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EDITOR'S NOTE

This is part of a larger unpublished study *The Modernization of Africa*

« La colonisation officielle se passait entre hommes, c'était une affaire d'hommes » – Kniebiehler et Gautier *La Femme au Temps des Colonies*

1 The literature on the colonial period of Africa is very large, including sociological analysis opened up by Balandier's seminal notion of "colonial situation" a generation ago[1]. However, the imagery and role of women in the construction and evolution of modern colonial Africa has had scant rigorous attention[2]. The topic deserves much greater empirical and analytical weight for various reasons.

2 First, sexuality in the form of erotic imagery was part of the exoticism that provided an additional enticement, besides economic and strategic reasons, to have colonies: colonial "possessions" were in the collective imaginary possessions of sexual delights that could not be directly expressed in the newly rationalize, industrial setting of the second half of the nineteenth century and its ubiquitous somber Victorian ethos. Whether a "Madame Butterfly" in the Far East, or the harem courtesan in North Africa and the Middle East depicted in paintings from Ingres to Matisse, or the "Black Eve" on French colonial stamps, the "native woman" was an important lure in attracting European men from the private and public sectors to the colonies. Adventure, profits, and exotic women were the other side of the coin of the image of Africa, whose "dark side" was its unhealthy aspect making it unsafe for Europeans[3].

3 In this we shall see how the African setting, in the formative years of colonization, manifested itself in the perception of a selected group of Westerners: women travelers in Africa. The rationale for devoting a chapter to such a group is as follows. First and foremost, in Victorian-industrial society women were marginal to European society in terms of the locus of economic and political power they did not vote and were in effect excluded from most professions (law, medicine, university teching), managerial positions, and occupations of high socio-economic status. One can speak, in retrospective, of a certain "institutional sexism" present which made the situation of a woman three-quarters of a century ago structurally similar to the situation of a Negro in American society until quite recently. There was prevalent the biological myth of women being of "the weaker sex", having mental and psychological characteristics so different from men that their participation in the larger society, on an equal footing with men, was unthinkable. Women were seen as more emotional, as dependent on men, and lacking creativity... all this from "innate" biological or constitutional factors[4].

Population in French Africa, 1904 – 1905

Country	Total	French Born		
		Total	Males	Females
Senegal	899.000	1.471	NA	NA
Ivory Coast	1.479.000	1.147	954	129
Dahomey	889.000	553	537	15
Upper Senegal & Niger	4.000.000	210	NA	NA
Congo	5.000.000	1.070	978	92
Madagascar & dependencies	2.645.000	7.820	4.910	2.910

source: Résultats Statistiques du recensement General de la Population effectué le 24 mars 1901, vol. 4, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906, p. 336 (The census in the colonies was undertaken in 1904 – 1905).

4 Second, demographically, as Table indicates, not only was colonial society at the turn of the century asymmetrical in terms of whites /Africans, but sex ratios within the dominant white population were equally distorted from the more normal sex ratio of either the metropolitan setting of the traditional African one. Not until the late 1920s and early 1930s did sex ratios in the European contingent of colonial society become more "normal", to a large extent resulting from the development of commercial air service *and* the availability of refrigerators, both of which permitted or facilitated the setting up of "standard" European households. Colonial society may thus be said to have been, in this context, a "no-woman's land", akin, particularly during its first phase, to the setting of frontier society in the American case[5].

5 The demographic underrepresentation of European women in the new colonies reflected many things; for many advocates of colonization it was a problem to be confronted, and

different remedies were proposed. With hindsight one can say that presuppositions, attitudes, and imagery grounded in the European societal context were constitutive of the demographic problems of the colonial situation.

6 For one thing, the prevalent image of the tropics as a "White man's grave" was in itself strong deterrent to bring in the "weaker sex" to Africa; in effect, by the turn of the century, the deterrence of Africa's imagery might be more accurately portrayed as ""White woman's grave", as we shall see later in this essay. The evolution in the nineteenth century imagery of women as the "weaker sex" bears passing attention here, since it relates to the interesting marginalization of middle-class women from the public sphere.

