
For a Republic ‘Diverse and Indivisible’? France’s Experience from the Colonial Past

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Au lieu des conceptions vagues et mal adaptées de ceux qui paraissent associer certains indigènes au gouvernement de toute la France et de tout l’Empire, nous nous attacherons sans démagogie et avec certitude de bien faire à les transformer d’abord en citoyens de leurs propres pays.¹

Recent debates about decentralisation and devolution in Corsica have mobilised two opposing concepts of the French republic and nation that go beyond the traditional left/right political divide. One that may be considered as ‘typically Republican’ is defended by the former socialist Home Affairs Minister, J. P. Chevènement (Mouvement des Citoyens), while the other, called by some the ‘new republicanism’, is advocated by his socialist successor, D. Vaillant (Parti Socialiste). The law adopted by the French National Assembly on 22 May 2001 envisaged giving the local assembly in Corsica the power to adapt laws and decrees passed by the assembly and adopted by the government. It also allows the teaching of Corsican languages in all Corsican state schools. Whether this teaching will be compulsory or not is still a matter of controversy and debate, as are the powers of adaptation. For some (right and left) following Chevènement’s position, these provisions could only lead to the demise of ‘the most fundamental principles of the republic’² and ‘the beginning of a move towards the independence of Corsica’.³ It is true that Article 7 of the law concerning the teaching of languages is modelled on a previous law adopted in 1996 for the Polynesian territories, which may frighten some deputies. However, for others (right and left) who support Vaillant and his socialist team, Corsica presents an opportunity

¹ Felix Eboué, *La nouvelle politique indigène pour l’Afrique Equatoriale Française* (Paris, Office Français d’Edition, 1945), 45. A former colonial administrator in Oubangui-Chari, Eboué (1884–1944) became governor of Chad in 1939. During the Second World War he was the first in the colonial empire to answer de Gaulle’s call on 26 Aug. 1940 and to join the liberation movement. From London, de Gaulle nominated him governor-general of French Equatorial Africa in 1941. His famous circulars on native policies (which were published in the above book) served as the main basis for discussion during the Brazzaville Conference (28 Jan.–8 Feb. 1944), which was supposed to prepare the future of the French Empire and whose conclusions were used by the constitutional assemblies to set up the Union Française in 1946.

² J. P. Chevènement, president of the Mouvement des Citoyens (left), *Le Monde*, 16 May 2001.

³ J. L. Debré, president of the RPR (right), *Le Monde*, 23 May 2001.

to build a new kind of republicanism more respectful of local autonomy and customs, as opposed to the old 'Jacobinist' and assimilationist version. It is seen as a step towards decentralisation or rather 'devolution' for the French regions.⁴ Another step has just been undertaken by the new Chirac government by means of a significant amendment to the Constitution: on 17 March 2002 the Parliament convened in Congress approved a motion modifying Article 1 of the French Constitution. The republic will in future be a 'decentralised Republic', while remaining 'one and indivisible'. The motion grants to local assemblies the power of 'experimentation' and allows for the adaptation of the law; it envisages new transfers of power, recognises the growing importance of the region as well as the principle of subsidiarity and allows for local referenda as a means of bringing the republic closer to citizens. Again, debates have opposed those who consider such changes as threatening the demise of the republic and the advent of a 'Europe des régions' and of new local fiefdoms⁵ with those who consider that national cohesion does not mean centralisation and uniformity, and that the French republic in Europe can only exist through a new kind of decentralised republicanism.⁶

This article argues that this 'new' kind of republicanism is anything but new. There has always been among republicans at least two ways of considering the French nation and republic, although finding a place and a time where they clashed openly is not an easy matter. The colonial ground may have been such a place: it is well known for being a distorting mirror where the internal contradictions of republicanism were reflected and magnified.⁷ Our focus here is the 1946 debate in the constitutional assembly on the reform of the empire, renamed the Union Française, although further debates on colonial local government following the implementation of the constitution will also be taken into account.

The international and the domestic context in which those debates took place have been well documented, as have the positions endorsed by the colonial service and the Colonial Ministry in the several committees then set up.⁸ Only a few essential facts need to be recapitulated here: a first Constituent Assembly was elected on 21 October 1945, largely dominated by three parties, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party (SFIO) and the Christian Democratic Party (MRP). Nine native Africans representing the French colonies were invited, among whom was Léopold Senghor (later to become the first president of Senegal). From that first debate

⁴ The English term is used: A. Madelin, president of Démocratie Libérale (right), *Le Monde*, 17 May 2001.

⁵ J. P. Chevènement, *l'Express*, 17 Oct. 2002; Nicole Borvo (Senate, Communist Party), Debates of the Congress, 17 March 2003; Assemblée Nationale. Pr/12/Congrès.

⁶ Pierre Albertini (National Assembly, Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF), centre-right); Michel Mercier (Senate, UDF), Debates of the Congress, 17 March 2003.

⁷ D. Deschamps, 'La république aux colonies', doctoral thesis, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Grenoble, 1998.

⁸ J. I. Lewis, 'The French Colonial Service and the Issues of Reform, 1944–1948', *Contemporary History*, 4, 2 (1995), 153–88; M. Michel, 'L'Empire colonial dans les débats parlementaires', in S. Berstein and P. Milza, *L'Année 1947* (Paris: Presses de Science Po, 2000), 189–217; M. Shipway, *The Road to War: France and Vietnam, 1944–1947* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996).

emerged a first draft strongly influenced by Senghor, largely endorsed by the left wing of the Constituent Assembly, concerning the reform of the empire: it was quite radical in that it envisaged a clear evolution towards self-government and democratisation which would involve the transfer of many policy-making decisions from the colonial administration to democratically elected local councils, which would have given advantages to native interests. This draft, along with a draft of the overall constitution, was adopted by the Constituent Assembly (19 April 1946) and then submitted to a national referendum (5 May 1946) which rejected it. As shown by James Lewis,⁹ this unexpected turn of events immediately stirred the colonial service into action to block its reintroduction in the second Constituent Assembly elected on 2 June 1946. This first stage of the campaign was led in preparatory and inter-ministerial commissions by the most conservative elements in the colonial service, those trained in the interwar period who went on to hold senior positions in the colonial office or in colonial governments. Junior members tended to have a more liberal approach along the lines developed by Robert Delavignette, director of the *Ecole Coloniale* (1937–46) and his friend Senghor. These two approaches, labelled respectively as ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’, have been analysed with the broader debate on decolonisation in mind.¹⁰ The focus of this article will be different. Indeed, we do not intend to cover the whole period and institutional reforms of the dying French Empire (1946–58). Constitutional debate on the reform of the empire is only a means for us to analyse more profound conceptions of the French republic and nation and the philosophical or sociological logic which underpinned them. We will therefore refer here to the opposing concepts of the ‘federalist’ and ‘unitarist’ *Union Française*, the former envisaging the *Union Française* on a federal and multinational model, as a great ‘*République diverse et indivisible*’,¹¹ which could offer overseas territories increasing autonomy within a kind of commonwealth of peoples where different kinds of citizenship comprised different rights and duties. The ‘unitarists’, in contrast, saw the *Union Française* as potentially a greater ‘one and indivisible’ French republic, centralised and uniform, in which all peoples would one day be politically and culturally assimilated with, eventually, one parliament, one government, one kind of citizen for the whole empire.

The assimilationist logic behind the second concept is well known, and is usually described as the typical French republican tradition derived from the 1789 Revolution and its principles. It rests on a certain idea of society as linked to or derived from political ties: the ‘republic one and indivisible’ is the result of a contract between individuals who by nature are supposed to be rational, independent, free and equal, their rights included in a same sovereign nation, derived from the same political project. Because it insists on equality and uniformity, this political project implies for all French citizens the same right and duties, and, as far as it also claims to be

⁹ Lewis, ‘French Colonial Service’.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ D. Boisdon, ‘Playdoyer pour une véritable révision constitutionnelle’, *Marchés Coloniaux du Monde*, 1 Aug. 1953, 2186.

universal, it may be extended to any other individual able to prove their rationality and independence . . . or, rather, almost any individual. For, despite its worldwide ambition, this ideal political community has borders, which, as P. Rosanvallon noted,¹² coincide with the borders of the French nation-state, considered both as a territorial community and as a cultural whole. In the mind of its creator the French republic and nation were closely linked to a French ‘civilisation’, which included on one hand universal political and human rights (in their 1789 version), but on the other a language, a civil code, in sum a culture, imposed on all French citizens at the expense, some analysts said, of local cultures and languages.¹³ In this tradition, then, two concepts of the nation and the republic came to merge: one political and therefore inclusive, the other more organicist and culturalist, and as such particularly exclusive. Given these ambiguities, political uniformity came to mean cultural uniformity and vice versa: only people sharing that civilisation could be part of the republic’s *civitas*. This excludes others, but only temporarily, since they could always be assimilated culturally and then included in the same political project. This was precisely the ambition of the ‘unitarist’.

