Verde, it was Gorée that opened Rufisque, Dakar, and Joâl to French traders. In 1679, Germain Ducasse, a special envoy from the King of France, signed treaties with the Serer and with the Damal of Cayor, which brought the Senegalese coast from Cape Verde to the Gambia River, as well as territory six leagues into the interior, into the French sphere of influence.

By the end of the seventeenth century, French interests officially turned to converting the Senegalese ports into entrepôts for the export of slaves to France's burgeoning sugar plantations in the West Indies. To this end, as well as to secure additional trading advantages in gum, gold, and spices, Colbert and his successors granted charters to a series of privileged companies. For various reasons—including the fact that the West Indian planters preferred Guinea coast slaves to those from Senegal—almost all the companies did poorly along the Senegal coast, and most went bankrupt, then shifted their operations to the Guinea and Dahomean coasts or began dealing in other commodities. Not even the *Compagnie de Sénégal*, one of the best-organized and best-financed of these enterprises, survived the financial hazards of the Senegalese trade.⁷

As the difficulties of the slave trade along the Senegal coast forced French slavers south and east into uneasy competition with slavers of other countries, the Senegalese posts were put onto a different economic footing and given a new identity and purpose. According to John Hargreaves: "Still, French companies did profit from the gum trade; also in much lesser degrees from dealing in gold, ivory, and hides, as well as from their disap-

pointingly modest business in slaves. This relative diversity, as well as the possibility of limited penetration inland, gave their Senegalese establishments a distinctive character."⁸ Early attempts at penetration of the Senegalese interior met with little success. André Brue, twice governor of the concession, traveled up the Senegal as far as the mouth of the Falémé River, then tried to interest the coastal traders in the opportunities that, he claimed, lay in the hinterland. They remained largely unconvinced, preferring their relatively secure coastal trade to the dangers of the hinterland and, for that matter, to the agricultural schemes proposed for the area.

Nonetheless, during the eighteenth century the Senegalese towns of Saint-Louis and Gorée grew both in size and in importance that was as much due to the culturally and biologically Afro-European character of the population as to the trade conducted there. Africans were integrated into the two settlements in four principal ways: through employment by Europeans, through moving from the status of salaried employee to that of self-employed trader, through interracial marriage and concubinage, and through moving from Portuguese to French areas of influence. Already during the eighteenth century, Senegal had become the laboratory of an assimilation that did not become official policy until the latter part of the next century. This "protoassimilation" occurred in the context of, among other things, the introduction of Catholicism (though only a minority of Senegalese subjects converted), and the limited introduction of European governmental institutions, including some hybrid judicial arrangements. Probably most important, assimilation meant that "Senegalese consciously accepted values and standards derived from their European rulers, and in return claimed the rights which they believed such acceptance should bring."⁹

Innovative as the Senegalese experiment may have been, by the latter part of the eighteenth century official French policy shifted toward the more immediately lucrative trade on the Guinea coast. Between 1763 and 1779, as partial consequence of French wars in Europe, the British annexed Senegal, creating the Senegambian crown colony. The French monarchy regained Senegal in 1779, only to lose it again to the British in 1809 as a result of the Napoleonic wars. The territory was ultimately returned to France in 1814 following the settlement of the Treaty of Paris.

For the next forty years France concentrated on establishing its presence along the coasts south and east of Senegal. In 1828, a French post was established in the Casamance, below the mouth of the Gambia River. In 1842 Admiral Bouët-Willaumez erected a permanent settlement on the Ivory Coast over the ruins of the old Assinie mission. Six years later the French navy installed a naval antislavery station near the site of present-day Libreville, and for several decades France maintained trading and missionary posts there and at the mouth of the Ogooué River. Then, in 1851,

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Assembly. The Second Empire later put an end to the attempt at overseas representation, the memory of which nevertheless remained a sign of the increasing political and social sophistication of the Senegalese communities.¹²

In the final analysis, however, it was the shift in the basis of trade that changed the character of French enclaves along the West African coast. Trade in slaves, precious metals, ivory, gum, and oil did not require more than a beachhead entrepôt and a few agents to do the bargaining. But trade in peanuts, palm oil, cotton, and indigo required that settlers be willing to create plantations and to retain a measure of permanence that could accommodate the seasonal and labor-intensive character of such crops. The beachheads were becoming bases and, in Senegal, settler colonies.

The Scramble and Territorial Conquest

What accounts for the extraordinary expansion of the French from their coastal beachheads, into the hinterlands of the western Sudan and to their acquisition, within about fifty years, of a territorial empire covering four-fifths of West Africa? To be sure, the coastal areas showed moderate economic promise, but they were hardly healthy enough for settlers until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the introduction of quinine made it possible for Europeans to survive malaria. The vast hinterlands were even less hospitable: they tended to be dry and, more important, populated by people who regarded Western incursions with general suspicion and often violent hostility. The standard arguments that attribute the colonial scramble to an economic determinism that required capital outlets abroad and colonial markets for European goods are attractive at first glance, but hardly persuasive in light of the facts.¹³

It is true that the desire for profit drove much of the colonial activity and that governments in Europe and the United States gave official encouragement first in the form of free trade policies and later in the form of protectionist policies that led to considerable expansion of European and U.S. exports between 1875 and 1914. Yet, concludes Phillip Neres, "only a small percentage of this increase can be accounted for by exports to the newly acquired colonies in Africa, whose populations were too poor to be able to absorb new products on any appreciable scale."¹⁴ Furthermore, the countries of Europe that produced great surpluses of capital preferred to invest in each other or in Russia and the United States, where substantial economic growth gave promise of much greater returns than could be had in Africa, where social and economic infrastructure were insufficient to attract risk capital.¹⁵

The coastal traders, including those operating on the Dahomey coast, where profits were largest, were specifically traders, not capitalists. "The

fundamental trait of this commerce," notes Henri Brunschwig, "is, in effect, that these traders did not invest in Africa." Even the large concessionary companies operating in the French Congo operated with relatively limited capital: they sought to extract as much profit as possible with minimal investment. Again, Brunschwig put his finger on the key distinction: Most of these societies "did badly and quickly disappeared," but even "those that succeeded did not display a capitalist spirit in the modern sense of the term."¹⁶

Karl Kautsky, the eminent Austrian socialist, first suggested in 1915 that the French and English roles in the scramble resulted from competition between the two countries for control of Egypt and the lower Nile valley, that is, the strategic European passage to the East. The British historians Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher later developed the connection further, on the basis of much more evidence than was available to Kautsky.¹⁷ According to this argument, the famous Fashoda Incident, when British and French soldiers raced to the town of Fashoda on the upper Nile, became emblematic of British-French imperial competition. But the argument is not convincing. In rebutting the Egyptocentric theory of imperialism, Jean Stengers, a Belgian historian, has pointed out that neither the governments nor the colonial interests of either country ever saw their sub-Saharan African activities in that light.¹⁸ Indeed, if Egypt and the Nile were the prize, there were more direct ways to Cairo, Alexandria, and the Isthmus of Suez than via Dakar or the settlements at the mouth of the Ogooué.

The more reasonable explanations are at once more complex and more direct. To begin with, the great rush for territory did not get under way until 1875. Prior to the last three decades of the nineteenth century the extension of French authority along the West African coast tended to follow the progress of French trade and, more important, could be measured by the extent to which influential French traders persuaded their government to guarantee peaceful conditions for their enterprises. One noteworthy example is that of Victor Régis and his brother Louis, who operated along the West African coast from 1833 to the mid-1870s. Victor Régis appears to have been principally responsible in 1843 for the hoisting of the French flag on the Ivory Coast, where it remained until 1856. Representing himself to the Dahomeans as an official agent of France, he established a factory (trading post) at Whydah in about 1841. In 1862 he secured consular status for his agents in Whydah, and in 1863 France established a protectorate at Porto Novo with, according to Hargreaves, "the sole purpose of securing for Régis substantial imports of spirits and entry into Yorubaland free of the heavy duties levied at Lagos."¹⁹ Of course, a good many traders followed their own commerce and not the flag, preferring to remain relatively unconcerned about which state controlled a trading post so long as they were unmolested and were treated fairly in their competition with traders

of other countries and in their dealings with the local African intermediaries.

The beachheads grew slowly in number and size over the years; by 1870 established beachheads protected by the French flag numbered only about fifteen: Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque, Dakar, Casamance, Assinie, Whydah, Grand Bassam, Porto Novo, and a few ephemeral posts along the Ivory Coast, the Bight of Biafra, and the lower Congo. The most significant of these establishments was, of course, Senegal, and it is from Senegal that the first tentative penetrations of the interior were launched.