7 In the advanced industrial urban society of the nineteenth century, middle class women were marginal to the new loci of economic and political power: they did not vote and were excluded from most professions, managerial positions, and other positions of high socio-economic status. Additionally, they were excluded from other spaces, such as public schools and clubs. This institutional sexism was hettressed by the biological myth of women being of the "weaker sex", not only physically weaker but also having mental and psychological characteristics so different from men that their participation in the public sphere on an equal footing with men was unthinkable. Women were assumed to be more emotional, more dependent, and lacking creativity – all this from "innate" constitutional factors.

8 The image of domesticity and gentility associated with middle-class city life in which women found a niche (or a gilded cage) was obviously dissonant with the African setting prior to World War I, where there were few cities and fewer still department stores and emporia to provide the amenities of modern civilized life. The frontier setting of the "bush" with its wild animals and military atmosphere which would become animated on many occasions with "wars" against native rebels, was definitely not seen as a "woman's world". One can even say that in termes of the total configuration of early colonial society, resembling something of a cross between a lumberjack camp, a military fort, a frontier setting and a penal colony, white middle-class women, certainly white were something of an anomaly.

9 For the most part, however, the absence of white women was taken as a given and not as a crucial obstacle to colonization. In an influential work, Bordier[6] had argued for the cross-breeding of Europeans with natives to produce a new colonial race, which in terms of his breeding analogy would produce a new, vigorous colonial race. Less elevated or theoretical in tone, but of equal sociological interest, is a work published nearly twenty years later by a French doctor with many years of experience in the tropics: Barot's *"Guide Pratique de l'Européen dans l'Afrique Occidentale"*[7]. As the title indicates, this was meant to offer a complete gamut of advice on everyday living problems in the colonies. Among its 500-odd pages is a section on sexual comportment, addressed, naturally, to European males who find themselves in Africa, and who may lack "the moral strength necessary to stand two years of absolute continence"[8]. What to do?

10 Barot advocates as the only reasonable thing to do: *"to have a temporary union with a well chosen native woman"*[9]. The reasons for this sage advice are several. On hygienic grounds, such a companion is much more likely to be healthy than a black prostitute. On social grounds, a "marriage" with a native woman, especially the daughter of a chief, can facilitate understanding and improve ties with influential Africans, while a footloose

European who chases after married men's wives will not be well regarded by blacks he deals with. On psychological grounds,

> If the female is not too dumb, the European male gets attached to her, she distracts him, takes care of him, takes away his boredom and sometimes prevents him from alcoholism or sexual depravities which unfortunately are so common in tropical countries[10].

11 And lastly, argues Barot, there are sound pedagogic reasons in undertaking a (temporary) union: it is one of the surest ways of learning African languages, of having entry to the most hidden native customs, to learn songs and legends, in short "to understand the black soul"[11]. Barot follows up with advice of the formal procedures involved in securing such a union, as well as how to "cool the mark" when one is about to return to Europe. He even provides the name of establishments in the French territories (at Kita and at Dinguira) where for a nominal sum offsprings of such unions can be brought up. Like Bordier before him, Barot saw offsprings of such unions as beneficial to the task of colonization: "... it is by the creation of mulatto races that we will most easily Frenchify West Africa"[12].

12 Barot looked forward to the new colonial race of mulattos with great expectations, partly because it would be a long time before white children could be brought up in tropical climates, partly because the new breed of races could be attractive, strong and intelligent. And he added that if mulattos have in the past been rather unfriendly to the colonizers, it is because Europeans have tended to despise them rather than understand them, which is very shortsighted and unintelligent on the part of whites[13].

13 Although statistics are lacking, quite likely a large number of European males, with or without reading his book, followed Barot's advice. Yet, there were other voices who advocated that for an effective and permanent colonization, the presence of white women was indispensable to stabilize colonial society. One early presentation of this viewpoint is contained in the publication of two addresses delivered at a meeting of January 12, 1897, of the Union Coloniale Française, a major lobby for colonial expansion[14].

