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The Unraveling of a Neglected Source

A Report on Women in Francophone West Africa
in the 1930s*

Scholars of African history recurrently face a dearth of sources written by women. Most historical records are produced by men who are generally disinterested in women's active roles. The study of European women and their written legacies in the colonial period is a recent trend in the historiography of Africa. The accomplishments of Margery Perham and Mary Kingsley in the British colonies are well-known. Yet, relatively few European women actually made it to the colonies, especially in the French territories where the colonial administration was a male preserve *par excellence*. Rarely were women assigned positions within the administration, and therefore one would expect archival records by such women to be rather exceptional.¹

This article is about such an archival source. It was brought to my attention by Mamadou Ndiaye, the administrative assistant of the Archives nationales du Sénégal. When informed that I was searching for historical sources on women, Ndiaye revealed a document recently found lying on a dusty shelf, catalogued but unclassified and thus seemingly unknown.² The dossier in question written by Denise Moran Savineau is entitled 'La

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1. Yvonne Knibiehler and Régine Goutalier claim that sources written by European women exist, but they are not of an official nature since women were excluded from the French colonial administration. See KNIBIEHLER & GOUTALIER (1987: 8).
2. The report has been cited by ECHENBERG & FILIPOVICH (1986), SCHREYGER (1984), and SURET-CANALE (1961).

famille en AOF: condition de la femme'.³ Compiled in the late 1930s, it is an important document for research on Francophone West Africa, and especially significant for studies on women. This is an attempt to reconstruct the story surrounding the manuscript, followed by an overview of the multi-disciplinary data it contains, together with an assessment of its relevance to future scholarship.

On October 7th 1937, Marcel Jules de Coppet, the Governor-General of French West Africa (AOF),⁴ delegated an important assignment to a 'Conseillère technique de l'enseignement', Denise Moran Savineau. She was to head a 'mission d'enquête'⁵ in AOF on 'la condition de la femme et de la famille, dans les écoles, l'emploi, etc.'.⁶ That French administrators felt it necessary to finance a special inquiry for the sole purpose of gathering data on African women in the colonies is rather *avant-garde*. Furthermore, this project seems to have assumed a high-priority nature judging from the correspondence exchanged prior to and during Denise Moran's eight month-long fieldwork. M. de Coppet took this project seriously and he instructed in a circular addressed to all governors in AOF that:

'Madame Savineau [...] devra jouir d'une grande liberté de mouvement [...] J'attache une grande importance aux conclusions de cette enquête, qui devra être minutieuse, et je vous serais reconnaissant d'assurer à Madame Savineau le concours le plus large de la part des commandants de postes, du personnel enseignant et médical, des magistrats, des indigènes qualifiés et notamment des interprètes, qui devront être soigneusement choisis.'⁷

Yet what incentives drove the Governor-General to sponsor such noteworthy research? Possible explanations can be inferred by placing this event in its historical context.

West Africa in the Great Depression

Throughout the 1930s, the Great Depression had detrimental repercussions in Africa. The period was characterized by an overall reduction in colonial

3. Archives nationales du Sénégal (hereafter ANS) 17G/381/126. A microfilm copy exists in the French colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence (Centre des archives d'Outre-mer, 17G 381).

4. By French West Africa is meant Afrique occidentale française; hereafter AOF.

5. 'Mission d'enquête', or mission of inquiry, was the appellation given to data collecting projects undertaken by the French colonial administration (discussed below).

6. These were Governor-General de Coppet's instructions as described in a circular he addressed to the governors of AOF ('Circulaire du Gouverneur-général aux Gouverneurs de l'AOF, 21 octobre 1937', in 'Voyages et Missions', lettres S à Z, ANS, 17G/217/104; [hereafter V & M]).

7. *Ibid.*

economic activity linked to a drop in cash-crop prices and exports which led to increased unemployment and underemployment.⁸ Although colonial enterprises were first hit, the Depression quickly precipitated local economies into decline. For Africans, an extreme scarcity of resources and cash was all the more debilitating with colonial taxation. In fact, taxes continued to rise in Francophone Africa throughout the 1930s, even in the worst years. As Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch explains (1977: 129), 'En Afrique noire, le contraste est frappant de la compensation budgétaire effectuée grâce à l'imposition indigène, qui continua de progresser en pleine crise, et dont le plafond coïncide précisément au moment où les cours, au plus bas, entraînaient la rémunération paysanne la plus faible, c'est-à-dire au moment où le producteur était le moins à même d'affronter la charge'. According to Patrick Manning's calculations (1988: 51), 1934 export prices fell to 20% of their 1927 level, yet government revenues were only cut in half 'which meant that effective tax rates more than doubled'.

During the 1930s, poverty reached unsurpassed levels and people resorted to multifarious means of acquiring cash in order to meet tax duties as well as basic needs. As usual, money lenders provided their services, and to pay back loans many people reverted to pawning or pledging family members as securities for loans. John Iliffe (1987: 154-155) suggests that in West Africa, 'the pawning of children [...] was a common resource for the poor [...] until government interference and the growth of wage-labor largely ended it during the 1930s'. As discussed below, pawning of women and girls in particular was still practiced in the late 1930s when Moran was compiling her reports. That the colonial administration was concerned about the increased activity of pawning and such practices could perhaps account for the decision to launch a large-scale study of the condition of women and families in French West Africa.

European Concern for African Women

On another note, colonial officials were familiar with the concerns of missionaries who adopted women's tribulations as a strategic theme. Evidence from the early 1930s indicates that French missionaries of the Compagnie du Saint-Esprit were actively embracing the cause of African women (Goyau 1934). For the Archbishop, Monseigneur A. Le Roy, the condition of indigenous women became a cardinal preoccupation. Family matters, namely betrothal, polygamy and inheritance rights were among the prime targets. In May 1936, Monseigneur Le Roy produced a ten-page booklet entitled *Pour le relèvement social de la femme en*

8. COQUERY-VIDROVITCH 1977: 131. For a statistical assessment of the 1930s crisis in Senegal, see BERNARD-DUQUENET (1985: 15-20).

Afrique française in which the inferior status of African women was discussed and measures to redress it were stipulated.⁹ The ulterior motive of such preoccupations was clearly a strategic one for it gave missionaries a perfectly humanitarian excuse to proselytize among African women. Missionaries identified women and girls as key vectors for transmitting Christian beliefs and behavior.

In 1933, the Vicar of Ouagadougou wrote to the Governor-General of AOF to report his concerns about the incidence of female slavery and marriage transactions (Klein & Roberts 1994: 307). Therefore, missionaries' efforts to 'relieve women' of oppressive indigenous practices probably influenced colonial matters. In fact, when placed against the conclusions of a recent study which links the Catholic Church to the Popular Front movement in France, these speculations carry further weight (Murphy 1989). It is also likely that women's political and religious associations put pressure on the French government. Indeed, since the late 1920s, women's groups, with often close ties to the French Catholic Church, began turning their attention to the fate of women in African colonies (Rabaut 1978: 283). It was during these times that French women were actively demonstrating for suffrage and emancipation.

Elsewhere, women began expressing public concern for their sisters in the colonies. Starting in 1923, Belgian women produced a weekly magazine printed in Brussels entitled *Bulletin de l'Union des Femmes congolaises*. Publication of the bulletin continued for at least twenty-five years and was available in select European and African capitals. The magazine circulated household tips from gardening to special recipes for European women stationed in the colonies. Opinion columns and articles of a more engaging nature were also published. In the February 1937 issue, for instance, there appeared an article entitled 'La femme blanche dans les colonies', reprinted from the French periodical *Le Temps*. One reads that 'depuis quelques années, un nouvel élément, sacré, occupe l'activité du monde médical aux Colonies: la femme et l'enfant.'¹⁰

Francophone women voiced their concern about the plight of African women at the 1931 Exposition coloniale held in Paris. They organized, under an umbrella movement, the 'États généraux du féminisme', with an aim to pay homage to women in the colonies (the colonizers and the colonized), and foster deliberation on ways to improve the situation of indigenous women.¹¹ Such political considerations in France presumably

9. ANS, 17G/160/28, 'Situation de la femme en AOF, 1934-1938'. This booklet contains seven propositions on how to ameliorate women's prerogatives, especially vis-à-vis customary and Muslim laws and issues such as the legal age of marriage, the rights of widows, and polygamy.

