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## 'Democracy' Rediscovered

Civilization through Association  
in French West Africa (1914-1930)\*

'The failure of the policy of assimilation became flagrant the day we noticed among those natives trained in our schools and abruptly separated from their environment a different frame of mind and a marked tendency to elude the discipline which an evolved society has the right to expect of its members.'<sup>1</sup>

As the 1921 administrative report cited above suggests, the period between 1914 and 1930 opened up a new era in the civilizing actions and assumptions of the Government General of French West Africa. Over the course of these years, French policy and ideology did indeed change to reflect the shifting political needs of the Government General. These needs had been starkly exposed by revolts triggered during World War I by the recruitment of African soldiers for duty in France, and a continuing demand—in the wake of Blaise Diagne's election to Parliament in 1914—by the 'évolués' for political equality with French citizens throughout the

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1. Direction des affaires politiques et administratives, 'Note au sujet de l'exécution des instructions contenues dans la note du 17 octobre, réglementation intéressant la politique indigène et la police générale de l'AOF', novembre 1921, Archives nationales de la République du Sénégal (henceforth ANS), Fonds moderne (FM) 17 G 40: 'L'échec de la politique d'assimilation est devenu flagrant du jour où nous avons constaté chez de nombreux indigènes, dressés à notre école et brusquement séparés de leur milieu, une orientation d'esprit différente de la nôtre et une tendance marquée à éluder la discipline qu'une société évoluée est en droit d'exiger de ses membres'.

1920s.<sup>2</sup> Such challenges made clear to Dakar that it had made a mistake in divesting chiefs of their authority, and maintaining all power in its own hands—two policies that had been identified with France's civilizing mission in West Africa under Governors General Roume and Ponty.<sup>3</sup> Dakar thus began to reconsider these policies even before the war ended. In particular, it recommended reappointing customary chiefs to office, and suggested a 'new deal' for the educated elite. Dakar's policy changes were given a name familiar in France and in some of the other colonies since the 1890s, but new in the Government General of West Africa in the 1920s: association.

Association was followed by the appearance of new themes in French civilization ideology, legitimating Dakar's policy reorientation. These themes remained within a republican framework, but the emphasis was clearly different from the prewar years. In the postwar period, the Government General no longer maintained that France had an obligation to free Africans from 'feudal bondage' by systematically removing traditional elites from power. It also quietly abandoned the view that the new elite would be ready to share in policy-making only at some distant point in the future. Dakar now argued that African society could better progress if chiefs were retained in office, where they would be regularly consulted, as well as trained, by the French. Thanks to their education, these chiefs could in turn 'civilize' the rural masses under their influence, whom the chiefs would also represent. In the place of its former vagueness with respect to the new elite, the Government General proclaimed that this group also deserved to begin to participate in a limited capacity alongside the French in their own government. In all these ways, Dakar insisted—ironically enough—association would begin to democratize the exercise of power in West Africa.

In this paper I would like to explore the advent of association in Dakar's policies and rhetoric in the 1920s as part of a larger history of French civilizing ideas in West Africa in the early twentieth century. Although the concept of association is usually opposed to that of assimilation in the existing historiography on French colonialism, there are in fact few local studies of what the former term meant in practice or why it made its appearance when it did.<sup>4</sup> In what follows I will examine how

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2. The fullest account of French recruitment policy in West Africa are provided in MICHEL (1982) and HARRIS (1993). On the election of Blaise Diagne and Senegalese nationalism generally in this period, see JOHNSON (1971), SEARING (1985) and LAMBERT (1993).

3. For an account of the 'civilizing' policies and outlook of the Government General under Ernest Roume (1902-1908) and William Ponty (1909-1915), see CONKLIN (1997).

4. Whether France was assimilationist or associationist has been a recurrent debate in the literature on French colonialism. The debate is to some extent a useless one, since most students of the subject agree that from the end of the nineteenth

four successive Governors General—François Clozel (1915-1917), Joost van Vollenhoven (1917-1918), Martial Merlin (1919-1923) and Jules Carde (1923-1930)—used the term, and how the idea of association affected their decision-making in Dakar.<sup>5</sup> Despite differing backgrounds, all of these men shared the same vision of how to rule Africans in the interwar years. In tracing their ideological reorientation, however, two additional points will be made. The first is that, through the concept of association, Dakar embraced a much more positive image of traditional West African social organization than had existed in the past. For example, federal authorities now insisted that their subjects had institutions, such as the chieftaincy, which were not nearly as exploitative as the French had once thought and therefore deserved to be respected. These images suggested a willingness to accept the conclusions that a new school of French ethnography was beginning to formulate: that the peoples of West Africa had not just customs, but cultures, which were worth preserving for their own sake. But in fact, France's reassessment was motivated more by a desire to contain the 'évolués' in particular, and to re-establish authority among their subjects in general, than by any intrinsic interest in either African civilizations or democratization.

The second point concerns the larger context in which the shift to association took place. Although most of the following analysis will be devoted to the specific African circumstances leading to Dakar's reorientation, political and cultural developments in the metropole, too, encouraged the new direction emerging in West Africa in the 1920s. Historians have increasingly seen this decade as a formative moment in the history of modern France. During and after the war, new technocratic and corporatist ways of organizing society, the economy and the state, which were still contested and resisted at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, competed with the more traditional political forces that gave priority to the rights of citizens. In Parliament itself, there was a gradual shift to the right, as conservative forces rode the wave of anxiety and disillusionment that four years of total war, fought mostly on French soil and at the cost of 1.4 million lives, had created. Movements that placed the national interest above that of the individual—such as pronatalism, eugenics and social hygiene—now received much greater support from the government and the public at large in a climate that was openly

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century on, France was both. The more interesting questions are in what context and for what reasons was one or the other of these tendencies dominant, and with what consequences for policy-making? For a similar approach to mine to these issues, see Gwendolyn WRIGHT'S fine account of the influence of associationist ideas on colonial architecture from 1900 to 1940 (1991).

5. Between the tenures of Vollenhoven and Merlin, the Governments General of both Equatorial and West Africa were temporarily headed by Gabriel Angoulvant. This appointment was always considered an interim one, therefore I am not including him.

more xenophobic and racist than in the past. Democratic liberties and universal values, in short, were on the defensive, while nostalgia for time-honored traditions helped to mask and negotiate the many transformations that were taking place.<sup>6</sup> The attenuation of the language of the 'droits de l'homme' in Dakar, and new emphasis upon preserving chiefs whose power was 'traditional' and 'familial', were also both evidence and products of these trends in France.

### Background to Association, 1915-1920

In June 1915, Ponty died in Dakar and was replaced briefly by an old African hand, François Clozel (1915-1917), before the appointment of the young Joost van Vollenhoven. In his previous service in the federation, Clozel had opposed Ponty's attempts to win over the African masses through divesting their leaders, preferring to work out collaborative relations with chiefs in the Ivory Coast then Upper Senegal-Niger.<sup>7</sup> He brought with him the interests of an amateur ethnographer intimately acquainted with, and genuinely interested in, the peoples he administered. Characteristically, one of his first acts as Governor General was to found the Comité d'études historiques et scientifiques de l'AOF, whose objective was to promote and publish research on the history of West African peoples and their civilizations.<sup>8</sup> An additional sign of Clozel's interest in African history was a plan he put forward in 1916 for reorganizing the federation after the war. The boundaries of West Africa, he argued, should be redrawn to take into account the human and economic geography of West Africa, 'such as it appears to us through the historical formation of large ethnic groups and the currents determined by the nature, needs and customs of their inhabitants'. As he envisioned it, the old arbitrary borders dividing French, English and German territories would disappear; certain colonies would be abolished altogether, such as Senegal and Upper Senegal-Niger. An expanded Mauritania and Senegambia would take their places. All Moors would thus be grouped for the first time under one authority. Their territory would include Saint-Louis and both banks of

6. For some recent discussions of these trends, see SCHNEIDER (1990), PEDERSEN (1993), ROBERTS (1994), MAIER (1975), KUISEL (1981), and BECKER & BERNSTEIN (1990).

