Individualism, Community, and Cooperatives in the Development Thinking of the Union Soudanaise-RDA, 1946–1960

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Abstract: In the late 1940s and 1950s, nationalists and colonial officials in French Soudan (Mali) shared a language of development centered on the concepts of tradition, modernity, community, and individualism. This shared language permitted collaboration but also masked important differences in nationalist and colonial analyses of social change and the direction of rural development. Particular areas of contention were social evolutionary models of change, the likelihood of rising individualism, and the potential of communitarian development. The patterns of interaction in this debate reveal that intellectual exchanges between and among officials and nationalists were multidirectional and characterized not by borrowing but by exchange, adaptation, and reformulation.

During the late colonial era, nationalists and colonial officials in French Soudan (Mali) engaged in extensive discussions with each other and among themselves about rural development. Key themes in these discussions were the nature of community among the rural population, the extent to which individualism was on the rise, and whether and how to organize cooperative institutions. At first glance, what is perhaps most striking is the common language of individualism, community, and cooperatives that nationalists and colonial officials used to analyze the social change they saw occurring around them. Scholars have explained this common language by noting the close links between ethnographers and colonial administrators and by pointing to the ways in which European social theorists and anthropologists influenced the thinking of African nationalists.

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That ethnographers, nationalists, and colonial administrators interacted intellectually is certain. Exactly how to characterize the ways in which ideas circulated among these groups remains a matter of discussion. Studies of pan-Africanism have often referred to the evidence that African intellectuals drew on representations of Africa by European and American ethnographers such as Leo Frobenius, Maurice Delafosse, Diedrich Westermann, and Melville Herskovits (Geiss 1974). This has been especially true of examinations of the *négritude* movement and its leaders (e.g. Hountondji 1983; Miller 1990; Vaillant 1990). The most sophisticated of these studies explored these borrowings as they were then reconfigured in the minds of African intellectuals. These approaches stressed the ways in which African intellectuals have, in Philip Zachernuk's words, "engaged with others' ideas of Africa to invent their own" (2000:6).

This article aims to explore the development thinking of the leaders of French Soudan's principal nationalist party, the Union Soudanaise-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (US) specifically as they engaged with European conceptualizations of Africa and of Soudanese societies in the process of defining their party's rural development policies. These policies were grounded in the Union Soudanaise's understanding of the history of Mali, its social and political institutions, and the social and economic change it had undergone under colonial rule. Both US leaders and French ethnographers and officials considered the relationship between individual and collective interests as central to their analysis of rural development. Common concerns and a common terminology—community, individualism, traditional, modern—permitted collaboration between and among nationalists and colonial officials during the transition years of the 1950s, but they also masked some fundamental differences in nationalist and colonial analyses of past social change and the future direction of rural development in Soudan. This coexistence of a common terminology and divergent beliefs and policies points to the need to reconsider how elites—African and European—arrived at their representations of Africa and their views of the challenges it faced at the end of the colonial era.

The Union Soudanaise

The Union Soudanaise was the more radical of the two parties that in the post–World War II period sought to give voice to the dissatisfaction of Africans in Soudan. The US had been established in October 1946 when delegates of three different political parties in French Soudan came together in a spirit of unity at the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain's (RDA) founding congress in Bamako.[1] The unity was short-lived, however; in November, Fily Dabo Sissoko, who had been a reluctant participant from the start, took the Parti Progressiste Soudanais (PSP) out of the grouping because he was dissatisfied with the RDA's ties to the French Communist Party

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(PCF). But the US survived this split, eventually becoming the party that led the colony to independence.

The US was headed by the new educated elite, the vast majority male, many of whom had received an education during the interwar years at the prestigious federal secondary school in Dakar, the Ecole William Ponty.[2] This educated elite had been exposed to French representations of West African history and culture during their primary education as well as at Ponty, and they were encouraged to pursue their own historical and ethnographic research. They would subsequently be involved in promoting cultural and historical consciousness in associations of the educated elite, in theater groups, and in political discussion groups.

Their education was the product of key colonial governmental reforms in the 1910s and the 1930s that sought to increase the study of African history and culture in the schools. In 1912, Georges Hardy, a friend of the French ethnographer Maurice Delafosse, became inspector general of education in French West Africa and school curricula began to include West African history and geography. Hardy and his successors also encouraged African teachers to study the region in which they were posted. Beginning in the 1910s and relying on oral sources as well as Arabic manuscripts, these teachers then published their findings on local history, culture, and economy in the official publication of the education service, the *Bulletin de l'Enseignement de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Sabatier 1977:85; Manchuelle 1995:351ff). At Ponty, as early as 1913, third-year students studied the history of French West Africa.[3] Beginning in 1933, Ponty students were also expected to conduct research projects on their own culture, and this constituted part of their final exam grade; they also wrote and produced plays with African themes (Sabatier 1977:130, 137–46; 1985). This was part of a shift in the Ponty curriculum, which lasted until 1945, toward paying increased attention to Africa.

These reforms in education reflected the French West African administration's growing support, in the late 1910s, for the policy of association. Earlier policies had emphasized the eradication of slavery, "barbaric" customary law, and "oppressive" chiefship, but rebellions in 1915 and again in 1917 made clear that French administrative practices were failing and that political reform was urgent. Beginning with Governor-General François Clozel (1915–17), who appointed Maurice Delafosse as his director of political affairs, the government general began to emphasize the importance of respecting African institutions (Conklin 1997:6,176–80). When Martial Merlin was appointed governor-general in 1919, he articulated a more positive view of precolonial chiefship. He also instituted policies that increased "the representation of African notables on the governor general's and the lieutenant governors' administrative councils… [and] created new councils at the village and circle levels, composed solely of Africans" (Conklin 1997:191–92). These more positive views of African political leadership

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were endorsed by an emerging group of ethnologists who sought to valorize the study of Africa. School curricula that paid attention to African history and cultures were consistent with the new administrative approach.