The logic behind the ‘federalist’ conception is less known and will be largely examined in this article through the work of one of the leading colonial thinker of the 1940s and a proponent of Senghor’s position: Robert Delavignette.¹⁴ According to this logic, citizens were not those abstract rational men linked by a social contract as envisaged by the French revolutionaries. They had a social existence and identity, but only if they were ‘rooted’ in a particular cultural and territorial community. Respecting this community and its culture, giving its members a political autonomy through which they could experience democracy, were the only ways in which to build a larger political unity without destroying its social basis and cohesion. The Union Française could only be an association of ‘civilisations’ linked by a common social and political project, ‘one’ politically, but ‘diverse’ culturally, in much the same way as the republic of which Robert Delavignette was dreaming.

The Union Française between unitarists and federalists

Unitarists and federalists first clashed during the Brazzaville Conference in January–February 1944.¹⁵ Its hybrid conclusions on the future Union Française served as a basis for the proposals made to the constitutional assemblies. These envisaged several

¹² P. Rosanvallon, *Le sacre du citoyen: histoire du suffrage universel en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

¹³ E. Weber, *La fin des terroirs, la modernisation de la France rurale, 1870–1914* (Paris: Fayard, 1983).

¹⁴ Robert Delavignette (1896–1976) began his career as a colonial administrator in French West Africa (Niger, Upper Volta), 1920–30. He then served in the colonial ministry and in 1936 was appointed chef-adjoint de cabinet of Marius Moutet, Ministre des Colonies. From 1937 to 1946 he served as the director of the colonial school, then as high commissioner in Cameroon (1947). He was Directeur des Affaires Politiques, one of the highest position in the Colonial Ministry in 1947–51.

¹⁵ See P. Isoart, ‘Les aspects politiques, constitutionnels et administratifs des recommandations’, in Institut Charles De Gaulle, *Brazzaville, janvier–février 1944. Aux sources de la décolonisation. Colloque organisé par l’Institut Charles De Gaulle et l’Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent, 22–23 mai 1987* (Paris: Plon, 1988), 79–96; Shipway, *Road to War*, 11–39.

evolutions, among which was a citizenship common to all inhabitants of the union, but which assigned different rights and duties to different kinds of citizens. Proper local institutions (territorial assemblies) for each colony were also suggested, alongside institutions common to France and its colonies, such as a great assembly where each territory could be represented. However, the provisions were sufficiently ambiguous to be interpreted in two different ways: either as a step towards the full political integration of the colonies into the republic or as a step towards a greater local autonomy. In his report to the first constitutional assembly,¹⁶ Senghor, representing Senegal, recognised that ambiguity, insisting at the same time on the transitory nature of the Union Française: eventually it would be up to the African peoples themselves to choose between the unitarist and the federalist model. Meanwhile, as no one was yet ready to accept such a solution, the battle between the two camps went on.

Looking at the first constitutional assembly debates, there is no doubt that federalist opinion prevailed. People of different political opinions such as René Plevén¹⁷ and Jacques Soustelle¹⁸ kept asking that the assembly of the Union Française and the territorial assemblies should be given legislative powers, as in any federation. Soustelle even talked of the Union Française as a possible 'multinational state' whose future could only be federal. Their radical proposals were narrowly rejected.¹⁹ The final draft, influenced by Senghor and his report, remained quite federal in mind. The report of Coste Floret²⁰ to the second constitutional assembly tried to proceed on the same lines: it presented the Union Française as a true federation, although the draft itself was even more ambiguous than the first one. The argument convinced no one except those 'unitarists' and assimilationists who considered it as being far too federal, a first step towards what was still considered as 'secession'.

For the unitarists,²¹ the project was indeed an 'open door to a new French girondism'.²² It ran against the true French republican tradition (of jacobinism) and the civilising mission allowing the construction of French national unity. The federal and multinational elements of the Union Française were a danger to that unity and would soon lead to independence, an outcome that no one was willing to accept. The only alternative solution was the integration of overseas territories into the same national and political whole, the republic and the French nation, that is, even if the word was not pronounced, their cultural and political assimilation. In this case no specific 'citoyenneté de l'Union française' would be necessary, since all the inhabitants

¹⁶ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante de la République Française*, 11 Apr. 1946, 1613.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1720. R. Plevén (left, Union démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance) had been president of the Brazzaville Conference in 1944 and was appointed *Ministre de la France d'Outre Mer* in the same year.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 Apr. 1946, 1773. J. Soustelle (right, Gaullist), ethnologist, *Ministre de la France d'Outre Mer* in 1945.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1946, 1865: 288 voted against, 266 in favour.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 Aug. 1946, 3189–3190.

²¹ Baumel, *Ibid.*, 23 Aug. 1946, 3293. Baumel was from the left (Union Démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance).

²² During the French Revolution Girondins had favoured a decentralised state respectful of the provincial identities and opposed the jacobinist model (of a centralised state).

of the Union would become French nationals and citizens. The very real problem that true political assimilation could entail went unmentioned. As Herriot put it,²³ millions of electors would outnumber French electors and would vote for French law. Would it not lead to 'France being colonised by its own colonies'? This fear was sufficiently strong to quieten the claims of the unitarists and give more weight to the other side.

Still, the debate went on and on, focusing on the contradictions of the citizenship of the Union as proposed in that second draft; on the problem raised by the idea of a double electoral college, something which was not accepted by the African representatives;²⁴ on the powers and organisation of territorial and local assemblies, which were, for the federalists, 'the keystone of the whole system',²⁵ 'the best school for democracy'.²⁶ In the end, the draft was accepted with few modifications and with all its contradictions. The Union comprising the French republic and its colonies was created. The preamble stressed that it was based on the principles of strict equality between those peoples who shared the privilege of being in the Union: its aim was to develop each people's civilisation, to care for their welfare and to lead them to self-rule.

The inhabitants of those overseas territories, once called 'subjects of Empire', became French citizens and were supposed to share the same rights and duties as those of French nationals born in France . . . or almost the same rights and duties. Indeed, in addition to the contradictions and imprecision of the Constitution on that issue, it appears that there were at least two types of citizen: those born in France or naturalised there who had to abide by the same civil law code; others could keep their personal status, that is, their common law, customs and religions; both groups could send representatives to the French Assemblée Nationale. But for those in the second category, these political rights were to be determined by a 'specific law'. According to this law they constituted a different electoral college, and, compared with the overall population of the colonial territories, they were to send relatively few deputies to the metropolitan assembly.²⁷ The same law also reserved the right to vote to certain categories of people, leaving universal suffrage for a later stage of native 'political evolution'. In sum, the citizenship of the Union Française was of a hybrid kind . . . much like the Union Française itself.

To say that this union was based on strict equality between the French republic and its overseas territories was indeed a mere illusion. First, the constitution was adopted by a French assembly. If some African representatives did take part in the discussion, the clauses concerning the Union Française were not submitted for the approval of the populations concerned. In sum, former colonies were not asked whether they

²³ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 27 Aug. 1946, 3333.

²⁴ Those against two separate colleges included Lamine Gueye (Senegal), *ibid.*, 18 Sept. 1946, 3798; Sissoko (Soudan), *ibid.*, 3820, Houphouët (Côte d'Ivoire), *ibid.*

²⁵ Sissoko, *ibid.*, 3820.