From 1815 on, many French people began to consider empire an essential element of national prestige. However, colonial expansion did not become widely popular in metropolitan France for another thirty years, until Louis Faidherbe, aided by excellent press-agentry, moved to consolidate the inland colony and then push east along the Senegal River and across to the Niger. Faidherbe, who governed Senegal from 1854 to 1861 and again from 1863 to 1865, extended French writ over most of Senegal, even seeking a kind of indirect-rule arrangement with the Muslim states of the Futa Toro and Cayor. He hoped to gradually create an empire in what he deemed the rich hinterlands near the bend of the Niger, by peaceful means if possible, by force if necessary. Faidherbe's efforts were only a precursor of the later push inland during which a handful of French officers commanding units made up almost wholly of African conscripts carved out an empire for France. By 1900 those conquests had made France the second largest colonial power of the day.

The real motives for France's part in the scramble lay in European politics: humiliated by their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the French developed a "febrile nationalism"²⁰ that saw in conquest and victories over their colonial competitors a way to regain national face lost in the disaster of 1871.²¹ Young French naval and military officers, often acting beyond the instructions of their superiors, seized what they saw as opportunities for glory as they pushed inland, and in the process they destroyed or reduced to impotence the African states that stood in their way: the Toucouleur empire of El Hajj Omar; the realm of Samori Touré; the kingdom of the Mossi; Rabeh's Chadian empire, and the domains and states of Bornu, Cayor, Ségou, Abomey, Futa Jalon, and Zinder. It was all represented as splendid and heroic, and it enabled unabashed imperialist Jules Ferry, a minister in various French governments, to urge his countryfolk on to even greater colonial heights: "Nowadays it is whole continents which are being annexed; vast areas are being divided up and especially that huge black continent so full of fierce mysteries and vague hopes. . . . Washing our hands of colonial responsibilities . . . amounts to the bankruptcy of our rights and our hopes."²²

By 1881 the holy city of Timbo in Guinea was occupied and a military

command had been created at Kayes, the headquarters for water transport on the upper Senegal. In 1883, after an advance up the Niger Basin, the French occupied Bamako, and eight years later, Ségou, the last stronghold of Samori's empire. Timbuktu fell to the French in 1893, and soon thereafter, in quick succession, the Mossi capital of Ouagadougou, and then Zinder, in what is now the Republic of Niger. To be sure, the French advance was resisted at almost every step by the military forces of the polities encountered on the way. Some of these armies, like those of Samori and Ahmadou (el-Hajj 'Umar Tal's son), even had modern weapons in limited supply. But neither those weapons nor the undoubted bravery of the Africans availed against the French: "French superiority in weapons was such that though Africans had larger forces, they were unable to resist with any success. Furthermore, chiefs almost never joined cause against their common enemy. Indeed, to gain temporary advantage over a traditional enemy, they sometimes allied themselves with the French. But the essential point is that the French imposed their rule on French West Africa largely by force of arms rather than by treaty."²³

While French civilians also played an important role in securing footholds for France along the Guinea coast, it was ultimately military conquest that decided the outcome. The strongest of the coastal states, Abomey, was subordinated by a combination of diplomacy and force. In 1874 Tofa, the ruler of Porto Novo and a nominal vassal of Glélé, the Abomeyan king, accepted French support in maintaining his dynastic claims. In 1883 the French proclaimed a protectorate over Porto Novo and occupied the neighboring port of Cotonou. Six years later, Glélé was succeeded by Gbehanzin, who was determined to reassert his control over Tofa and check the French advance north. Over time, Gbehanzin became too much of a threat to the French, so in 1892 a military column headed by Colonel Maurice Dodds finally occupied Abomey, the royal capital. Gbehanzin remained king for two more years at French sufferance, but was finally deposed in 1894.²⁴ Tofa died in 1908, leaving his heir little more than the regalia of office.

Throughout the period of conquest, the French actively competed with other European states, first for control of the beachheads and by 1890 for territorial possession. During the last thirty years of the century, the British secured Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gold Coast, and the Germans established protectorates in Togo and Cameroon. Equatorial Africa fell to the French by a combination of belated good fortune, diplomatic maneuver, successful competition with the Belgians, and military conquest. The good fortune came by way of an 1874 decision in which the British cabinet refused a French offer to trade its Gabonese outposts for Gambia.²⁵ The French unwillingly stayed on in Gabon, and this provided the opportunity for Savorgnan de Brazza, a naturalized Frenchman of

Italian birth, to push into the Congo basin and lay the groundwork for France's equatorial domain.

For a time de Brazza and Henry M. Stanley were in active competition in the lower Congo basin, de Brazza exploring for the French along the western bank of the river and Stanley exploring on the eastern side on commission from the Belgian king, Leopold II. The rivalry between France and Belgium in the area was temporarily settled by the Congress of Berlin in 1884, but it was not until 1908, when the Belgian government assumed Leopold's title and made the Congo a Belgian colony, that the boundaries of the area became more or less settled. De Brazza spent two years at home, and when he returned to Africa in 1886, he aimed for Chad. The French government and a French Comité de l'Afrique Française underwrote his efforts with subventions and encouragement, and he launched a number of exploratory expeditions, several of which met with disaster. One such mission, led by Jean-Baptiste Marchand, pushed all the way north and east to Fashoda on the upper Nile in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent the British from gaining control of that area.²⁶

The French missions north continued despite all the setbacks. Finally in October 1899 the military mission led by Emile Gentil inflicted an early, though incomplete, defeat upon Rabeh, the Bornouan adventurer who had carved out a Chadian sultanate in the face of the German, French, and British colonial advance. It was not until April 22, 1900, that a 1,500-man force headed by Commandant François-Joseph Amédée Lamy finally chased Rabeh from the field at Koussouri.²⁷ The battle was a costly one: Lamy and most of his officers were killed, Rabeh himself was killed, and his army of five thousand was decimated. France could now link her West and Equatorial African domains into one great empire, to be complemented later by the fruit of her conquests of the Maghreb, and after 1916 by the addition of the western parts of the former German Togo and Kamerun, which became League of Nations mandated territories.²⁸ Although pacification of the hinterland territories was not complete until the second decade of the twentieth century, by 1920 France had emerged from the scramble with one of the largest territorial empires ever assembled.

The French Colonial System

In contrast to the possessions of France's colonial competitors, with the exception of Algeria, French colonies were never settler colonies. Charles A. Julien noted that, at the height of French colonial power, on the eve of World War II, "In Indochina there were only 42,000 Frenchmen in a population of 23,000,000; in Equatorial Africa the proportion was 5,000 to 3,423,000. Only in Algeria, because of its proximity to France and the similarity of its climate, were there as many as 988,000 French out of 7,234,684

inhabitants."²⁹ In 1938 there were 26,000 French people in French West Africa out of 15 million inhabitants. The unwillingness of French people, whom Julien describes as "stay-at-home by nature," to populate their colonies reinforced the strong French bias toward centralized control of the empire. This tendency helped give the French colonial system another of its dominant characteristics: the fortunes of the colonies were more strongly tied than those of other colonial powers to the political situation prevailing in the metropole at any given time. It was for this reason that regime changes, shifts in colonial philosophy, and even debates about colonial ends and means were so clearly reflected in virtually every part of the empire. This helps to explain some of the differences in administration among the various colonies and the frequent contradictions between policy and practice that eventually contributed to the dissolution of the empire.

During the expansion of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, encouraged by a monarchy intent on centralizing power and unifying populations, France transplanted its institutions overseas while insisting that its colonies remain assimilated politically to the metropole. The ancien régime, however, saw its dependent native peoples in a different light: they might be converted to Christianity—itself a form of assimilation—but otherwise they were usually regarded in purely instrumental terms according to the extent to which they contributed, or could be made to contribute, to the metropole's economic interests. In such a context, slavery could be accepted, as well as conflicting doctrines favoring the social and political advancement of the native peoples.