10. *Bulletin de l'Union des Femmes congolaises* (Bruxelles), no 75, janvier 1937, p. 1.

11. An account of this conference indicates that ambiguous conclusions were reached. But French women were unanimously in favor of both the abolition

inspired officials in the colonies, especially since the main organizers of this movement were the wives of prominent colonial administrators. These issues gained large audiences during the rise of the Popular Front movement in France and the short-lived government led by Léon Blum in 1936.

The Popular Front Government and its Colonial Agenda

When examining the political climate in France during the mid-1930s, there are clear indications that the social situation in the colonies was a concern. In the years preparing the socialist victory of May 1936, Popular Front slogans exalted the aim of socialism as the defense of 'all the oppressed without distinction of race' (Cohen 1972: 373). Promises to 'make the colonial system more humane' by placing an emphasis on public education and 'granting political liberties' were also articulated during election campaigns (*ibid.*: 373-374).

As France's socialist president, Léon Blum's rhetoric was a salutary move towards a humane political agenda (Julien 1981: 376; Cohen 1972: 372). Once in office, however, Blum's cabinet was divided and his position on France's role in the colonies remained ambiguous. For Marius Moutet, nominated to head the colonial office, France's mission was unquestionably 'd'amener les fruits de la civilisation française aux colonies' (Julien 1981: 376). As the first socialist Minister of Colonies, Moutet proceeded to delegate posts to sympathizers. In so doing, he provoked one of the most dramatic shuffles in colonial appointments whereupon eleven out of the sixteen governorships in Africa changed hands (Dela-vignette 1981: 392). This is how Marcel Jules de Coppet came to be appointed Governor-General of French West Africa. In fact, Moutet personally installed his friend de Coppet in August 1936 during his first official tour of West Africa.

De Coppet was a socialist with a decidedly liberal reputation and a long-standing career in Africa. He served for over thirty years in Madagascar, Senegal, Guinea, Chad, Dahomey (present-day Benin), Djibouti (Somalia), and Mauritania.¹² A close friend of André Gide, de Coppet

of polygamy and the education of girls, which had hitherto been neglected by the Bureau de l'enseignement colonial, see KNIBIEHLER & GOUTALIER (1987: 16-36).

12. The most accurate biographical information published to date on Marcel de Coppet is contained in BERNARD-DUQUENET (1985: 81-90). Bernard-Duquet explains that de Coppet studied law and also took courses at the *École des langues orientales* before entering the colonial office. He spent five years in Madagascar before transferring to AOF. He served seven years in various regions of Senegal where he got the reputation of a 'négraphile'. In 1918, he was sent to Guinea, and ten years later he became Governor of Chad until 1933. He subsequently was governor of Dahomey, Somalia and Mauritania

was once suspected of supplying him with data which appeared in *Voyage au Congo* (1927), one of the first popular works to report on French abuses in Equatorial Africa. As Governor-General, de Coppet's policies and actions reflected his progressive political drive and a seemingly genuine resolve to end exploitation and instill social justice in the colonies. Although de Coppet's style spurred sharp criticisms in and out of the colonial office, his approach was nonetheless a welcomed move away from French authoritarianism. An examination of his political agenda is very telling with regards to Denise Moran Savineau's assignment.

In a note on Marius Moutet's colonial agenda, Robert Delavignette (1981) explains that it sought to address two broad issues. The 'improvement of the fate of the masses' with a focus on preventing famines and enacting protective labor legislation. Labor policies prohibited the employment of women and children on night shifts, shortened the working day, and reduced forced labor duty from fifteen to ten days. The second component of the colonial program was entitled 'the road toward political emancipation' and it addressed the dismantling of the system of *indigénat* and the installment of a council of representatives to encourage the colonized to participate in local politics.

With these directives and the guidelines of the SFIO (Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière), de Coppet set to work in August 1936. He was the first Governor-General to invite African students for a luncheon at the colonial palace. He also inaugurated a number of exceptional colonial reforms. He was the first to observe Muslim holidays (*ʿid al-fiṭr* and *ʿid al-adḥa*), and ordered that all colonial administrators in AOF do the same.¹³ De Coppet enacted labor legislation long ago passed in France yet never applied to the colonies. A decree was activated regarding work-related accidents and compensations, another liberalized syndicalism (Person 1979: 91). This albeit limited political liberalization provoked a swell in trade unions and labor associations which led to a number of strikes starting in 1937. An interesting piece of legislation concerned the protection of women and children. The ordinance of 18 September 1936 contained five clauses on child, family and female labor.¹⁴ These determined the conditions under which child labor was considered permissible. A third clause pertained to regulations of child labor in both public and private establishments. Moreover, so-called 'family labor' was defined, exempting women over seven months pregnant from strenuous work. De

before his long-awaited appointment as Governor-General of AOF. For details on de Coppet's service in Chad, see A. GIDE (1927), and M. ALLÉGRET (1993). M. PERHAM (1983) visited the de Coppets in 1932 and reports her impressions in her diary. I thank John Hargreaves for this information.

13. For details on de Coppet's policies towards Muslims, see HARRISON (1988: 183-193) and BERNARD-DUQUENET (1985: 88-89).

14. 'Ordonnance no 2563 AP', *Journal officiel du Sénégal*, no 1889, 3 décembre 1936, pp. 948-952.

Coppet's reforms modeled the political and social commitment of the Popular Front government which claimed to follow the guidelines of the SFIO, the Human Rights League and the International Labor Office (Lefranc 1965: 306; Delavignette 1981: 394).

The decision to finance an inquiry on the condition of women in AOF, however contextual, was not entirely of de Coppet's making. When they came to power, neither Léon Blum nor his ministers had a coherent colonial policy (Lefranc 1965: 301-307; Bernard-Duquenet 1985: 57-61; Jackson 1988: 154-158). After much electoral rhetoric about reform overseas, the Popular Front government focused mainly on domestic issues. Yet, as discussed above, important social reforms applied in AOF set remarkable precedents.

In August 1936, the French parliament, under the auspices of the Minister of the Colonies Marius Moutet, approved the launching of a wide-scale inquiry on the social conditions in the colonies.¹⁵ The commission was to investigate 'the needs and legitimate aspirations of the populations living in the colonies, protectorates, and mandates.'¹⁶ This rather bureaucratic commission of inquiry, which took six months to convene, was headed by Henri Guernut (former minister and Human Rights League delegate) and included among its members such personalities as Robert Delavignette, Hubert Deschamps, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and André Gide.¹⁷ According to William Cohen, 'instead of making on-the-spot investigations, the commission worked through questionnaires which, incidentally, took six months to draw-up [and] in the end the commission did not carry out its assignment.'¹⁸ The project remained for the most part inoperative for lack of funds and perhaps motivation; it eventually failed together with the Popular Front government. However, de Coppet was among the few colonial administrators to take the assignment seriously. Upon receiving the news of the Ministry of the Colonies' agenda, Governor-General de Coppet immediately set to work recruiting French officials to undertake inquiries in AOF, and Denise Moran Savineau was evidently a perfect candidate.

It is extremely significant that it was precisely during the Popular Front government that another French woman was put in charge of a challenging mission. Odette Du Puigauveau, the heroine of the desert who crossed the Sahara in the early 1930s, was later hired by the Ministry of Education,

15. BERNARD-DUQUENET 1985: 77-79. It is important to note that the emphasis of these inquiries was on North Africa and Indochina, not on Sub-Saharan Africa.

16. 'La commission est chargée de déterminer les besoins et les aspirations légitimes des populations demeurant dans les colonies, les protectorats et les mandats', *Bulletin officiel du Ministère des Colonies*, LI, no 2, février 1937, p. 109.

17. *Bulletin officiel du Ministère des Colonies*, LI, no 5, mai 1937, pp. 532-533.

18. COHEN 1972: 371. Lévy-Bruhl was the only member of the commission to actually write a final report, the subject of which was cannibalism in certain remote areas of Africa.

the Ministry of Colonies and the Musée national d'histoire naturelle. She led an exploration of the Sahara travelling from Morocco to Mauritania and French Sudan from December 1936 to January 1938. Unfortunately, du Puigauveau's biographer provides few details about this official mission and its conclusions (Vérité 1992: 184). There are striking parallels between the experiences of du Puigauveau and Moran, namely their critical outlook of French colonial rule and their commitment to African/Saharan cultures.