²⁶ P. Cot (Parti Radical, left), *ibid.*, 20 Sept. 1946, 3901.

²⁷ Lois du 5 October 1946, J. O., *Lois et Décrets*, 8 Oct. 1946, 8494–8. Overseas territories sent 34 representatives to the Assemblée Nationale, metropolitan France 553.

wanted to remain in or to leave what was formerly called the French Empire. Second, the institutional structure of the union could hardly hide the dominant position of the French republic and the subordinate position of its overseas territories. The union had its own assembly (different from the *Assemblée Nationale*), half of whose members were representatives of France (sent by the two French assemblies, the *Assemblée Nationale* and the *Conseil de la République*), the other half being representatives of the overseas territories (sent by their local assemblies). However, the Assembly of the Union, unlike federal assemblies, merely had consultative powers: it was supposed to advise the *Assemblée Nationale*, which included representatives of overseas territories and voted on the laws to be applied in those territories as well as on those to be applied in France. The union also had a specific council (*Haut Conseil*), which included representatives of both the French government and each overseas territory, and which was presided over by the French president, who was also president of the union. The main function of this council was to 'assist' the French government in ruling the union.

Finally, the Constitution envisaged for each territory an assembly (*Assemblée Territoriale*), elected according to 'specific laws' by the citizens of the union, but whose powers were to be decided by subsequent discussions, as were the mechanics of creating local assemblies. On that particular point Marius Moutet, the Minister de la France d'Outre-Mer, had concluded the debate in a reassuring way: 'local assemblies will be created, which will respect the local customs while guiding the native peoples to more modern forms of democracy'.²⁸ However, federalists such as Robert Delavignette remained sceptical as to the ability of the French politicians to keep their promises. Given the little importance granted by the Constitution to the local level, they kept asking that most embarrassing question: 'Was it not a big mistake to build the roof of the house before its foundations?'²⁹ To understand the full meaning of this sentence, we must enter the minds of those non-assimilationist republicans, who envisaged for the French republic and its empire a model of political integration which respected local autonomy and local cultures.

Assimilation or association?

In one of his articles Hubert Deschamps,³⁰ a French historian and himself a former colonial administrator, stressed that assimilation had scarcely been the colonial policy of the French republic, an assertion which runs against the usual image of the French republic and its empire, put forward in particular by British academics.³¹ Officially

²⁸ J.O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 20 Sept. 1946, 3904.

²⁹ Archives Privées de Robert Delavignette (APRD), Carton 13, Dossier 180, Conférence d'introduction au cours d'organisation administrative des Territoires d'Outre-Mer, donnée à l'ENFOM, 25 March 1953.

³⁰ H. Deschamps, 'Et maintenant Lord Lugard?', *Africa*, 33, 4 (1963), 294–305.

³¹ For a typical example see M. Crowder, 'Indirect Rule: French and British style', *Africa*, 34, 3 (1964), 197–204.

assimilation ceased to be the policy of France as early as 1905,³² at least for tropical Africa. From then on, the concept itself disappeared almost completely from the discourse of the colonial ministry. It is worth noticing that the word ‘assimilation’ was hardly pronounced during the two constitutional assemblies’ long debates in 1946.³³ It was referred to neither in the 1946 Constitution nor in the Brazzaville Conference (January–February 1944).³⁴ In the official discourse it was replaced by the more ambiguous concept of ‘association’. Association meant that native peoples would be allowed to evolve within their tradition, (‘l’évolution dans la tradition’), which in itself was a very ambiguous aim. Indeed it left particularly imprecise the ultimate outcome of such process. As a result association could be, and was, interpreted differently by different people, not so much according to their attachment to the republican ideal but according to how they considered French ‘civilisation’ in relation to African ‘cultures’. Two interpretations at least were to clash in the interwar period as well as in the 1946 constitutional assemblies.

For those who like Albert Sarraut³⁵ (Ministre des Colonies in 1920–24 and 1932–33) were still influenced by the evolutionist and ethnocentrist theories of the nineteenth century, natives were still the ‘child races of the world’, inferior species at the bottom of the evolutionary scale. By contrast, French civilisation was supposed to represent the ultimate result of the technical and moral progress of humanity, the very end of that evolution process which all the peoples in the world would inevitably follow. France’s mission was, then, to help African peoples to climb the evolution scale more quickly, to ‘civilise’ them. Respect for what was called native customs was initially necessary (since, as a necessary stage in evolution, they could not be got rid of immediately), but was also purely temporary. The ultimate result of the civilising mission was not clearly specified. But one may guess, from Sarraut’s writings, that full political and cultural integration into the French republic would follow. It was not long before such integration was envisaged, becoming closer in 1946 for members of the constitutional assemblies who still adhered to Sarraut’s conceptions. Talking of ‘inferior races’ became impossible after the Second World War, and words used to describe the native inhabitants were chosen with much caution. The very word ‘native’ itself was replaced by the term ‘African people’. Still, some went on talking

³² R. F. Betts, ‘La doctrine coloniale française entre 1890 et 1910: de l’Assimilation à l’Association’, doctoral thesis, Faculté des Lettres de l’Université de Grenoble, 1955.

³³ Senghor was one of the few to use the word ‘assimilation’. But he said that for him it meant to respect African civilisations while allowing African peoples to take what they wanted from the French one and vice versa, what he called ‘une assimilation active de part et d’autre [on both sides]’. See J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, session of 11 Apr. 1946, 1713 (First Constitutional Assembly); session of 19 Sept. 1946, 3791 (Second Constitutional Assembly).

³⁴ *La Conférence Africaine Française, Brazzaville, 30 janvier–8 février 1944* (Brazzaville: Editions du Boab, n.d.). On Sarraut see C. Rosenberg, ‘Sarraut and Republican Racial Thought’, *French Politics, Culture and Society*, 20, 3 (2002).

³⁵ A. Sarraut, *La mise en valeur des colonies française* (Paris: Payot, 1923).

of French civilisation as more 'advanced', which gave France the right to continue its guiding, not so say, its civilising mission.³⁶

For such people, as for Albert Sarraut, the ultimate aim of the French republic and of the French Union through association was not so different from what had been once called assimilation. Only the methods were opposed. Assimilation meant for them 'imposing' a foreign culture through force and coercion, which explained why it was avoided as a concept. Association supposed more educational means, since it aimed at 'convincing' African peoples that their evolution towards French civilisation was desirable. In contrast, for people like Robert Delavignette or Léopold Senghor,³⁷ the aims of association and assimilation were radically different.

Influenced by the social anthropological theories developed in the interwar period (particularly by Malinowski), they came to question the superiority of French civilisation and to recognise the value of African ones. In the thirties, Robert Delavignette was very critical of assimilation and of the technical and moral progress that was supposed to constitute the superiority of French civilisation.³⁸ Having himself experienced that progress on the battle fronts of the First World War, he was sceptical about its benefits. At the same time he refused to consider African peoples as 'the child races of the world'. They had their own cultures or rather 'civilisations' (a word also used by Senghor),³⁹ and their own social and political organisations, which were worthy of consideration. Colonisation as a cultural contact had been more or less destructive for those civilisations. Thus, the aim of association was to protect them or, rather, to find a new 'adjustment' between what was best in French civilisation and what was best in native civilisations. The outcome of that adjustment was unclear and could vary from one society or one government to another. But it was certainly not the same as the outcome of assimilation. True, according to Robert Delavignette, Occidental nations still held the keys of social and economic development and were still the guardians of what he considered to be universal values, human rights. In that sense, cultural relativism had its own limits. However, if France could bring beneficial elements to Africa, Africa could bring its own values to Europe: the values of the rural communities that Robert Delavignette came to idealise.

A territorial vision of society

Robert Delavignette's vision of African societies was not especially original in the 1930s, reflecting conceptions which were very popular in France or in other European countries (Britain especially). In his books, the real Africa could only be the rural Africa of the bush inhabited by small peasants 'rooted' in their land. African societies were seen as small territorial entities, 'villages', cut off from the outside world. They

³⁶ Teitgen, for example, referred to 'ces nations que nous avons infantées à la civilisation', J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 22 Aug. 1946, 3238 (2nd Const. Ass.). Baumel talked of 'l'oeuvre civilisatrice de la France, ce magnifique travail', *ibid.*, 23 Aug. 1946, 3293 (2nd Const. Ass.).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 Apr. 1946, 1713. Delavignette reserved some pages in his book *Service Africain* to Senghor, as the person he considered as the best representative of his own ideas.