After the French Revolution of 1789, France incorporated both the institutional and the moral assimilationist policies of the ancien régime into the Constitution of 1795, but with an important difference: the constitution was to apply to both French citizens and natives with equal force, slavery having been abolished in 1792. Kenneth Robinson has called this the "policy of Identity," the colonial expression of the revolutionary-egalitarian phases of French history.³⁰ In its African reflections it gave political form to the protoassimilation already underway in Senegal before the Revolution. After 1848 the "policy of identity" was evident in the right of the citizens of the *quatre communes* of Senegal (Dakar, Saint-Louis, Gorée, and Rufisque) to elect a deputy to the French National Assembly, as well as in Senegal's educational system—"predominantly public, free, secular, and conducted in the French language."³¹ It was also expressed in local governmental institutions variously adopted throughout Africa.

Napoleon I returned to the ideas of the ancien régime; he reestablished slavery and gave new life to the old mercantilistic impulses. Succeeding regimes of the Restoration (1814–1830) and the July Monarchy (1830–1848) vacillated between policies of harsh subjugation and moderate laissez-faire. However, the more enlightened doctrines of assimilation man-

aged to survive, appearing finally to triumph during the ill-fated Second Republic (1848–1851).

Once French ideas of assimilation had taken hold, they appealed strongly, almost irresistibly, to later generations of French thinkers and politicians.³² The reasons for this are relatively simple. The Revolution of 1789 proclaimed the Rights of Man to be universal values, and legislation made them part of the package of French citizenship that was conferred on all persons living on French soil, domestic or overseas. Under such circumstances, pride naturally went hand in hand with the assertion that French citizenship, thus endowed with the heritage of freedom, was both a noble and inimitably precious gift. Thus, *assimilation* was always self-referential: it meant assimilation *to* or *into* French civilization, not the other way around; it was France's unique gift, and the candidate for assimilation was expected to receive it with gratitude.

As it turned out, revolutionary pride was just a short step from the ultimate rationale of assimilation, the *mission civilisatrice*—France's "civilizing mission": given the self-evident superiority of French culture, law, administration, and language, assimilation was not only a worthy goal, but a *duty* that accompanied colonial expansion. Thus the leaders of the Second Republic, who saw in their work the moral reincarnation of the victories of 1789, once again abolished slavery, turned all natives into citizens, and provided for parliamentary representation of the colonies. Under the Second Republic the *quatre communes* of Senegal became the proud African example of the vitality and rightness of assimilation, and whatever else may have been wrong with French rule, there is little doubt that the Senegalese of Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Gorée, and Dakar considered themselves favored over all colonized peoples.³³ Assimilation, today condemned as the crassest kind of cultural chauvinism, was once hailed by both colonizers and colonized as an expression of the finest sentiments of the human spirit. It seldom occurred to French colonial policymakers and thinkers that Africans might not wish to be assimilated, and the fact is that most of those subjugated by France did not seriously begin to question the doctrine until after World War II.

With the fall of the Second French Republic and the rise of Napoleon III's Second Empire (1851–1870), the ideological pendulum swung the other way, and the advocates of unfettered domination again won the day. The right of political representation was suppressed, and the state asserted its prerogative to rule the colonies by decree. Authoritarian administration and a separate system of legislation for the colonies, two of the legacies of the Second Empire, remained basic to colonial principle and practice until 1939.

Under the Third Republic, France created its second colonial empire, consolidating its control over much of North Africa, the Sahara, and what

subsequently became French West and Equatorial Africa. (French Togo and Cameroon were not added to the empire until after World War I, and then as League of Nations mandates.) The Third Republic's initial impulses were liberal: to revive at least some of the reforms of the Second Republic. Thus, assimilation once again came into vogue; parliamentary representation for the Old Colonies, including the Senegalese *quatre communes*, was revived; and an innovation, representative local institutions, was introduced.

It was not long, however, before the political legacies of the earlier French regimes and the realities of military conquest and of rule over increasingly larger areas and more heterogeneous populations began to influence policy at the center through the voices of discordant and often mutually hostile groups and interests. There were, to begin with, the assimilationists, to whom assimilation remained the logical expression of national pride, cultural superiority, and the legacies of the revolutions of 1789 and 1848. Other voices, according to Julien, were no less strident: there was "a colonial party, active and realist, chiefly concerned with making money; a military party, jealous of its authority and maintaining it by the fiction of indirect administration," and modeled on British Indian and Dutch East Indian examples; "a school of sociology (Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl) which revealed to the public the diversity and originality of the native civilizations; a state of public opinion indifferent or hostile to the imperial expansion which a minority of politicians or businessmen pursued."³⁴

In the end, the debate was settled by the *faits accomplis* of conquest and domination. The advocates of cultural and political assimilation could hardly prevail amid the nationalist fever of imperial acquisition that gripped the country after 1880. By 1905, the French Ministry of Colonies had abandoned the official policy of assimilation; dominant opinion in French colonial circles had come to espouse French racial superiority and its corollary doctrine that only after centuries of slow evolution under European direction could Africans reach European levels of civilization. There were also baser motives at work, as Michael Crowder has suggested:

The French administrators resented being subjected to democratic assemblies, which could, and like the *conseil général* of Senegal, did criticize their policies. Furthermore, an assimilationist policy was expensive, if followed to its conclusions. For if Africans were French citizens they should enjoy the privileges of French citizens, such as education, etc. The resources available to the French in West Africa were clearly not sufficient even to begin assimilating Africans to the same economic and social standards as obtained in France. And France itself was unwilling to pay the cost of the implementation of such a policy from its metropolitan budget. Therefore, except in the Four Communes of Senegal, assimilation was abandoned as the basis of administering Africans.³⁵

The new orientation was styled *association*. As Jules Harmand, one of its leading proponents, argued, association involved a kind of cooperative arrangement whereby conqueror and conquered coexisted to the benefit of the latter. Given tolerance, respect for native customs and laws, and cooperation and assistance instead of exploitation, it would be possible to bring order, material prosperity, and morality to societies hitherto unable to achieve these values.³⁶ In practice, of course, association had numerous practical advantages as well: it permitted the French to pick and choose among traditional institutions, keeping or modifying those most likely to "second" (promote) the work of colonization while discarding the rest. Chiefs were made and unmade, and traditional political units could be dismantled or reconfigured as administrative or political exigencies dictated. This permitted degrees of control ranging from the direct administration of local affairs practiced along the coast to the looser arrangements whereby chiefs who had survived the conquest, such as the *mogho naba* (king) of the Mossi, were permitted to keep some of their traditional powers in exchange for maintaining order, collecting taxes, and assembling conscript labor.

The new policy evolved in time to undergird the institutional consolidation of France's new empire. It was plain, by the turn of the twentieth century, that some degree of administrative coherence would have to be given to the vast sprawl of colonies from Dakar to the Congo River. The phase of pacification was almost over, and it was only in the more remote reaches of the savannah and desert that resistance continued for some decades. Mauritania, for example, was not brought under practical control until the 1920s, and frequent police actions continued into the 1930s. The first attempt at territorial union occurred in 1895, when a governor-general and a *conseil supérieur* were mandated for the colonies of Senegal, Soudan (now Mali), Guinea, and Ivory Coast. The operation of the new system, however, left each colonial administration virtually autonomous. In 1899, Soudan was dismembered and divided among Senegal, Upper Senegal-Niger, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Dahomey, but it was not until the reforms of 1902-1904 that the federation became an administrative and political reality. A constitution for French West Africa (AOF) was promulgated in 1904, and an effective *gouvernement général* was established at Dakar, complete with its own budget, bureaucracy, and powers of taxation.³⁷

The federation operated as a strict hierarchy, with the governor-general at the top assisted by high-ranking French officials and an advisory council (Conseil Supérieur de Gouvernement) composed of French citizens and African subjects all appointed by the governor-general. Below the governor-general and directly responsible to him were the governors of the several colonies (styled *lieutenant governors*), each of whom had his own bureaucracy and a handpicked advisory council (a *conseil administratif*),

also composed of French and African members. Only Senegal retained its older *conseil général*.

The lieutenant governors were not permitted to exercise independent decisionmaking powers. Instead, all had to channel major policy decisions through the governor-general, who also controlled the major federal services (post and telegraph, public works, sanitary services, agriculture). It was solely in matters of routine and day-to-day administration that the lieutenant governors exercised much discretion, and few of the governors remained more than two or three years in one post; this system of rapid rotation prevented them from developing the independent political fiefdoms that had been the bane of French Indochinese administration. Not even the governor-general, for all his powers, could legislate for the federation as did the governors of British colonies through their legislative councils. He could only recommend legislation to the minister of colonies, who, by virtue of laws adopted in 1854, possessed authority to rule the colonies by decree. In form, colonial laws and decrees were usually decisions of the French cabinet. The whole structure conformed nicely to the French preoccupation with order and centralized control. In the neat French colonial scheme of things, Paris, like the Rome of old, had to be the center of the imperial universe. (See Appendix D.)