Denise Moran Savineau: An Elusive Biography

It is intriguing that little biographical information is available on Denise Moran Savineau although she was officially appointed to carry-out an exceptional assignment. Neither in the French archives, nor in the Archives nationales du Sénégal does her personal file exist. It is noteworthy that her name is repeatedly misspelled in correspondence exchanged between Moran Savineau and the colonial office. Instead of Moran one finds 'Maran'; yet she is most often referred to by her married name as 'Madame Savineau'.

The correct spelling of her family name is confirmed in her only publication entitled *Tchad* (1934), where she uses simply Denise Moran (hereafter referred to as such). *Tchad* is dedicated to her late husband Edmond Savineau who died in Chad 'au service des noirs'. In writing this testimony of nearly four years in Chad, she expects to go beyond André Gide's *Voyage au Congo*, which was based on a nine-month trip to the area. Like Gide's account, Moran pays close attention to French concessionary companies and the incidence of forced labor in Equatorial Africa. She reports on the corrupt practices of colonial officials and private companies, and common abuses committed by *tirailleurs sénégalais* or colonial riflemen. Jean Suret-Canale quotes extensively from Moran's account in his seminal history of West Africa.¹⁹ He rightfully ranks Moran's contribution, alongside that of Gide, as important attempts to publicize human rights violations linked to European presence in Africa.

Tchad reads like a travelogue rich in dialogues and lengthy citations from local archives. Moran deliberately changed the names of people and places so as to avoid a 'scandal'. What is more, she is typically elusive about her personal life. For instance, she is never explicit about E. Savineau's post, although he is once referred to as 'commandant'.

19. SURET-CANALE 1961: 172-175. He explains in a footnote that Moran cited archival material which in theory was illegal, but laments that she often left out names of people and places (*ibid.*: 172, fn 1). Since Suret-Canale did not identify Moran, he probably knew nothing about her. Moreover, he omitted to include her name in his bibliography.

Perhaps he was a *commandant de cercle* or a military officer, which would explain why he was in charge of labor recruitment. As for Moran, she did not just play the traditional role of the colonial officer's wife engaged part-time as an educator and a nurse. She worked on several occasions for the administration, and managed 'par intérim—le Bureau des affaires politiques et économiques' and explored the archives (Moran 1934: 12). It is important to note that both Monsieur and Madame Savineau were to some degree fluent in Arabic; a skill which clearly adds depth to their experiences.

Although she disclosed very little personal information, it is clear from both *Tchad* and Moran's report, that she was well-traveled. For instance, she compared the Office du Niger enterprise to harsh conditions in the Soviet Union where she visited.²⁰ She obviously traveled extensively throughout Equatorial Africa, and was very eager to renew a similar experience under Marcel de Coppet's governorship in 1937. There is also evidence in her publication that Moran and her husband were close friends with the de Coppets, a friendship which helped, no doubt, in securing her position as head of a mission of inquiry.

When applying for a position in the commission of inquiry, Moran was in Dakar (Senegal) serving as the 'conseillère technique de l'enseignement en AOF'.²¹ She volunteered to partake in the commission which was to conduct investigations throughout the French colonies in both West and Equatorial Africa.²² Although she was obviously highly qualified, there seemed to be an initial reluctance on the part of the colonial ministry in France to enlist Moran. But after much deliberation, and de Coppet's support, her application was successful.

As stipulated by decision n° 2811, on October 21 1937, Moran embarked on an expedition accompanied by a 'domestique voyageant en 6^e catégorie' and 300 kilograms of luggage.²³ She traveled from Dakar to Bamako in present-day Mali, then headed to Segou, Mopti, Timbuktu,

20. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 2: 'Les villages de colonisation de l'Office du Niger', p. 46.

21. 'Lettre no 467 du Gouverneur-général de l'AEF au Gouverneur-général de l'AOF, 26 mai 1937, Brazzaville', in V & M (see *supra* fn 6). No details were found on this assignment.

22. Incidentally, Moran was eager to go back to French Equatorial Africa, but the Governor-General of AEF had replied that there were no positions available for her there, which is why she served in AOF. For the bulk of official correspondence exchanged, refer to V & M (see *supra* fn 6).

23. 'Décision no 2811 du 7 octobre 1937. . .', Centre d'archives d'outre-mer, microfilm 17G381. It is very intriguing that decision no 2811 was not reported in any of the relevant official journals. Indeed, neither the *Journal officiel du Sénégal*, the *Journal officiel du Soudan français*, nor the *Bulletin officiel du Ministère des Colonies* mention Denise Maran-Savineau's appointment, although information on who was hired as a typist-secretary to such or such department figures prominently. It is tempting to surmise that de Coppet's decision to appoint Moran was subject to criticism, and it was best not to publicize it.

down to Gao and over to Niamey (Niger). From there, she continued eastward to Dogondoutchi, and then turned south to Porto-Novo (present-day Benin), Cotonou and Lomé (Togo), stopping in various towns along the way. Later, she headed north over Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) to Ouagadougou (in present-day Burkina Faso), before turning west to Bobo-Dioulasso and then Guinea slowly making her way back to Senegal in May 1938. Although it is unclear what means of transportation she used, it was the responsibility of each colonial territory to secure Moran's passage to the next location. According to a circular dispatched by the Governor-General to the governors of AOF, the 'commandants de cercle' were to be informed via telegraph about her expected arrivals.²⁴ Moran produced a total of eighteen reports typewritten on very thin paper: a 'Rapport d'ensemble' (232 pages) and seventeen smaller reports of an average of 45 pages each, classified by region. The entire dossier entitled 'La famille en AOF: condition de la femme', is very well written and is approximately 1000 pages in length.

It is difficult to say much about Moran's fieldwork methodology. In the preface introducing her final report, she explains her familiarity with African cultures and states that the purpose of her research was to define African women's roles and to discern leading social problems. Her background in the field of education is not only evident when she examines schools and medical facilities, it is manifest throughout the reports since she viewed education as a colonial priority. Moreover, she had a good sense of economic analysis which makes her study all the more valuable. It seems that she often relied on translators, some were 'officially' recommended, others she chose. To be sure, she was very suspicious of colonial officials in the field, and was not duped when she was being 'guided' in her inquiry. Her informants were both female and male, and she often quotes them in her reports. Obviously Moran derived a good deal of her information on women from men, namely African and French colonial officers and entrepreneurs. Her inquiries are not always related to family or women's issues, and she spoke with many children. She compiled numerous case-studies of individuals and households with sometimes quite detailed biographical and occupational profiles.

Let us now turn to the document in question which is, as far as the Archives nationales du Sénégal are concerned, the only file that Moran ever produced. Its multi-disciplinary character makes Moran's research an important source for a wide-range of studies focused on Francophone West African countries. Rather than attempt to summarize one thousand pages of research, several themes have been chosen for discussion.

24. 'Circulaire du Gouverneur-général, . . .' (see ref. *supra* fn 6).

Women's Roles in Production

Moran's remarkable awareness of economic affairs makes her observations particularly valuable for the study of economic history. Because her instructions were to focus on women and families, the information Moran disclosed is all the more critical for future scholarship. She was acutely aware of the fact that colonial encroachment was disrupting patterns of African economic development. Moran expresses this throughout the study: 'l'occupation française bouleverse profondément l'Afrique noire [...] nous avons bouleversé l'économie des noirs, et si violemment . . .'²⁵

Wherever she sojourned, Moran inquired about women's activities in the sphere of production or what she termed *industries féminines*. She offered meticulous descriptions and calculated assessments of female occupations from artisans to producers of goods and services. For example, Moran paid close attention to professional dyers. In Guinea, she examined the various stages of production and made estimates of women's profits (in French Francs).²⁶ Women in Conakry dyed white cotton cloth with indigo to produce striped textiles in various hues of blue. Investment for the production of one *pagne*²⁷ involved the purchase of 15 F worth of cotton fabric, 1,50 F of indigo, thread for 1,25 F, and five days worth of labor (including the estimated time spent selling the end-product on the market).²⁸ The difference between the sales price and the total production cost for one *pagne* was on average 12,25 F. So, according to Moran's calculations, Conakry dyers earned about 2,50 F per day in 1938. In Kindia, a town about 100 kilometers east of Conakry, the profits of Soussou women dyers were considerably lower, mainly because the cost of cotton fabric was higher since it was often bought on credit.²⁹ Here, when computing inputs, Moran took into account the cost of potassium used in the indigo dye solution, the time allowed to collect wood, and the potential risk of breaking the clay pots in which the solution was boiled. Net profits seldom exceeded 7,50 F per *pagne* (or barely 1,50 F a day).

25. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18.

26. It is important to mention that French West African colonies used French Francs until 1946 when the F/CFA or Colonies françaises d'Afrique (now called the Communauté financière africaine), a currency pegged to the French Franc, was introduced. Moreover, the French Franc was dramatically devaluated in 1936 during the Popular Front government. Subsequently, the prices of imported commodities, such as rice, escalated, see PERSON (1979). Until the devaluation of 1960, the French currency was the Franc, which was then converted to the 'nouveau Franc' at a rate of 100 to 1. These devaluations must be taken into account in order to appreciate the value of goods in real (1930s) terms.

27. *Pagne* is the unit of cloth, and is approximately 4 by 2 meters.

28. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 16: 'La Basse Guinée', pp. 8-9.

29. *Ibid.* pp. 23-24. Moran mentions that Lebanese businessmen sold cotton cloth on credit. They extended loans with approximately a 20% monthly interest rate. Monthly loans to some women were as high as 2,000 F.

Given these low returns, Moran believed women were wasting their time. Indeed, she declared: 'les femmes ne savent ni établir un prix de revient, ni mesurer leur peine'.³⁰ It is clear that in her assessments, she did not always appreciate such factors as time and expended energy, which have different realities in the African versus European contexts. Therefore when assessing these estimates one is compelled to be very careful, for there is no way of knowing how this data was recorded. Did Moran question several women and then average their costs, or did she simply transcribe statistics from one producer, and if so, how typical was she and can one assume that the information was not partial in some way? Moreover, in comparing the production costs of dyers in Conakry and in Kindia, apparently Moran took certain variables into account in the former case and not in the latter (the cost of wood, potassium, and that of replacing clay pots).

Despite these limitations, such statistics represent a rare attempt to quantify the profits of women entrepreneurs. Other estimates were compiled from the region of Timbuktu where women dyers used a special technique involving the use of rice to produce blotchy patterns on textiles.³¹ In Fada N'Gourma (Burkina Faso), Moran described how women dyed leather with various natural and commercial dyes for the manufacture of cushions. In contrast, indigo dyers from the town of Dogondoutchi (Niger) were exclusively male and used pits. This was unusual because, according to Moran, dying textiles was a profession normally performed by women in West Africa.

Pottery production is another *industrie féminine* which Moran studied carefully. Here again, her comprehensive cost-evaluations in Niger, Ivory Coast, Mali and Burkina Faso could prove extremely useful to the economic historian. Discussing a female potter in Dogondoutchi, Moran explained: 'Autrefois, elle fabriquait 10 canaris par jour, et maintenant elle en produit seulement 5 [car] elle cherche la terre à 10 kilomètres'.³² In other words, over time women experienced a loss in productivity because they walked farther to obtain raw materials.

Moran's research is not only rich in information on women's crafts and manufacturing activities, but also on the production and distribution of commodities such as foodstuffs. A typical example is the manufacture of shea butter in the Gaoua region of present-day Burkina Faso.³³ The production of shea butter (beurre de karité), from picking and carrying nuts to cooking and processing, is carefully assessed. Moran described

30. *Ibid.*

31. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 4: 'Goudam, Tombouctou et Gao', p. 15.

32. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 5: 'Le Niger occidental', p. 16. Canaris are clay containers.

33. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 62; also Rapport no 9: 'Bobo, Marka, Lobi, Senoufo etc'.

the time-consuming task of processing the butter, which involved repetitive boiling, mincing and churning actions for two work days (excluding the time spent at collecting, crushing and extracting the almond from the nut, or that spent at collecting water and wood). Five kilograms of shea nuts worth 1,50 F on the market, produced one kilogram of butter worth 1 F.³⁴ In other words, women's work decreased the value of the product, which at first glance makes no sense. Moran speculated that if women actually sold the nuts without converting them into butter, their profits would be greater. For this reason, she complained that women were not acting in their own best interests. It is likely, however, that the time/labor involved in transporting shea butter to the market was far less than that of carrying five times the weight in bulk nuts. This, and perhaps other variables which Moran must have overlooked, would explain shea butter producers' rationale. Or could it be that Moran's calculations are simply inaccurate?

The reports contain several cases where women's production inputs, such as processing raw materials, were not compensated by a higher sales price of the end-product. She documented seemingly unproductive work patterns in which processing edible commodities to conserve them actually reduced their value: 'Plus la matière est travaillée, moins la vendeuse gagne.'³⁵ However, in the case of fish products it is likely that women actually smoked unsold and therefore cheaper goods to realize profits.³⁶ This situation can be contrasted to the processing of shea nuts where the issue of time-consuming transportation might have been a determining factor. These and other examples of women's production are described in copious detail, yet one has to read between the lines at times when the author's perceptions distort the data she volunteers.

Moran studied a wide-range of women entrepreneurs, producing anything from arts and crafts to subsistence commodities such as salt (she explains the varying boiling techniques in several areas) and palm oil (sometimes the labor was gendered, men provided the nuts and women did all the rest). In the late 1930s as today, women were involved in all levels of production, so much so that when attempting to list the commodities produced by women in Conakry Moran exclaimed 'Les femmes font tout!'³⁷

34. These details are found in Rapport no 9, pp. 28-30.

35. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 116.

36. Three pieces of fresh shark (fished by men) were sold for 10 F. Presumably, the fish left unsold at the end of the market day was smoked by women who incurred the cost of obtaining firewood. Yet, they sold smoked shark at a much lower price. At any rate, according to Moran, the profits derived from the sale of smoked fish were not disposed of by women, but by their husbands. Moran remarked the same tendency for the sale of smoked oysters. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 12: 'La Basse Côte d'Ivoire (ouest)', p. 4.

37. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 16: 'La Basse Guinée', p. 11.

Long-distance Traders

Aside from the rich descriptions of *industries féminines*, Moran compiled data on commerce and long-distance female traders. In one detailed account from western Guinea in the Malinké town of Kankan, Moran explained how women bought cloth and then traveled to the towns of Beyla (approximately 400 kilometers to the south, near Liberia) or Kíssidougou (about 200 km at the border with Sierra Leone), where they would sell the cloth and purchase rice, palm oil, and soap. They would then return to Kankan and make substantial profits selling these imported commodities on the market.³⁸ Other women, who did not engage in long distance trade, would intercept the returning traders on the road before they entered the village. From them they purchased rice at the rate of 3 F for seven ‘mesures’ (units of account), which they would later resell at 1 F per ‘mesure’ on the market.³⁹ Although Moran did not specify traders’ regular mode of transportation, it is likely that long distances were sometimes covered in motorized vehicles. It is tempting to surmise that before the advent of such means of public transportation, the option to engage in long-distance trade was open to fewer women.

Moran’s most revealing case study is about a successful long-distance trader. Hounyo was 32 years of age in 1938, and lived in a town approximately fifty kilometers west of Porto Novo, the capital city of present-day Benin.⁴⁰ After refusing to marry the man chosen by her father, Hounyo established a large-scale commercial network. Traveling by railroad and by truck, Hounyo would purchase cassava directly from the producers in the town of Savalou (about 220 km north in a mountainous area), and beans in Djougou (550 km north of Allada) with the profits realized from her sales of imported goods (mainly cloth, buckets and bowls). Moran drew a table detailing Hounyo’s costs, including wholesale and retail purchases/sales. Her tri-monthly freight costs were the most burdensome. Hounyo spent the greater part of her earnings supporting her parents and paying for her younger brothers’ education. In another report on the Ivory Coast, Moran assessed the activities of male kola nut traders who traveled from Man to Bamako in present-day Mali.⁴¹ Still other descriptions of long-distance trade can be gleaned from this informative dossier.

38. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 13: ‘La Guinée orientale’, pp. 20-21. Traders’ husbands apparently complained that their women were often away on the road, and they did not share their earnings with them.

39. It is unclear exactly what amount is meant by a ‘mesure’.

40. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 6: ‘Le Dahomey’, pp. 41-43.

41. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 12: ‘La Basse Côte d’Ivoire (ouest)’, pp. 36-38.

Agricultural Business and Labor

Whether as independent producers, or as forced laborers, it is clear that women's work was vital to the subsistence of their communities by the third decade of the twentieth century. Moran was made particularly aware of this fact through the testimony of her informants. For example, small-scale plantation owners in the village of Divo in southern Ivory Coast explained how they married several wives instead of hiring labor and put them to work in the fields. Along with this information, Moran notes that many women migrated to the city of Abidjan, and even as far as the Gold Coast (Ghana).⁴² According to Coquery-Vidrovitch (1976: 412), it was during the 1930s and in response to the Great Depression that large-scale agricultural plantations developed in AOF. Moran studied several French as well as African plantations, reporting how women were compelled to increase their productivity in order to sustain and feed their families, including their wage-earning husbands. Her report is an invaluable source for future research on the subject of agricultural business and labor in colonial Francophone Africa.

With the assistance of an interpreter, Moran interviewed an elder Gouro woman who compared 'the before and the after' in the Dabou region of the Ivory Coast:

'La vie des femmes autrefois était plus douce parce qu'on cultivait moins et on ne se "promenait" pas beaucoup. Avec le coton, l'arachide, le riz, elles sont fatiguées trop. Il y a beaucoup de champs à sarcler, beaucoup de produits à récolter, beaucoup de promenade, c'est-à-dire de portage. Mais puisqu'on ne peut pas faire autrement [...]. Les enfants aussi travaillent plus qu'autrefois, aux champs et aussi sur la route, car il faut toujours des prestataires.'⁴³

The changes addressed by this woman were undoubtedly linked to both the development of colonial cash-crop economies and the repercussions of the 1930s Depression. The example of cotton production in the Zuénoula region of the Ivory Coast clearly illustrates the combination of economic depression and colonial reversion to coercion. Moran spoke with the subdivision chief of Zuénoula, Mr Van Kampen, who was not ashamed to admit how he brutally forced African laborers to increase cotton production. In order to obtain female cotton laborers every village appointed a female chief whose responsibility it was to round-up women for work. Moreover, as a result of a drop in prices, farmers responded by not sifting the cotton so Mr Van Kampen burned down 1200 houses to motivate his workers!⁴⁴

42. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

43. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 12: 'La Basse Côte d'Ivoire (ouest)', pp. 26-27.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

In Guinea, Moran spent several days studying three French plantations located in the town of Kindia (about 50 km west of Conakry). At the Delacroix banana plantation, both male and female labor was employed. Men received 2,50 F and a fixed amount of rice for a ten-hour day in the field or packaging bananas. Women manufactured the corks used in the packaging process, and received 1 F for every 1000 corks produced; they also worked on personal plots during their spare time.⁴⁵ On another note, young female stevedores in Mali and in Senegal employed by export/import companies received 6 F per day.⁴⁶ In each of these cases, but also in other plantations or factories visited by Moran, she gathered information on such factors as salaries and costs of living which could yield interesting comparisons. Overall, Moran found that throughout AOF few women were wage-earners and their wages were very often minimal.

Some information of this type can probably be obtained from colonial archives, but it is clear that this report provides remarkable insights. The coercive measures of French colonial enterprises are very much denounced, both overtly and indirectly, throughout the dossier. Moran's remarks will suffice to convey the extent of her indignation: 'Certes, tous les planteurs ne sont pas des tortionnaires, mais il ne paraît pas exagéré de dire que les travailleurs sont au moins giflés un peu partout (surtout en Côte d'Ivoire) et que les patrons vraiment humains sont rares.'⁴⁷ She cites the testimony of a worker recruited as forced labor in Man (Ivory Coast): 'Même malades on nous battait pour nous forcer à travailler. Ceux qui portaient plainte, le patron les remettait à l'administrateur, en disant qu'ils avaient voulu se sauver, et on les mettait en prison.'⁴⁸ The remarks of another elderly woman in Ivory Coast equally describe the difficult times: 'Autrefois, on avait beaucoup de riz et on mangeait bien. Maintenant on cultive beaucoup plus et on manque de nourriture parce qu'il faut fournir l'administration qui ravitaille les manœuvres des planteurs européens.'⁴⁹

An Early Critique of the Office du Niger

Moran's critique of French colonialism is an important facet of her research, and nowhere is this more apparent than in her report on the Office du Niger.⁵⁰ In the early 1930s, this development scheme was

45. ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport no 16: 'La Basse Guinée', pp. 21-22. Moran quotes a French attendant who describes female laborers as 'une main-d'œuvre "rebelle" et en cas de presse il faut "faire intervenir" le chef d'équipe'.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

47. In her final report, Moran further condemns French officials and businessmen for abuses and injustices committed, see ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 80.

48. *Ibid.*

49. ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport no 12: 'La Basse Côte d'Ivoire (ouest)', p. 35.

50. For a study of this colonial venture, see SCHREYGER (1984).

launched with the aim of yielding colossal outputs in cotton and other crops through the large-scale irrigation of the Niger River basin. This expensive enterprise was an embarrassing fiasco for all European parties involved, starting with the French. Nevertheless, too ashamed to reveal the catastrophes generated by the Office, administrators concealed the facts from European audiences well into the 1960s.⁵¹

Moran spent two weeks studying the Niger River project, talking with families displaced as a result of the flooding. Her report is all the more significant since she visited the Office du Niger shortly after the project was fully operative; the majority of the 'villages de colonisation' were founded in the early 1930s.⁵² Moran did a thorough investigation informed by official documentation, namely the *Note sur les méthodes de colonisation de l'O.N.* by E.L. Bélime (1935), the project's engineer and director. She expressed her low opinion of Bélime in her final report: 'Comme d'autres dictateurs de plus grande envergure, le Directeur de l'Office du Niger donne volontiers à cette politique les couleurs du socialisme. En réalité, il reconstitue l'esclavage.'⁵³

Moran chose to transcribe her conversations with colonial officers and people whose lives had been disrupted by the Office du Niger. She first arrived in Baguineda and was welcomed by the 'contrôleur du projet' who provided a car and chauffeur, as well as a young student from Bamako acting as a translator. They first visited the village of Kogni where Moran interviewed women and men residing in a camp founded in 1934 who volunteered seemingly rehearsed answers of contentment. She then inspected the main 'villages de colonisation'. Moran obtained confidential information from an auxiliary doctor who described the sanitation problems and the most prevalent diseases exacerbated by the flooding of the Niger River. These included dysentery caused by contaminated water, but especially malaria. He also provided statistics of mortality rates related to sickness and respiratory problems.⁵⁴ Moran deliberately avoided dealing with French officials and their agents because she sensed their inherent biases.⁵⁵ But she explained that the 'official visit' was not uninteresting in as far as it highlighted the attitude of 'colonizers' towards the settlers.⁵⁶

51. Another critical assessment of the Office du Niger was produced by P. HERBART (1939). This is a pamphlet prefaced by André Gide, which I have not yet consulted. But I thank the board of editors of this journal for bringing it to my attention.

52. ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport no 2: 'Les villages de colonisation de l'Office du Niger' (49 pages).

53. ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 95.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

55. ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport no 2: 'Les villages de colonisation de l'Office du Niger', pp. 1-6.

56. "La visite officielle" n'a cependant pas manqué d'intérêt, ne fût-ce que pour avoir mis en lumière l'attitude des "colonisateurs" à l'égard des colons [...], le

In the camp named Dar Salam where she was escorted by Office agents, Moran reported ‘les femmes ont de jolis boubous que les maris leur ont achetés *avant* de quitter le pays. M. Grelat (instructeur) essaie vainement de leur faire dire “après”.’⁵⁷

The most intriguing incident occurred in the district of Kokry when she was approached one night by three ‘informateurs officieux’ who disclosed confidential information. They revealed that the ‘colons’ or settlers were reluctant to voice their grievances even in the absence of a project agent because ‘ils ont peur’.⁵⁸ They explained that no one could remain in the village from dawn to dusk or circulate without authorization, and punishments were inflicted upon those who did not work hard enough. It is interesting to note that women were not punished directly, but their husbands were instructed to execute the punishment.

