

merchant communities and Islamic identities. Bentyia has special interest because it is adjacent to the early Songhay capital of Kukiya; its inscriptions suggest the very complex relations of Muslim, partially Muslim, and non-Muslim inhabitants, as well as the presence of a “Wangara” community with ties to the Mali Empire. These themes contradict the West African “vulgate” established on the basis of the Timbuktu chronicles and the “glorious” Islamic practice of the *askiyas* of the sixteenth century, the emphases of Barth, who never visited the region, and Delafosse, who dismissed its evidence.

In sum, Moraes Farais has provided, in a handsomely produced volume, an extraordinary resource for understanding interior West Africa and the process of Islamization. He provides judicious interpretation where there is evidence, intriguing speculation where there is less evidence, and a careful and usable account of the available epigraphs for all to see and for generations to come. He issues a strong call for more study of the available epigraphs, search for new evidence, and comparison with the architecture, archeology, and texts of the West African Sahel.

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James E. Genova. *Colonial Ambivalence, Cultural Authenticity, and the Limitations of Mimicry in French-Ruled West Africa, 1914–1956*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004. xi + 300 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$72.95. Cloth.

James Genova’s aim in this ambitious book is to explore how the French-educated West African elite came to play a strategic role in the colonial relationship between France and West Africa—how it came to claim “the prerogative to speak on behalf of the *sujet* population and to represent French culture to the indigenous communities” of French West Africa (274). Genova argues that the rise of the *évolué* class was closely tied to debates in the metropole and the colonies among the French and the French-educated West African elite about what constituted “authentic” Africa and “true” France. Genova believes that understanding these debates and the role of the educated elite in them sheds light on some of the long-term legacies of colonial rule for France and West Africa, namely the contestations over national identity in France and the crises of political institutions in Africa.

Genova’s narrative begins in the 1910s amid the debates in Paris and Dakar about whether Africans born in the four communes of Senegal had a right to be French citizens. The end of the First World War heightened the controversy as Africans who had fought for France sought to claim citizenship. This struggle was the beginning of an extended debate about citizenship and identity in the context of France’s “civilizing mission” in

French West Africa. Neither the leftist Popular Front nor the right-wing Vichy regime was able to resolve the apparent contradiction between the belief in the fundamental “difference” between France and West Africa and the notion that the “civilizing process” would make Africans French. As the French-educated West African elite in the metropole engaged with leftist politics and with French ethnographic representations of Africa, they framed their identity within the context of these debates and they secured a position for themselves “astride the divide between French and African cultures, between citizen and subject” (274). This was a position that was endorsed by colonial officials, who at times saw these *évolués* as dangerous and at times as strategically important allies. Genova argues that *évolué* views and political ideology were informed by the same prevailing discourses about “authentic” Africa that informed colonial policymakers, discourses articulated by French ethnographers, notably Maurice Delafosse. This emphasis on an authentic Africa that was rural, “tribal,” and collectivist led, Genova argues, to a particular type of nationalism, one in which *évolués* depended on ethnic-based constituencies, an approach that would be at the root of subsequent political crises. As individuals who identified with France, the *évolués* were “reluctant decolonizers” (274) who, because of their unwillingness to bring about anything but political decolonization, would sow the seeds of subsequent instability.

What is most exciting about Genova’s book is its effort to examine French and West African politics within a single frame: to argue that debates about authentic Africa and true France were and are so intimately intertwined that we cannot understand one without the other. But it is difficult to keep all the various strands of this colonial world in focus and to give them each the detailed attention they deserve. This reader, for example, found Genova to have underplayed the diversity within the *évolué* class. When he speaks of the *évolué* class, he focuses largely on those who resided in the metropole or were close to the Dakar milieu, men such as Léopold Senghor, Lamine Gueye, and Garan Kouyaté. As a result, we do not gain any insight into who the prominent and not-so-prominent *évolués* were in more peripheral regions. On several occasions Genova acknowledges differences of opinion between *évolués* in the metropole and those in the colonies, yet the world of *évolués* who resided in French West Africa remains sketchy. The paths whereby ideas circulating in the metropole may have made their way to the colonies and how these ideas were received is not a central concern. Yet one could make the case that this is precisely where one might find intriguing challenges to the hegemonic discourse about authenticity that Genova argues is central to the rise of the *évolué* class.

Genova’s analysis of the role of ethnographers in defining “authentic” Africa also merits further development. Considering the importance he accords to Maurice Delafosse, one might have expected a more detailed examination of his work (as well as a reference to Jean-Loup Amselle and

Emmanuelle Sibeud's edited volume on Delafosse). But Delafosse was not the only influential anthropologist, and therefore an analysis of the broader trends in the development of an Africanist anthropology and the ambiguous position that ethnographers occupied in the French colonial world would have provided essential depth and context. Here again, attention to the ways in which the évolués adopted, adapted, *and* rejected aspects of these ethnographic constructions of Africa is necessary if we are to make sense not only of common discourses but also of how the évolués were able to set themselves apart from colonial officials and claim a space for themselves as nationalist leaders fighting for freedom.

Genova may not have answered all the questions his study raises for those interested in the intersection of metropolitan and colonial discourses about identity, but the book will point future researchers in intriguing and fruitful directions.

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