The curricular changes were also part of a broader transformation in the political climate that occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Beginning in 1937, and stimulated by the rise to power of the Popular Front, the Western-educated elite of Soudan came together in a number of associations such as the Association des Lettrés du Soudan (later Foyer du Soudan), and Art et Travail. Art et Travail was a Bamako youth group that used plays and performances to assert the value of African history and culture, to examine the position of the African-educated elite, and to critique colonial rule (Cutter 1985; Morgenthau 1964:270–73). In the 1940s this political and cultural activism expanded to include a Groupe d'Etudes Communistes (GEC) and a Comité d'Etudes Franco-Africaines (CEFA), two associations that existed in other French West African colonies as well. Although the first CEFA in Senegal seemed inclined to promote a policy of assimilation, the CEFA in Soudan was more strongly anticolonial, calling for independence (Chafer 2002:70–71).

Out of these associations emerged the political groupings that would come together in the Union Soudanaise (US) and the Parti Progressiste Soudanais (PSP). The PSP's early base of support was among non-Muslims and populations that had welcomed the French. The US initially obtained its support from trade union members and traders in the cities and towns, gradually building rural support especially along the railroads and the Niger River and among those populations that had strongly opposed French conquest. Adopting a language of equality, the US identified itself as the party seeking to end both colonial rule and "traditional" chiefship. It was this approach that allowed the US to gradually build up a large enough following in the countryside to achieve victory over the PSP in elections in January 1956. It was to retain its majority until independence (Morgenthau 1964:275–79,285–88).

The RDA was affiliated with the French Communist Party (PCF) from 1946 to 1950. West African nationalists, especially those living in France, had had ties to the Communist Party since at least the mid-1920s, and the publications of the organizations they created, such as the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre, were read by activists in West Africa. Individual French Communists had been active in French West Africa, and by the 1940s they were leading numerous Communist study groups (GEC), including one in Bamako. Of all the French political groupings, the Communists took the strongest stand against colonial rule. The PCF was the only French party to attend the Bamako congress of 1946, and this allowed it to strengthen its ties with political activists in the colonies. But the RDA's ties to the PCF would yield little. French Communists had won the most seats in the October 1945 election, but by May 1947 they found themselves ousted from all ministerial positions (Chafer 2002:63,104–5). As a marginalized opposi-

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tion party, the PCF produced no legislative victories for its African allies, and government pressure led more and more African representatives to the French parliament to leave the coalition. Therefore, in 1950 the RDA broke ties with the Communists. The US followed the coalition but not without debate and opposition from youth groups and trade unions (Morgenthau 1964:89–99,293).

The RDA's split with the Communists was not a major ideological shift. A significant number of members of the RDA, including members of the US, remained Marxists. So while US party statements may, for strategic reasons, have become less inflammatory, and while they dropped references to international Communist organizations, Marxist analyses of history and socialist models of development continued to influence the thinking of party leaders (Campmas n.d [1987]:64–66).

From its earliest days as a party, US leadership perceived agriculture as critical to the region's future and directed its regional leaders and activists to gain an understanding of the concerns of farmers. The US did not contest the basic agricultural development agenda of the colonial government, and during the late 1950s it was increasingly involved in designing it. It accepted the basic premise that land use needed to be intensified and that to accomplish this goal it was necessary to adopt the plow, crop rotation, and fertilization. Party leaders, like most French officials, were critical of some of the central practices of extensive agriculture, including clearing fields with fire.[4] Although they criticized French control of government, they also had high praise for French modernization efforts. The US paper *L'Essor*, for example, saw the costly and largely unsuccessful Office du Niger irrigation scheme as one of the best legacies of colonial rule. While it regularly criticized the living and working conditions of African settlers at the Office, it hailed Emile Bélime, the engineer behind the scheme, as "one of those great French pioneers" and called the project itself "one of the rare achievements of French engineering, a matter of pride for Soudan, a prospect for the future for all of Africa" (*Essor* 1957; see also *Essor* 1958a).

Besides increasing agricultural production, the creation of cooperatives was a key element in US thinking about rural development. As early as 1947 the party charged its regional leaders with determining whether farmers were interested in unionization (*syndicalisme agricole*) and assisting them in the creation of cooperatives managed by producers.[5] During the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the US did not have the support of the majority of the rural population and it did not actively push for unionization and cooperatives. Instead, it called for the training of agricultural extension agents who could promote "modern methods of agriculture" among farmers, the establishment of a cadastre to prevent contestations over land, and the inclusion of village heads or selected notables on the board of directors of the Sociétés de Prévoyance (SP).[6] Nonetheless, its interest in increasing African representation on the SP board was indicative of its push for representative cooperative institutions. The Office du Niger irrigation scheme offered the

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US its first opportunity to institute farmer cooperatives. In 1954, building on existing farmer activism and dissatisfaction, the US helped unionize Office farmers in order to create an alternative to the Office-sponsored Association Agricole Indigène. It saw this union as the first step in the creation of farmer cooperatives that would take responsibility for the marketing of production and the supply of basic consumer necessities (interview with Mamadou Gologo, Bamako, July 29, 1986).

In the late 1950s, as the US became directly involved in policymaking, its initiatives were focused on strengthening the agricultural base of the economy. It sought to limit labor migration to cities and the coastal regions of French West Africa, arguing that migration was a loss of critical agricultural labor. The US would increasingly come to see migration as incompatible with the construction of the nation, adopting restrictive measures to curb migratory flows. It imagined that by organizing the peasantry and improving its means of production it could motivate the migrants to "return to the land" (Gary-Tounkara 2003). The US thus focused on the creation of rural production groups (*groupements ruraux de production*), which party leaders stressed were the basis for economic liberation and the creation of socialist structures. Central to the rural production groups was the collective field, which was to help increase production, "increase the standard of living and the purchasing power of the producer while allowing the state additional exports, a source of foreign currency" (Union Soudanaise 1963:97). In the late 1950s the US also began to promote collective work parties for public works projects. Termed *investissement humain* (human investment), these work parties were explicitly differentiated from colonial era forced labor and described as voluntary efforts to construct the nation.[7] This emphasis on constructing the nation through communal labor would also lead to the creation, in 1960, of the Service Civique Rural, a quasi-military service in which young uniformed men performed agricultural work on state farms (Bogosian 2003). While the US would not ignore industrialization as a path toward development, its principal focus was agriculture and its principal strategy was cooperative labor.