The Office, which claimed to be a social *œuvre*, was in fact exploitation on a massive scale reminiscent of slavery.⁵⁹ Moran was most outraged by the indirect practice of forced labor which fell upon women and children. This unrecorded ‘free labor’ was thus largely taken for granted. The more wives a man had, the wealthier he was likely to be because, as the chief of the village of Massakoni explains snickering, ‘elles doivent s’y rendre [aux champs] c’est obligatoire’.⁶⁰ Three young men in a peanut field explained in an interview: ‘il faut avoir beaucoup de femmes pour gagner une bicyclette’.⁶¹ Moran accused the Office du Niger of violating the labor laws drafted by the International Labor Office and enacted in August 1937 throughout AOF. From her own calculations based on estimates of female and child labor, she concluded that the Office not only used forced labor, but it also manipulated accounts and statistical records to make them speak in favor of the project.⁶²

‘La collaboration de la femme et de l’enfant, on la qualifie de “petits travaux”, l’homme seul “cultivant”, c’est-à-dire usant de la houe ou de la charrue (ce qui d’ailleurs est faux). En réalité, des *heures* de travail sont fournies par les hommes, les femmes et les enfants. Que tous n’aient pas la même valeur, soit, mais dans le calcul des profits, il faut tenir compte de tous. C’est ce que l’O.N. ne fait pas.’⁶³

ton est de maître à esclave. Nous le retrouverons partout employé, d’Européen à colon’ (Rapport no 2, pp. 8-9).

57. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

59. In her final report, Moran describes the Office as a ‘système d’économie dirigée par des Européens et dont ils profitent. Il est scandaleux qu’une entreprise européenne s’équilibre aux dépens des faibles [...]. C’est la pratique indirecte de l’esclavage’ (ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport d’ensemble, no 18, p. 38).

60. ANS 17G/3281/126, Rapport no 2: ‘Les villages de colonisation de l’Office du Niger’, p. 6.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-45.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Persistence of Other Forms of Slavery

The Office du Niger is not the only institution discussed in Moran's dossier which exploited the labor of women and children. In Guinea, the industry of orange extract (essence d'orange) used for the manufacture of European perfumes relied entirely on this type of 'free labor'.⁶⁴ Extracting oils from orange peels was a remarkably painful task for it involved scraping the surface of individual oranges with a spoon. According to Moran, the schoolmaster in Mamou literally forced his pupils to scrape oranges for a good part of the day. Another Frenchman explained to her: 'c'est pas difficile [. . .], ils [les femmes et les enfants] font le travail en bavardant'.⁶⁵ What is more, she describes the shady business practices of Lebanese ('Libano-syriens') traders who purchased orange extract acting as commercial brokers between producers and export companies.

Whether in reference to forced labor or pawning, Moran examined various forms of slavery prevailing throughout AOF. This may well be an indication that her assignment was prompted by a concern with the incidence of pawning in the aftermath of the 1930s Depression. Henri Ortolé (1939: 315-316), the joint-administrator to the French colonial office, defined pawning in 1939 as 'une convention orale par laquelle un débiteur remet à son créancier, pour garantir le paiement d'une dette, une ou plusieurs personnes de sa famille ou s'engage lui-même'. The pawn was therefore a guarantee for the creditor, and the pawn's labor was comparable to the interest on a loan. However, never was a pawn substituted for an actual loan.

Ortolé asserts that the incidence of pawning was not a serious issue in the late 1930s. Yet it has been demonstrated elsewhere that French colonial officials were taking the matter rather seriously since pawning actually increased during the Depression. The Governor-General of AOF in 1936 and 1937 (*ie* Marcel de Coppet) was sufficiently concerned to issue 'two circulars which addressed the linked problems of pawning and forced marriages' (Klein & Roberts 1994: 310). As Toyin Falola and Paul Lovejoy (1994: 2) explain in their recent study devoted to this neglected subject, pawnship was a 'common mechanism for mobilizing labor and guaranteeing credit', and women and children were prime targets. Most of Moran's regional reports contain cases of women and mainly girls forced into slavery as pawns. For instance, in Ouagadougou early in 1938, a man volunteered his daughter to someone who had given him a loan. The girl was entirely at the disposal of the creditor, and was in turn loaned to his brother.⁶⁶ In another case which took place in the courthouse of Pita, a town in Guinea, an owner sued to obtain possession of the child of a slave he had pawned. This, as well as similar examples,

64. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 15: 'Le Fouta Djallon', pp. 9-15.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

66. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 8: 'Ouagadougou', p. 25.

caused Moran to declare that ‘ni l’esclavage ni la mise en gage n’ont entièrement disparu du Fouta comme certains commandants et chefs le prétendent’.⁶⁷

Although the distinction between slavery and marital status is at times ambiguous, Moran was very much aware of the situations she encountered. She perceived as slaves what missionaries called wives.⁶⁸ However, she was not duped into believing that women and children did not mind transporting cash-crops because they enjoyed going to the market, as some French men argued.⁶⁹ The subject of portage has too often been overlooked by scholars of West Africa, just as it was taken for granted by the colonial administration.⁷⁰ Throughout AOF, Moran noticed the amount of women and children carrying heavy loads of one type of commodity or another literally forming human trains alongside expanding roads. The testimony of the elder Gouro woman she interviewed who complained about portage is an indication that the incidence had increased in recent years.

Women and the Colonial Justice System

Studies of African customary law and colonial legal history, and research informed by court-records, are in vogue these days. Describing colonial court-records, Richard Roberts and Kristin Mann (1991: 5) argue that Europeans perceived African customary law as one homogeneous and ‘immutable tradition’. This opinion was shared by Moran who was aware of European stereotypes about African legal systems. She formulated her thoughts on this issue at the beginning of her final report: ‘Les Européens font souvent allusion à la “vraie coutume indigène” comme à un édifice construit dans son entier par quelques sages des temps préhistoriques et qui aurait dès lors fixé les mœurs. Tout apport étranger, ils l’appellent “altération”. Il n’y a pas de “vraie” coutume, mais, témoin de mœurs changeantes, un ensemble d’usages en incessant devenir.’⁷¹ Moran’s attempt to debunk commonly held beliefs that Africans were locked-up in a static tradition is indeed remarkable. She realized that African laws were constantly changing as a result of internal and external factors, including European influence.

Courts are particularly fertile grounds for gleaning information on women who often brought their grievances to the colonial justice system. Moran carefully examined women’s relationship with the law and often includes in the regional reports a section under the heading ‘la femme et la justice’. She studied the reasons behind women’s recourse to French

67. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 15: ‘Le Fouta Djallon’, p. 26.

68. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 13: ‘La Guinée orientale’, pp. 1-2.

69. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d’ensemble, no 18, p. 102.

70. One exception is ‘DEJI OGUNREMI (1975).

71. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d’ensemble, no 18, p. 1.

justice, recording the number of women in prisons and ascertaining causes of incarceration. She reported where legal practice was biased in favor of men, providing invaluable data on the multifarious brands of justice carried out in the colonies.⁷² She focused mainly on women and on the types of cases men brought to colonial courts concerning women.⁷³ One of her most interesting findings, applicable to a majority of cases, is neatly captured in words of the president of the court in the village of Diezon (Ivory Coast) who said 'Sans les femmes, on pourrait fermer le Tribunal!'⁷⁴

On the issue of marriage, one finds several examples of fathers speculating on their daughters throughout Moran's manuscript. In Ouagadougou, Moran described a case in which young Mossi men brought charges against an older man who had promised his daughter to several suitors because of the numerous gifts he received in return. Evidence suggests that women more than men sought to obtain divorces in colonial courts. In Kindia (Guinea) for example, half of the civil cases in 1937 were introduced by women seeking divorces.⁷⁵ These facts should be considered against the backdrop of Muslim law prevailing in many parts of West Africa which rules that only men can divorce without the mediation of a Muslim judge.