³⁸ R. Delavignette, 'Deux Europes pour une Afrique', *Afrique Française*, Feb. 1936, 87.

³⁹ L. Senghor, J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 11 Apr. 1946, 1714; 18 Sept. 1946, 3791.

were autonomous communities, egalitarian or even democratic in form, where social conflicts did not exist, where human beings lived in harmony with one another and with nature, and were linked by a religious solidarity and a mutual 'communion with the land'.⁴⁰ Community life was organised around the villages' land and religion ('les sorciers faiseurs de pluie'). Properties belonged to families, work was collective and, despite his poor techniques, the Black Peasant knew how to take advantage of his environment, because he knew the most important thing: 'to love his land'.⁴¹ According to Delavignette, his spirit, his soul, his customs came from this land. In his books he devoted many pages to the description of these customs, of the black peasants' agrarian spirit, at the same time criticising those Europeans who saw them as idle and lacking any methods of production or organisation.⁴²

Needless to say, his idealised vision of African societies was influenced by his own idealised view of the French rural past. As a novelist, Delavignette belonged to that regionalist literary movement analysed by Anne Marie Thiesse,⁴³ to those who, like Gaston Roupnel, praised the old agrarian French civilisation.⁴⁴ The latter had been Delavignette's schoolmaster, and many similarities can be drawn between the African village described by Delavignette and the 'manse' (rural community) of the Middle Ages described by Roupnel.⁴⁵ They both spoke of 'the sacred bond with the land'⁴⁶ which guaranteed the essential values of justice, human dignity, liberty, which in turn guaranteed the rights and duties of each man within his community.

This idea of an organic and mystical link between men and land is significant in a certain definition of society, of individual and collective identities based on the idea of 'taking root' in a territory ('enracinement'). As Philippe Veitl has shown,⁴⁷ this idea can be found in the works of French anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss and Lucien Levy-Bruhl. But more generally it was part of a wider belief among the French urban elite from the end of the nineteenth century:⁴⁸ paradoxically, at a time when man increasingly left his native soil to be integrated in professional groups, territorial solidarity came to be considered as the most important constituent identity. 'Man and land were seen as amalgamated, merged, as part of the same organism which was the

⁴⁰ R. Delavignette, *Service Africain*, 4th edn (Paris: Gallimard, 1946 (first published 1939 as *Les vrais chefs d'un empire*)), 127.

⁴¹ R. Delavignette, *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne* (Paris: Grasset, 1935), 133.

⁴² Delavignette, *Service Africain*, 179, 181–182.

⁴³ A. M. Thiesse, 'Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque et la Libération', doctoral thesis, Université Lyon II, 1989.

⁴⁴ G. Roupnel, *Histoire de la campagne française* (Paris: Grasset, 1932).

⁴⁵ See Delavignette, *Service Africain*, 173–82; R. Delavignette, *Les Paysans Noirs* (Paris: Stock, 1946 [1931]), 31; Delavignette, *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, 135–6. In some articles Delavignette referred directly to Roupnel: R. Delavignette, 'La campagne française et la colonie africaine', *Dépêche Coloniale*, 24–25 July 1933.

⁴⁶ Roupnel, *Histoire de la campagne française*, 382.

⁴⁷ P. Veitl, 'Les régions économiques Clémentel et l'invention de la région des Alpes Françaises', doctoral thesis, IEP Grenoble, UPMF, Grenoble II, 1992, 18.

⁴⁸ See also Thiesse, 'Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste', 108–24; Veitl, 'Les régions économiques Clémentel', esp. 19–23.

elementary cell of social life'.⁴⁹ Delavignette, for example, used to present himself as the 'son of this land'⁵⁰ of Burgundy, his 'terroir' or 'pays'. As a consequence of this fusion, man had a social existence only if he remained 'rooted' in his native land. This land gave him his real personality, his soul, his 'vital energy'. Born in a specific land, he belonged to a specific community of people sharing the same culture and living in harmony with each other.

Thus, like Roupnel and many other people at that time, Delavignette considered that the true French civilisation, the '*civilisation de jardiniers*',⁵¹ was not to be found in the uniform technical and moral progress praised by the nineteenth-century positivists, but in the values and diverse cultures of the countryside – just as the real Africa was to be found in the rural and traditional Africa. Through that idealisation of rural France, specific values were praised, values that could differ according to political affiliation.⁵² For the republican left to which Delavignette belonged, it meant a return to the pre-feudal, pre-capitalist society, seen as a more egalitarian society based on solidarity. For the Catholic and monarchist right, it meant a return to a pre-industrial, pre-democratic, pre-republican society, to the essential values of family, social hierarchy and religion, since this – part of a discourse which was consecrated by the Vichy Regime in 1940 – was considered to be the only way to solve social conflict. For all, however, the end of rural France meant the end of French civilisation and the beginning of social disintegration. Indeed, detached from his native land, his 'terroir', man was nothing socially speaking. He would soon lose his moral energy, and corruption, misery and social conflict would follow. In sum, he would be like an uprooted tree, which was doomed to perish.

According to Philippe Veitl, this explained the fear of land desertion during the interwar period⁵³ and why many of the French political elite were incapable of considering urban life and industrial growth in a positive way. Towns were not seen as social organisations, as urban identities represented the loss of a 'real' identity and so threatened social and national cohesion. Delavignette's description of Paris and its urban proletariat, the result of what he called 'mass uprooting', is quite significant. As a socialist, he condemned capitalism in the colonies as well as in France because it took away people from their land and led them to join this 'disturbing French urban youth'⁵⁴ ready for riots and political upheaval. As Félix Eboué, the famous French governor put it, land desertion meant that uprooted natives 'would disappear for ever in this floating urban population without discipline and without support'.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁰ Delavignette, *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, 236.

⁵¹ Delavignette, *Service Africain*, 220.

⁵² See H. Lebovics, *La vraie France. les enjeux de l'identité culturelle, 1900–1945* (Paris: Belin, 1995); Thiessé, 'Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste'.

⁵³ Delavignette shared this fear: R. Delavignette (under the name L. Faivre), *Toum* (Paris: Grasset, 1926), 210; R. Delavignette, 'Action colonisatrice et paysannat indigène', *Afrique Française*, Sept. 1935, 529.

⁵⁴ Delavignette, *Service Africain*, 147; *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, 172–173, 102–3.

⁵⁵ F. Eboué, circulaire du 8 novembre 1941, in *La nouvelle politique indigène*, 52.

Given that concept of land desertion and urbanisation, the question for France as well as for the colonies was how to integrate people in a larger political, economic and cultural whole, how to modernise their society without destroying their 'sacred bond with the land', their local culture. Concerning France itself, different solutions were found or at least tried: for example, Clémentel, the Trade Minister between 1914 and 1919, tried to create new territorial and administrative entities, the regions.⁵⁶ Through some kind of decentralisation, these were supposed to facilitate the social and economic modernisation of the whole country while keeping people on their land ('terroir') and allowing them to take an active part in the changes envisaged by the republic. Similar preoccupations can be found in the republic's education policy, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. It has often been said that French schoolmasters (the 'Hussards noirs de la République') 'imposed' the French language, national identity and culture on French children.⁵⁷ In fact, as shown by Jean François Chanet and Anne Marie Thiesse,⁵⁸ the reality was much more complicated and probably less coercive than it appeared. Many regulations in the thirties invited schoolmasters to use and respect local cultures, history, geography and even languages. Schoolbooks celebrated the French provinces and their customs.⁵⁹ As a consequence many schoolmasters became the ethnologists of provincial France as much as the advocates of republican principles. Indeed these principles and the French language had to be taught, as the aim of the education policy was to make citizens and Frenchmen. But to be able to explain what France and the republic were, you had first to make these concepts intelligible, that is, you had to integrate them into the day-to-day experience of the children. In other words, before teaching them how to love France and the republic you had to teach them how to love their own 'little patries'. This was considered to be the only way to develop among them a new identity without uprooting them. In the same way, local elections were seen and used as a way of mediation between the 'little patries' and the great French nation, as a way for new citizens to experience democracy and the republic.⁶⁰ In sum, national identity and local identities were not seen as opposed but as complementary, and both had to be retained.