14 The first speaker, le Comte d'Haussonville, was not a specialist on colonies nor a militant "feminist" in his own terms, but was interested in the amelioration of the social situation of women. He argued that the new colonies offered women better possibilities than could be had in Europe. He mentioned that presently (1897) men were taking away jobs which were formerly the preserve of women and that men were preventing women from taking jobs which they could do as well as men[15]. Moreover, he continued, many women in Europe have, through their educational training, acquired aspirations which cannot be fulfilled in satisfactory careers. If the situation was bleak in Europe, it was much brighter in the colonies, since the quantity and quality of European women there left something to be desired. The kinds of women found in the colonies, he noted, are the following: (a) a handful of devoted wives of civil servants, wishing their husbands had been appointed elsewhere, (b) used-up entertainers ("divettes de café-concert") who can no longer get billings anywhere in the home country, and (c) religious sisters or nuns. What is lacking is a fourth type, attractive and intelligent nubile females, a *sine qua non* for the marriages of European males in the colonies for "no marriages, no families, and without families, no more colonies in the future"[16]. And, echoing the nineteenth-century Teutonic male credo of "Kinder, Kuchen, Kirche", Haussonville terminated his address by stressing that the real career of a woman lies in marriage rather than in the school, the telegraph, or the telephone[17].

15 The major speech was given by Joseph Chailley-Bert, a tireless and influential spokesman for colonial expansion. Colonies need stable colons and to be stable, colons need be married. The *Union Coloniale Française,* which had done much in recent years to attract colons from the ranks of impoverished farmers and impoverished petits bourgeois, was now turning its attention to remedying the shortage of women in the colonies, where the sex ratio was from 5: 1 to 10: 1. Chailley-Bert argued that the colonies could provide an outlet for nubile women: he argued that with rising dowry demands on the part of prospective husbands and declining resources of families with daughters to marry[18], there would be a surplus of women unable to marry and have a place in society[19].

16 Moreover, he pointed out, there was also a number of women who have diplomas and have passed state examinations but have no means of livelihood open. The conclusion was that the new colonies could provide outlets for the surplus population of women (just as a few years before the colonies had been hailed as providing outlets for surplus industrial production and surplus capital investments). In brief, Chailley-Bert made the argument that the colonies were a place for social mobility for women[20].

17 Chailley-Bert envisaged the setting up of a "society of feminine emigration" to encourage young women to go to the new colonies to look for a better situation and hopefully, to get married, a society "patterned after English societies of the same sort"[21]. Should the supply exceed the demand, applicants would be given questionnaires, like English societies did, to select out the best. Then personal inquiries would be made for a final screening.

18 Apparently, not many women "got the message", at least in the case of French Africa, where, with the exception of Madagascar, women remained a small part of the European population, as shown in Table p. 211.

19 Much later, when Robert Doucet wrote his *Commentaires sur la Colonisation*[22], the sex ratio had not yet shown much improvement. Writing in 1926, the author noted that in West Africa the ratio was 3: 1 and in Equatorial Africa, 5: 1[23]. However, what is new in this work is the amplification of the social role of white women in Africa. Essentially, Doucet held that white women have a civilizing function vis-a-vis European males and vis-a-vis Africans, stemming from the image of woman as having different natural psychological characteristics from man.

20 Thus, Doucet urged the presence of white women in the African colonies because: "Having nearly always horror of violence, a woman, simply by her being there, prevents many acts of brutality"[24]. But more than not letting things happen, she also can play a positive role in colonization "if she knows intelligently how to participate in the task of domestication (*l'oeuvre d'apprivoisement*) which is a major objective in colonial policy"[25].

21 As a teacher, without any pretensions and solely by virtue of her equanimity and her affability, a (white) woman can exercise a moral influence on natives, continued Doucet, which is more efficacious than that of many male administrators or instructors[26].

22 To be sure, cautioned Doucet, a woman who is either loose or unintelligent, who can't adapt to local conditions, who treats natives either by despising them or loving them, is a heavy burden for any colony to bear, for she "surely destroys the indispensable prestige of the white over the colored man"[27]. As negative types of this kind found in the colonies are on the one hand, the woman-apostle "having the soul of a Livingstone"[28], and, on the other, the vain if not sadistic type who will parade undressed in front of her male servants under the pretext that "a black is not a man", taking pleasure in arousing in servants "deplorable and dangerous" passions[29].