The US did not see cooperative institutions as a radical departure from "tradition." Modibo Keita, leader of the US and president of independent Mali, noted in a speech in 1961 that rural production groups "establish among the inhabitants by a law, the ties of solidarity that nature had woven for centuries." He elaborated, "Well before the colonial period, community spirit (*esprit communautaire*) predominated in our villages and constituted the basis and the roots of our society" (Keita 1965:79–80; see also Union Soudanaise 1963:31). The key institution that Keita and other US leaders had in mind was the *ton*, a term referring to a variety of groups that were based on age-grade associations rather than kinship ties. These ton brought together individuals (especially unmarried youth) for the purposes of work and mutual aid as well as ritual and leisure. When Emile Leynaud documented the activities of ton in the upper Niger Valley in 1960, they were

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mostly engaged in agricultural work such as preparing fields and weeding, tasks that either needed to be completed rapidly or were labor intensive. Ton also performed other laborious tasks such as chopping wood, making bricks, or building earthen dams. And they served as mutual assistance societies at the time of marriage or as individuals prepared to migrate to Senegal or Côte d'Ivoire (Leynaud 1966; see also Meillassoux 1968). While the US was partially successful in relying on ton for political mobilization for independence, its efforts to use ton as the basis for its rural production groups and communal agriculture would meet with sustained resistance (see, e.g., Jones 1976).

The US's emphasis on the communitarian dimensions of Mande society was not unusual in nationalist politics. Leftist leaders across the continent, from Senghor to Nyerere, described African societies as communitarian, and while not strictly egalitarian, oriented toward mutual respect among members and a sharing of basic resources by all who needed them (Nyerere 1968:106–8; Senghor 1964:93–94). This perspective of "traditional" Africa engaged with a longstanding European discourse about the key social, economic, and political characteristics of African societies.

Community and Individualism in French Representations of Soudan, 1920s–1930s

From the earliest days of colonial rule until independence, concepts of community, individualism, hierarchy, and equality were central to the way in which French ethnographers and colonial officials understood the societies they encountered in West Africa. In French West Africa and French Soudan in particular, ethnography and colonial administration were closely intertwined. Many of the key ethnographic and historical accounts of the region were written by colonial administrators who subsequently used their expertise in teaching positions at the Ecole Coloniale and the Institut des Langues Orientales in Paris. Among the most noteworthy administrator-ethnographers were Charles Monteil, Maurice Delafosse, Henri Labouret, and Robert Delavignette. Their works not only instructed students of colonial administration but also helped reshape popular French conceptions about Africa. Delafosse (1870–1926), for example, wrote for a general audience with the intention "to define African otherness and to valorize it" (Grosz-Ngaté 1988:505). Labouret (1878–1959) along with Delavignette (1897–1976) is credited with changing African "natives" into "peasants," a category more readily understood and valued by the French public (Cohen 1971:101–4). These administrator-ethnographers were most influential in the interwar period, but their impact was felt in the 1950s as well through the cadre of administrators whom they had trained. Some, such as Delavignette, remained active and influential well into the 1950s, even as other Africanist experts rose to prominence within France.

All these administrator-ethnographers worked within a social evolution-

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ist model of change that sought to place African societies along a unilinear path of development similar to Europe's. This approach allowed them to describe the level of development of a society and to predict how it would change. The relationship between the individual and the community was a key criterion in evaluating African societies, with greater individualism representing a higher stage of social evolution. As van Hoven (1990) has noted, these administrator-ethnographers saw hierarchy as opposing individualism. Labouret and Delafosse, for example, were critical of chiefly authority and saw progress as the liberation of individuals from the constraints of community and a collectivist mentality perceived to be characteristic of "primitive" societies. They saw differentiation in Mande societies as based on inherited status, which they considered a feature of societies lower on the social evolutionary ladder. Colonialism, they argued, should put an end to this feudal system and promote individualism and the equality with which it was allied.

Considering the close links between ethnography and administration, it should not be surprising that colonial policy was deeply concerned with questions of authority, individualism, and social change. During the early years of colonial rule, in line with prevailing social theories that saw hierarchy and inherited status as antithetical to individualism and equality, officials had characterized chiefship as oligarchical and chiefly power as abusive. But if, in theory, increased individualism and a breakdown of hierarchy were seen as progress, in practice, colonial officials soon became worried. With the arrival in office in 1919 of Governor-General Merlin, official views of chiefship began to change. Merlin argued that chiefly power was more benign, and patriarchal and familial in nature. Structure and hierarchy were increasingly seen as grounded in kin relations, and these needed to be sustained and reinforced if French authority were to be maintained (Conklin 1997:187–96).

Merlin's shift was the result of concerns about a decline in community structures that began to be articulated with greater frequency in the 1920s and 1930s. Following the First World War, colonial officials at the highest levels were disturbed by what they perceived as the disintegration of communities, which they attributed to the loss of authority of chiefs. They blamed themselves for having undermined chiefly authority by appointing chiefs whose principal credential had been willingness to collaborate with the French (Cohen 1971:115). The perceived decline of community structures led numerous French observers to panic about the dangers of rampant individualism. In 1930, a political report for Soudan noted:

> But the most serious expression of the new individualist spirit brought in from the outside is the disaggregation of numerous native communities.... One sees villages breaking up in two or more factions that successively take to the bush without rejoining each other.... Sometimes, instead of the disaggregation of a collectivity into several elements, it is the complete

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> regression to individualism.... The collapse of native societies would constitute for our subjects a moral disaster as well as a material one and would moreover strike at our authority... which would be powerless to act on a scattering of anarchic personalities. (CAOM 1AffPol 160 Soudan Rap. Pol. 1930)

As this comment suggests, French authorities feared that this "excessive individualism" would lead to a loss of political control. With family authority and political authority seen as part of the same continuum, it is not surprising that this discourse of disintegration characterized discussions of the family as well. In 1921, the colonialist Henri Cosnier described recent trends in French West Africa:

> The disorganization of collectivities... was completed in a good many regions by the disorganization of the family. The black person is very individualistic by temperament and from an early age. Family groups disperse easily as a result of conflicts of authority, disputes over land. Young blacks are very inclined to reject paternal authority and to enjoy a liberty acquired too early, by emigrating to the towns where they do not always find an honest occupation. (1921:164–65)

Beginning with Governor-General Merlin, the French response to the perceived decline in community structures consisted largely of reinforcing political authority. In line with the more benign view of chiefship, the government general adopted a policy of association that sought to strengthen and increase the role of African notables and chiefs in government.[8] While much of the government's response was focused on political institutions, the concern with the decline of "traditional" community also shaped colonial rural development policy.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, as Soudan began to conceptualize and implement agricultural development programs, officials made reference to the need to reinforce the family and encourage cooperative structures. This was the period that saw the expansion of the Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance (SIP, later known as Société de Prévoyance). The SIP were first established in French West Africa in 1910 and grew rapidly in number in the early 1930s. Farmers were obliged to be members of their local SIP and pay dues to it. The *commandant de cercle* (circle commander) was the director of the SIP. The SIP had multiple functions including operating communal granaries for famine prevention, providing seeds and improved agricultural tools on credit, and marketing the production of their members. The SIP were seen as a way to inculcate "foresight" into African farmers, who were considered to be sorely lacking in this area (Mann & Guyer 1999). The structure and means of operation of the SIP assumed the existence of collective interests and promoted collective solutions to shared problems such as food shortages and famines.