According to historians like Hubert Pérez, Jean François Chanet, Anne Marie Thiesse and Philippe Veitl this may explain why the republic respected and made use of the territorial units of traditional socialisation: the village, the 'terroirs' and their customs, to allow a new collective identity to develop. This ran against the accepted idea developed by historians such as Eugène Weber⁶¹ that the French nation and the republic were built through the assimilation process, through the destruction of local

⁵⁶ Veitl, 'Les régions économiques Clémentel'.

⁵⁷ Weber, *La fin des terroirs*.

⁵⁸ J. F. Chanet, 'L'école républicaine et les petites patries. Enseignement primaire et sentiment d'appartenance en France sous la Troisième République (1879–1940)', doctoral thesis, Université Paris I, Panthéon Sorbonne, 1994; Thiesse, 'Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste'.

⁵⁹ See also Lebovics, *La vraie France*.

⁶⁰ H. Pérès, 'Le village dans la nation française sous la Troisième République. Une configuration cumulative de l'identité', in D. C. Martin, ed., *Carte d'identité. Comment dit on nous en politique?* (Paris: Presse FNSP, 1994), 211.

⁶¹ Weber, *La fin des terroirs*.

customs and centralisation. Hubert Pérez even goes further when he analyses the idea of republican centralisation and assimilation as part of regionalist rhetoric. Being a regionalist and a republican, Delavignette was a typical example of the contradictions he noticed in the regionalist movements: he spent a whole book⁶² criticising the assimilationist and centralising policy of the French republic while celebrating the culture of Burgundy, which in itself was proof that not all republicans were born assimilators and that local customs were still alive after fifty years of republicanism!

Delavignette's criticism of the centralised republican state was also typical of what may be called the 'spirit of the 1930s',⁶³ of the non-conformist movement led by Emmanuel Mounier. In the interwar period, Delavignette was part of the intellectual elite who tried to find a fourth way between fascism, communism and the liberal parliamentary system. As French democracy was weakened and endangered by the number of political crises,⁶⁴ Delavignette became quite critical of the incapacity of the heads of government to impose their will on a party-dominated parliament, what he called 'Paris sans chef'. Democratic alternatives were sought. For Delavignette, such alternatives could only be found at the local level: families and villages once again had to become the basic units from which a local democracy based on consensus, reciprocity, and mutual obligations and services could be created and led by few able men chosen from 'among the people'.⁶⁵ The ideal French republic and nation he envisaged was not a cultural and centralised whole but a decentralised system based on local autonomy, a mixture of peoples still attached to their local cultures and 'terroirs', and linked by a same project: democracy, and social and economic development. In his grand scheme, this economic development could be achieved without the evils of capitalism. A 'new world' had to be devised in which human labour had to be given priority over capital, in which workers would be organised in communities based on solidarity and collaboration. In the countryside would be built small factories that would keep a human face, and would allow people to remain on their land and keep their dignity, their values and customs.⁶⁶ Some aspects of this great project were more or less connected with the communitarian doctrine ('personnalisme Communautaire') defended at that time by the Roman Catholic Emmanuel Mounier, the founding father of the journal *Esprit* (1932), to which Delavignette, himself a Catholic, contributed.⁶⁷

⁶² Delavignette, *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*.

⁶³ P. Lévêque, *Histoire des forces politiques en France. Vol. II: 1880–1940* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994), 259; J. M. Mayeur, *La vie politique sous la Troisième République, 1870–1940* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 330; D. Borne and H. Dubief, *La crise des années 1930, 1929–1938* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 99 *et seq.*

⁶⁴ Borne and Dubief, *La crise des années 1930*, 82 *et seq.*; M. Morabito and D. Bourmaud, *Histoire constitutionnelle et politique de la France (1789–1958)*, 2nd edn (Paris: Montchrestien, 1992), 348 *et seq.*; Mayeur, *La vie politique*, ch. 13.

⁶⁵ Delavignette, *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, 153–4, 72.

⁶⁶ R. Delavignette, *Petite histoire des colonies françaises* (Paris: PUF, 1942), 60.

⁶⁷ R. Delavignette, 'Pour le paysannat noir, pour l'Esprit Africain', *Esprit*, 39 (1 Dec. 1935), 368–90. This article conveys ideas similar to those of *Esprit*: the same moral and economic critique of what is described as 'bourgeois capitalism, individualism and productivism', the same vision of man as a member of a community linked to nature and guided by spiritual principles.

In the new world envisaged by Delavignette both ‘Blacks and Whites’, ‘peasants and workers’ would take an active part. Even better, Africa had to be the ground where a new political system could be tried out. In that sense, it was to help in ‘reforming France’.⁶⁸ That is why the solutions he envisaged for the Union Française were the same as those he envisaged for the metropolitan republic. Because the policy of association had to allow a kind of adjustment between French and African civilisations in the colonies, the Union Française could only lead to a great community of ‘associated’ peoples sharing the same ideals and interests, the same political and economic project, while their own interests and civilisations were also preserved.⁶⁹ That kind of community, also envisaged by Senghor in his constitutional report⁷⁰, had to be built from bottom to top, by consent and on the basis of the African ‘pays’.⁷¹ In order to take into account those ‘pays’, and the wishes, interests and cultures of each people, priority had to be given to that level of government where they could be expressed directly: the local level, that is, for Delavignette, the village. The political organisation of the village could vary from one place to another as it had to take into account the native customs and traditional authorities which, in some places, were already of a consensual democratic kind. It could evolve towards more occidental forms of local democracy through the electoral process. In either case it had to allow people to rule themselves, to allow the true representation of their wishes. From that local level, larger entities could be built through mutual consent and would lead to a kind of federation. Federation or confederation? The answer was unclear, especially as Delavignette often gave the British Commonwealth as an example of the ideal Union Française, a tendency which was common among the federalists.⁷²

‘Construire le toit avant les fondations’

Was the Union Française the opportunity to build such community? In 1946 Delavignette was quite optimistic about it⁷³. The preamble of the 1946 Constitution stressed clearly that the aim of the Union Française was to develop the civilisation of each people, care for their welfare and lead them to rule themselves. These principles were all the more worthy of respect in that they were also part of the United Nations Charter that France had signed, a point which was raised several times during the discussions of the constitutional assemblies.⁷⁴ As stated earlier, the Constitution envisaged the creation of local assemblies to lead each colony, but their

⁶⁸ Delavignette, *Les Paysans Noirs*, 14; *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, 243.

⁶⁹ APRD, Carton 16, Dossier 208, Delavignette, R., ‘Note au sujet du document de presse “self-government pour les colonies”’, 22 Nov. 1944.

⁷⁰ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 Sept. 1946, 3791. M. Moutet, Ministre des Colonies agreed.

⁷¹ The word ‘pays’ was used by Robert Delavignette to describe not only his native land, Burgundy, but also the different regions of Africa. See Delavignette, ‘Pour le paysannat noir’, 371.

⁷² E.g., R. Moreux, ‘La révision constitutionnelle ne doit pas se borner à envisager les problèmes métropolitains mais d’urgence ceux de l’Union Française tout entière’, *Marchés coloniaux et Tropicaux*, 20 June 1953, 1825.

⁷³ See the last chapter of his book, *Service Africain*, which is devoted to the Union Française.

⁷⁴ Colonna (representative of Tunisia), J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 Sept. 1946, 3822.

power and organisation were supposed to be specified by a subsequent law.⁷⁵ No specific political organisation was envisaged for the other levels of local government (especially the villages and districts), the internal organisation of each colony being left open to discussion (Art. 74). However, as the Constitution (Title X, Arts. 85, 86) also recognised the existence of local territorial entities in France itself, it was hoped that such recognition would be extended and would become a reality in the overseas territories as well. Unfortunately these hopes were soon to be disappointed. A temporary decree (rather than a law) was adopted in 1946⁷⁶ to define some of the few competences of the *assemblées territoriales*, but the expected law concerning their full powers remained a matter for discussion⁷⁷. These *assemblées territoriales*, elected by the citizens of the Union, were in fact given few powers and remained under the strict control of the French governors. Besides, after some years of expectation, during which no laws were adopted to define the organisation of other local assemblies (at village or district levels) in the overseas territories, it became clear to Delavignette that those levels were not to be given the priority they deserved.