23 Finally, concluded the author, the white woman will have a positive influence on her husband: by preventing him from living with native women (which is a moral lapse, he added) and thereby this will naturally do away with offsprings of such union, who are disavowed equally by both races[30]. Looking ahead to the near future, Doucet contended that the presence of the white woman in the colonies would soon have an influence which would have repercussions in the whole atmosphere of colonial society.

24 There was something prophetic about what Doucet had said, but with different results than he had anticipated. In the next two decades, white women did come to Africa in greater numbers, and the social atmosphere did change. With wives and children of Europeans in the African colonies, residential and social segregation became institutionalized, particularly so in British colonies: hotels, bars, social clubs, even food stores – all these providing daily affronts to Africans no less bearable than other aspects of colonial oppression[31]. To spell out in detail the influence of the increased presence of white women in African colonial society would be a major undertaking beyond the space available in this article, but we might content ourselves with the observation of O. Mannoni, writing after World War II with quite a different evaluation from that of the earlier one of Doucet:

> A great psychological change has in fact come about in the course of a single generation, which may in part be due to the racialist influence of the European women[32].

25 A psychologist, Mannoni suggested that the racialism of the European woman in the colonies (at least in the case of Madagascar) had several key components: over-compensation for an inferiority complex, the desire to show her superiority over the Malagasy or native woman, and in issuing tyrannical orders to the native males, an unconscious urge to dominate a male figure[33]. One can debate with the factors he adduces, but that increased numbers of European women settled in the colonies, either as housewives or as shopkeepers contributed to the exacerbation of racial antagonisms by their treatment of Africans placed in subordinate roles is hardly to be doubted[34].

26 In brief, the colonization of Africa had a very ambibalent perspective on European women. On the one hand, women were seen as having a role in domesticating the colonial setting, but on the other hand, colonial society was seen as off-limits for women, implicitly as a reserve for European masculine endeavors. Two groups of European women fell in between the cracks. First, the religious orders which were allowed because they provided valuable services in training African women and providing various unpaid services for the colonial administration (Knibiehler and Gautalier, chap. 5), and whose missions were on the margin of colonial society. Second, an unusual group of transient (or "anomalous") persons, marginal by their gender and unattachement to the colonial situation and to colonial ideology: Women travelers to Africa[35]. It is accounts of the colonial setting by several of the latter to which we turn for the remainder of this essay.

27 One went to Africa in part as a representative of British commercial interests, another accompanied her husband sent to the French Sudan on a factfinding mission, and two went on their own simply out of curiosity. All were in sub-Sahara Africa in the period 1890-1910, the formative years or first generation of modern Africa civilization. Unlike the brilliant cluster of western women, particularly anthropologists like Audrey Richards, Monica Wilson, Mary Douglas, Hilda Kuper, Eleanor Bowen, Germaine Dieterlen, Denise Paulme, to mention a few, who have made noteworthy contributions to the African literature from the 1930s on, the women whose accounts we shall discuss were not

trained as social scientists; yet their perception of the social situation was a keen one, providing the penetrating gaze of the observer.

28 The first we shall consider is quite well known through two works which have become classics of the Africana travel literature (both have been reprinted in recent years): Mary Kingsley, author of *Travels in West Africa* (1897) and *WestAfrican Studies* (1899). A close friend of John Holt, a leading figure in Britain's commercial relations with Africa, Mary Kingsley was a champion of free trade in Africa, free not only from government restrictions but also from missionary influences: she felt that missionaries or missionary societies at home slandered the action of British traders on the West Coast of Africa. But she can hardly be labelled a typical British "imperialist" in the style of a Disraeli, a Chamberlain or a Rhodes; her writings do not reveal an advocate of a "manifest destiny" of British imperial rule, nor a supporter of Social Darwinism. In fact, in a period prone to view and dismiss Africans as inferior beings on the lower end of the scale of social evolution, "she did more than any other writer to produce in Europe a willingness to try to understand African behaviour"[36] – an understanding based on concrete observations rather than on a priori postulates or theories concerning "primitive" men. Like many later anthropologists (and sociologists) who go off for the first time in "the field", when she first set out for West Africa in 1893, her mind was "full of the deductions of every book on Ethnology... that I had read during fifteen years – and being a good Cambridge person, I was particularly confident from Mr. Frazer's book, *The Golden Bough,* I had got a semi-universal key to the underlying idea of native custom and belief"[37]. She had also read other anthropological writings (she was most impressed with E.E. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*), but she managed to avoid letting her intellectual baggage weigh down her on-the- scene observations[38].