7. The details of Clozel's career are contained in his personnel dossier, in Archives nationales, Section Outre-Mer (henceforth ANSOM), EE II 845 (I). For an analysis of Clozel's policies as Governor of the Ivory Coast, see WEISKEL (1980: ch. 4, 5); for more personalized accounts of the man, see both M. DELAFOSSE (1918), and L. DELAFOSSE (1976).

8. By the time of his appointment to Dakar, CLOZEL had already published two books on the Ivory Coast, one on local customs (1902) and the other describing his relations with African chiefs (1906). Clozel had also encouraged his subordinates to study the customs of the local peoples in their circles.

the Senegal River, which 'historically always was and should remain the reverse of a barrier: that is to say a means of contact and communication'. In this way, Mauritania would be spared from becoming a purely desert country. Senegambia, located to the south of Mauritania with Dakar as its capital, and expanded to include the circles of Kayes, Bafoulabé, Kita and Bélé Dougou from Upper Senegal-Niger, as well as the Guinean circle of Koumbia, would constitute a vast territory specializing in peanut and rice production. Guinea would be enlarged by the addition of British Sierra Leone, while Dahomey would be yielded to England in exchange; the Ivory Coast's boundaries would not change. All that would be left of Upper Senegal-Niger would be Niger proper, which could be divided between Upper Niger (whose territory would coincide with that of the ancient empire of Songhai) and Lower Niger (whose territory would include the Hausa speaking peoples of the Eastern Ghana, Togo and part of Nigeria).<sup>9</sup>

Needless to say, this program was not implemented. Clozel's greatest contribution to a policy reorientation in Dakar was rather his decision to appoint as his Director of Political Affairs his old friend and colleague, the distinguished Africanist and career administrator, Maurice Delafosse.<sup>10</sup> Delafosse had long maintained that Dakar had made a fundamental mistake in trying to rule Africans through a policy of 'feudal emancipation' and 'direct contact'. Dispossessed chiefs were now revolting because of French actions against them, actions which reflected both a lack of interest in, and respect for, the cultures France had undertaken to change. Ponty, he pointed out, had held all scientific inquiry in contempt. The African people had a history of their own, which 'we do not have the right to ignore nor disdain, on the grounds that it is not written and does not appear on university curricula, it is the history of a human race and, for

9. This letter was actually drafted by Maurice Delafosse in his capacity as Clozel's chief of political affairs. For the draft, see M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 20 février 1917, ANS 17 G 60: 'Nous ne devons avoir en vue qu'une répartition territoriale basée sur la géographie humaine et économique du pays, telle qu'elle nous apparaît à travers la formation historique des grands groupements indigènes et des courants déterminés par la nature et par les besoins et les habitudes des habitants.' For the final version, see M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 'Rapport sur la réorganisation de l'AOF après la cessation des hostilités', no. N 339, 15 mars 1917, Institut de France, Fonds Auguste Terrier, 5925: 'Il faut inclure les deux rives [du fleuve Sénégal] qui historiquement a toujours été et devrait demeurer le contraire d'une barrière.'

10. No major study of Delafosse's contribution to the field of ethnography exists, despite his pioneering fieldwork in West Africa. Nor has his influence on native policy received adequate attention. This neglect is beginning to change. See WOOTEN (1993), GROSZ-NGATÉ (1988), VAN HOVEN (1990), HARRISON (1988: 102-105, 144-149, 155-156), AND BAZIN (1985). For a contemporary view of his work, see 'La vie de Maurice Delafosse', and 'Une vocation coloniale' (Mémorial... 1929: 263-269, 270-285).

this reason, cannot remain unknown to men, whomever they might be, and particularly not to men who have received the mission to continue [this history].'<sup>11</sup>

Rather than condemning outright indigenous political structures, the French should be working through them. These ideas did indeed become the basis for a new 'politique indigène' in West Africa, even before the war ended; for example, confronted in 1915 with the need for reasserting French control in the Western Sudan, Clozel issued instructions stressing the importance of respecting customary lineages when appointing chiefs, thereby implicitly legitimating a precolonial institution that earlier administrators had dismissed as parasitic and tyrannical. Henceforth, Clozel insisted, no new men were to be appointed in recompense for services rendered to the French.<sup>12</sup> It was under Vollenhoven, however, that Delafosse's ideas had their greatest impact. In his meteoric ascension to the top of the colonial administration, Vollenhoven had never acquired the in-depth knowledge of Africans that came from serving as a circle 'commandant'.<sup>13</sup> He was, therefore, all the more receptive to Delafosse's point of view, particularly since the latter provided the Governor General with a historical explanation for the current unrest in the federation. Delafosse's influence is obvious in a number of initiatives for which Vollenhoven is famous, including further instructions regarding the need to appoint traditional chiefs as French auxiliaries wherever possible, and a new concern for addressing the aspirations of the 'évolués' (Vollenhoven 1948). Nevertheless, it is in a final detailed statement sent by Vollenhoven to Paris in January 1918, summarizing the political situation in AOF, that Delafosse's hand is perhaps most evident. First drafted by Delafosse and edited by Vollenhoven, this memorandum is worth quoting at length, because it indicates how and why Dakar was now ready to repudiate its older civilizing views and policies and put new ones in their place.

There had been, Vollenhoven complained to the Minister, a deplorable absence of unified doctrine in West Africa over the past thirty years. Due to a lack of documentation and to the problems posed by organizing these vast territories, actions had been undertaken in a piecemeal fashion, often with the best of intentions. This approach had, through no one individual's fault, 'necessarily and fatally' disrupted African society. The

11. Draft of a letter to the Minister of Colonies, dated September 22, 1917, in Delafosse's handwriting, ANS, 2 G 17-4: 'Nous n'avons pas le droit de la mépriser [l'histoire], ni de l'ignorer sous le prétexte qu'elle n'est pas écrite et ne figure pas aux programmes des universités, c'est l'histoire d'une race humaine et à ce titre elle ne peut demeurer étrange à des hommes, quels qu'ils soient, ni surtout à des hommes qui ont reçu mission de la continuer.'

12. 'Chef du Service des affaires civiles au Directeur des finances', 23 avril 1917, ANS, 17 G 39. This letter refers to Clozel's initiatives while Governor General.

13. The details of the life of Vollenhoven are available in a variety of sources, see VOLLENHOVEN (1920), MANGEOT (1943), PRÉVAUDEAU (1953). He continues to fascinate, as two recent articles attest: DEGROOT (1991), and CORNEVIN (1989).

establishment of French peace and the introduction of the railroad had broken down the isolation in which Africans had lived for centuries. Such isolation deserved to be ended, for it was the 'fruit of barbarism'. This isolation nevertheless had had certain advantages: 'traditions remained alive, custom was rigorously observed, social and family discipline was everywhere respected, and everywhere punishment for deviation was ruthlessly applied'.<sup>14</sup> France then completed the process of social disintegration through the application of its laws and the suppression of the great commands.