In her final report, Moran prioritizes the motives for divorces, or at least those vocalized in court since she was aware that many agreements settled in or out of court were verbal and therefore left no records. These include sterility, impotence, leprosy, syphilis and adultery.⁷⁶ In the hinterland areas of Niger, northern Ivory Coast and northern Benin, women often cited abandonment by husbands who migrated to the coast as justification for seeking a divorce. Women of rank in the coastal towns sometimes demanded a divorce to avoid following their husbands who were assigned positions in the interior.⁷⁷ Other reasons included assault

72. To illustrate this point, one could cite the variations in length of sentences. For instance in the town of Allada, the sentence served by adulterous women was five months, whereas men served six months for the same crime (Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 31). In another case, among the Toma, judges replaced the death sentence for adultery with a compensation equal to the bridewealth. Moran reports that this 'new legislation' was often abused by husbands who would falsely accuse their wives of adultery because it was lucrative.

73. In Moran's opinion, 'il est impossible, actuellement de faire admettre le principe du consentement de la femme à son propre mariage. Les assesseurs rient au nez du président à cette suggestion' (ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 8: 'Ouagadougou', p. 26; see also Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 11).

74. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 12: 'La Basse Côte d'Ivoire', p. 39. The same sentiments were expressed in Bamako where in 1936, 227 cases out of a total of 267 were related to marriage and brought to court primarily by women (Rapport no 1: 'La Femme et la famille à Bamako', p. 10).

75. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 16: 'La Basse Guinée', p. 28.

76. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 32.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

and battery, betrothal and neglect. Moran differentiated between motives and pretexts given by women to successfully obtain divorces. She also noted the areas where women rarely appeared before colonial tribunals and assessed why this was so.⁷⁸ She found that men rarely sought divorces unless their wives left them, in which case husbands tried to recover the bridewealth from their wives' family.⁷⁹ Arguments about the reimbursement of bridewealth varied between colonies as well as within regions. Data on legislative decisions regarding child allocation and divorce settlements also feature in her reports.

Moreover, Moran gathered statistics alongside her observations about prisons in AOF. After inspecting most institutions operating in the late 1930s, she described prison buildings, sanitary and health conditions, and the general climate in each facility. Most prisons were in deplorable state, with the exception of the facilities at Kandi (Benin) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) which were clean, bright and well kept. For each prison, she specified if cell blocks had separate quarters for women. This was frequently not the case, and women had scanty accommodations as compared to male inmates: 'Elles dorment sous une vérandah, ou dans la cuisine, ou dans un magasin plus ou moins encombré, plus ou moins délabré.'⁸⁰

Not only were women living in the worst conditions, they were also usually responsible for preparing the meals of the prison population. In the prison of Bamako, six female prisoners pounded 60 kg of rice and 80 kg of millet for the daily ration of the entire prison or a total of 191 prisoners. In addition, women were often sexually harassed and assaulted by male prisoners and guards. On the prisoners' island of Fotobah near Conakry, women were locked up to protect them from being molested. In contrast, men were allowed to wander freely around the island. Moran commented: 'Il est injuste que la proximité des hommes entraîne, pour elles, une aggravation de la peine.'⁸¹ In some cases Moran noted the names of female convicts and explained their crimes. Charges ranged from victims of circumstance,⁸² to minor offenses,⁸³ and serious crimes.⁸⁴

78. In Ouagadougou, Moran notes that only three women between 1936 and 1938 had been convicted, and explains their crimes (ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 8: 'Ouagadougou', p. 25); oftentimes she found that a woman could not go to court without the consent of her husband (Abidjan) (ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 10: 'La Basse Côte d'Ivoire (est)', p. 4; Rapport no 11: 'Abidjan et Bingerville - Grand Bassam', p. 20).

79. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 34.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 41. See also Rapport no 16: 'La Basse Guinée', pp. 13-15.

82. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 1: 'Bamako', pp. 11-12.

83. In the town of Fada N'Gourma, Niger, many women were imprisoned for producing and selling millet beer.

84. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 5: 'Le Niger occidental', p. 10. She notes instances of women imprisoned for infanticide (Rapport no 12: 'La Basse Côte

She interviewed the six female prisoners in the Bamako penitentiary, carefully recording their testimonies.

This manuscript is a rich source on the complex interactions of African men and women with the colonial judicial system. Although Moran clearly perceived the implementation of French justice in Africa as a beneficial recourse for Africans, especially for women,⁸⁵ she was aware of gender inequities in legal practice. It is clear from Moran's account that colonial justice was actuated by African and French male officers who regulated and controlled the institution of marriage and interpreted the law to women's disadvantage. According to Moran, the local judge tended to take justice in his hands. The concerted effort of legal officers '[pour] préserver l'unité de la famille' by turning down women's appeals for divorces is a key indicator. As she explained in the case of Bamako, 'les juges, de leur aveu, s'efforcent avant tout de renvoyer la femme à son mari.'⁸⁶ In Moran's final report, she seriously questioned this policy on feminist terms: 'L'on peut se demander jusqu'à quel point il est moral et utile à la famille de maintenir unis des êtres qui ne parviennent pas à former une famille, de maintenir auprès de ses enfants une femme qui les quitterait sans regret. À moins de considérer (ce que l'ethnologie dément) que l'homme est le maître *naturel* de la femme, une telle politique n'est pas défendable, actuellement en Afrique noire.'⁸⁷

An examination of legal records sheds much light on myriad episodes shaping the lives of men, women and children. Collected by a French official who was one of the rare women to serve in the colonial office, these data inform about the variation in legal practice in AOF as each local context shaped enforcement. This is an important recognition in order to move beyond some of the generalizations which characterize scholarship on the law in colonial Africa. In a pioneering historical examination of 'women and the law in Africa' edited by Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright, studies of West Africa were sorely lacking.⁸⁸ Scholars will find in Moran's reports an invaluable resource for future research on the social and legal history of Francophone West Africa.

Health and Educational Facilities

As part of her assignment, Moran studied colonial services focussing on schools and health care facilities. Indeed, she provided an ideal source

d'Ivoire (ouest)', p. 39). Here, in 1938 there was one woman for every four prisoners, and many were convicted of cannibalism.

85. In her final report Moran offers that 'protégées par nous, les femmes commencent à se défendre elles-mêmes, voire à attaquer. Nous le verrons à l'occasion du divorce' (Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 18).

86. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 1: Bamako, p. 10.

87. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 34.

88. HAY & WRIGHT 1982. See CHRISTELOW 1991.

for studies of health practices and colonial medicine in West Africa as her seventeen reports contain information on prominent diseases, medical facilities and staff in every region. She examined cases of social misfits and people with disabilities who were often associated with, or even confined within, prisons. In the town of Bouaflé (Ivory Coast) she reported a curiously high incidence of suicides, including conjugal suicides.⁸⁹

Moran also recorded many instances of infanticide, as well as abortions (which were sometimes performed by mothers on their daughters), child abandonment, and other such practices.

Health care facilities and medical schools, such as the leprosy center in Bamako, are described in detail. Moran also examined nurses' attempts to lure women into their sphere of control,⁹⁰ as well as the 'cultural obstacles' they encountered in attracting women to maternities and health dispensaries.⁹¹ When commenting on the training program for nurses in Senegal, one of AOF's rare medical schools, she noted with humor: 'les infirmières-visiteuses européennes parviennent, à Dakar, à donner aux femmes l'idée du *microbe*, de la "petite bête" qui communique le tétanos à l'enfant.'⁹²

Wherever possible, Moran gathered data on the increasing incidence of African births in maternity wards, illustrating the headway western medical practice was making in AOF. In Bamako, she noted that hospitalized births had increased over 1,000% in a decade, from 500 in 1927 to 6,100 in 1937.⁹³ In her report on eastern Guinea, Moran describes the health care center in the town of Nzerekore where women came voluntarily usually one month before they were due, and wove mats which they sold in the market as they waited.⁹⁴ It is important to recall colonial legislation, passed under de Coppet's administration, which prohibited forcing women over seven months pregnant to undertake strenuous 'family labor'.⁹⁵ If this law had actually been advertized to the interested parties, women could have been released from family and work obligations two months prior to giving birth; a luxury which no doubt few could afford. It would be optimistic, however, to directly link the increase in hospitalized births recorded by Moran to legal innovations in the capital of AOF. Besides, these statistics, which must in no way be viewed as absolute,

89. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 12: 'La Basse Côte d'Ivoire (ouest)', p. 25.