29 Her feelings toward Africans are expressed in the following passage:

> I confess I like the African on the whole, a thing 1 never expected to do when I went to the Coast with the idea that he was a degraded, savage, cruel brute, but that is a trifling error you soon get rid of when you know him[39].

30 An indication that she perceived with an open mind is her comparison of the African with Westerners:

> The Kruboy is decidedly the most likeable of all Africans that 1 know... In his better manifestations he reminds me of that charming personality the Irish peasant, for though he lacks the sparkle, he is full of humour, and is the laziest and the most industrious of mankind[40].

31 It might be argued that this passage indicates British stereotypic image of the Irish, but Mary Kingsley was more making the point that the African is a humain being just like warm other human beings in the United Kingdom of her day, rather than intrinsically belonging to a different and inferior race apart from mankind. Thus, she explicitly rejected the then prevalent teachings of physical anthropology concerning cranial and physiological differences between Africans and Europeans (p. 672f).

32 In another passage, she criticizes the then standard image of the African as a child:

> ... you cannot associate with them long before you must recognize that these Africans have often a remarkable mental acuteness and a large share of common sense... there is nothing really "child-like" in their form of mind at all. Observe them further and you will find they are not a flighty-minded, mystical set of people in the least...[41].

33 The one area where she found Africans inferior to Europeans was in mechanical aptitude, but in this it was more a matter of environmental circumstances rather than stemming from innate biological factors:

> This absence of mechanical aptitude... most likely has the very simple underlying reason that the conditions under which the African has been living have been such as to make no call for a higher mechanical culture[42].

34 There was, it should be pointed out, one sector of the African population that Mary Kingsley cared for little: those that had come under the influence of missionaries (she could stand the latter even less). She describes the "missionary- made man" as vain and conceited, and "very much like the 'suburban agnostics' in his religious method" – that is, removing from his social prestigeful religion its austere and ascetic aspects (Hell, Sabbath-Keeping, food interdictions, ideas of retribution)[43]. Her attitude towards the Christianized and the Western-educated Africans was essentially negative, much like later colonials' negative image of the "évolués", albeit in her case one cannot impute this to the threat the évolués presented to the social position of whites. She had a profound respect for native culture and society and did not feel that its elements, such as polygamy or even "fetichism", should be decreed inferior in terms of Western standards and thereby done away with. Her *bête noire was* not so much the missionary-man but the missionary.

> ... regarding the native minds as so many jugs, only requiring to be emptied of the stuff which is in them and refilled with the particular form of dogma he is engaged in teaching, in order to make them the equals of the white races[44].

35 Her pronouncement in this quoted passage resembles in some ways the later attacks on missionaries in some nationalist African circles, although for the latter the missionaries were integral components of the global process of imperialism. Mary Kingsley was neither imperialist nor anti-imperialist, but more of a nineteenth-century economic liberal, believing that free trade is the key cement to international relations, including relations between the West and Africa. Missionaries were a source of vexation to her because of the false picture they painted about Africa. It was they who were rousing public opinion about the liquor traffic in Africa whereas, she riposted, more "evil, degradation and premature decay" can be observed in English urban areas than in West Africa. If missionaries made such clamor at home about how bad things were in Africa, it was because this was an efficient way of raising funds, playing upon their gullible public's "perpetual thirst for thrilling details of the amount of Baptisms and Experiences among the people they pay other people to risk their lives to convert"[45].