'We created civil justice, but native society was scared by the rights we granted to individuals, particularly to women and to young people, [who began] challenging with impunity conjugal and paternal authority, ageless foundations of the African family. We suppressed the great commands, feared and respected, but we also deprived the collectivity of the tyranny that constituted a solid framework. [...] I do not criticize these measures, [...] I only assert that these reforms have profoundly troubled the natives who [...] observe that the rigorous hierarchy of yesterday has been replaced [today] by a well-intentioned but emasculated one'.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the disarray created in rural West Africa, there was 'profound discontent and growing disillusion among the minority who rallied to our cause out of either affinity or self-interest, and who has not found in the new West Africa advantageous employment'. They have heard our speeches, Vollenhoven pointed out, but do not see the civilization promised them: no schools, no hospitals, no modern technology, no prosperity. Thus, he concluded, alongside the unhappy rural masses, an elite ready to follow 'the wrong shepherds' has now sprung up.<sup>16</sup> Vollenhoven's laments here, which constituted both a 'cri d'alarme' by a panicky administration and a 'cri de coeur' by a true believer in republican France's

14. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 20 décembre 1917, ANS, 17 G 61: 'Cet isolement, fruit de la barbarie, avait ses avantages, les traditions demeuraient vivaces; les coutumes étaient rigoureusement observées; la discipline sociale et familiale était respectée partout, partout d'ailleurs les sanctions étaient impitoyables contre les contrevenants.'

15. *Ibid.*: 'Nous avons créé la justice civile, mais la société indigène s'est effrayée des droits que nous reconnaissons à l'individu, en particulier aux femmes et aux jeunes gens, bravant impunément l'autorité maritale et paternelle, bases séculaires de la famille indigène. Nous avons supprimé les grands commandements indigènes, redoutés et respectés, mais nous avons privé ainsi les collectivités d'une tyrannie qui constituait une solide armature. [...] Je ne critique pas ces mesures [...], j'affirme seulement que ces réformes ont profondément troublé les indigènes [...] qui constatent qu'à la rigoureuse hiérarchie d'hier se trouve substituée une hiérarchie bienveillante et émasculée.'

16. *Ibid.*: 'À ce désarroi grandissant [...], j'ajoute le mécontentement profond et la désillusion grandissante de la minorité qui s'est franchement ralliée à nous par sympathie ou par intérêt, mais qui n'a pas trouvé dans la nouvelle Afrique occidentale une place suffisamment avantageuse [...]. À côté de cette masse désorientée vit une élite mécontente, désillusionnée, prête à suivre les suggestions des mauvais bergers.'

‘mission civilisatrice’, did not fall on deaf ears. They became commonplace under Vollenhoven’s successors—who also provided a solution to Dakar’s perceived dilemma: henceforth France must associate new and old African elites in policy-making.

### Association defined, 1920-1930

Association was not, of course, an original concept in 1919. Since the expansion of the empire under the Third Republic, Parisian theorists had advocated some form of government by association for their overseas territories, predicated upon respect for indigenous cultures, and administration through pre-existing ‘native’ political structures. In the 1920’s, however, this French version of indirect rule began for the first time to appear relevant in Dakar. In addition, the Government General now faced far greater pressure from the metropolitan government to implement a policy by that name. The most powerful Colonial Minister of the interwar years, Albert Sarraut (1921-1925), proclaimed in 1921 that a new era of ‘association’ was about to begin throughout the empire, one in which old and new elites would everywhere be granted representative assemblies of some kind (Saraut 1923: 105). Sarraut justified this largesse as part of France’s reward to its subjects for contributing to the war effort. This directive from Paris, reiterated throughout the interwar years, dovetailed with Dakar’s own thinking and made compliance easy. In the wake of the war, the Government General increasingly spoke of its obligation to extend gradually ‘democratic’ rights to select Africans, in order to ‘associate’ them in their own administration.

What exactly did Dakar mean by these terms? An examination of the rhetoric and policies of the chief architects of association, Martial Merlin and Jules Carde, suggests that the Government General’s new doctrine rested upon two premises. The first was that some form of power-sharing with the old and new elite in West Africa was necessary to preserve French authority intact. The second was that this power-sharing, in the proper doses and surrounded by the proper safeguards, was also in the best interests of their subjects and thus consistent with the Third Republic’s civilizing mission in West Africa. Merlin, arriving in Dakar just as Diagne’s campaign for political equality was escalating, set the tone for the interwar years early on.<sup>17</sup> The situation in West Africa, he wrote

17. Like Clozel, Martial Merlin was no newcomer to the federation. He arrived in Dakar with a record of long and distinguished service in France’s different African territories, including a recent posting as Governor General of the French Equatorial African federation. His own experience in West Africa dated to the early 1890s in the colony of Senegal, where he had promoted a policy of collaboration with aristocratic chiefs in the interests of both cheap and efficient indirect administration. This experiment anticipated on a local level the policies



Sarraut in 1921, had never been 'more favorable. Peace reigns everywhere'. 'But', he continued, 'of what does [this peace] consist?'<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately for the French, several dark spots loomed on the horizon. One was the hatred of those at whose expense the French peace had been achieved: dispossessed sovereigns, warrior chiefs, *marabouts*, witches, fetishists; it was they, Merlin claimed in another circular, who were at the root of the revolts of 1916 and 1917. In addition to their resentment, Dakar had to cope with that of the 'évolués':

'The ideas of emancipation, which the backers of the anti-European movement are attempting to spread in Africa, are obviously destined to create illusions among the young educated blacks, agents of the administration or of commerce, desiring to equal the white man [. . .]. On the other hand, new impressions have been stimulated amongst the masses, who up until now have stayed attached to the land and to their ancient customs, by the accounts of liberated soldiers or of soldiers returning from trips to the metropole or the coastal cities [. . .]. It thus behooves us to confront these unhealthy stimuli with the notions of order and social discipline, which should direct the evolution of the black races and preserve Africa from upheavals, whose certain effect would be to annihilate the work of civilization that has begun and return the continent to its ancient barbarism.'<sup>19</sup>

The challenge was to determine what attitude to adopt towards both groups in the future, and more specifically, what portion of French sovereignty to accord or refuse them. 'Let there be no mistake', Merlin warned, 'regarding this issue: it is the most important one facing our colonial policy'.<sup>20</sup> In posing this issue, however, Merlin also had a ready

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that Dakar began to adopt during the war for the entire federation and which Merlin would now continue. For Merlin's career, see ANSOM, EE II 1726 (I) and (II); EE II 1629, personnel file. It has often been assumed that Merlin was deliberately appointed to counter Diagne's influence, although there is no direct evidence that I know of to support this conclusion.

18. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 26 mars 1921, ANS, 17 G 293 FM: 'la situation politique générale n'a jamais été plus favorable. La paix règne partout. Mais de quoi est-elle faite?'
19. M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire confidentielle au sujet du Congrès panafricain de Bruxelles et de Paris', 17 septembre 1921, Circulaire n° 64, ANS, Circulaires, année 1921: 'Les idées d'émancipation que les promoteurs du mouvement anti-européen essaient de répandre en Afrique sont évidemment destinées à créer des illusions parmi les jeunes noirs lettrés, agents d'administration ou de commerce, désireux d'égaliser l'homme blanc [. . .]. D'autre part, dans la masse qui est restée jusqu'ici attachée au sol et fidèle à ses anciennes coutumes, les récits des tirailleurs libérés ou des tirailleurs revenus de leurs voyages dans la métropole ou dans les villes de la côte ont pu éveiller des impressions nouvelles [. . .]. Il nous appartient d'opposer à ces excitations malsaines les notions d'ordre et de discipline sociale qui doivent diriger l'évolution des races noires et préserver l'Afrique des bouleversements dont l'effet certain serait d'anéantir l'oeuvre de civilisation commencée et de faire revivre l'ancienne barbarie.'
20. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 26 mars 1921, ANS, 17 G 293 FM: 'Il ne faut pas s'y méprendre; là est le problème capital de notre politique coloniale.'

made answer: rather than continue to reduce chiefs to the role of simple intermediaries, 'was there not room for a mixed policy [. . .] that simultaneously respects the *amour propre* of the ruling classes and the essential rights of the masses?'<sup>21</sup> As for the 'évolués' a happy medium could be found there, too, between Diagne's demands for immediate equality and the ill-conceived policies of the past. He did not oppose, Merlin wrote to the Minister, the goals the 'évolués' and Diagne stood for. Rather, he opposed the means Diagne was using: 'what separates us is the question of extent [. . .]. He wants to go too fast, while I intend to show consideration for the transitions.' And Merlin concluded, 'in point of fact, I am firmly convinced that reasonable and carefully considered democratic measures are likely to engender, to the benefit of civilization, more solid and lasting habits than measures inspired by a demagoguery that is as imprudent as it is utopian.'<sup>22</sup>

Such 'reasonable' measures did not remain hypothetical. First Merlin and then Carde inaugurated several policy changes which, in theory, now recognized the traditional rights of those chiefs previously scorned by Dakar, and extended a hand to the 'évolués'. On May 5, 1919 Merlin provided for the creation of 'conseils de notables', or councils of notables at the circle level.<sup>23</sup> A series of additional decrees appeared on December 4, 1920; these included measures designed to increase the representation of African 'évolués' and chiefs on the Governor General's and Lieutenant Governors' administrative councils, and created new councils at the village level, composed solely of Africans.<sup>24</sup> None of these rural councils was

21. *Ibid.*: 'N'y a-t-il pas place pour une politique mixte entre les deux systèmes qui assure à la fois l'amour propre des classes dirigeantes et les droits essentiels des masses?'

22. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, Confidentielle et personnelle, 14 août 1921, ANS, 17 G 233 FM: 'Seule nous divisait une question de mesure [. . .]. Il voulait aller trop vite tandis que j'entendais ménager les transitions. Je suis, en effet, fortement convaincu que des mesures démocratiques raisonnées et raisonnables sont de nature à engendrer, au profit de la civilisation, des acquisitions plus sûres et plus définitives que les mesures inspirées par une démagogie aussi imprudente qu'utopique.'

23. 'Arrêté promulguant en AOF le décret du 21 mai 1919 portant création de conseils de notables indigènes en AOF', *Journal officiel de l'Afrique occidentale française (JOAOF)*, 6 juin 1919, p. 405; M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire n° 74 relative à la création de conseils de notables', *JOAOF*, 6 juin 1919, p. 410.

24. 'Arrêté promulguant en AOF le décret du 4 décembre 1920 portant réorganisation des communes mixtes et des communes indigènes en AOF', *JOAOF*, 16 janvier 1921, p. 90; 'Arrêté promulguant en AOF le décret du 4 décembre 1920 réorganisant le Conseil de Gouvernement, la Commission permanente de ce conseil et le Conseil du Contentieux administratif de l'AOF', *JOAOF*, 16 janvier 1921, p. 95. The councils created at the village level were part of a larger plan to transform all African communities into *communes* with municipal responsibilities. Three degrees of *communes*, each one more autonomous than the latter, were envisaged: native *communes*, mixed *communes* and 'communes de plein

to have powers of its own. When Carde succeeded Merlin in 1924 he made further concessions to the chiefs, and especially the 'évolués'.<sup>25</sup> 'Local administrations', Carde reported to Paris in 1925, 'are pursuing tirelessly the education and strengthening of *le commandement indigène* [. . .]. Everywhere a serious effort is being made to develop, reinforce, or create an armature whose need is made every moment more pressing.'<sup>26</sup> Thinking ahead, he now made school attendance and the learning of French obligatory for all sons of chiefs, notables and the rich generally: 'the prestige that is conferred upon birth must be strengthened by the respect that knowledge confers'.<sup>27</sup>

Carde was no less worried about the new elite than Merlin had been:

'To our worries, which the last resistances of barbarism have created, must be added the worries of watching the deviations of those at the avant-garde of evolution, those who are exercised by vain ambitions. At the head of this avant-garde we find those who have been educated in our schools, whom we have employed in our administration. Abruptly torn from their milieu, without yet possessing sufficient aptitudes to adapt to their new milieu, these uprooted Africans suffer from their isolation, chafe against their lack of power, and ceding to the perfidious suggestions that aggravate racial hatreds, soon become rebels.'<sup>28</sup>

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exercice' with the full range of privileges allowed municipalities in France. African *communes*, which were what villages could expect to become, were to be run by an administrator-mayor with the help of a commission of elders appointed by the Governor and presided over by one of its members, presumably the village chief. They could consider matters of local interest—taxes, prestations, census rolls, maintaining public order, public hygiene—but, like the council of notables, their opinions were non-binding.

25. Carde had entered the colonial service in 1898 and served in Madagascar, the Ivory Coast and Equatorial Africa as cabinet chief to Angoulvant. In 1917, he was hand-picked by Vollenhoven to serve as Secretary General of the West African federation. Vollenhoven thought very highly of Carde, writing, upon his own resignation, that he could not say enough good of the man, and calling him a true chef, ultimate praise from someone who had made a cult of leadership abilities. ANSOM, EE II 814 (I), personnel file.
26. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 'Rapport politique', 1925, ANS, 2 G 25-8: 'Les administrations locales poursuivent inlassablement l'éducation et l'épuration du commandement indigène [. . .]. Partout s'affirme un sérieux effort pour étayer, renforcer, ou créer une armature dont le besoin se fait de plus en plus sentir.'
27. M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire sur la réorganisation de l'Enseignement', *JOAOF*, 1<sup>er</sup> mai 1924, p. 327: 'Le prestige qui s'attache à la naissance doit se renforcer du respect que confère le pouvoir.'
28. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 'Rapport politique', 1928, ANSOM, Commission Guernut (CG) 60/B 36: 'Aux préoccupations que peuvent donner les dernières résistances de la barbarie s'ajoute désormais le souci de veiller aux écarts de ceux, à l'avant-garde de l'évolution, qui sont agités par de présomptueuses ambitions. À l'extrême pointe de cette avant-garde nous trouvons principalement ceux que nous avons instruits dans nos écoles, que nous avons employés dans notre administration. Brusquement arrachés à leur milieu, sans posséder encore des aptitudes suffisantes pour s'adapter au milieu nouveau,

In 1924, Carde exempted the 'évolués' from the 'indigénat', in much the way chiefs had been exempted by Vollenhoven in 1917.<sup>29</sup> The following year he created a limited electoral college for chiefs and 'évolués'. All those who could legitimately claim to speak in the name of the collectivity were to be admitted. This college would now elect to the councils of the individual colonies and the council of the Government General those members of the African community who had previously been designated by the administration.<sup>30</sup> In 1928, Carde expanded upon this measure by allowing African subjects to qualify for certain administrative positions formerly reserved to citizens.<sup>31</sup>

These various reforms, although following in the footsteps of earlier decisions by Dakar to return chiefs to office, went beyond them in several respects. They introduced the principle of consultation, and they acknowledged for the first time the aspirations of the 'évolués'. Merlin and Carde apparently believed that future misunderstandings could be avoided by providing the administration with a means of keeping in touch with the sentiments and aspirations of those among their subjects who had appeared most unhappy with French rule: traditional notables and the

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ces déracinés souffrent de leur isolement, s'irritent de leur impuissance et, cédant aux suggestions perfides qui attisent les animosités de races, s'érigent bientôt en révoltés.'