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The case for the importance of cooperative structures was perhaps nowhere more evident than in the policy of *colonisation indigène*, first articulated in the late 1920s (see van Beusekom 2002:ch. 2). This policy underpinned the massive and costly Office du Niger rice and cotton irrigation scheme. Planners of the Office du Niger subscribed to the view that traditional African communities were in decline, but they argued that restoring and rebuilding traditional community structures was a worthwhile goal. M. Bauzil, deputy director of the Office du Niger, employing an evolutionary model of community, distinguished between community structures that relied on proximity and family ties and those that were more "evolved" and could overcome distance and a lack of blood ties with education and sophisticated means of communication. With these more "evolved" forms of community out of reach, Bauzil advocated restoring "traditional" community:

> The black person will be incapable for a long time of understanding that solidarity can extend further than the familial horizon.... If we want... to restore and if necessary rebuild a communal structure in Soudan true to the deep traditions and to the required forms of black character then we should attempt it in conditions as similar as possible to the old village societies: that is with a fixed population, sufficiently dense so that the intensity and stability of social relations engender directly a sense of solidarity. It is only in this way that we can save what remains of the old and admirable communal spirit and give it new life in a rejuvenated context. (1938:44–45)

This "rejuvenated context" included the creation of regional farmers' associations at the Office du Niger. These Associations Agricoles Indigènes (AAI) were, like the SIP, coercive and hierarchical institutions. Membership was mandatory and the top positions were occupied by French administrators. Yet even more explicitly than with the SIP, the AAI were structured as mutualist institutions that provided farmers with inputs and marketed their harvests. The Office du Niger's extension agents were officially on the AAI payroll and the AAI were also responsible for the maintenance of the project's irrigation system (Schreyger 1984; van Beusekom 2002). That the AAI were in reality an extension of the Office du Niger administration and not farmers' cooperatives is less important than the fact that colonial officials touted cooperative structures as a key element of rural development.

Bauzil and others may have had a certain nostalgia for the coherent, self-sufficient, and well-functioning communities they said had been the norm in Soudan's past. But it is important to note that numerous other French officials were more likely to assume that African community structures stifled initiative, especially in the economy. Whether they were nostalgic or had no regrets, the vast majority of French officials saw the end of traditional African community as an inevitable step in the "civilizing" process. They perceived the weakening of community, in fact, as a *necessary* step if agricultural

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production were to improve. From the earliest days of colonial rule, French observers criticized extensive hoe agriculture as primitive, destructive of the environment, and not especially productive. It was, they thought, ill-suited to the expansion in agricultural production that they desired. Intensive agriculture, employing the plow, crop rotations, and fertilizer, was the model they promoted. In French thinking of the time, intensive agriculture went hand-in-hand with the emergence of private property and the nuclear family. The weakening of ties of community and extended kinship was thus causally linked to agricultural intensification and the adoption of European technology (see van Beusekom 2002:ch. 2).

In the interwar period, then, discourse about community among colonial officials combined a nostalgia for the perceived coherence of "traditional" community with a conviction that this community was not adaptive to improvements in farming. Fearful of "rampant individualism," colonial officials sought to stem the disintegration they saw around them and attempted to control the nature and the pace of changes which they nonetheless saw as an inevitable part of "modernization." They began to lay the groundwork for new collective institutions that grouped together "modern" individuals and guided them toward "modern" agricultural methods. These collective institutions like the SIP and the AAI were largely met with hostility or indifference by African farmers, who considered them unresponsive to their concerns. This African opposition contributed to subsequent changes in the way the French designed their rural development programs, but it did not overturn French assumptions that "modern" individualism was a central component of development.

Community and Individualism in French Representations of Soudan, 1940s–1950s

In the postwar period, French interest in community and cooperative institutions shifted and grew. In the 1950s, unlike during the interwar period, government officials did not write at length about the waning of traditional society. That "traditional" society was waning remained a shared assumption, evoked with brief references to "societies that are disintegrating" or in transition from "medieval" to "modern." Many, if not most, colonial officials remained social evolutionist in their outlook. For them, "disintegration" was inevitable and part of a predictable path of development leading from strong, extended kin ties to individualism and modernity (CAOM 2 FIDES/158 Compte-rendu, Groupe de travail, March 18, 1955; Rossin 1954:7).

By the 1950s, however, persistent failures in French efforts to improve agriculture had led French officials to become less confident about their ability to transform the rural economy and more willing to consult with farmers about their methods and their priorities. Moreover, political unrest, initially centered largely in cities and among waged workers, also con-

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tributed to the desire of officials to appease the rural population before it joined forces with urban discontents. Thus postwar interest in community was, as in the interwar period, stimulated at least in part by a desire to maintain political control and to impose order on what threatened to become an increasingly disorderly society. But unlike interwar officials, government officials in the late 1940s and 1950s were far less concerned with reinforcing old community structures and more interested in creating new ones. Nostalgia about "traditional" Africa was rare. The agronomist Pierre Viguier, who had worked in Soudan from the 1930s onward, may have spoken for many when he wrote:

> The future belongs without a doubt to a social organization based on the simple conjugal family and on individual gain. This is moreover, a general tendency at present in all of West Africa, where a veritable silent revolution in terms of individual liberty has been launched. Whether one should deplore this or rejoice in it, doesn't matter, since such an evolution seems inescapable. According to what one can observe on the irrigated lands of the central delta, it seems that the disappearance of the extended family constitutes a stimulus for production in favoring individual initiative. Only those who consider Black Africa an ethnographic reserve will, in sum, regret this evolution. (1950:176)

Viguier reiterated here the long-held belief in colonial circles that individualism was both an inevitable and a positive step on the road to modernity.