By the time the AOF federation broke up in 1959, the original five members of the federation had grown to eight, with the last of the group, Upper Volta, reconstituted in 1947 from pieces allocated to its neighbors in 1932. The pattern of rule set up for the AOF was sufficiently attractive to Paris and to Minister of Colonies Gaston Doumergue, whose initiatives were one of the principal reasons for the creation of the federation, that it was not long until it was applied, with little variation, to France's equatorial possessions, then known generally as the French Congo. In 1908, a General Government of French Equatorial Africa was set up, with its capital at Brazzaville. Two years later the Federation of French Equatorial Africa (AEF) was established along structural lines resembling those of the AOF. The AEF split the old French Congo into three component colonies—Gabon, Moyen-Congo (or Middle Congo), and Ubangi-Shari-Chad—which were governed by a governor-general at the top and subordinate lieutenant governors for the territories, with councils, bureaucracy, and local administration closely paralleling the AOF model. Chad became a separate colony in 1920.

Although the AOF and AEF federations were much alike in formal structure, the governor-general in Brazzaville exercised greater *de facto* powers than did his counterpart in Dakar, a development probably due both to the greater distance between Brazzaville and Paris and to the especially strong personalities of the first governors-general. "In the 1930s, for example," note Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, "a Governor-General

was able with impunity to refuse for eight years to promulgate locally a decree on education drawn up specifically for AEF by the Minister of Colonies."³⁸ The AOF and AEF federations were both finally liquidated in 1959 in the wake of the extraordinary political reforms that followed World War II.³⁹

The Government Hierarchy

The administration of both AEF and AOF was dominated by a theoretically rigid hierarchy of French career officials who wielded power in an authoritarian, sometimes tyrannical manner. Governors-general and lieutenant governors (after 1947 called high commissioners and commissioners) were appointed by the French governments of the day and drawn sometimes from the French colonial service and sometimes from the ranks of politicians. In time both higher and lower officials were drawn from the ranks of the colonial civil service, the *administrateurs des colonies*. In practice, because of the constraints upon the governors, the periodic lack of central policy for the administration of the colonies, and poor communications, the actual on-the-spot formulation of policy usually devolved upon the local French officials, in particular the *commandants de cercle*. As Franz Ansprenger put it, the *commandant de cercle* "is the uncrowned king and jack-of-all-trades for his district: road construction engineer, judge, sanitation inspector, policeman, agronomist."⁴⁰ He oversaw the collection of taxes for his district, settled disputes, and "guided" the chiefs in their duties. And he could call upon the district police and the paramilitary *gardes de cercle* to enforce his writ, which included, among nastier jobs, the assembly of involuntary laborers and the collection of head taxes. His mandate was reinforced by the *Indigénat*, a legal system of administrative abuses and penalties that he enforced at his discretion. Naturally, the quality of the *commandants de cercle* varied greatly within and between colonies; some were harsh and cruel, while not a few showed sensitivity and devotion, often earning the respect and friendship of their subjects. One such individual was Robert Delavignette, who rose from commandant to high commissioner and whose humane and enlightened service embodied an ideal rarely achieved by colonial administrators.⁴¹

The Pacte Colonial

Association continued as the dominant policy orientation of French governments up to World War II. Political assimilation survived as an ideal in the climate of opinion that prevailed until 1940, but it was considered to be dangerous to French political and economic interests in the short run. Seen in this light, the *quatre communes* of Senegal were more than exceptional; they were unique. Their visibility and success as paradigms of assimilation

probably did much to bring on the unabashed reactive paternalism of association: they served to remind the French that political assimilation was valuable as a distant goal, but convinced decisionmakers already fearful of its long-range consequences that it was unpalatable as an immediate practical reality.

The AOF and AEF federations were designed not for the convenience of Africans, but for the benefit of France, and more *communes* along Senegalese lines would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the economic and political alliances engendered by the old *pacte coloniale*, the French version of British mercantilism that was basic to French colonial economic policy until World War II. The *pacte colonial*, refurbished as "economic assimilation," meant in practice "that all important economic and financial decisions were made at Paris within the framework of French interests, that colonial resources were exploited fully for French interests, and that colonial markets were reserved for French manufacturers and merchants, no matter how adversely all this might affect the interests and development of the colonies themselves."⁴² This is not to say that French policymakers were uninterested in the economic and social development of the African colonies; the solid construction of towns, railways, roads, and the like are testimony to this fact. Still, such development was seen as instrumental to French needs, interests, and plans. In 1921, for example, Albert Sarraut, then minister of colonies, introduced a proposal to utilize basic colonial resources to aid France's postwar recovery. His so-called *mise en valeur* (development) proposals would have cost at least 497 million francs in the AOF for infrastructure, irrigation, and urban development alone. The economic crisis of 1921 killed the plan.⁴³

Political Assimilation

In theory, the *mission civilisatrice* (exemplified in the policies of assimilation) advertised itself as an expression of French universalism. In practice, however, assimilation tended to be highly selective and, over time, increasingly restrictive. The rules by which an African might achieve assimilation emphasized cultural adaptation—education, language, life-style, and by engaging in a typically French occupation or profession. In the end, the process created an elite group of "black Frenchmen" who were culturally and socially assimilated into white French society. (The exemplar of assimilation was, of course, Leopold Sédar Senghor. As the story goes, when Senghor was told that he was more French than the French, he took it as a compliment. The story is probably apocryphal, but credible.) Assimilation was never easy and—not infrequently, because of restrictive French employment and economic practices—finding that French occupation or profession (in effect, attaining economic, social, and political assimilation)

proved twice as difficult as acquiring a French education. At all events, to achieve *citoyen* (citizen) status one had to be born French or on "French soil," that is, in the *quatre communes*, where birthrates were generally higher than elsewhere in French Africa because many women tried to have their children born there, or one could become an assimilated citizen by acquiring a good French education, becoming Christian, and proving loyalty to France through recognized service. This combination of requirements effectively kept the number of *assimilés* small; Michael Crowder reports that in AOF, fewer than five hundred Africans had become assimilated citizens in this way before 1940.⁴⁴

Education was initially available only to a fortunate few, such as the sons of chiefs, and its aim was primarily to prepare the future leaders of rural Africa and the subordinate professionals needed in medicine, teaching, and commerce. The French system operated—as did other colonial systems—to create a small but essential auxiliary class that would serve the colonial regime. The French even had a phrase for it: *seconder l'oeuvre coloniale*, that is, to support and promote the colonial enterprise. Even though educational opportunities expanded over time, in 1940 only about ninety thousand Africans in both AOF and AEF were in schools.⁴⁵

Colonial Political Life

Other than the citizens of the Senegalese *communes* and the handful of French-naturalized Africans in the two federations and the mandates, Africans were rarely involved in colonial political life. The great majority were subjects (*sujets*), not citizens, a distinction that not only underscored the cultural and political gap between the Africans and the French, but also provided the legal foundation for the whole administrative structure of colonial rule. A subject, by definition a person unready for French citizenship, needed different rules and institutions, that he might be guided and controlled for his own good. At first glance it might appear that the African chiefs, still numbering about fifty thousand in the AOF just before World War II, would not be treated as subjects, as might the various communal, territorial, and local councils on which Africans served. In reality the chiefs, like those over whom they allegedly ruled, were treated as inferiors with second-class status.