As a consequence, he strongly criticised an institutional framework which gave African peoples the right to send a few representatives to the French Parliament, whose concern for the overseas territories had never been very strong, but which refused to give them the right to rule themselves locally.⁷⁸ Such a situation, largely influenced by the most conservative elements in the colonial service during the preparation of the second constitutional assembly and later on, resulted in the real power being given to the colonial governors and their administrations, as in the empire during the 1930s.⁷⁹ It did not prepare African peoples to rule themselves democratically as envisaged in the Constitution. In sum, did not the Union Française give very theoretical and superficial rights to theoretical and superficial citizens? 'Was it not a big mistake to build the roof of the house before its foundations?' This was one of the questions given by Delavignette to his students at the colonial schools in the 1950s.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ In fact it was a decree and not a law that came to define the powers and organisation of the *assemblées territoriales*: Décret, 25 octobre 1946, portant institution d'assemblées représentatives dans les Territoires d'Outre Mer, J. O., *Lois et Décrets*, 27 Oct. 1946, 9109–23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Rapport fait au nom de la commission de politique générale sur la demande d'avis transmise par le Président de l'Assemblée Nationale sur la proposition de loi de Senghor et plusieurs de ses collègues députés, tendant à fixer les attributions des Assemblées Territoriales et Provinciales des Territoires de l'AOF, AEF, Madagascar, Côte Française des Somalis, par Ya Dombia, J. O., *Union Française, Documents*, annexe 270, session of 16 July 1953, 265–78.

⁷⁸ See the courses he gave at the colonial school in the 1950s: APRD, Carton 16, Dossier 209, Notes pour le cours donné à l'ENFOM sur l'évolution politique des Territoires d'Outre-Mer, 'les colonies et l'Union Française', July 1952.

⁷⁹ Lewis, 'The French Colonial Service'. The constitution envisaged that in the overseas territories, the legislative powers belonged to the Assemblée Nationale (for all matters concerning criminal law, public liberties, political and administrative organisations). For all other matters French law was extended to the colonies only if this was clearly specified by the Assemblée Nationale or by decree, that is by the French Ministre des Colonies or his local delegate (the governor). See L. Rolland and P. Lampué, *Précis de Droit des Pays d'Outre Mer*, 2nd edn (Paris: Dalloz, 1959), 178 *et seq.*; 189 *et seq.*

⁸⁰ In 1951 Delavignette took up the Chair of Droits et Coutumes d'Outre Mer at the colonial school, teaching African sociology and politics.

And the answer of one of them (who was given an excellent mark – 18/20) left no doubt as to the answer he expected:

Before giving colonial peoples a right to intervene at the general level, a right which has been very ill conceived, it would have been better to build a juridical framework from a solid basis: their participation in the municipal, then regional, then territorial authorities. This would have allowed a political evolution, which would have penetrated the African masses in depth . . . France was not able to choose between assimilation and federalism, which led to the compromise of the 1946 Constitution. This compromise goes too far or not far enough: too far on the way towards assimilation, as it allowed overseas peoples to take part in the government of metropolitan France; not far enough on the way towards federalism, as it did not give them the opportunity to have political rights in the framework of a large economic and financial local autonomy.⁸¹

This view was in fact largely supported by some of the African elite, whose voices in the constitutional assembly had been very clear:⁸² if, as Senghor put it, the Union Française wanted to be a ‘co-operation between civilisations’ respectful of the culture of each people, a kind of federation based on local political life had to be devised. As a consequence, they became more and more impatient as the laws on local government promised in the Constitution did not materialise, blocked by the lethargy of the French parliament on that issue. This lethargy was such that it ‘came to disconcert the African populations’.⁸³ Several proposals concerning the creation of the local assemblies (at village or district level) were made by African representatives as soon as 1947.⁸⁴ A draft bill was also devised by the government in 1951 which envisaged the creation of some kind of municipal assemblies.⁸⁵ This bill, like earlier and later proposals, were submitted to the members of the Assembly of the Union whose impatience grew considerably, as most of the texts examined were similar and never led to the expected law.⁸⁶

The arguments of those African and European members of that assembly who supported the proposals were much the same as those of Delavignette. First, the existing system of local administration and government was seen as obsolete, given the evolution of African societies. It was still based on French colonial administrators invested with considerable power and helped at local level by village heads and district chiefs (who could be the traditional chiefs) and at the regional level by a *conseil de*

⁸¹ APRD, Carton 11, Dossier 150, Correction des copies sur le sujet: ‘on a dit que la constitution de 1946 bâtissait outre-mer la maison par le toit’, Examen sur le cours de politique indigène, mai 1952, copie de M. A Merlet (author’s translation).

⁸² J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 Sept. 1946, 3792.

⁸³ Djim Momar Guèye, *J. O., Union Française, Débats*, 824, 23 July 1953, 824.

⁸⁴ The list of those proposals is to be found in: Proposition de résolution tendant à la création de conseils locaux et valablement représentatifs des collectivités indigènes dans les circonscriptions administratives de l’AEE, AOF, Madagascar, par L. Jouselin, et autres membres du Mouvement Républicain Populaire, *J. O., Union Française, Documents*, annexe 106, session of 6 Feb. 1952, 127–8.

⁸⁵ Projet de loi relatif à l’organisation municipale en Afrique Occidentale Française, en Afrique Equatoriale Française, au Togo, au Cameroun, présenté par R. Pleven, Président du Conseil des Ministres et L. Jaquinot, Ministre de la France d’outre-Mer, *J. O., Assemblée Nationale, Documents*, annexe 1353, session of 6 Nov. 1951, 2691–2.

⁸⁶ *J. O., Union Française, Débats*, 30 Oct. 1952, 1027.

notables made up of the district chiefs, whose powers were purely consultative.⁸⁷ For historical reasons, the four *communes de plein exercice* of Senegal were the only places where local assemblies democratically elected on the French model (with an elected mayor) were set up as early as the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ Several decrees adopted during the 1920s also allowed the creation of 'communes mixtes' in large cities.⁸⁹ Many in the Assembly of the Union considered that the creation of such assemblies (whose composition and organisation could be adapted to local customs) should be established elsewhere. After all, did not the 1946 Constitution recognise the existence of those assemblies for the metropolis? Why should it be different for the colonies? Were they not part of the same political whole as France?⁹⁰

The second argument was that the Union Française, as a democratic pyramid, was doomed to collapse if its peak was built before the rest, if

the roof of the house was built without concern for the foundation . . . It is precisely what was done when we gave those populations rights that a majority of them could not actually use while not setting up basic institutions, which at the local level, could have allowed them to be conscious of their responsibilities, to have some political apprenticeship and to rule themselves. In any country in the world the evolution towards democracy began through those liberties which allowed local entities to defend their rights efficiently.⁹¹

The then *Ministre de la France d'Outre Mer*, Pierre Pfimlin, agreed: 'We need to set up local elected institutions where democracy would be tried: these institutions could be regional or municipal assemblies, whose members, as representatives of the population, could deliberate on what they knew best, their quotidian life, while being still inspired by their ancestral wisdom'.⁹² The proposals generally envisaged that these councils would 'deal at the local level with local problems, as far as they could be dealt with at this level, and would give the *assemblées territoriales* local information to help them in their deliberations. Among their competences they would discuss the local budget and could have some consultative powers in such matters as economics and social development . . . Uniform rules concerning their organisation and designation had to be avoided as different religions, customs, evolution called

⁸⁷ J. O., *Union Française*, annexe 106, 127.

⁸⁸ These *communes* were part of the colonial territories conquered before the great expansion at the end of the nineteenth century. Their inhabitants were considered French citizens and had the same rights. The *communes* were organised on the same pattern as French ones (Law of 5 April 1884). The same applied to the French comptoirs in India. See Rolland and Lampué, *Droit d'Outre-Mer*, 369.