Colonial officials were very much preoccupied with what they perceived as the inability of "traditional" ways to cope with the postwar realities of a "modernizing" economy. A typical analysis argued that population growth and the cultivation of cash crops rendered old agricultural practices obsolete. In a government study of soil conservation published in 1952, the authors argued that extensive cultivation practices that demanded five to ten times more land than a farmer would cultivate in any one year were no longer appropriate in an era when surface areas cultivated were expanding because of population growth and cash crop farming (Inspection Générale de l'Agriculture 1952:20). Fears of environmental degradation became more pronounced during this period, and descriptions of extensive cultivation practices made them appear increasingly anarchic, excessively self-interested, and short-sighted.[9]

Colonial officials, concerned about the disjuncture between existing practices and these new economic realities, saw their role as looking for ways to bridge the gap. They saw the establishment of cooperative structures as the answer. Official calls for cooperative institutions were closely tied to the massive new investments being allocated to rural development in the postwar era. The Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES), created in 1946, and the Fonds d'Equipement Rural pour le Développement Economique et Social (FERDES), created in 1949,

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allocated much larger funds than before, mostly in the form of grants for social and economic development. With sizeable funds at their disposal for rural development, government officials had to find new ways to manage the rural economy.

Officials considered it logistically impossible for government assistance to be extended individually and thought that the most efficient way to aid farmers was to work through groups. In the mid-1950s, drawing on earlier experiences with such institutions as the SIP and the AAI, officials, both in the metropole and in the colonies themselves, debated and explored what other kinds of mutualist institutions might be created in order to promote social and economic development.[10] With mutualist institutions officials hoped to be able to motivate the African farmer to undertake what they perceived as essential modernization. If there was one central theme to the 1950s government discussions about rural development it was that the participation of the African farmer was essential to the success of agricultural development programs and that participation was best obtained by organizing farmers into groups.

Whereas interwar officials had been nostalgic about the perceived coherence and stability of "traditional" community institutions, postwar colonial officials began to question whether Africans could act cooperatively. Some saw a role for government in educating rural people about the collective good. In 1957 a metropolitan committee on "rural action" concluded that "it is appearing indispensable to awaken within the traditional collectivities an awareness of the needs and common interests of the group and to arouse the desire to search together for the means to satisfy them" (CAOM 2 FIDES/158 L'action rurale, n.a., n.d.). Repeatedly colonial officials noted that Africans were not ready for certain forms of cooperation, in particular formal cooperatives. In 1955, for example, a report on agricultural policy in French West Africa to the colonial office's committee on rural economic development noted that officials considered "that the evolution of the population was not sufficient that cooperation, in its perfect form, could be proposed to it." Instead, existing rural extension organizations would be gradually transformed toward that end (CAOM 2 FIDES/158 Groupe de travail développement économie rurale, 4ème séance, May 2, 1955). Transitional institutions, run largely by elected members, would be ideal forums where farmers could "familiarize themselves with notions of common interest and solidarity" (CAOM 2 FIDES/158 L'action rurale, n.a., n.d.).

Some French observers and development experts were more optimistic and saw the possibility of building cooperative institutions by adapting local institutions. Among them was Robert Delavignette, who felt that "the peasant of the Negro-African world is not individualist. He works best in community." He thought that the "spirit of mutual aid which drives the collective work of the land" could be capable of serving as the basis for a production cooperative in which modern agricultural equipment could be held in common (1948:277–78). Likewise R. P. D. Malgras, an agronomist

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working among Minianka farmers in the San region, was "struck by the role of work parties [*communautés de travail*] which permitted Minianka peasants to execute agricultural work apparently out of proportion to the limited means used." This led him to initiate the creation of an association of farmers (1959:728).

Even while optimistic about the future of cooperative institutions, Delavignette, for one, remained extremely concerned with what he perceived as the proletarianization of African societies. While expressing concern for proletarianization everywhere, including Europe, Delavignette emphasized the way in which the African proletariat emerged from an "uprooted peasantry" (*paysannerie déracinée*) that had been forcibly recruited for public works projects. Describing urban centers such as Douala and Dakar, Delavignette notes, "One would say that there are, there, under the wretched sun [*soleil triste*], streets without happiness; and sometimes there are even no streets, no refuse collection, no hygiene. One sees only a jumble of sheds, a slum town where the African man is at the same time spellbound and devitalized" (1948:281). Delavignette argued further that this proletarianization was not confined to the cities but affected the countryside as well. Among the sources of proletarianization he identified "the taxes that are impossible to pay, the head-loading [*les portages*], the emigration of young people and a whole host of economic realities, which conspire to alter the old way of life of the peasants and to drive the peasant away from his organization of old and to throw him into a world without soul… where he will have no other rules but imitating the European in the race for profit" (1948:282). For Delavignette, there was no turning back. The disorder and uncertainty he saw around him was unsettling, but to be expected, considering the imperatives of modernization. For him, the upheaval and proletarianization evident in Africa were similar to the experiences of Europe because the two regions were evolving in a similar manner

In the 1930s, fears of rampant individualism had generated nostalgia for the past and efforts to recreate "traditional" community. In the postwar era, excessive individualism was seen as a pervasive reality that could be overcome only through diligent government efforts to instill discipline and cooperation within rural farming communities through the creation of mutualist institutions. Government documents evoke a sense of urgency around this task, as a growing trade union movement and the rise of nationalist parties challenged colonial control in the cities and increasingly in the countryside as well.

Individualism and Community in the Ideology of the Union Soudanaise

As noted earlier, the US also thought cooperative institutions were essential to the future. But their rationale and strategies for promoting coopera-

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tion differed substantively from those of the French colonial administration. French colonial officials who promoted cooperative institutions in the 1950s saw these as a practical way to allocate development funds and as a bridge toward a European economic model. For Modibo Keita and other party members such as Seydou Badian Kouyaté, cooperatives were a way to strengthen core values and practices and diminish and ultimately eliminate colonial (or neocolonial) control of the economy. Kouyaté saw evidence for the compatibility of socialism in the Bambara expression "Who am I and what can I do without others? When I arrived I was in their hands and when I go, I will be in their hands" (1963:67). Cooperatives, for Kouyaté and others, were a way to liberate the peasants from "the network of parasitic intermediaries who were the last link of the colonial system of exploitation" (Kouyaté 1963:69–70).