Three grades of chiefs existed in AOF, AEF, and the mandates: village chiefs, cantonal chiefs (in some instances misleadingly called tribal chiefs), and provincial chiefs (sometimes called *chefs supérieurs*).⁴⁶ Under colonial rule the first two functioned mainly as agents for the collection of taxes, recruitment of forced labor, enforcement of compulsory cultivation of crops, and conscription of men into the army. The French considered it desirable that village chiefs enjoy traditional legitimacy, but more often

than not they treated both the village chiefs and the cantonal chiefs, who were simply appointed officials, in degrading and humiliating fashion, as if they were lowly civil servants. The chiefs were subject to summary dismissal, public castigation, and, sometimes, beatings. The low esteem in which Africans held these chiefs is attested by the fact that where local traditional councils had a role in nominating village chiefs, they sometimes put forward someone other than the real chief, whom they chose in secret and entrusted with their traditional rites and functions. The false village chiefs were known as "straw chiefs." Delavignette, who served at all levels of the French colonial service during a fifty-year career, related an experience that illustrates the point:

When I was head of a subdivision on the Upper Volta, I went on tour in the first months of my stay, and landed unexpectedly in a distant, little visited, village. The Chief gave me a good reception. I came back there two years later at the end of my tour, and had a still better reception. The Chief, however, did not seem to me to be the same man. I had before me an old man, while it was a young man who had received me the first time, and I recognized him, standing behind the old man. I asked the two of them why the chieftainship of the village had passed from the one to the other without my being told of it. The old man said to me: "He whom you see behind me was in front of me," and he explained, "it is I who am the Chief, today as the other time, and in front of this man, as behind him. But two years ago we did not know you, and he showed himself in my place."⁴⁷

Delavignette noted that it was "not unusual" for such "straw chiefs" to be put forward, particularly in the villages, and concluded that what he called "the living entity" of the village must be respected by the colonial administrator if he was to be expected to perform his tasks at all.

Cantonal chiefs fared somewhat better, but only to the extent that they still represented genuine, substantive authority, and the French needed their cooperation. They too were replaced with more compliant types if they challenged French power too directly or failed to "second the colonial enterprise" of France. Before 1940 various local councils—such as the five AEF mixed municipal councils, the *cq̄nseils de gouvernement* in AEF and AOF, and the *conseils de notables* in Togo and Cameroon, all of which included Africans—were no better able to affect policymaking in the colonies. Almost uniformly their functions were purely advisory, and their advice was restricted to a limited number of subjects.

It was only in the Senegalese Old Towns—the *quatre communes* of Gorée, Saint-Louis, Rufisque, and Dakar that Africans could and did exercise French political rights. In matters of personal status, they could also have recourse to traditional and customary law. Beginning in 1890 attempts were made to remove or curtail the privileges of the *communes*. Then, dur-

ing World War I, when France badly needed African troops, Blaise Diagne, the first African to be elected to the French Parliament from the *communes*, aided military recruitment in Africa in exchange for a law that reaffirmed the rights of citizenship for all persons born in the Old Towns and their descendants. In 1919 Diagne organized the first African political party in French tropical Africa, the Republican-Socialist Party, and he virtually dominated Senegalese politics until his death in 1934.⁴⁸

European and Native Law

Two different codes of law, European and native, were applied in the French African colonies. As *sujets*, the vast majority of people were under the jurisdiction of the native courts and subject to the procedures of arbitrary punishment under the *Indigénat*, administered at the discretion of the *commandants de cercle*. Courts applying the French penal and civil codes never involved more than forty thousand Europeans and Africans in the colonies—citizens and *assimilés*. For the rest, tribunals, usually composed of one French administrator and two African assessors chosen for their knowledge of custom, applied African traditional law in both civil and penal cases. Of course, the French administrator-judge had the last word and was not bound by the advice of his assessors. The *Indigénat*, a set of rules and a list of some thirty-four infractions (later reduced to twelve) covering everything from vagabondage to malingering on public works projects to failure to show due respect to a French official, was a formidable weapon in the hands of local administrators. Promulgated in 1904, the *Indigénat* permitted French colonial officials to impose fines and even short prison terms on violators, all without a trial or—except in the mandates of Togo and Cameroon—the right of appeal. Abuses under the *Indigénat* were widespread, causing much resentment and later making it a particular target of nationalist agitation.

Forced Labor and the Labor Tax

As used by French colonial officials, often operating under the legal cover of the *Indigénat*, forced labor and the head tax constituted some of the most repressive aspects of French rule. Until they were finally suppressed in 1946, the *corvée* (forced labor, usually without pay) and the *prestation* (labor tax) were two of the principal sources of labor for public—and often private—works projects. Only *assimilés*, the citizens of the *quatre communes*, and, later, war veterans, were exempt. The most common use of forced labor was on roads and on the so-called *champs administratifs*, tilled fields maintained by the administration. In some areas, such as the Ivory Coast, Gabon, and the French Congo, labor was requisitioned for commercial companies and concessions, often for portage and manual

labor, and for the construction of railroads, as in French Cameroon during the 1920s.

Support for forced labor came from French politicians who believed that Africans were naturally lazy and therefore had to be forced to work for their own good; even Blaise Diagne defended the practice. Crowder points out that Diagne's defense of French labor policies came "at a time when women, carrying children on their backs, worked on the *corvée* making up roads in French Congo with their bare hands, since the administration did not provide them with tools. This scandal was well known by 1930, for André Gide had given it wide publicity three years before through his *Voyage au Congo*, which caused a furore in France."⁴⁹ It is hardly surprising that some of the most common forms of protest against French rule focused on the *corvée* and the *prestation*: occasionally entire populations of villages took flight to avoid forced labor; hundreds of thousands did so in the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta, according to one observer.⁵⁰ The head tax, the arbitrary requisitioning of food and animals by the chiefs—exactions permitted by the French administration—and high levies on retail market activity also occasioned protests, and at times riots and violence, during the 1920s and 1930s.

Military Conscription

Military conscription became, after 1904, a permanent feature of France's colonial system. Before that date, black African volunteers had fought in various parts of the empire, and the military columns that subjugated West and Equatorial Africa usually included recruits from previously conquered areas. During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 Africans fought in Europe itself for the first time. When the AOF and AEF federations were created, a decree provided for the conscription of Africans if there were not enough volunteers to fill African quotas. When the war in Europe broke out in 1914, conscription and recruitment of volunteers increased sharply, and by the end of the war, with the help of Blaise Diagne, about 173,000 Africans had been put at France's disposal to fight on the front lines and to work in support capacities. Conscription continued after the war, and all able-bodied men from ages eighteen to thirty-five were eligible. The annual quota was for the AOF was 23,000 men, but because of rejections for physical reasons, no more than 10,000 were inducted from the AOF per year between 1919 and 1939. The majority of both volunteers and conscripts were drawn from such predominantly Muslim areas as Senegal, Soudan, Upper Volta, and Chad, and some ethnic groups, such as the Mossi and the Sara of Chad, contributed disproportionate shares of the annual levies.⁵¹

Though considerable numbers of young men went willingly to serve in the French armies, both recruitment and conscription—particularly the lat-

ter—were widely considered to be yet another exaction upon subject peoples. Many young men took flight to avoid what they considered a “blood tax,” and recruiters and conscription agents often resorted to the same strong-arm methods that were used to enforce the *prestation* and *corvée*. One consequence of this opposition was to induce France to make service more attractive, granting to veterans such concessions as payment of allowances and pensions, preferment in some government jobs, and exemption from the *Indigénat* and taxation. Nevertheless, many veterans returned home restless and dissatisfied with the old ways, and rather than becoming solid links between the colonial administration and the local *sujet* milieux as had been widely hoped by the French government, they frequently found themselves alienated from both. Not surprisingly, both interwar and post-World War II political movements in AEF and AOF often found willing supporters among *anciens combattants* (veterans) and military pensioner groups.

It is clear that the main lines of French colonial practice and policy fostered a system that became increasingly authoritarian and conservative over time. Even Blaise Diagne, Senegal’s black deputy, who had fought to preserve the privileges of the *quatre communes*’ sixteen thousand electors, was willing to justify forced labor, the distinctions between *citoyens* and *sujets*, and “the total lack of democratic institutions outside Senegal.”⁵² Save for Lamine Guèye’s longtime opposition to Diagne, few if any challenges to the basic premises of the system were successfully mounted in or out of Africa before 1936, when the Popular Front government of socialist leader Léon Blum came to power in France. (Lamine Guèye was one of the AOF’s dominant political figures during the interwar period; he was the first French West African lawyer and was active within a Senegalese socialist group during the late 1920s and early 1930s.) Thomas Hodgkin notes the main lines of these changes:

The first African unions were formed in 1937; the first legal strikes occurred; the first collective agreements were negotiated. . . . And not only trade unions: the *Foyer du Sudan*, a political discussion circle, was organized by the intelligentsia of Bamako at about the same time. The first African newspapers too were beginning to appear—*L’Eclaireur de la Côte d’Ivoire*, founded in Abidjan in 1935 by Messrs. Binzème and Vilascox, which attacked the big chiefs and supported the demands of the unemployed and African planters hit by the economic crisis.⁵³

Also, Germany’s growing militancy about the return of her former African colonies, in particular, Togo and Cameroon, as well as the mounting threat in Europe posed by the Nazi regime, persuaded the French government to sponsor such quasipolitical groups as the Togolese Cercle des Amitiés Françaises (founded in 1936) and the Jeunesse Camerounaise Française

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(organized in 1938), whose programs consisted of opposition to Germany and the general furtherance of patriotism.