29. A decree of December 7, 1917 had exempted certain agents of the colonial administration, including chiefs. In 1918, all those who had served in the African troops were also exempted. In 1924, the Government General again reformed the 'indigénat', this time exempting all Africans serving in the administration, a group defined to include subjects who were members of any official councils or committees, recipients of any French medal, holders of the brevet or higher degree, licensed traders and certain property owners, and women and children. 'Arrêté promulguant en AOF le décret du 15 novembre 1924 portant réglementation des sanctions de police administrative en AOF', *JOAOF*, 20 juin 1925, p. 575.
30. The following African subjects would qualify for admission: functionaries who had served five years (except members of the police and those whose jobs required no special qualifications); canton and province chiefs; merchants who paid the 'patente' and who met the qualifications required for election in the chambers of commerce; urban property owners whose property was valued at 5,000 francs; rural property owners who cultivated their land year round (the amount of land required was to be determined by the Governors); recipients of the Legion of Honor; and Africans who had rendered exceptional service to France. Eligible voters also had to be over the age of twenty-five, reside within the federation, and have no criminal record (Lettre de M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 6 mars 1925, ANS, 18 G 128 FM; 'Arrêté promulguant en AOF les décrets du 30 mars 1925', *JOAOF*, 18 avril 1925, pp. 340-341).
31. 'Arrêté promulguant en AOF le décret du 23 février 1928 déterminant l'accèsion des indigènes non-citoyens originaires des colonies du groupe de l'AOF à certains emplois publics', *JOAOF*, 22 mai 1928, pp. 366-367. This decree opened up the elite 'cadre supérieur' to non-citizens who passed the necessary qualifying exam.

younger generation. Rural councils also appeared designed to help the administration in another more subtle way. Dakar saw in these institutions a chance to make the rural elite into more modern leaders in their own right. 'Only assemblies at the circle (council of notables) and communal level, where the questions discussed are of immediate practical interest [...] permit [Africans] to collaborate effectively with the local administration and prepare their education in public affairs.'<sup>32</sup> Such collaboration would represent an important improvement over past practices, when 'the social function of a village was reduced to the execution, pure and simple, through the intermediary of the chief, of administrative orders'.<sup>33</sup> Implicit in this argument was the assumption that only by becoming more forward-looking, could chiefs hope to retain their prestige over the impatient and uprooted 'évolués', and thus prevent the latter from challenging the French.

Merlin and Carde innovated in a final way as well. In the process of formulating the policy of association, they embraced a different rhetoric of civilization than that of their predecessors. The two phenomena were not unrelated. Dakar's postwar discourse changed in exactly the same direction as its native policy. For example, in the postwar period power-sharing suddenly became a theme of France's mission in West Africa. In the presentation of his decree creating councils in West Africa, Merlin declared:

'[These measures] achieve for the first time [...] the principle of participation of all the political, economic and social interests present [in the colony] in our attributions of sovereignty. In all the parts of the both massive and complex organism that constitutes the French West African Federation, from the Council of the the Government General, which is in one sense the brain, to the native *commune*, which can be considered the cell, we are everywhere associating in our administration those affected by it.'<sup>34</sup>

32. 'Rapport n° 77', 12 mars 1921, réponse de M. le Gouverneur Général, ANSOM, AP 3052, Mission Kair, Guinée, 1921: 'Seules les assemblées des cercles (conseils de notables) et communales, où se posent des questions qui sont pour eux [les Africains] d'un intérêt pratique [...] leur permettent de collaborer effectivement avec l'administration locale et préparer leur éducation publique.'

33. M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, Circulaire n° 3 au sujet de la réorganisation des communes mixtes, 12 février 1921, ANS, Circulaires, année 1921: 'Nous avons réduit la fonction sociale du village à l'exécution pure et simple, par l'intermédiaire de son chef, des ordres administratifs.'

34. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 26 mars 1921, ANS, 17 G 293 FM: '[Ces mesures] réalisent pour la première fois [...] le principe de la participation à nos attributions de souveraineté de tous les intérêts en présence, intérêts politiques, économiques, sociaux. Dans toutes les parties de l'organisme à la fois massif et complexe que constitue l'AOF, du Conseil du Gouvernement Général, qui est en quelque sorte le cerveau, jusqu'à la commune indigène qui en est la cellule, partout nous associons à notre administration ceux auxquels elle s'applique.'

Another new civilizing theme was a revised assessment of the nature of Africa's traditional ruling class. It now became a cardinal principle of the French that the precolonial African chieftaincy was less exploitative and more representative than had earlier been believed. 'The institution [of councils]', Merlin wrote, 'represents one phase in the reconstitution of the cadres of native society that we inconsiderately destroyed. It aims at restoring to life those councils of notables that existed in fact in the majority of communities and which constituted the representative body of common interests before the French conquest.'<sup>35</sup> An administrative report later that year echoed the same sentiment:

'We condemned too quickly the use of the *commandement indigène* [...], a premature generalization hid from us the advantages we could derive from an undoubtedly imperfect social organization, but one which was nevertheless long adapted to local mores and satisfactory generally since it was in sum the spontaneous reflection of the natural needs and aspirations of our subjects [...]. Through lack of careful scrutiny, we did not see the patriarchal and familial side of this organization that we destroyed, instead of ameliorating or adapting it to the new function that we wished it to play. Our error was to believe that in acting this way we were fulfilling the deepest wishes of our natives.'<sup>36</sup>

The interwar administration articulated one last theme, which also contrasted with the emancipationist doctrine of the prewar years. This was the idea that, as Africa's traditional and popularly accepted rulers, chiefs and ruling notables offered the best vehicle for introducing change into the countryside, and should and would now be used as such by the administration. Association of chiefs and councils would not be a static process, in which rural African society would simply be restored to its precolonial status quo. Instead, civilization would continue as in the past, but this time in a manner truly adapted to the African environment. As

35. M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, Circulaire n° 3 au sujet de la réorganisation des communes mixtes, 12 février 1921, ANS, Circulaires, année 1921: 'La création [de conseils] est une phase de la reconstitution des cadres de la société indigène que nous avons inconsidérément détruits. Elle tend à restituer leur action aux conseils de notables qui existent encore virtuellement dans la plupart des agglomérations et qui constituaient, avant la conquête française, l'organisme représentatif des intérêts communs.'