36 Her forte was to cut through the typical perceptual screens of her time and to observe traditional African society as being as authentic and valid as Western society. Moreover, although she wrote in advance of Levy-Bruhl's influential theses concerning the qualitatively different approach of the "primitive mind" towards reality, in terms of a "pre-logical" mode of thought which associates heterogenous elements in terms of a "mystical participation"[46], Mary Kingsley would undoubtedly have treated such a premise as "stuff and nonsense", for, she held:

> The more you know the African, the more you study his laws and institutions, the more you must recognise that the main characteristic of his intellect is logical and you see how in all things he uses this absolutely sound but narrow thought- form... This may seem strange to those who read accounts of wild and awful ceremonials, or of the African's terror at white man's things... [but] the African knows the

> moment he has time to think it over, what that white man's thing really is, namely either a white man's Jumu or a devil[47].

37 Mary Kingsley first arrived in West Africa a month before a Frenchwoman returned home after spending nearly a year in Senegal and the French Sudan. The latter, Madame Paul Bonnetain, at the age of 24, had insisted on going with her husband and taking her seven-year-old daughter with her. Today this would seem a "natural" thing to do, but at the time, it was considered tantamount to suicidal conduct. During her saga, Madame Bonnetain kept a travel journal initially intended just for friends and relatives, but fortunately she was persuaded to publish it a year after her return[48]. Although the work does not measure up to Mary Kingsley's literary qualities, nor has the wealth of ethnographic observations of her English counterpart, it is nonetheless an important source of information and observations on the nascent colonial system, particularly its shortcomings as observed by a young woman who, like Mary Kingsley, is a refutation of the myth of the weaker sex.

38 The first pages of her travel accounts establish just how difficult it was to get others to accept her very going to Africa. Friends and strangers tried to discourage her from going to a certain grave. Her husband likewise thought it best for her to stay home because of the terrible climate, but she argued with him that they had always shared joys and hardships together, so why not dangers– if there are any, in Africa,[49].

39 To all those who objected and begged her not to go, she answered that with minimum material conforts, hygiene and prudence, they would all get along well. But still the pressures from well-meaning others kept up, leading her to write:

> The persecution continues. I am becoming taken as a strange animal, a phenomenon. Yet I don't think of myself as either heroic or insane, and I am getting very tired of certain masks of compassion, of certain compliments. Surely the English would not be surprised to see me follow my husband![50].

40 She, of course, did not give in, and after the standard eight-day boat trip from Bordeaux, arrived in Dakar in November 1892. Her first observation was the contrast between how nice Africa looked in contrast to what she had been led to expect from what people had told her at home and from reading a book published shortly before entitled *The Land of the Dead*[51]. Far from being a "frightening village", she dound Dakar (and its jutting isle of Gorée) very attractive, with a flaming luminosity not found even in the South of France[52].

41 Her attention was immediately caught by several aspects of the colonial setting. Conversation between arriving passengers and those greeting them is taken up with exchanging gossip and slander about officials in France and those in the colonies (one of the most popular pastimes in the colonies). She notes disapprovingly of the lack of organization for disembarkation, passengers had to arrange themselves to get ashore on little dinghies, with no standard rates: "The English treat their people much better!", she writes after two hours of vexations. And at Gorée where she sees a British ship decked with neatly dressed Englishmen, she observes:

> Among them, many women and children. I am certain the women dot not astonish their mates and that unlike me, they are not assassinated with congratulations more like condolences[53].

42 In contrast to the glamorous view of the noble enterprise of colonization that was being painted at home, she perceived the shabbiness of the colony, its run-down aspects as well a place to run away from:

> One feels the people here are in an overnight camp, that makeshift reigns, and that we only export petty bureaucrats [paperassiers], customs officials and soldiers. In brief one feels that each says to himself, "Once I have earned my money, I'll slip out!"[54].