⁸⁹ E.g., the decree of 17 Apr. 1920 for French West Africa. These *communes* could be set up by the governor. They had their own budget. They were administered by an *administrateur-maire* (French colonial administrator or governor) assisted by an assembly whose members he chose or who in some cases were elected.

⁹⁰ J. O., *Union Française*, *Débats*, 30 Oct. 1952, 1027 *et seq.*

⁹¹ Proposition tendant à inviter le gouvernement à instituer des conseils régionaux dans les territoires d'outre-mer présentée par H. Laurier et autres membres du groupe du Rassemblement du Peuple Français, J. O., *Union Française*, *Documents*, annexe 352, session of 23 Oct. 1952, 284. See also Leo Hamond, quoted in J. O., *Union Française*, annexe 270, 265.

⁹² J. O., *Union Française*, annexe 270, 265. These arguments were also used in the debate of the *Assemblée de l'Union Française*, J. O., *Union Française*, 30 Oct. 52.

for different solutions'.⁹³ As a consequence it was up to the governors (with the advice of the *assemblées territoriales*) to decide on those matters. Depending on their designation, universal suffrage might not be adopted in some circumstances. In each case, the different parts of the population should be represented, but 'we need to reconcile our concern to see democratic institutions penetrate the masses with the already existing institutions'.⁹⁴ Those institutions might be democratic or traditional. But as long as the native people were attached to them, they had to be integrated in one way or another into the new councils, otherwise these councils might only be rejected by the people and their traditional authority. Besides, they 'should allow the population to take initiatives on any subject of local interest and especially on the possible consequences of general and uniform measures when those measures may neglect the rights and customs of the local population'.⁹⁵ Last but not least, it was thought that these councils would 'attach the rural population more closely to their villages, thus avoiding land desertion. Considering those detribalised masses, packed in African towns in awful housing conditions, one may see that argument as extremely important'.⁹⁶ The village as a traditional community was seen as the 'future of Africa'. Rural municipalities would allow the 'consecration of the African reality'.⁹⁷ Behind that argument was of course the growing fear that 'uprooted' rural masses might follow the ideas and claims for independence of some of the African political parties led by those educated African of the cities.⁹⁸ The only way to maintain strict control over them and to avoid that danger was to keep them on their land under the traditional authority of their chiefs, while offering new possibilities of local rule.

Those arguments also show that Delavignette's territorial vision of African society was still quite popular in the 1950s. The nature of the debates held in the Assembly of the Union indicate that his federalist position in favour of more decentralisation was dominant there.⁹⁹ This is apparently confirmed by a survey carried out among its members in 1956 by *Marchés Coloniaux du Monde* (one of the most influential colonial journals of the time) on the question of the reforming the Union Française.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹³ J. O., *Union Française*, annexe 352, 284.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; J. Brevié was quoted here.

⁹⁵ J. O., *Union Française*, annexe 106, 127.

⁹⁶ Laurin, J. O., *Union Française, Débats*, 5 May 1955, 448. Laurin was taking part in a discussion on a report: Rapport fait au nom de la commission de politique générale sur demande d'avis du Président de l'Assemblée Nationale sur un projet de loi visant la création de conseils de subdivision et l'institution d'un budget de cercle, par Laurin., J. O., *Union Française, Documents*, annexe 374, séance 25 novembre 1954, 458. See also: Projet de loi autorisant la création en Afrique Occidentale française de conseils de subdivision et de cercle, en Afrique Equatoriale française de conseils de district et de région, présenté au nom de J. Laniel, président du conseil des ministres, et par L. Jaquinot, Ministre de la France d'Outre Mer, J. O., *Union Française, Documents*, annexe 8258, session of 1 Apr. 1954, 697–8.

⁹⁷ Charle Gros, J. O., *Union Française, Débats*, 5 May 1955, 450.

⁹⁸ See for example: 'Nécessité de structures politiques de base', *Marchés Coloniaux du Monde*, 6 March 1954, 637.

⁹⁹ The debates we have mentioned generally tended to favour that position.

¹⁰⁰ Fifty-five men took part in that survey (among whom were deputies of the Assemblée Nationale or senators). See *Marchés Coloniaux du Monde*, 31 March 1956.

results have to be treated with caution, since the questions were largely oriented towards federalism and decentralisation, the director of the journal being a great advocate of that position.¹⁰¹ Not surprisingly, most of the answers conformed to those expected: federalism was inevitable and the local assemblies of the villages had to be the 'cellule civique de base', the basis for 'educating citizens'.¹⁰² These answers were also probably prompted by the fact that a law on local (municipal) assemblies in the overseas territories had been passed by the Assemblée Nationale in 1955,¹⁰³ after almost ten years' delay, with many reports and proposals during the intervening period.¹⁰⁴

The law itself was very flexible, leaving room for adaptation but also for bias: new communes ('communes de plein exercice', on the French model) could be created by decree on the advice of the *assemblées territoriales*; other kinds of communes, much like the older 'communes mixtes' (with a mayor nominated by the French administration but an elected assembly) could also be set up by the governor, but only if the community concerned were 'developed enough' to have money for its budget. This law was the first step towards an important reform, the Loi Cadre Defferre.¹⁰⁵ It gave the *assemblée territoriale* real legislative powers in some matters (including the budget), and envisaged a real universal suffrage¹⁰⁶ and the creation of a *conseil de gouvernement* for each territory – a kind of council of ministers chosen by the *assemblée territoriale*, presided over by the governor and in charge of the executive. In places where no communes existed, it also set up 'communes rurales', which would be ruled by traditional chiefs or 'notables' assisted by an elected council.

The colonial administrators, who had to introduce these new political arrangements at local level, were to encounter many difficulties as they searched for a balance between the traditional African elites ('the chiefs') and the new 'educated

¹⁰¹ R. Moreux (editor of the journal): 'L'Union Française sera fédérale ou ne sera pas', *Marchés Coloniaux du Monde*, 12 Jan. 1952, 58–9; 'La décomposition de l'Union Française ne peut être évitée que par le fédéralisme', *ibid.*, 18 July 1953, 2065–6. See also, e.g., R. Malbrant, 'il faut créer, à tous les échelons administratifs des conseils régionaux dans les TOM', *ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1952, 3081–82; L. Sengor, 'Le fédéralisme est la vérité du vingtième siècle et l'avenir de l'Union Française', *ibid.*, 17 Sept. 1955, 2513–14; L. Senghor, 'Contre le courant centrifuge de l'Etat associé, une seule solution: la République Fédérale Française', *ibid.*, 4 Apr. 1953, 1005–6;

¹⁰² A. Sarraut, president of the Assembly of the Union, responding to the survey, *Marchés Coloniaux du Monde*, 31 March 1956, 887; J. Lecanuet (former deputy and minister), *ibid.*, 889.

¹⁰³ Loi du 18 novembre 1955 relative à la réorganisation municipale en AOF, AEF, Togo, Cameroun et Madagascar, J. O., *Lois et Décrets*, 19 Nov. 1955, 11274–7.

¹⁰⁴ On those later proposals and projects see Rapport fait au nom de la commission des territoires d'outre-mer sur: 1) le projet de loi (1353, 1951) relatif à l'organisation municipale en AOF, en AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun. 2) Les propositions de loi de Mitterrand et plusieurs de ses collègues tendant à l'extension du régime des municipalités de plein exercice à certaines localités de l'AOF, de l'AEF, du Togo et du Cameroun; de Senghor et plusieurs de ses collègues relative à l'organisation municipale en AOF, AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun, par Y. Diallo, J. O., *Assemblée Nationale, Débats*, annexe 6686, session of 24 July 1953, 1332.

¹⁰⁵ Loi du 23 juin 1956, modified by another law, 19 juin 1957. See Rolland and Lampué, *Droit d'Outre-Mer*, 149.