The fall of France in 1940 and the formation of the puppet Vichy government, which recreated the worst aspects of the colonial regime, put an end to this brief political "renaissance" (to use Hodgkin's term). In 1943 French West and Equatorial Africa were liberated from Vichy rule, and the stage was set for General Charles de Gaulle's Free French provisional government to initiate the chain of reforms that would completely change French rule in Africa and ultimately lead to the dissolution of France's African empire.

Resistance

France's colonial venture in Africa was never without challenge on the part of the Africans themselves, a challenge that always shadowed and disturbed the rosy vision of the enterprise elaborated in both private and official colonial circles. Henri Brunschwig has argued that French colonialism in Africa largely depended on the acquiescence and often the willing help of Africans of all types, from the *assimilés*, *acculturés*, and *convertis* (converted) at the top of the colonial social order, to the simple illiterate collaborators at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.⁵⁴ The point is well taken; the most seductive gift the conqueror can offer the conquered is the opportunity to be like the conqueror and to share the prerogatives and rewards of rule. This tactic was understood by most past imperial powers, from the Romans to the Arabs to the Ottomans. But the other side of that coin was resistance.⁵⁵

As Crawford Young has brilliantly demonstrated,⁵⁶ the colonial state was usually a pragmatic construct designed primarily for domination and extraction. Particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, it was the "minimal," or even "constabulary" state⁵⁷ par excellence. This was in part because the resources at its disposal were limited—colonial officials largely needed to live off the land and operate with a skeleton crew—and in part because those it ruled tended to pursue strategies that minimized, blunted, and sometimes foiled its reach and extractive capacities. It is true that the colonial state was coercive and capable of deploying overwhelming force if its writ was directly challenged—as it did in response to a whole series of bloody but unsuccessful nineteenth- and twentieth-century anticolonial uprisings that ranged in scale from village-level revolts to regional insurrections and rebellions.⁵⁸ But once the colonial state was firmly in place, while it never foreclosed recourse to armed violence, it usually sought pragmatic accommodations with its subjects, rather than simple domination by brute force.

Colonial administrations also could and did find ways of extracting

additional resources and revenue from already impoverished territories (as in Niger and Dahomey),⁵⁹ mobilizing forced labor for plantation and infrastructural work (as in Senegal and Guinea),⁶⁰ and otherwise demonstrating the power of the colonial state. Nevertheless, the modern colonial venture was seldom a simple zero-sum game tilted to favor the conquerors; the matter tended to be much more complex. John Lonsdale points out one of the main political dilemmas of European colonialism in Africa:

African authorities lost the race for power and, as they did so, became increasingly divided. Europeans accumulated power, but were much less sure about how to convert it to authority. The perplexities of rulers, conquerors and conquered alike, stemmed in part from their shared difficulties in securing the more profitable obedience of those whom they tried to rule. Many Africans resisted conquest, but more Africans evaded the forms of work which were then devised for them.⁶¹

Thus, as Boubacar Fall, Patrick Manning, and Finn Fugelstad also show, the forced labor systems of Guinea and Senegal gradually collapsed because of increasingly widespread evasion of and flight from the labor recruiters, and in both Dahomey and Niger colonial regimes found some of their mechanisms of exploitation and extraction snagged, if not blocked, by Africans who were only nominally cooperative.

The image of the all-powerful, brutally single-minded colonial state of which French Indochina, Portuguese Africa, and Leopold II's Congo (before 1908) are the archetypes is an oversimplification at best. Unlike noncolonial states, and perhaps partly because they tended to be forever short of personnel and resources, colonial states usually had their own large, informal political and economic sectors with which to contend. Not only was conquest almost everywhere physically incomplete, but colonial authorities more often than not found it much more expedient and cost-effective to strike political and economic bargains with local elites and "traditional" rulers, including those the colonizers had put in place, even though such deals plainly opened the doors to reciprocal manipulation, widespread evasion, dissimulation, and manifold other forms of everyday resistance to the colonial regime itself. It is hardly surprising that the British found their system of indirect rule, which they had first introduced in India, admirably suited to their needs in Africa. The French operated a similar system and, in an unguarded moment, even admitted that they had borrowed some of its aspects from the British.⁶²

While armed resistance to colonial conquest was the manifest expression of African confrontation with the French, it was the intimate, informal, and usually nonviolent contexts of French-African interaction that shaped that resistance and that ultimately led to the rise of modern African politics and the end of formal colonialism. African resistance in this informal sector operated in seven main modes:

1. *Within the politics of exclusion.* Almost without exception, African nationalism was born in the shadows of colonial systems initially designed to prevent indigenous political expression, to curtail it when it could not be prevented, and to suppress it when it could not be curtailed. Thus, the earliest anticolonial associations were almost by definition nonformal, and they were of a special kind: they remained nonformal only so long as they remained excluded from the formal political realm. When France began opening political doors in its colonies after World War II, many of these associations crossed into the formal realm. Others, whose founders espoused ideologies that provoked the French to continue excluding them, were created with the specific purpose of forcing entry onto the macropolitical stage. Once these latter became strong enough or troublesome enough, they could often pressure the colonial state to recognize them, co-opt them, or bargain with them. This was the avenue to power of many self-styled revolutionary nationalist movements and parties. Others, unable to open the doors of the colonial state by peaceful means, resorted to armed violence and organized rebellion as their mode of entry. (Chapter 3 offers discussion and data on these matters.)

2. *By arrangement.* Where the costs of direct control proved too high, more or less mutually profitable, pragmatic bargains could be struck if the subjects were willing. By various arrangements, the French came to collaborative terms with the Islamic brotherhoods of Senegal, the *mogho naba* of the Mossi (in what is today Burkina Faso), the sultans and emirs of Niger and Chad, the *lamibé* of northern Cameroon, and the "kings" and the chiefs of the "grassfields" of southwest Cameroon.

3. *With French toleration.* What the colonial authorities could not control, they often simply tolerated, as long as the activities did not represent an open threat to public order. Low-level corruption within the indigenous administrative cadre, relatively minor black-market operations, and the activities of such groups as market women's associations all were areas of informal collusion between the colonial regimes and their native subjects.

4. *Through muted resistance.* Muted resistance was the colonial systems' version of James C. Scott's "everyday forms of resistance."⁶³ It was often aided and abetted by local chiefs, rulers, and notables, and it involved not only peasants, but also local traders and members of the indigenous colonial petty bourgeoisie. This kind of resistance could involve foot-dragging in meeting government production quotas, as apparently happened quite often in Socialist Guinea; minor but continuing vandalism of government offices; or seemingly unorganized mass absenteeism from government workplaces. In 1970, during a visit to Lomé, Togo, I witnessed a silent demonstration in front of the municipal offices by a sizable group of traditional healers (*fétisheurs*), who I was told were casting powerful maledictions and curses on the city government for imposing a new tax on their stalls in Lomé's central market. The fetisheurs danced, waved amulets and

"magical" objects, and threw pebbles into the air. One of the demonstrators deliberately urinated on the mayor's car. They carried on for at least an hour, attracting a large and sympathetic crowd. The tax was rescinded the next day.

5. *By evasion.* Frequently, political space could be appropriated by means of, for example, the creation of new Christian churches and religious sects, which the colonial regimes usually tolerated much more readily than they did secular organizations. In francophone Africa, as elsewhere on the continent, millenarian, syncretistic, and evangelical churches and sects often represented foyers of submerged resistance, as did cultural organizations such as football clubs and mutual aid societies.⁶⁴ Of course, if the groups began to threaten the colonial status quo, they were suppressed, and their leaders were prosecuted, imprisoned, and sometimes deported. This is what happened in the cases of the Anglican-Liberian church of the prophet William Wade Harris in the Ivory Coast; the Mouride brotherhood and its founder Amadou Bamba, who was deported from Senegal in 1895; the Hamalists in Senegal and later in North Africa; and the Matsouanist and Bwiti sects in Gabon and Middle Congo, among others.⁶⁵

Outside the main towns evasion often took the form of widespread protective dissimulation, of which Delavignette's story about the straw chief and the true chief is almost paradigmatic. It is entirely possible that those villagers' ruse made it possible for them to preserve their informal political space for at least a year, and perhaps even longer. Manning notes a similar but more explicit arrangement in Dahomey at the turn of the century: some districts had two chiefs, one the chief "of the land," who was selected by the community according to its own procedures, and the other the "white man's chief," who had no authority save in the eyes of the whites. In order to get anything done, "the administration would have to know both chiefs and get them to agree to the action."⁶⁶ Sékou Touré, the first president of independent Guinea, abolished most of the country's chiefdoms in 1958, but there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that "hidden" chiefs were chosen and legitimated according to traditional norms in many of the same villages struck by the government's edict.

