

MIGRATION AND THE ORIGINS OF 'IVOIRIAN  
IDENTITY'

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*Migrants soudanais/maliens et conscience ivoirienne: Les étrangers en Côte d'Ivoire (1903–1980)*. By DAOU DA GARY-TOUNKARA. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008. Pp. 343. €32, paperback (ISBN 978-2-296-06347-1).

KEY WORDS: West Africa, Ivory Coast, ethnicity, identity, migration, nationalism.

Between a single set of covers, Daouda Gary-Toukara offers us two fine and intertwined studies. The first is an in-depth historical and sociological account of Soudanais/Malian migration to Côte d'Ivoire since the late nineteenth century, a topic surprisingly little treated in the scholarly literature.<sup>1</sup> The second study is a thoughtful and nuanced exploration of the origins of the contemporary conflict in Côte d'Ivoire and how the presence of migrants – in this case mainly from the French colony of Soudan, but also from other French colonies such as Upper Volta (today's Burkina Faso), Dahomey (today's Benin), and Togo – contributed to the creation of an increasingly exclusionary Ivoirian national identity in the long twentieth century. Along the way, the author includes a short history of Malian government policy on migration since independence.

Following the introduction, the three parts of the study treat successive historical periods, each of which is divided into chapters. A conclusion very usefully summarizes the successive phases in Malian migration to Côte d'Ivoire and the emergence of today's sense of Ivoirian identity or *ivoirité*. The introduction sets the theoretical stage for the volume by taking on the concept of ethnic identity. Gary-Toukara concurs with Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch that what the social sciences commonly call 'ethnicity' is but a modern stand-in for the essentialist notion of 'tribe' in the colonial era. An operational and more useful concept is rather 'ethnic sentiment', which is constructed and varies through time (p. 11). More concretely, he submits that migrants from the regions that make up today's Mali were crucial, if inadvertent, players in the creation of an Ivoirian 'ethnic sentiment' or identity.

The author opens with two explicit hypotheses: first, that after 1930 the Côte d'Ivoire supplanted Senegal as the most important destination for migration from French Soudan owing to the rise of cocoa production. Gary-Toukara argues that, after 1950, when the deep-water port opened in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire became the most important destination for Soudanais migrants, even serving as a transit point for migration to Central Africa and Europe. The second hypothesis holds that Ivoirian unity was 'constructed' in opposition to the presence of 'foreigners', laying the groundwork for resisting the colonial administration and the independence-era government of Houphouët-Boigny, both of whom had encouraged immigration (p. 22).

Part One (pp. 29–93) focuses on migration between Soudan and Côte d'Ivoire in 1903–28, mobility that the author submits was 'both spontaneous and provoked' (p. 29). He reminds us that people from the desert edge or Sahel had long migrated towards the forest regions in the south – as traders seeking cola nuts, salt, and other goods, or as slave-raiders. Whereas traders in the precolonial era had made their

<sup>1</sup> The French colony of Soudan took the name of Mali after independence in 1960. When referring to the colonial period, I call the colony 'Soudan' and use the term 'Soudanais' for its people, so as not to confuse either with the English colony and independent country of Sudan. When referring to the independence era, I call the country Mali and use the term 'Malian' both as an adjective and as a term for the people who live there.

way fairly easily into the wooded savanna, the forest peoples farther south held them at bay. Early in the colonial era, however, migrants from the north returned as auxiliaries of the French colonial army. This time they moved into the forests, and traders from the Soudan followed them. Supported by colonial interests, other migrants came south to work on railroads and in the emerging forestry industry. Very soon, southern peoples came to identify these migrants with the colonial administration. They found some unity in opposition to both.

The second part of the book (pp. 95–193) explores immigration from Soudan and other French colonies in the remainder of the colonial period (1928–60). After 1930, cocoa plantations supplanted railroad construction and forestry industry as the major draw for migrants from Soudan. With economic expansion came development of public and private infrastructure, and increased demand for second-echelon clerks and teachers. Migrants from Dahomey and Togo, who had benefited from more developed educational systems, made their way to Côte d'Ivoire. Still increasing numbers of Soudanais came to work for Ivoirian cocoa farmers, while others sought fallow lands in the south-west to raise cocoa as independent producers. The small educated class of Ivoirians felt threatened by the Dahomeans and Togolese, while the increasing numbers of migrants from the north ratcheted up resentment among farmers in the south; both contributed to the creation of an Ivoirian 'ethnic sentiment'. In 1938, this contentious environment produced the first explicitly 'nationalist' organization, the Association de Défense des Intérêts des Autochtones de la Côte d'Ivoire (ADIACI), which demanded that the administration limit the employment of Dahomeans and Togolese (pp. 116–17). Other organizations, and violence, followed in the 1940s.