¹⁰⁶ Universal suffrage in the colonies was established in 1956 (Loi du 23 juin 1956). This law granted all colonial citizens the right to vote under the same conditions as applied in France.

elites'. An earlier proposed law, aimed at institutionalising the status of traditional chief and which led to long discussions within the Assembly of the Union among the African representatives, may give a clue as to their different expectations, and how difficult it was to make them compatible. Such a law was first proposed by Africans: in April 1947 some chiefs in the territory of Guinea published a memorandum in which they asked that their function and status be clearly defined and their future guaranteed in a legal text. Chiefs had long been used in practice by the French colonial administrators, but no status had so far been granted to them which could protect them against the arbitrary powers of the French authorities. Following their suggestions, Yacine Diallo, the Guinea representative in the French Assemblée Nationale, and some of his colleagues put forward a resolution inviting the French government to determine the status of the chiefs, especially as regards their material and institutional situation, and the sanctions which could be applied to them.¹⁰⁷ Given the favourable response of the National Assembly to this resolution,¹⁰⁸ it was adopted without opposition on 9 August 1947 and led the French government to draft a bill on that issue,¹⁰⁹ which was then transmitted to each territorial assembly for approval.¹¹⁰ It set out the powers of the chief, his rights and duties, and his revenues, although, as some of these details were a matter of disagreement among the African representatives, other drafts were created and proposed to the Assemblée Nationale.¹¹¹ All were to be examined by the Assembly of the Union, resulting in reports and lengthy discussions in 1951–1953.¹¹² As Directeur des Affaires Politiques,

¹⁰⁷ Résolution tendant à préciser le statut des chefs indigènes en AOF, AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun au triple point de vue de la situation matérielle, de la situation morale et des sanctions dont le chef peut être l'objet, J. O., *Documents Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale*, session of 17 June 1947, annexe 1711, 1385.

¹⁰⁸ Rapport fait au nom de la Commission des territoires d'outre-mer sur la proposition de résolution de M. Yacine Diallo (député de Guinée) et plusieurs de ses collègues tendant à inviter le gouvernement à préciser le statut des chefs indigènes en AOF, AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun par J. Dumas, député, J. O., *Documents Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale*, session of 1 Aug. 1947, annexe 2221, 1801 *et seq.*; J. O., *Débats Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale*, session of 9 Aug. 1947, 4183.

¹⁰⁹ Projet de loi relatif au statut des chefs coutumiers en AOF, AEF, au Cameroun et au Togo, J. O., *Documents Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale*, session of 27 July 1949, annexe 8058, 1532–1533.

¹¹⁰ This took place in 1948 and 1949. On the views of these assemblies see: Rapport fait au nom de la Commission de la législation, de la justice, des affaires administratives et domaniales, sur les demandes d'avis transmises par le Président de l'Assemblée Nationale (à l'Union Française) relative au statut des chefs coutumiers en AOF, AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun, par M. Jousselin, J. O., *de l'Union Française, Assemblée de l'Union, Documents*, session of 27 Nov. 1951, annexe 275, 318–19.

¹¹¹ The main ones being: Proposition de Aku, député du Togo, J. O., *Documents Parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale*, session of 16 May 1950, annexe 9971, 918–19 (simultaneously deposited with the Conseil de la République); Proposition de Saller, sénateur de Guinée, J. O., *Documents Parlementaires, Conseil de la République (séat)*, session of 10 July 1950, annexe 500, 641–2; Proposition de Conombo, député de Haute-Volta, J. O., *Documents parlementaires, Assemblée Nationale*, session of 2 Aug. 1951, annexe 481, 1660; Proposition de Razac, sénateur de Mauritanie, et membres du Mouvement Républicain Populaire, J. O., *Documents parlementaires, Conseil de la République*, session of 23 Jan. 1951, annexe 38, 66–7.

¹¹² Rapport Jousselin; Rapport fait au nom de la Commission de la législation, de la justice, des affaires administratives et domaniales, sur les demandes d'avis transmises par le Président de l'Assemblée Nationale (à l'Union Française) relative au statut des chefs coutumiers en AOF, AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun, par Momo Touré, J. O., *de l'Union Française, Assemblée de l'Union, Documents*, session of 15 Jan. 1953, annexe 8,

one of the main positions in the Colonial Ministry, Delavignette took an active part in the preparation of the bill, which in the end was dropped.¹¹³

The apparent consensus of the territorial assemblies on the principles of the bill soon gave way to deep disagreements among the African elite in the Assembly of the Union:¹¹⁴ the 'educated Africans', those who had been assimilated and went to a French school, came to insist on the transitory nature of the traditional chiefs, their possible disappearance and their replacement by elected body. For them the proposals put forward in the bill meant that it was only a step towards a local political system similar to the French one.¹¹⁵ For the traditional chiefs, the bill represented a means of protecting their power in a society which was devolving quickly, and, even if this was unspoken, of protecting their position against the growing influence of the new elite. These opposing attitudes were sufficiently serious to alarm colonial ministry personnel, who feared a situation like that in the Gold Coast, where the two elites were already engaged in a dangerous conflict.¹¹⁶ As a consequence the bill was abandoned; the subsequent Loi Cadre Defferre tried to be sufficiently flexible to be acceptable to both sides.

In the end however, as Senghor wished, it was left to the African elites themselves to come to their own arrangements. The Loi Cadre Defferre was supposed to lead progressively to that great community envisaged by Delavignette in which each territory would be given progressively greater autonomy. In fact this autonomy (almost equivalent to dominion status in the British Empire) was granted faster than expected through the Communauté Française proposed for overseas territories by De Gaulle in the new constitution of 1958.¹¹⁷ The fate of that Communauté is well known. For the French republicans who intended to experiment in the colonies with that great republic 'diverse et indivisible', an opportunity was definitely lost. A new opportunity would not come up again for some years, as a new multicultural community centred on Europe was to emerge with France at its centre. Not surprisingly, the 1992 debate on the Maastricht Treaty in the French National

5 et seq.; rapport similaire de Momo Touré, *ibid.*, session of 5 Feb. 1953, annexe 28, 45. Only reports by Momo Touré were discussed in the session of the Assembly of the Union, 29 Jan. 1953, and 5 Feb. 1953, *J. O. de l'Union Française, Assemblée de l'Union, Débats*, 109–25; 155–67.

¹¹³ See Archives du Ministère des Colonies (AMCAP), Carton 2153, Dossier 1; APRD, Carton 15, Dossier 201.

¹¹⁴ Session of the Assembly of the Union, 29 Jan. 1953, 5 Feb. 1953, *J. O. de l'Union Française, Assemblée de l'Union, Débats*, 1109–25; 155–67.

¹¹⁵ This is the dominant position of the representatives of Senegal. The territorial assembly of this territory did vote for a resolution on 26 May 1952 which asked for the traditional chiefs to be replaced by local elected assemblies on the French model: AMCAP, Carton 2153, Dossier 1, note confidentielle sur le statut des chefs coutumiers, sans date, sans signature, provenant du 2ème bureau des Affaires Politiques.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Art. 77 of the Constitution of 1958, Title XII, establishing the Communauté Française. This community was of a federal type. Each territory had administrative and legislative autonomy (a parliament and government) for internal matters. Some matters (foreign policy, defence, budget, economic policy) were decided at federal level. Federal institutions with real powers were set up: a senate which included representatives of the French Parliament and of the parliament of each territory; a council which included the head of government of France and of each territory. However, the president of the Communauté was still to be the president of the republic.

Assembly led again not simply to two conceptions of the European Union but to the same opposition between the two versions of the republic and the nation.¹¹⁸ For the Europeanists who believed that the concept of a European citizenship (distinguishing between nationality and citizenship) was an important step towards a federal European Union, the past example of the citizenship of the Union Française was even taken as proof that their European project was in total conformity with what they considered to be the true French republican tradition. It has been our argument here that there has never been one single French republican tradition but several, or at least two which were regularly opposed until compromise was reached. One considers that the one and indivisible republic can only be culturally uniform and more or less centralised politically, while the other believes that the political unity of the republic does not preclude cultural diversity and decentralisation of power. With the pull of Europe and the advent of 'a decentralised republic' it may well be that the second will prevail in the future.

¹¹⁸ V. Dimier, 'De la citoyenneté de l'Union Française (1946) à la citoyenneté de l'Union Européenne (1992): la nation et la république françaises en débat', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, 1013 (July 2001).