90. Medical personnel often portrayed their clinics as sanctuaries and distributed free paraphernalia to attract new patients. See ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 13: 'La Guinée orientale'.

91. For a lengthy chapter examining the obstacles the medical profession faced in the colonies, see ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

93. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 1: 'Bamako', pp. 26-27.

94. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport no 13: 'La Guinée orientale', p. 5. Moran explains that the men were not pleased with the situation because in the absence of their 'hospitalized' wives, farming and cooking were left unattended.

95. *Journal officiel du Sénégal*, no 1889, 3 décembre 1936, pp. 948-949.

appear negligible when compared to the total population.⁹⁶ In general, Moran noticed that African women were reluctant to visit colonial medical facilities, choosing to rely on their own health practices. When women did come to the dispensaries they explained that they did so for their children.⁹⁷

Moran appears to have attached great significance to France's role in the colonies. For her, the French colonial mission was above all one motivated by educational prerogatives. As an education administrator, Moran believed in the *mission civilisatrice* but she obviously disagreed with the way most colonial representatives carried out their duty. Moreover, she argued that Europeans had much to learn from Africans, including in the field of education. Moran was therefore particularly interested in the various establishments of education. Although she investigated all levels of schooling, she paid close attention to rural schools which provided vocational as well as classical educational training. Official statistics of schooling in AOF inform that there was one classroom for every 14,350 people, and one student per 650 inhabitants in 1937.⁹⁸ Moran's information details both male and female students. On female education, she believed that the role of French education was to bring forward what she called 'cultural evolution', and that schooling was especially important as the only opportunity available for girls to improve their status in society.⁹⁹ Yet, she appreciated African educational systems and cultures, namely the transmission of oral history and the practice of learning by demonstration, games, mimes, dances and songs.

From her remarks about missionary schools, it is clear that Moran favored secular institutions of education. In her final report, she wrote a detailed account on missionary schools describing the tasks they generally assigned to pupils. She denounced the misconduct of some missionaries and was highly critical of the instruction delivered by certain priests.¹⁰⁰ Missionary schools rarely accepted female students and in the few sisters' schools in AOF, the emphasis was on the teaching of domesticity which,

96. Statistics of hospitalized births are probably difficult to find, even for the 1930s. Official records only contain general figures such as the total numbers of consultations per medical staff. See for example *Journal officiel du Soudan*, no 1942, 11 novembre 1937, p. 800.

97. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, pp. 168-185. Moran makes many interesting observations about African medical practices useful to researchers of medical history and anthropology.

98. *Journal officiel du Soudan*, no 1942, 11 novembre 1937, pp. 788-789.

99. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, pp. 145-146.

100. Moran criticized certain missionaries for collecting excessive donations sometimes four times higher than taxes. She accused missionaries of substituting themselves for the families of their followers and imposing Christian husbands upon young girls and pocketing the bridewealth if they were orphans (ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 142; see also Rapport no 12: 'La Basse Côte d'Ivoire', for more detail). There are several examples of missionaries stepping over ethical boundaries, and some cases of suspected physical abuse.

according to Moran, was a disguised form of free labor.¹⁰¹ Moran complained that the purpose of schooling in Protestant missions was to produce catechists and catechists' wives who participated in the economy of the mission. Moran also visited other schools, including Quranic and private African schools.

Moran's mission of inquiry must be understood within the context of Marcel de Coppet's social agenda and the priority placed on education by the Popular Front government (Bernard-Duquenet 1985: 87-88). Moreover, the French colonial administration then began extending education to girls, although in 1930 there had been an initial concern about the implications of girls' schooling, for 'si elle [la fillette noire] allait à l'école, qui donc irait à la fontaine, au marché, aux champs et promènerait le petit fils cramponné à son dos?'¹⁰²

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The themes chosen for discussion here cannot be viewed as inclusive. The dossier compiled by Moran is an extremely rich mine of facts, figures and insights on Francophone West Africa in the 1930s. This is not to say that equally relevant information cannot be found in other sources, but women and families being Moran's main focus makes her research unique. Despite its originality, the manuscript contains certain limitations alluded to throughout the present study. Unquestionably, her analysis is somewhat undermined by a conservative notion that France's role in the colonies was to bring 'civilization' and 'cultural evolution' to Africa. Yet, she was obviously open-minded and believed that Africans also had lessons to teach to Europeans. When her assumptions on what constitutes economic rationality seem to distort her analysis, scholars must as always remain critical. One apparent shortcoming is that she often derived her data from European and African men linked to the colonial administration. However, she was able to overcome this by interviewing a wide-range of women, men and children.

Moran's opinions about French colonial rule are original. The caustic reprimand of the Office du Niger is a case in point when one considers that the failure of this massive enterprise was concealed for many decades. Her candid outlook on colonial atrocities committed in the name of 'French progress' makes the data she provides all the more valuable. Without doubt, one of the reasons why Moran's work has been stored away and her research largely ignored was because it raised many controversial issues which were easily disregarded by the colonial office.

101. ANS 17G/381/126, Rapport d'ensemble, no 18, p. 164.

102. *Le Quotidien*, 7 octobre 1930, quoted in KNIBIEHLER & GOUTALIER (1985: 226).

In a recent history of women and French colonialism in Africa which reviewed the available sources written by women, Moran's seminal report escaped attention.¹⁰³ In light of what has been discussed here, and in recalling the exploits of Odette du Puigaudeau, the assertion that sources written by women in the colonial period never bore official seals must be corrected. Clearly, Denise Moran Savineau was an exception to the typical French official hired by the colonial administration, and therefore it is altogether surprising that she has been forgotten. The answer to this puzzle would seem to lie in the fact that the Popular Front government which hired her, was not nearly as popular by the time it was ousted. In fact, it bore such a bad reputation that the work undertaken in those two years (1936-1938) was simply swept under the carpet. As Nicole Bernard-Duquenet (1985: 10) explains, the legacy of the Popular Front movement in AOF was systematically destroyed and written sources of the period are therefore rare. Surely de Coppet's liberal governance in particular stirred much resentment in and out of AOF, and ultimately caused his premature discharge. Moreover, Léon Blum's grandiose commission of inquiry into the situation in the colonies was essentially a failure. So Moran's efforts were bound to be disregarded, though this does not explain why her document has been overlooked by researchers until now. Whatever the reasons may be, historians must take it upon themselves to find such exceptional sources that have been similarly neglected and await an unraveling on a dusty shelf of an archive.

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103. See fn 1.

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ABSTRACT

In October 1937, the Governor-General of AOF appointed Denise Moran Savineau to head a mission of inquiry into the social and economic situation of women and the family in the French West African colonies. Moran, one of the rare women to be employed by the French colonial administration, produced a remarkable study. This article attempts to place her document in its historical context. Attention is paid to the economic and social conditions of the 1930s and the French colonial policy of the 1936 Popular Front government. In the second part of the article, the document in question is examined by themes: women and production, trade, employment, rural and forced labor (especially the case of the Office du Niger), slavery and pawnship, women and the colonial justice system, education and medical facilities.

RÉSUMÉ

La re-découverte d'une source négligée : un rapport sur la condition des femmes en AOF dans les années 1930. — En octobre 1937, le Gouverneur général de l'AOF a confié à Denise Moran Savineau la mission de mener une enquête sur la situation économique et sociale de la femme et de la famille dans les colonies ouest-africaines. Denise Moran est l'une des rares femmes à avoir été employée par l'administration coloniale française et à avoir produit une série de documents qui constituent une étude remarquable. Cet article tente de replacer cette mission d'enquête dans son contexte historique. Une attention particulière est portée à la politique coloniale du Front populaire et à la conjoncture économique et sociale des années 1930. En second lieu, l'auteur analyse l'ensemble des documents produits par D. Moran en fonction des thèmes abordés : production et commerce féminins, emploi agricole et travail forcé (plus particulièrement à propos de l'Office du Niger), esclavage et mise-en-gage, les femmes et la justice, les établissements scolaires et médicaux.

Keywords/Mots-clés: AOF/AOF, French colonization/colonisation française, Popular front/Front populaire, Office du Niger/Office du Niger.