36. Direction des Affaires politiques et administratives, 'Note au sujet de l'exécution des instructions contenues dans la note du 17 octobre, réglementation intéressant la politique indigène et la police générale de l'AOF', novembre 1921, ANS, 17 G 40 FM: 'On a trop vite condamné l'emploi du commandement indigène [...], une généralisation prématurée nous cacha les avantages que nous aurions pu retirer d'une organisation sociale imparfaite sans doute, mais adaptée de longue date aux mœurs locales et satisfaisante dans son ensemble puisqu'elle était en somme l'immixtion spontanée des besoins naturels voire des aspirations de nos administrés [...]. Faute d'observation précise on ne vit pas le côté patriarcal et familial de cette organisation que l'on brisa faute de l'améliorer et de l'adapter à la nouvelle fonction que nous voulions lui faire assurer. Notre erreur fut de croire que ce faisant, nous comblions les vœux les plus chers des indigènes.'

the same 1921 administrative report cited above put it, by respecting traditional forms of political authority in West Africa and simultaneously encouraging the public education of chiefs, association would allow 'all classes of African society to evolve within an organization that is familiar to them and which, far from being incompatible with a superior civilization, will render such civilization more accessible to the mass of our subjects.'<sup>37</sup> Carde was equally convinced that the interests of the masses and those of Dakar could be reconciled by the education of chiefs and their participation in policy-making. Chiefs, strengthened and trained, would become the intermediaries through which new ideas penetrated the countryside. 'It is through the intimate association of all the different elements of authority in this country', Carde insisted in 1923, '[. . .] that we will most securely guide the higher destinies of the people who have accepted our tutelage.'

'[But] chiefs must be the most solid pressure point of the lever with which we propose to elevate the masses. Their training must be furthered, but without the impatience of before [. . .]; our action must necessarily adapt itself to the particular circumstances it encounters. And since there can be no question of democracy everywhere [. . .], it should first be given to the ruling class. Our efforts must be directed toward consolidating the traditional social armature, toward creating it wherever it does not exist, it is toward constituting an intelligent aristocracy that we must first apply our efforts.'<sup>38</sup>

By 1930, Carde would look back upon his years in office convinced that he had contributed decisively to the moral progress of the African elite, and by extension that of the African masses, which had begun the day the French first set foot in West Africa:

'Thanks to the security, thanks to the amelioration in the economic conditions of existence, the ancient families of native chiefs naturally began to base their superiority upon new "values", which the sheer strength of force no longer sufficed to uphold. Even though they have jealously preserved the advantages of certain local traditions, they have evolved under French authority, of which it was only

37. *Ibid.*: 'Cette politique nous permet de faire évoluer toutes les classes de la société noire dans une organisation qui, loin d'être incompatible avec une civilisation supérieure, rendra celle-ci plus accessible à la masse de nos sujets.'

38. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, 'Rapport d'ensemble', 1923, ANS,2 G 23-9: 'C'est par l'intime association de tous les éléments d'autorité épars dans le pays [. . .] que nous parviendrons plus sûrement à guider vers des destinées plus hautes les peuples qui se sont confiés à notre tutelle. Le commandement indigène doit être le plus solide point d'appui du levier avec lequel nous nous proposons d'élever la masse. Il faut pousser plus loin leur formation, mais sans l'impatience d'autrefois [. . .]; notre action doit nécessairement s'adapter aux circonstances particulières qu'elle rencontre. Et puisqu'il ne peut être question partout de démocratie [. . .], c'est d'abord à la classe dirigeante que nous devons la destiner, c'est à consolider l'armature sociale traditionnelle, c'est à créer partout où elle n'existe pas, c'est à constituer une aristocratie intelligente que nous devons en premier lieu d'appliquer nos efforts.'

in their best interest to become the auxiliaries. The development of education and the special access that their sons have been given to this instruction have allowed them to assimilate certain modes of thinking and action to which their contact with material progress made them initially receptive, but whose moral aspect is now developing in an ever more marked fashion.’<sup>39</sup>

Independently of these chiefs, Carde added, certain particularly talented individuals had taken advantage of the educational and administrative opportunities that were being offered in ever greater numbers. They, together with the rural notables, formed a ‘true elite’ who occupied a preponderant position in the social organism and whose aspirations were fully respected by the local administration.

### Association Assessed

In the postwar era, then, Dakar’s outlook toward Africans shifted dramatically, as it sought to both make sense of and contain the revolts and the new political ambitions that it certainly had not anticipated twenty years earlier. To what extent, it is now fair to ask, did the policy of association serve the particular needs of the Government General and promote the cause of African social progress and democratization as claimed? With respect to the ‘*évolués*’, the answer is relatively straightforward. ‘Gradual democratic measures’ offered an effective counter-doctrine to the ‘*évolué*’ demand for assimilation, since association justified devolving only a small portion of French sovereignty on the new elite in the place of the full equality they demanded. The Government General was thus able to preserve in its own hands, for the entire interwar period, the very authority that was being contested, without appearing as die-hard racists before world or metropolitan opinion. The various measures that Dakar adopted to allow the ‘*évolués*’ to participate in the administration—their appointment to administrative councils, the institution of an electoral college, and the decision to allow them to qualify for administrative positions formerly reserved to citizens—were concessions of the most

39. M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, n° 1072, 8 octobre 1930, ANSOM, AP 1638/3: ‘Grâce à la sécurité, grâce à l’amélioration des conditions économiques de la vie, les anciennes familles de chefs indigènes ont été normalement amenées à fonder sur de nouvelles “valeurs” une supériorité que la seule force des armes ne suffisait plus à maintenir. Tout en conservant jalousement le bénéfice de certaines traditions locales, ils ont évolué sous l’influence de l’autorité française dont ils avaient le plus grand intérêt à s’instituer les auxiliaires. Le développement de l’instruction et les facilités qui leur ont été spécialement données d’en faire bénéficier leurs fils leur ont permis d’assimiler certains modes de pensée et d’action dont le contact du seul progrès matériel a pu d’abord leur rendre l’acquisition désirable, mais dont le côté purement moral s’affirme de plus en plus par une évolution naturelle.’



minimal kind.<sup>40</sup> At best, the 'évolués' were now to be consulted in matters concerning them. With respect to chiefs, however, the impact of Dakar's same postwar policy was a little more complicated.

Although association did help consolidate French authority in the countryside, it did not do so as completely as Dakar had intended. As the continued protests of the new elite throughout the interwar years would attest, association of chiefs failed to reestablish the control of the older generation over that of a new generation born under colonial rule. On the other hand, after 1918, chiefs in West Africa did not revolt again; instead, they loyally served the colonial administration for a variety of reasons. In part, their defeat during the war convinced them that rebellion in the future would be fruitless. The kind of association that chiefs were being offered also differed substantially from that of the 'évolués'. For the chiefs, association meant, not so much the empty 'privilege' of sitting on councils in urban areas, or the right to sit for exams only to be rejected, but the opportunity to accrue real power and wealth as French intermediaries in the countryside. While ostensibly supervised by French administrators, these chiefs would, in fact, have considerable freedom to act as they chose, as long as they collected the taxes and labor demanded by the local commandant. French personnel was too scarce, after the war as before, to exercise any real control over the chiefs. In the interwar years, the French did not hesitate to give chiefs privileged access to new agricultural technology, capital resources and land in an effort to use them, in keeping with their ideology, as vehicles for introducing new farming methods in the countryside. Astute chiefs in the service of the French could take advantage of these opportunities to amass personal fortunes. A final reason for collaborating was that, as Dakar had accurately realized, customary chiefs and other notables had suffered a real loss of their former authority in the wake of social changes introduced by the French. Much like the colonial administration, they deeply resented the claims of a new younger generation to speak now for the majority of Africans; these demands for assimilation threatened only further to detach the masses

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40. Just how minimal Dakar's interwar concessions were can be seen in the administration's subsequent treatment of Africans who applied for jobs formerly open exclusively to the French. According to the new legislation, in order to gain admission to the 'cadre supérieur', Africans had to pass the same exams as Europeans. In 1929, Carde sent a circular saying that none of that year's African candidates had passed the requisite exams, and complaining of the deplorable preparation of these candidates. The latter, he went on, had had the arrogance to assume that authorization to apply to the new 'cadre' meant that they would automatically be admitted. Carde pointed out that the new measure would only apply to those truly worthy, by virtue of their education and their morality (M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, Circulaire n° 084, 18 mars 1929, ANS, Circulaires, année 1929). SABATIER (1978: 263-264) confirms that very few Africans were able to enter the higher cadre before World War II.

from their traditional deference. For the old elite, therefore, association appeared to offer a way to stem the decline in their personal prestige.