6. *By default.* Given its limitations, the colonial state had to depend mainly on extraction from the commercialized economic sector, including the extraction of those export commodities whose production it developed or encouraged, and it had to seek taxes and services from the "domesticated" part of the society. As a result, much, if not most, indigenous economic activity operated in the hidden or parallel economy. Already under siege, the French and African operators of the colonial economy needed to practice economies of scale and therefore had to content themselves with controlling such parts of the economy as they could effectively reach. To be sure, their reach varied widely across colonial systems, and this not only

left open wide fields of activity for indigenous economic and political entrepreneurs, including those with formal ties to the state, but also preserved much of the political autonomy of the groups, communities, and polities involved.

7. *By outwitting of the state.* Outwitting the machinery and the officials of the state has always been one of the "weapons of the weak" (to use Scott's phrase), and this was especially so during the colonial period. Elizabeth Colson reports that in colonial times Zambians measured each others' political "competence" by the extent to which they were able to manipulate white colonial officials.⁶⁷ One of the better descriptions of such manipulation is in Amadou Hampaté Bâ's delightful novel, *The Fortunes of Wangrin (Etrange destin de Wangrin)*. Wangrin, a semiliterate scoundrel operating on the fringes of colonial French West Africa, cons his employer, a French district officer, into sponsoring Wangrin's lavish wedding engagement party.

[Wangrin] arranged a great *mechoui* for his friends. That was a memorable Sunday of revelry and drinking enlivened by the harmony of lutes and women's singing. . . . Wangrin had given the district officer to understand that the party had been arranged to mark the inauguration of a society named "Friends of France." His superior sent two cases of red wine and later put in a personal appearance, as his country's representative. . . . He also handed over a large French flag to the society on behalf of the local governor who represented the Governor-General, head of all the Whites who were working in West Africa at the time. Thus a nonexistent society came to be recognized by the government. It was pure Wangrin!⁶⁸

There is no way of knowing if this incident, or one like it, in fact happened, though it is not improbable. The author, in a 1965 interview, told stories about colonial con-men, some of whom, I have no doubt, inspired his fictional Wangrin.⁶⁹ The point is that Wangrin-like figures were hardly exceptional in colonial Africa: the reports of colonial district officers abound with rueful or irritated accounts of such manipulation—and of their frustrations in trying to deal with it. Indeed, postcolonial African governments had a double burden: they not only had to give political flesh to the juridical skeleton of independence, but in the process of trying to create national structures of order, control, and civil loyalty, had to deal both with the informal political domains engendered by the colonial state, and populations already well-schooled in the subtle and not-so-subtle ways of bypassing and undermining authority.

Notes

1. Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*.
2. Among the most noteworthy French examples are the following: Terrier

and Mourey, *L'expansion française et la formation territoriale: L'oeuvre de la Troisième République en Afrique occidentale*; Gaffarel, *Histoire de l'expansion coloniale de la France depuis 1870 jusqu'en 1905*; Hanotiaux and Martineau, eds., *Histoire des colonies françaises*; Duchêne, *La politique coloniale de la France: Le Ministère des colonies depuis Richelieu*.

3. Perhaps the revisionist history of French colonialism begins with Augagneur's *Erreurs et brutalités coloniales* and Buell's influential *The Native Problem in Africa*, 2 vols. Both authors attack French, British, and Belgian colonial malpractice. Among the more prominent demythifying works are Brunshwig's *French Colonialism 1871-1914*, which effectively laid to rest the lingering ghost of the "mission civilisatrice" and other rationalizations, and Suret-Canale's *Afrique Noire: L'ère coloniale*, which is written from a Marxist viewpoint and includes a thoroughgoing denunciation of all the premises and practices of France's African colonial ventures. The popularity of the revisionist mode is also attested by the success of Chaffard's *Les carnets secrets de la décolonisation*, a two-volume set of historical vignettes about French embarrassments and difficulties toward the end of the colonial era. A recent historical monograph by Frederick Quinn, a former U.S. diplomat with long experience in francophone Africa, *The French Overseas Empire*, and Chafer's *The End of Empire in French West Africa*, exemplify the best of the recent scholarship on the subject.

4. See Hargreaves's useful collection of documents illustrating French activity along the West African coast, which includes accounts of the Assinie post: *France and West Africa*, especially 34-66.

5. Along the East African coast, the French were principally involved in the slave trade until deterioration of relations between the French and the Arab rulers of Kilwa and Zanzibar finally forced the latter to abandon most of their coastal trade and to concentrate on exploiting the island of Bourbon in the Indian Ocean. The French did carry on limited trading in Zanzibar, however, following the signing of a consular treaty between France and the sultan of Zanzibar in 1844. See Akinola, "The French and East Africa" (1966). The standard account is Freeman-Grenville, *The French at Kilwa Island*.

6. Elements of Senegal's history may be found in Charpy, *La fondation de Dakar, 1845-1861*; Cultru, *Histoire du Sénégal du XVe siècle à 1870*; Villard, *Histoire du Sénégal*; and Crowder, *Senegal: A Study of French Assimilation Policy*. See also Klein's *Islam and Imperialism in the Sine-Saloum* and Milcent's survey "Senegal," in Carter, ed., *Five African States*.

7. See Abdoulaye Ly, *La Compagnie du Sénégal*.

8. Hargreaves, *West Africa, the Former French States*, 65.

9. *Ibid.*, 71. My summary statement of the protoassimilation of the Senegalese towns is derived from Hargreaves's argument in *ibid.*, 65-73. For a fuller exposition of the assimilationist theme in Senegal, see Crowder, *Senegal*.

10. For further details, see Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century*.

11. Milcent, "Senegal," 89.

12. Hargreaves, *West Africa, the Former French States*, 86.

13. See, for example, Labouret, *Colonisation, colonialisme, décolonisation*; Sik, *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire*; Suret-Canale, *Afrique Noire*.

14. Neres, *French-Speaking West Africa*, 13-14.

15. A well-argued critique of Marxist, neo-Marxist, Leninist, and neo-Leninist theories of imperialism is in Gann and Duignan, *Burden of Empire*, especially 47-87. The fullest exposition of this theme thus far is in Pakenham's magisterial *The Scramble for Africa*.

16. Brunshwig, "Politique et économie dans l'empire français d'Afrique Noire, 1870-1914," 402, 414. My translation.

17. Robinson and Gallagher, with Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*. Kautsky's arguments are reviewed by Gann and Duignan in *Burden of Empire*, 47-54.

18. Stengers, "L'Impérialisme colonial de la fin du XIX siècle: Mythe ou réalité."

19. Hargreaves, "Toward a History of the Partition of Africa," 100. For details of the activities of the brothers Régis, see Schnapper, *La politique et le commerce français dans le Golfe de Guinée de 1838 à 1871*.

20. Neres introduces this phrase in *French-Speaking West Africa*, 14.

21. The argument is developed in Brunshwig's *French Colonialism*. Many of Brunshwig's contemporaries, including Hargreaves, Neres, Gann and Duignan, and Crowder, appear to agree.

22. Jules Ferry, *Le Tonkin et la mère patrie*, cited in Brunshwig, *French Colonialism*, 82-85.

23. Crowder, "The Administration of French West Africa," 60.

24. The story of the Abomeyan kingdoms is told in Cornevin, *Histoire du Dahomey*. See also Herskovits, *Dahomey, an Ancient West African Kingdom*, 2 vols. Paul Hazoumé's novel, *Dogucimi*, gives an intimate and informed reconstruction of court life in the Abomeyan kingdom. Hazoumé was a French-educated Dahomean social anthropologist and politician. For an appreciation of Hazoumé and an English translation of the novel by Richard Bjornson, see *Dogucimi: The First Dahomean Novel (1937)*.