Gary-Toukara charts the twists and turns of this emerging 'national' identity, pairing it with the growing conviction among Ivoirian nationalists in the 1940s that the other colonies of the federation of French West Africa were a drain on its resources. These combined feelings of injustice eventually brought the effective dissolution of the federation in 1956. The author shows quite clearly that the seeds of this break-up were planted by events much earlier in the history of Côte d'Ivoire. He also points out contravening and contradictory trends, perhaps illustrated best in the ways in which Houphouët-Boigny called on migrant labor to develop the colony often by working on his own plantations or those of his fellow Baoule, or in the ways that he manipulated migrants to shore up his political base when faced with internal competition.

The third part of *Migrants soudanais/maliens* (pp. 195–251) deals with the independence era, up to the decade before the death of President Houphouët-Boigny. Although the leader was now Ivoirian, the contradictions of the later colonial era continued. Desiring to accelerate economic development, the president continued to encourage immigration of agricultural labor from Mali and Upper Volta. He also invited French advisors and technical assistance personnel to stay on, and even expanded their numbers. In an effort to expand his political base, he proposed laws that would extend citizenship and naturalization to residents whose forebears came from the north, and even presented a proposal to naturalize immigrants both of whose parents came from Mali, Upper Volta, and elsewhere. When faced with rising xenophobia among Ivoirians in the south, however, he promptly reversed himself.

As time passed, those in the south who opposed those from the north had to contend increasingly with 'Maliens' and 'Voltaïcs' or 'Burkinabè' who were, in reality, native-born Ivoirians. Among them were leaders who were now part of the fabric of Ivoirian political life. As Gary-Toukara illustrates very well, the old dance that alternated between the outstretched arms of inclusiveness and the folded arms of rejection set groups of people against each other whose personal and

social histories – and ‘ethnic sentiments’ – were the products of Ivoirian soil. The president managed to dance this contorted choreography until he died in 1993. His successors, plagued by a weakened economy and a more competitive political environment, reaped what migration policies and politics in the colonial and independence eras had sown: civil war broke out. Gary-Toungara’s knowledgeable and careful historical analysis opens a large window through which we may see much more clearly just how all of this came to be.

*Migrants soudanais/maliens* is supported by a very rich array of sources, ranging from the conventional monographs and scholarly articles to a particularly exhaustive bibliography of documents from national and local archives in Mali, and national archives in Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, and France. To this catalog should be added 35 interviews with informants, almost exclusively in Mali and Côte d’Ivoire; photographs; and information extracted from newspapers and periodicals published in the colonial and independence periods. Excerpts in text boxes and the appendices offer salient examples of this documentation.

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## AFRICAN INTERMEDIARIES IN EARLY COLONIAL NIGERIA

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*Brokering Colonial Rule: Political Agents in Northern Nigeria, 1886–1914.* By PHILIP AFEADI. Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008. Pp. 184. £45, paperback (ISBN 978-3-63907-094-1).

KEY WORDS: Nigeria, colonial administration, colonial intermediaries, state.

The early colonial state in Africa was a fragile entity. It usually had grand ambitions, but lacked the capacity and means to implement let alone sustain them. Whatever hegemony it achieved, it did so, as Sara Berry reminds us, on ‘a shoestring’. Such a situation created all sorts of challenges for colonial rulers and opportunities for Africans. Philip Afeadi’s slender book provides some insights into this situation during the formative phase of the development of colonial rule in Northern Nigeria with his focus on the roles of African political agents in colonial service.

The chronological scope of Afeadi’s study spans the Royal Niger Company’s charter through the first phase of Lugard’s consolidation of colonialism in Northern Nigeria in 1914. Afeadi’s discussion of the administrative structure of the Royal Niger period, from 1886 to 1900, when its charter was revoked, is thin in part because the Company had elaborate administrative structures on paper but only a sparse presence on the ground. Nor did the Company keep adequate records about its operations in the bush, so the evidence that Afeadi has discovered about the initial role of African political agents is negligible.

The evidence is richer and the research stronger when Afeadi discusses the roles of political agents during the early protectorate period from 1900 to 1914. These African political agents were ‘essential’ to the colonial administration because they ‘bridged’ the communication gap between British colonial officers and indigenous subjects, engaged in diplomacy, provided intelligence, brokered local services, and managed access to the British political officers. Linguistic skills were at the core of their skill set and many African political agents were multilingual. Only a few had