These motives did not bode well for advancing the cause of civilization as defined by the French. Once entrenched in office, the old elite often took advantage of the very peoples whom they were supposed to be guiding, and enriched themselves at their expense. This flagrant abuse of power was particularly true under Carde. During his administration, the 2,200 canton chiefs employed in West Africa became notorious for their corruption and excessive labor demands.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, the various councils, which had been deemed essential vehicles for the education of these chiefs and a means for staying in touch with popular sentiment, had either never been organized, or else served only as forums for communicating the commandant's wishes to the assembled notables.<sup>42</sup>

The French were not entirely unaware of the gap between what they were promising and what was actually transpiring. Although Merlin and Carde either were genuinely oblivious to, or else chose to ignore, the abuses of chiefs and their declining status and popularity during their tenures in Dakar, Carde's successor, Jules Brévié, understood the situation all too well. Upon taking office, he immediately declared the existence of a 'crisis' of the authority of chiefs in the countryside. This crisis was particularly upsetting not only to Brévié, but also to Paris, because it meant that the new generation was no more 'in hand' than it had been in the early 1920s.<sup>43</sup> Brévié, however, did not then question the funda-

41. The Government General implicitly admitted this problem in 1932, when an important circular on local assemblies argued that while canton chiefs were to remain the principal agents of the French in the countryside, they were no longer to collect taxes. This task was to be left to the village chiefs. See M. le Gouverneur à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire n° 421 A P sur l'Administration indigène (les Conseils)', *JOAOF*, 28 septembre 1932, p. 938.

42. The fate of the 1919-1920 legislation can be partially reconstructed through the reports filed by Missions of Inspection throughout the 1920s and in Dakar's own circulars. See in particular 'Rapport n° 78', 19 mars 1921, observations de M. le Gouverneur Général, ANSOM, AP 3052, Mission Kair, Guinée, 1921; and 'Rapport n° 67', 30 avril 1921, ANSOM, AP 3052, Mission Kair, Guinée, 1921; 'Rapport n° 62', 30 avril 1924, ANSOM, AP 3056, Mission Cazaux, Dahomey, 1923-1924; and M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire n° 421 A P sur l'Administration indigène (les Conseils)', *JOAOF*, 28 septembre 1932, p. 938.

43. It is interesting to note that at the same time that Brévié arrived in Dakar, the Minister of Colonies, concerned by growing unrest in Indochina, suddenly began to take an interest in the problem of the authority of rural chiefs throughout Africa. A directive sent to the African Governors General by the Minister explained that 'certain African chefferies have disappeared or constitute a mere façade. The traditional command structures of the native collectivities have proven too weak to resist the new aspirations of a generation whose tendencies disconcert and surprise the old notables. The old social armature is coming apart.' This circular went on to recommend that new measures be taken to consolidate chiefly authority (Circulaire n° 10, 9 octobre 1929; and M. le Ministre

mental assumptions or structure of association as defined by Merlin, or advocate a new flexibility toward the 'évolués'. He simply reiterated these assumptions, and expanded the existing structure of association in a new set of circulars.<sup>44</sup> In the 1930s, Brévié decided that Merlin's legislation had been too ambitious; in its place he instituted new consultative councils at the village and canton level, in yet another attempt to ensure that chiefs stayed in touch with local sentiment.<sup>45</sup> He also recommended that more attention be paid to the education of the chiefs and their selection. Such measures would, Brévié explained, restore the chieftaincy to its original representative function, and prevent abuses in the future.

This concept remained as flawed in the 1930s as it had been in the 1920s. Contrary to what Brévié maintained, chiefs, even with their restored councils, could not be 'both the representatives of the ethnic collectivities and the agents of the administration whom they were required to obey'. And even as the federal authority was noting the problem of 'an old elite that was running the risk of all those aristocracies who do

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des Colonies à MM. les Gouverneurs Généraux, Circulaire n° 1 c.s., 10 juin 1930, ANS, 18 G 66 FM). When Governor General Brévié received the Minister's circulars, he requested his Governors to submit reports on the extent to which Vollenhoven's directions of 1917 and the decrees of 1919 and 1920 had been implemented (M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, Circulaire n° 342, 17 septembre 1930, ANS 18G 65 FM). These reports revealed how little had been accomplished in the ten years since the war in the way of genuine association. These reports are contained in ANS, 18 G 54 FM, and are summarized in M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, n° 28, 28 janvier 1932. ANS, 18 G 66 FM, M. le Gouverneur Général à M. le Ministre des Colonies, n° 1060, 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 1930, also discusses the current state of native policy in West Africa.

44. Jules Brévié was Governor General from 1930-1936. His commitment to the same policy is all the more telling because he fit the profile of the 'ethnographer-administrator' much more than either of his fellow école coloniale graduates, Carde or Vollenhoven. Brévié had had considerable field experience in the Western Sudan and showed an all-consuming interest in native policy while in office. He was enormously well read, and in 1923 published *Islamisme contre 'naturisme' au Soudan français: essai de psychologie politique coloniale*. This book, to which Maurice Delafosse wrote the introduction, compared animism to Islam in West Africa. Brévié also knew Lévy-Bruhl, and their correspondence can be consulted in the Archives nationales du Sénégal (Correspondance Brévié, ANS 17G 327 FM). One of his final gestures before leaving Dakar was to found the Institut français d'Afrique noire, a research institute devoted to the study of African civilization.
45. As in the past, however, no deliberative powers were to be granted any African assembly. The right to the final say in policy-making had to be preserved in the hands of the colonizer, 'in order to apply it in the direction of the moral and material improvement of the African populations' ('Rapport au sujet des assemblées indigènes', 10 mai 1932, ANS, 18 G 54 FM). A description of the new assemblies and their attributes was provided by Brévié in his 'Circulaire n° 421 A P sur l'Administration indigène (les Conseils)', *JOAOF*, 28 septembre 1932, p. 938, and his 'Arrêté type', ANS 18 G 66 FM.

not evolve quickly enough to retain control of the milieux they are claiming to guide', the Government General continued to maintain that traditional notables remained the best instruments of the progress France wished to effect.<sup>46</sup> Respected but also taught by the French, these chiefs, Brévié insisted, could still become 'animated by our thought, infused with our desire to assure a better future to the native'.<sup>47</sup> To this end, administrators were to make sure that chiefs 'had access to the new conditions of existence' that were developing around them. 'Without this effort', Brévié warned his subordinates, 'the evolution of the masses will precede that of their natural chiefs, and the chasm that already exists in some places between the new and the old generation will grow deeper. We must convince all chiefs that they have a duty to rise to the challenge, to turn over a new leaf, to precede the young along the path to progress, in order to maintain intact their prestige and their moral ascendancy'.<sup>48</sup>

Such an outlook, for all its apparent emphasis upon progress, was essentially backward-looking, seeking to contain the consequences of the 'mission civilisatrice' rather than recognize the social, cultural and economic changes that colonial rule had engendered. Despite Brévié's insistence that chiefs could become ideal enlightened collaborators, accepted by their peoples as their 'natural' leaders, no such evolution took place in the 1930s. Their authority continued to decline and their abuses remained unchecked.