But insistence that communitarian principles were traditionally African did not mean that the US thought that cooperatives or collective work would be automatically and readily accepted by farmers. In 1958, in a three-part article in *L'Essor*, the US discussed the precise nature of communal property and collective work in rural communities. It noted that while certain property, such as fallow land, fishing pools, and hunting grounds, belonged to the village collectivity, other property, such as cultivated land, harvests, and cattle, belonged to families. This private property was "jealously kept," and family units relied on their own means for the maintenance and growth of this property. These means, the US argued, were "often rudimentary and irrational." The challenge facing the US as it sought to implement cooperatives in the countryside was "how to group certain means of production of the collectivity and organize a rational marketing circuit that was compatible with the peasant mentality" (*Essor* 1958b: no. 2826). The US recognized however, that farmers did not see collective work as an end in itself but as a means to accomplish certain labor-intensive tasks such as planting and threshing, noting that "the notion of communal production requires a certain alienation of private property for the benefit of the community. That is the point that will initially shock our peasants. One should, moreover, never think that it will be possible to push this alienation to its furthest extremes. Passed a certain limit, the organization will have no members" *(Essor* 1958b: no. 2845).

The discussion of the nature of "traditional" ties of solidarity was closely tied to US leaders' understandings of historical change, whose broad outlines were viewed as following a predictable pattern. Adopting a Marxist evolutionary model, they sought to explain the past in terms of three key phases of history: feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Like French Marxists and colonial ethnographers, they identified precolonial Africa as feudal, although the US's discomfort with this designation is palpable. In his lengthy report to the sixth congress of the US, Idrissa Diarra was tentative when he noted that

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> The colonial conquests found Africa, and particularly our country, under a regime whose characteristics *could be* similar in *some* respects to the feudal regime in Europe. The economy, essentially based on agriculture and small-scale craft, was essentially a subsistence economy, though certain commercial currents gave our country, to some extent, the character of a *market economy* in comparison to the majority of other African countries [emphasis added]. (Union Soudanaise 1963:83)

Diarra goes on to highlight political fragmentation following the decline of the Mali empire, describing it as "a true feudal dispersion" (Union Soudanaise 1963:83).

Yet Diarra and others could not ignore the very real divergences between the historical development of Sahelian West Africa and the European Marxist model, and in seeking to make sense of these divergences they emphasized the disruptive effects of colonialism. Yaya Kane (1960), in an article initially published in *Le Mali* and reprinted in *L'Essor*, noted that "the first impression to emerge after sociological analysis of the African environment reveals clearly: a society whose 'predictable mechanistic' evolution was disrupted by the fact of colonialism." Diarra developed this idea further, arguing that colonial conquest "brought its traders, charged with draining towards the French metropole, raw materials from our country and with selling products made by French industry." Colonialism, Diarra continued, had smothered the development of African commerce and artisanal production and had blocked the emergence of a bourgeoisie, distorting the economic development of the country. For Diarra, there had been three principal consequences of colonialism: (1) the establishment of unequal commercial exchange that had impoverished the population; (2) the creation of a system of rule that had undermined the authority of chiefs; and (3) the emergence of a small but politically significant number of educated people who had used the French ideals of racial and social equality to challenge the legitimacy of colonial rule (Union Soudanaise 1963:83–84). Diarra and Kane may not have been willing to dismiss evolutionary models entirely, but their analyses of the Soudanese past sought to show that their applicability was limited.

That the leaders of the US found feudalism to have only limited explanatory power is perhaps also evident in the fact that the empires of the precolonial period were often evoked in highly positive terms in political speeches and in party publications when these sought to promote nationalist sentiment and cultural pride. In 1959 *L'Essor* publicized the public history lessons provided by Mamby Sidibe every Wednesday evening outside the Bamako post office and *L'Essor hebdomadaire* ran a weekly cartoon version of the Sundiata epic.[11] Similarly, Idrissa Diarra's historical account at the Sixth Congress of the Union Soudanaise in 1963 noted the heroic resistance of certain chiefs and their supporters to colonialism (Union Soudanaise 1963:83).

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Unlike French colonial officials and experts, US leaders did not see a rampant and inevitable increase in individualism. It is not that US leaders did not see individualism as a potential problem. US writings do discuss rising individualism with some concern. In 1959 an article entitled "Préserver le collectivisme" in *L'Essor hebdomadaire* observed:

> It is certain that Western individualism is gradually establishing itself in customs, but one would be wrong to believe that it is the Western way of thinking that is responsible for this established fact. In reality, this Western individualism is not itself but the consequence of societal structures that, based on private gain, divide men instead of uniting them. Now it is these same structures which are spreading in Africa and it is on their taking root or on their disappearing that depends either the reawakening of traditional solidarity transformed in modern collectivism or the reinforcement of individualism. (1959c)

Nationalist leaders, unlike colonial officials of the same period, did not see this individualism as widespread or as an inevitable and necessary step in social development. In fact, despite considerable differences in income, the US argued that class struggle or the division of society into classes had been blocked partly by "the profoundly anchored traditional solidarity... which Western individualism although intrusive had not yet altered" (*Essor* 1959a). While it was certainly possible that inequalities in income and standard of living would lead to divisiveness, this had not yet occurred and could and should be prevented. The end of colonial rule and the loss of the common bond of anticolonialism were seen as potentially contributing to the diminishing of traditional solidarity.[12]

It is not that the US saw no change in what Keita had termed "the ties of solidarity that nature had woven for centuries." Party leaders noted that a decline in these ties was possible, but they also pointed to an abuse of them. In urban centers, Diarra noted, this communitarian spirit had become distorted, leading to *parasitisme* as unemployed youth in the towns expected support from their employed relatives. This was contrary to "traditional solidarity," which was based on "work done in common by the members of the family" who could then expect their basic needs to be met by the head of the family (Union Soudanaise 1963:69).