43 The run down appearance of the streets and the docks was part of a general lack of upkeep and physical improvements, with no provision for minimal urban comforts, such as bath houses[55]. Later, in St. Louis, then the capital of Senegal and in French hands since 1626, she cited the total absence of hotels. The shabbiness of goods was part of the dismal scene of the colony, and she reported being told by French merchants that "most of our purveyors, most of the French commercial houses have a special, inferior manufacture for the colonies (even if the labels are the same)" and this extended even to ammunition and shells sent to Africa being considered too old for use in France[56]. Finally, in this context, although like her husband, Madame Bonnetain was opposed to the military regime in the colonies, she was indignant at the treatment of French soldiers. Parcel post gifts arriving from relatives for soldiers stationed in the Sudan were doubly taxed, by Senegal and by the Sudan administrations, making these gifts very expensive for the poorly paid soldiers, who in addition, were deprived of the staples of the French table: bread and wine[57]. Moreover, shabbily outfitted, French soldiers had to ride third-class on the train with the lowest-rung blacks:

> The English would never treat thusly their men... How can you expect them to feel well or be respected by the natives,[58]

44 Yet another reference to the superior English way of developing a colony occurs when she takes a walk around St. Louis and notes the city is not badlooking although it appears artificial and destitute; yet, it gives an idea of what could be done "if we wanted to spend the necessary": the only solid and durable buildings adapted to the climate are those, she points out, that were built by the British when they occupied St. Louis (1758-1779, 1809-1817)[59].

45 Wherein lies the reason for the French neglect of her West African colonies, Madame Bonnetain thought that it due to the emphasis on the military regime, as well as the negligence of the metropole. The French businessman or sales representative in the colonies was the victim of the military mentality prevalent, which was scornful of the former. And everyone in the military cadres was out for his own promotion. Thus, she registered her disapproval of (then) Colonel Archinard (who became a great name in the military history of the colonization of the West African hinterland) for allegedly taking a military column "towards Timbuctu" while in reality, and against orders from Paris, he "went off on a military expedition to Segou so as to win a general's stars against natives in dethroning some native sovereign... and in uselessly allowing to have killed a certain nomber of foot soldiers"[60].

46 Madame Bonnetain thought that two elements were missing from the European population, whose presence would give the colony a badly needed quality. First, there was need for those with real knowledge of African affairs, for scientists, whereas instead the colony has a plethora of "the military ambitious for an additional stripe or civil servants who happen by chance to be here, ignorant of Africa and not really interested in studying and knowing it"[61]. And, second, French women were not a real presence in the colonies, which made the European men careless in their appearances – even officers went around shabbily and sloppily dressed. Rather than educating natives on matters of cleanliness and hygiene, the military set no example; talking about one officer she saw on the streets,

she says: "undoubtedly he sleeps in a furnished room whose furniture is no more adapted to the climate here than the house itself, stupidly copied after the model of the metropolis"[62]. The French women who are in the colonies hide indoors:

> I am told they almost never go outside, except to go to church on Sundays, or from time to time to an official soirée. I am not surprised that with that routine, they put on weight, are bored, and are not in good health[63].

47 Without saying it in so many words, Madame bonnetain touched on an essential feature of colonial society, namely its *inauthenticity,* manifested in the quality of boredom. She notes this in a variety of observations. Thus:

> ... people are bored, and to kill time, they gossip [on potine]. The militaries call here by the expressive name of soudanitis a sickness which consists precisely in taking boredom out in nasty gossip [médisances], restlessness [impatiences], and quarrels [64].

48 Another observations related to this point is the significance that people attach to waiting for mail from home (p. 163). This is indicative of being away from "where the action is", and basically of not accepting the setting of the colony as the most important plane of one's existence; the colony is a temporary stage in one's life, a place of exile perhaps or a place where one makes his fortune and career, but not a place one accepts as home. In brief, one is only marking time in the colony[65], in the anticipation of returning "home". Relevant here is her wry comment that everybody she meets talks and dreams of being "back" in Pari – even if they havent't been there: "Ah, will the month of ... ever come, when I shall return" is a typical conversation item, followed by gossiping about others"[66].

49 Also relevant to our study is Madame Bonnetain's perspective on the other half of the colonial population, the Africans. She describes herself as "neither negrophile nor negrophobe", and adds in the same breath:

> The black has an extraordinary sentiment for justice. If he is at fault, he awaits and stoically receives his punishment, despising you if you don't, but neither will he forgive you if you punish him without just cause/good reason[67].