25. Pouquet, *L'Afrique Equatoriale Française et le Cameroun*, 5.

26. The authoritative account of the "Fashoda Incident" is David Levering Lewis's, *The Race to Fashoda*.

27. The capital of Chad was originally named Fort Lamy by Emile Gentil, who had been in overall command of the French effort to reach Chad. He named it for Commandant François-Joseph Amédée Lamy, the commander of the forces that had routed the Bornouan sultan Rabeh at Koussouri on April 22, 1900. Both Lamy and Rabeh were killed in that battle. After independence was achieved in 1960, the Chadian government attempted to resurrect the memory of Rabeh as an authentic national hero, but paradoxically suggestions to change the name of the capital were indignantly rejected at the time. It was finally changed to Ndjamená by President N'Garta (François) Tombalbaye in 1972 as part of his effort to impose "authenticity" on the country. French honor was preserved by retention of the name of the Avenue Charles de Gaulle in the capital. (Most of the capitals of ex-French Africa have an Avenue or Boulevard Charles de Gaulle, a name usually given before or just after independence. Some forty years later, the name in most cases remains unchanged, a witness not so much to amity with France, as to the enduring myth of de Gaulle the Liberator.)

28. For accounts of the French conquest of Equatorial Africa see the summary in Thompson and Adloff, *The Emerging States of French Equatorial Africa*, 1-24. A fuller account is in Guernier's standard work, *Afrique Equatoriale Française et côte française des Somali*. *Encyclopédie coloniale et maritimes*, vol. 5, in which the articles by Georges Hardy and H. Zieglé are particularly important. See also Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, and Hargreaves, *Prelude to the Partition of West Africa*, 91-315.

29. Julien, "From the French Empire to the French Union," 231.

30. Robinson, "Political Development in French West Africa," 140-181.

31. Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, 35.

32. For an excellent commentary on French-style assimilation, see Betts,

Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914; and Lewis, "One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The Assimilation Theory in French Colonial Policy." A case study is Crowder's *Senegal*.

33. See Crowder, *Senegal*. For an excellent, extensive discussion of the *mission civilisatrice*, see Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

34. Julien, "From the French Empire," 66.

35. Crowder, "Administration of French West Africa," 61.

36. Harmand, *Domination et colonisation*. Harmand and others argued that the success of the policy in Madagascar and Indochina justified its application to mainland Africa. See Betts, *Assimilation and Association*, for an expanded discussion of these issues.

37. For an insightful account of the new system, see two articles by Colin Newbury: "The Formation of the Government-General of French West Africa" and "The Government-General and Political Change in French West Africa."

38. Thompson and Adloff, *Emerging States of French Equatorial Africa*, 27.

39. The discussion that follows uses as points of departure the summaries presented by Richard Adloff in *West Africa: The French-Speaking Nations, Yesterday and Today*, 179–180.

40. Ansprenger, *Politik im Schwarzen Afrika: Die modernen politische Bewegungen im Afrika französischer Prägung*, 41, my translation. There were very few French officials for such large areas. Robert Delavignette (in *Service Africain*, which has been translated as *Freedom and Authority in French West Africa*) claims that in 1938–1939 there were only 3,660 French officials to an AOF native population of 15 million, and only 887 officials to about 3.2 million Africans in AEF. Because France operated its AOF and AEF federations with skeleton crews, it needed substantial numbers of trained African auxiliaries to fill positions as teachers, clerks, bookkeepers, bailiffs, warders, orderlies (*plantons*), technicians, foremen, mechanics, dispensary assistants, and so on, not to speak of maintenance workers, linesmen, guards, policemen, and soldiers. Local educational policy was aimed, above all, to the training of Africans for such work. *Africans Learn to Be French*, a 1935 survey of educational policy and activity in francophone Africa by W. Bryant Mumford with G. St. J. Orde-Browne, confirms the point.

41. The best of Delavignette's books is *Service Africain*, or *Freedom and Authority in French West Africa* in its English translation. Apparently the last French *préfet* of Garoua in northern Cameroon (whose name, unfortunately, I never learned) was a man of similar caliber. I happened to be present when he finally left Garoua in 1960 after more than twenty years of service in the area. He was one of the last French administrators remaining in Cameroon after the country gained its independence in that year, and his sendoff was quite remarkable. The traditional chief of the area, the *lamido* of Garoua, brought a mounted guard of honor to the airport, and hundreds of Garouans were there to see him off. I was surprised to see tears flow freely; the very real affection he had engendered was obvious in the warmth and sincerity of the farewell. I met with the *lamido* two days later, and though he spoke acidly of French colonialism, he had nothing but praise for the former *préfet*.

42. Ballard, "The Colonial Phase in French West Africa," 443.

43. Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies françaises*.

44. Crowder, "Administration of French West Africa," 62.

45. In 1937–1938, report Thompson and Adloff, there were 68,419 pupils in AOF primary schools, but fewer than one hundred graduated each year from the Ecole Normale William Ponty, and only a handful went to France for higher educa-

tion (*French West Africa*, 535). The same authors report that in the following school year 21,895 pupils attended AEF primary schools, and there were no secondary schools in the AEF at that time (*Emerging States of French Equatorial Africa*, 278.)

46. Delavignette, *Freedom and Authority*, 73, gives the following breakdown: 48,048 village chiefs, 2,206 cantonal chiefs, and 52 provincial chiefs.

47. *Ibid.*, 71.

48. For more on Blaise Diagne, see Johnson, "The Ascendancy of Blaise Diagne and the Beginning of African Politics in Senegal," as well as Johnson's "Blaise Diagne, Master Politician of Senegal."

49. Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, 436. A similar exposé by Raymond Leslie Buell in his classic *Native Problem in Africa* helped give the problem worldwide publicity.

50. Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa*, citing Foliet, *Le travail forcé aux colonies*, 43–49. For details see, for example, Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640–1960*; and Fall, "Economie de plantations et main-d'oeuvre forcée en Guinée-Française: 1920–1946."

51. For details, see Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960*; and Davis, *Reservoirs of Men: A History of the Black Troops of French West Africa*.

52. Hodgkin, "Background to AOF 3: African Reactions to French Rule," 31.

53. *Ibid.*, 32.

54. Brunschwig, *Noirs et blancs dans l'Afrique Noire française*.

55. Substantial portions of this section are adapted from my unpublished manuscript, "Parapolitics and the Terrain of Informal Politics."

56. Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*.

57. In French, the *état-gendarme*, meaning the state whose sole functions are those of defense, police, justice, and foreign relations. The French colonial state did levy taxes, conscript labor, and soldiers, and provided minimal education and health facilities, though much of the latter was contracted out to private and voluntary organizations. In general, it turned out that the poorer the colony, the fewer the amenities for its *sujets*.

58. See Boni, *Histoire synthétique de l'Afrique résistante*; Suret-Canale, *Afrique Noire*, 123–154. A semiofficial colonial chronology by Henri Mariol, *La chronologie coloniale*, lists some thirty-five major and minor uprisings between 1900 and 1921 in French West and Equatorial Africa, all requiring "pacification," "repression," or police or military "action" by the authorities. Suret-Canale, in *Afrique Noire*, 529–537, brings the story to the eve of World War II, highlighting what he terms a *grande révolte* in the AEF's Upper Sangha (Haute Sangha) region of Congo and Ubangui from 1928 to 1931.

59. See Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth*, and Fugelstadt, *A History of Niger*.

60. Fall, "Economie de plantations."

61. John Lonsdale, "Political Accountability in African History," 681.

62. The admission was that of AEF Governor-General Félix Eboué at the Brazzaville Conference (see Chapter 3).

63. See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

64. See especially Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, 84–114.

65. See Suret-Canale, *Afrique Noire*, 537–547, and Hodgkin, *Nationalism in*

Colonial Africa, 93–114.

66. Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth*, 13.

67. Colson, "Competence and Incompetence in the Context of Independence."

68. Bâ, *Fortunes of Wangrin*, 90. At a *mechoui* a goat or sheep (or multiples of these animals, depending on the number of people invited) is typically barbecued whole, and participants enjoy other food and festive activities. (I've attended several *mechoui*, including one given in 1961 by the president of Cameroon, Ahmadou Ahidjo, which featured a full dozen spitted and roasted sheep and waves of polite but heavily armed guests attacking the carcasses on signals from the minister of the interior.)

69. I was fortunate to meet Hampaté Bâ in Ouagadougou in February 1965, and among other subjects, we discussed the phenomenon of colonial-era con-men, one of whom, it seems, turned up as Wangrin in 1973.