This worry about parasitic behavior tied in closely with an area of social change that the US highlighted in its newspaper in the late 1950s: attitudes about work among the urban population. The US worried that urban workers lacked initiative and conscientiousness and attributed this to the meager benefits that they had gained from their labor under colonialism. Work, according to the US, was associated with colonial rule and opposition to the colonial ruler was expressed by "a disaffection toward everything he advocated, notably work" (*Essor* 1958d). This aversion posed a threat as Soudan moved toward independence, and the US noted that "from now on, every

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negligence at work is a serious misdeed against the collectivity, against Soudan, against Mali, against the future of Africa" (*Essor hebdomadaire* 1959d).

What emerges from this examination of the US's ideas regarding individualism and community is the fact that US leaders were less confident than other nationalists, notably Léopold Senghor of Senegal, that the evils of individualism were characteristically European rather than a consequence of capitalism. Another key element was the US's conviction that "traditional" community spirit or "collectivism" was not enough. The US wrote about changes and modifications needed to this collectivism and actively sought out models elsewhere. Both colonial officials and US leaders wanted to educate the rural population about cooperation. Whereas many colonial officials saw little to build on, US leaders saw rural communities as already having a good basis for cooperation.

US members visited cooperatives in Europe and used them as examples in educational broadcasts on the radio and in newspaper articles (Direction du Service de l'Agriculture 1960; *Essor* 1959b). More significant for the US was the example of Israel.[13] Following a visit to Israel in 1958 by Modibo Keita, Seydou Badian Kouyaté, Salah Niaré, and Zouboye Mohammed, the US highlighted Israel as a success story on which it could draw as it designed rural development policy.[14] Of particular interest was the fact that Israeli farmers, who also faced arid and semi-arid conditions, had yields that were two to five times the size of those of Soudanese farmers and that Israel had well-developed cooperatives engaged in agricultural, industrial, cultural, and educational activities. While at least one US leader questioned whether the Israeli model was replicable, considering Israel's unlimited financial support from American capitalists (*Essor* 1958c), it is clear that the US, like many of Israel's cooperatives, sought to create multipurpose cooperatives that served the marketing and consumption needs of their members as well as providing education and health care (*Essor hebdomadaire* 1959b).

The differences in the US's perception of individualism and community and that of French officials would contribute to significant discord as US leaders took over rural development planning. There remained, of course, some common ground. Some US leaders (typically the less radical ones) saw eye-to-eye with the more progressive French officials and experts, pushing for a recognition of peasants as rational, if not always equipped with the latest technology and agricultural expertise; they advocated for a practical approach to agricultural development based on the technical and agronomic prescriptions of French agronomists. Pierre Viguier, in fact, would be hired to head up Mali's Institut d'Economie Rurale and his book, *L'Afrique de l'Ouest vue par un agriculteur*, which contained his prescriptions for agricultural development, would be distributed to *commandants de cercle*.[15] But differences of perspective would emerge.[16] As the US became increasingly committed to socialism, the government opted for collective fields in all villages, increased mechanization, and state enterprises for the import of agricultural inputs and the marketing of harvests. While one

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could well argue that all these approaches had precedents in the colonial era, the US pursued these policies with greater rigor and commitment, and in the eyes of many farmers, with greater coercive power. Leading party members saw their approach as substantively different from earlier policies and as crucial to the building of a socialist state independent of French interests. These policies, they argued, would build on communitarian principles, which were perceived by most French ethnologists and policymakers as inevitably in decline but which were seen by many US leaders as crucial building blocks in the creation of a new society.

Conclusion

Nationalists and French officials and experts shared a faith in Western agronomy and technology. They also shared a language of development centered on the concepts of tradition, modernity, community, and individualism. Some of the more progressive French experts also shared with US leaders a desire to build on existing community institutions such as the work party. Some of these progressive French experts and some US officials also shared a vision of rural development as gradual, small-scale, and peasant-centered. This common ground facilitated the conversations and negotiations of the late colonial era about the direction that rural development should take. But it also masked divergent interpretations of the social and economic changes that had taken place in French Soudan during the colonial era as well as fundamental disagreements about the best institutions for promoting agricultural growth.

The common ground that existed among nationalists and French colonial officials and experts was no doubt the result of significant intellectual interaction. It has been widely acknowledged that as a result of Western education, African elites had been strongly influenced by European social theorists and ethnographers. Recently historians such as Philip Zachernuk (2000) and François Manchuelle (1995) have suggested that the educated elite did not merely adopt the ideas of European theorists and ethnographers. Rather, they selected elements and reshaped them into their own representations of Africa. US leaders fit that model as they engaged with Marxist ideology, social evolutionary theory, European ethnography of Africa, and European dualities of tradition/modernity and community/individualism as well as their own knowledge of Mande social structures and their experience of colonization.

The result was a complex, hybrid notion of Africa and of rural development. US leaders questioned the social evolutionism that was inherent in much European thinking about Africa, especially the evolutionism characteristic of ethnologists. They sought to draw a distinction between Westernization and what one might call scientific and technological modernization. They embraced many of the technological and scientific dimensions of French development policy, but they did not expect development to lead

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necessarily to Westernization. On a social and cultural level they expected to be able to chart their own course. Marxism, in spite of its own evolutionary paradigm, was an attractive ideology, at least in part because it offered a vision of a better life but one that differed from contemporary Europe. The US leadership did not find Marxism's concept of class struggle to be particularly applicable to West Africa, and it could not easily identify feudalism or capitalism in the region. But what US leaders did find attractive was Marxism's vision of an egalitarian society in which the needs and concerns of all people were met. Marxism offered the possibility of industrialization without the alienation and racism that so many African intellectuals saw as characteristic of Europe. It offered a framework within which community would not be supplanted by individualism.