French ideology and policy, however, refused to confront this reality. In West Africa, association still offered sufficient advantages to the Government General for Dakar to turn a blind eye to the glaring gap between

46. M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire n° 415 A P sur l'Administration indigène (les Chefs)', *JOAOF*, 28 septembre 1932, p. 903: 'Les chefs indigènes sont à la fois les représentants de collectivités ethniques [...] et les mandataires d'une administration à laquelle ils sont tenus d'obéir [...]. L'ancienne élite risque de subir le sort de toutes les aristocraties qui ne se transforment pas assez vite pour garder la maîtrise des milieux qu'elles prétendent diriger.'

47. M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire n° 421 A P sur l'Administration indigène (les Conseils)', *JOAOF*, 28 septembre 1932, p. 938: 'Ils redeviendront, dans une certaine mesure, ce que la plupart d'entre eux étaient avant notre arrivée, des chefs; mais des chefs animés de notre pensée, pénétrés de notre désir d'assurer un avenir meilleur aux indigènes.'

48. M. le Gouverneur Général à MM. les Lieutenants-Gouverneurs, 'Circulaire n° 415 A P, sur l'Administration indigène (les Chefs)', *JOAOF*, 27 septembre 1932, p. 903: 'Il importe donc de mettre à la portée [de l'ancienne élite indigène] les moyens de s'adapter aux conditions nouvelles de l'existence qui se développent autour d'elle; sans quoi l'évolution de la masse devancera celle de ses chefs naturels et alors s'approfondira le fossé qui déjà, par endroits, sépare la jeune génération de l'ancienne. C'est là une autre cause de la carence du commandement indigène. Il faut convaincre tous les chefs qu'ils ont le devoir de se hausser à la hauteur des circonstances, de dépouiller le vieil homme, de précéder les jeunes dans la voie du progrès de manière à maintenir intacts leur prestige et leur ascendant moral.'

its stated objectives and what was actually taking place. These advantages included the loyal allegiance of chiefs who had earlier revolted, and the containment of 'évolué' demands. To have admitted that the chiefs were unable to represent both the French and the masses would have meant finding new intermediaries for administering the federation. The Government General understood that the only possible alternative intermediaries to these chiefs were paid French administrators or members of the new elite. The first option was unacceptable, for reasons of cost; the second was eliminated because, as Dakar realized, the new elite would have demanded a greater say in policy-making than the chiefs they replaced. The only safe choice, when it came to preserving Dakar's authority intact, was to retain the old regime in office.

There was, however, another reason favoring the persistence of the doctrine of association. In the interwar years Paris began to pressure Dakar to embark upon a more vigorous and more successful policy of 'mise en valeur' than it had pursued to date. The federal authorities thus had a greater need to secure the loyalty of rural elites and shore up their prestige, for the implementation of 'mise en valeur' would inevitably necessitate an increase in taxes and labor requisitions from the local populations. As in the past, the French were in no position to extract these resources 'directly'; they needed African intermediaries. Precolonial chiefs appeared to be the obvious candidates in the 1920s, since they required minimal pay and were familiar to their subjects. Ironically, the very 'mise en valeur' that these chiefs facilitated would only serve to widen the chasm between the masses and chiefs that Brévié feared, and which the policy of association had originally been conceived to prevent.

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The development of a rhetoric of civilization through association in AOF tells us a great deal about how French power was legitimated at a particular junction in the modern history of colonization. But it also raises a number of intriguing questions about the relationship between the emergence of a more conservative republicanism in France, developments in the empire and a burgeoning interest in traditional African civilizations. That a more sympathetic and nuanced view of traditional African society was also taking shape in France in this period is not in doubt. In 1925 the Institut d'ethnologie was jointly founded at l'Université de Paris by Delafosse, the Durkheimians, Marcel Mauss and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and the anthropologist Paul Rivet.<sup>49</sup> Thanks to the work of William Cohen, we have long known that colonial officialdom was actively involved in this new

49. On the founding of the Institut, see CLARK (1973: 214), LEBOVICS (1992: 32-36), CLIFFORD (1988: 61, 123-124), and DIAS (1991: 247-255).

institution. In 1926 the *École coloniale* began offering several new courses in West African history, customary law and languages, and sending its students for additional training at the Institut. There they learned how to conduct ethnographic fieldwork and were encouraged to take a scholarly interest in the peoples they would be administering (Cohen 1971: 193, ch. 6; Clifford 1988: 61). But it would be interesting to know more about how and why the Institut was founded in the first place, and what role the new appreciation of African cultures occurring on both sides of the colonial divide played in creating an interwar French republican identity that now appeared to value hierarchy over equality, and difference over universality. Did the French discover in traditional African institutions not only a bulwark against the assimilationist demands of the new elite, but an idealized world that they had lost in interwar France and now wished to resurrect? And conversely, did disillusionment with republicanism overseas render republican values at home suspect? Was the empire, in short, more responsible for trends in the metropole than historians of modern France have imagined? There is, I suspect, much more to the history of association in West Africa than the local reaction of an insecure colonial state.

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the new rhetoric and policy of 'democratic' association that emerged in Dakar after World War I. New threats to French authority—the election of Blaise Diagne and revolts throughout AOF against conscription—along with a shift to the right in France, led administrators in the 1920s to reformulate the *politique indigène* followed since 1895. The legitimate aspirations of old and new African elites for power were now to be met by associating them in decision-making. Ostensibly a liberalizing move, association in fact was fundamentally backwards-looking, seeking to contain the African ambitions that Dakar's prewar policies had unwittingly unleashed.

#### RÉSUMÉ

*La démocratie redécouverte : l'avènement de l'« association » en AOF, 1914-1930.*  
— Cet article étudie la nouvelle conception démocratique de l'« association » telle

qu'elle émerge à Dakar après la Première Guerre mondiale. La contestation de l'autorité de la métropole telle qu'elle se manifeste lors de l'élection de Blaise Diagne et à la suite des révoltes qui éclatent dans toute l'AOF contre la conscription, de même que le glissement à droite de la politique française, conduisent les administrateurs coloniaux, au cours des années 1920, à reformuler la politique indigène suivie depuis 1855. C'est désormais en associant tant les anciennes élites africaines que les nouvelles au processus de prise de décision qu'on est censé satisfaire leur souhait légitime d'accéder au pouvoir. D'inspiration apparemment progressiste, l'« association » était en fait réactionnaire, puisque cette politique visait à contenir les aspirations des Africains que la ligne suivie avant 1914 par le Gouvernement général de l'AOF avait involontairement débridées.

Keywords/Mots-clés: AOF/AOF, colonial policy/politique coloniale, democracy/démocratie, council/conseil, chief/chef.