My findings, along with those of Zachernuk and Manchuelle, suggest that there was considerable exchange among intellectual elites—both European and African—during the colonial era. These exchanges defy easy description; the term "borrow" does not do justice to the complex interactions among elites that included the acceptance, rejection, adaptation, and reformulation of ideas from a variety of sources. I would suggest that a similar process characterized the development of European ideas about Africa, a topic beyond the scope of this paper but which no doubt should be explored further. European representations of Africa also emerged from complex interactions with a range of sources, including the African intellectual elite. Bennetta Jules-Rosette, for example, points to the ways in which the journal *Présence Africaine* contributed to shifts in French anthropology and functioned as "a trilogue among the African elite, French intellectuals, and the African masses"(1998:36). Certainly after 1945, and perhaps even by the 1930s, the interactions between African elites and European experts on Africa were intensive and regular enough that conceptualizing the exchange of ideas as "circulation" among elites would be more accurate than the longstanding practice of examining African borrowings from Europe. Because the channels of intellectual exchange from African elites to European experts on Africa were mostly informal in nature, these have generally been hidden from view. Nonetheless hints of these appear in the scholarship of European scholars, suggesting that we should rethink the way we study the intellectual life of late colonial Africa to view European and African elites through the same lens. [17]

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Notes

1. The US initially united the Bloc Soudanais, the Parti Démocratique du Soudan, and the Parti Progressiste Soudanais. The Bloc Soudanais included Mamadou Konaté, Modibo Keita, and Mamadou Fadiala Kieta. The Parti Démocratique du Soudan included Idrissa Diarra and Aboubacar Sissoko. The PDS saw itself as communist (Campmas 1987:28–29).
2. See Morgenthau (1964:10–14) for an overview of educational institutions in French West Africa. See Sabatier (1977, 1978, 1985) for a more detailed study of the Ecole William Ponty. See Campmas (n.d. [1987]) for biographies of the principal leaders of the US.

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3. The course was one hour per week and "was divided into four main parts: A.O.F. before colonization, including the early savanna empires; early exploration and trade; the formation of the colonies in the late nineteenth century; and administrative history and economic development in A.O.F. since the end of the nineteenth century" (Sabatier 1977:83).
4. Once in power, the US initiated campaigns against brush firing (Keita 1965:72, 82). On the Keita government's agricultural policy, see Diarrah (1986) and Jones (1976).
5. Union Soudanaise, Circulaire no. 22 bis, Bases d'organisation et de travail sur le territoire d'une section, Sept. 16, 1947, and Union Soudanaise, Rapport d'organisation, Nov. 7, 1947, Morgenthau, comp. n.d., Reel 2. I am grateful to Fred Cooper for pointing me to the Morgenthau collection of documents.
6. Union Soudanaise, Troisième Congrès Territoriale, 25, 26, et 27 Septembre 1952, Commission Economique et Sociale, Morgenthau, comp. n.d., Reel 2.
7. *Essor* 1960. See also articles in *L'Essor* on collective work parties engaged in planting trees, constructing buildings, cleaning markets, and repairing roads, e.g. no. 3194, Sept. 21, 1959; no. 3195, Sept. 22, 1959; no. 3196, Sept. 23, 1959; no. 3201, Sept. 29, 1959; no. 3213, Oct. 13, 1959; no. 3246, Nov. 21, 1959.
8. Several governors-general insisted on the importance of relying on "traditional" African leaders as France's intermediaries, including Clozel and Van Vollenhoven. Governor-General Merlin articulated this association policy in a more formal fashion (see Conklin 1997:ch. 6).
9. In 1945, for example, Viguier wrote: "Clearing land for agriculture would be nothing if the native did not use the easiest but the most savage means: fire. Because the fire of course does not stop at the section that has been cleared but continues everywhere where it can find nourishment." Viguier went on to critique the way in which herders burned pasture in order to promote the growth of new grasses. This, Viguier argued, made the pasture inedible later on in the season "and in the subsequent dry season, the native again sets the fire, improving briefly the situation, but exacerbating it increasingly for the future, since the grasses of the fire climax are not, one can well imagine, among the most tender!" (CAOM SOM C4448 Viguier, *Soudan Français: Ressources et possibilités agricoles*, 31).
10. CAOM, 2 FIDES/158 Groupe de travail pour le développement rural, 1955. The SIP and AAI were among the institutions studied by this working group.
11. *Essor* 1959c; *L'Essor hebdomadaire* 22–33 (July 31–Oct. 16, 1959).
12. "Chacun en effet s'accorde à reconnaitre que la solidarité traditionnelle qui plonge dans les racines de l'âme noire, est entrain de s'effriter lentement mais sûrement. Le départ du colonisateur risque dans une certaine mesure, de l'accentuer car la présence dominatrice, malgré le fameux 'diviser pour regner' avait permis de renforcer cette solidarité" (*L'Essor hebdomadaire* 1959c).
13. According to Raymond Lefevre, who accompanied a Soudanese delegation to Israel, RDA interest in Israel dated back to 1957 when Roland Pré called Houphouet-Boigny's attention to the relevance of Israel's experiences for Africa. In 1958 Golda Meir, on a stopover in Abidjan, spent an evening with Houphouet-Boigny, Modibo Keita, and other RDA leaders and suggested that they visit Israel. Lefevre also noted a longstanding interest of some African students in Israeli experiences, remarking on the presentation on Israel made by Seydou Kouyaté in 1957 in Bamako, which reflected solid knowledge of Israeli

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institutions (CAOM 1 AffPol 2188/3 Note sur la visite d'une délégation du Soudan Français en Israel, Raymond Lefevre).

14. Seydou Badian Kouyaté was the Minister of Rural Economy and Planning; Salah Niaré was the Minister of Agriculture, and Zouboye Mohammed worked in the Cooperative Service (CAOM 1 AffPol 2188/3 Note sur la visite d'une délégation du Soudan Français en Israel, Raymond Lefevre; *Essor* 1958c. See also *Essor hebdomadaire* 1959a).
15. Interview with Pierre Viguier, January 2005, Nérac, France. Letter, August 1, 1961, Gouverneur de la région de Bamako à Messieurs les commandants de cercle de Bamako, Dioila, Kolokani, Koulikoro et Nara; letter, December 12, 1961, Commandant de cercle de Kolokani à Monsieur le Gouverneur de la région de Bamako. Copies provided to author by Pierre Viguier.
16. Pierre Viguier, for example, found it increasingly difficult to work with the Keita government, and his disagreements with Seydou Badian Kouyaté were so profound that he was forced out in April 1962. Interview with Pierre Viguier, January 2005, Nérac, France, and letter, April 17, 1962, Viguier to Monsieur le Président. Copy provided to author by Pierre Viguier.
17. To cite just one example of the engagement of European intellectuals with the perspectives of African intellectuals: in a roundtable discussion held in 1958, Georges Balandier responded to an audience member's reference to "parasitism" in the cities by noting that this rather negative European formulation of the problem was contested by Africans and failed to adequately explain the nature of familial relationships in the cities (Balandier 1958:28).

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