50 It is the widespread institution of slavery which particularly catches her attention, and the attitude of the French administration towards it which catches her ire. She notes three kinds of slaves: those bought from owners, those born in the family (like ancient Greece and Rome), and thirdly, those captured in warfare. The French army allows slavery to go on by "buying" recruits from owners at a minimum of 300 francs each (p. 74), these "recruits" having been captured in wars; the purchase price is officially called a "bonus", but it is the owner, not the recruit who receives the premium. Alternatively, recruiting is encouraged by the possibility of soldiers themselves getting slaves in military expeditions; military authorities allow this to go on for fear that if they did not, recruitment would fall off sharply. Thus, when the French captured human booty from their great foe in the Sudan, Samory, the Africans, who had been free before being captured by Samory were released to go back home, but those who were born slaves were given over to soldiers in the French army: the men farmed out to friends, women and children kept around by the soldiers themselves[68]. True, in theory slaves could become free by asking the French authority for their freedom but in fact they don't, unless they themselves can have their own slaves.

51 She saw, consequently, colonial society as resting upon a pervasive system of masters and slaves, albeit the treatment of the latter by blacks is more benign than the French

treatment of its own troops. To maintain peace and French rule, she said, one can understand perhaps that we allow black subjects (but not French citizens) to possess other blacks. However, she added, in reference to the black citizens of the free communes, "One cannot understand why we don't impose on the blacks wanting to be our equal, to be voting citizens and to fill public offices, the obligation to spend at least a year [in military service] and to renounce having the least captive (captive-slave). The card of an elector is a diploma of French naturalization, and the law should be the same for all"[69].

52 It is, in brief, the exploitation of workers, of the lowly, irrespective of their skin color that she objects to vehemently. Thus, at Bafoulabé, she rants at the poor lodgings of ordinary French soldiers, living in wooden shacks which had quartered Chinese coolies working on the railroad nearby; a great many of the latter had died not because of the climate but because of a lack of sanitation, and she adds the same was true in Panama and the Congo. Those who today profess the loudest against slavery (*les libéromanes*) treat the unskilled workers far worse than slave traders treated their "bois d'ébène": "disguised slavery is decidedly far worse than slavery admitted and regulated, which at least grants to the captive guarantees against the white ferocity of the exploiters of the *struggle for life*[70].

53 Madame Bonnetain's travel notes contain far more observations than can be treated here, but over all they show her as a concrete humain being relating to others concretely, interested in the human aspect of the situation, rather than perceiving it in terms of *a priori* categories.

54 A third female traveler in Africa who went there in the decade of the 1890s was a young Englishwoman, Helen Caddick, who spent the year 1898 on an extensive journey going from Capetown to Central Africa culminating at Lake Tanganyika, returning by way of Mozambique and Zanzibar. She published a book focusing upon her journey from the mouth of the Zambesi to Lake Tanganyika, whose preface states that she would like her countrymen "to know how kind and attentive the natives, who are spoken of in England as 'savages', can be to a lady travelling absolutely alone with them"[71].

55 Like Raymonde Bonnetain and Mary Kingsley, she recounts that she had to overcome considerable pressure from well-meaning acquaintances not to venture, especially alone, in Africa; this "made me the more desirous to set out"[72]. What stands out in her narrative is how she viewed the African setting and its people in positive terms; her account is utterly devoid of lurid or sensational items.

56 Her remarks about Africans and traditional African society are always constructive, without being patronizing or paternalistic. Thus, she says of her porters:

> The natives have any amount of patient endurance, and also a keen sense of humour – two very excellent qualities on a journey. I invariably found them honest, and I am certain white men would not have been more careful of me, or have behaved better, while they certainly would not have been so entertaining[73].

57 She shows no aversion to "black" skins; there is no perceptual distortion in her observation about African skin color that:

> It is a rich chocolate, and, when well kept, has a beautifully clear, smooth look, almost like satin. Out in Africa it looks infinitely handsomer than the yellowish white skin of the Europeans...[74].

58 And in several places her respect for traditional African culture manifests itself as she laments its "Westernization". Thus, noting that most places are named after chiefs or recall events of African history that antedate the European presence, she observes:

> ... it seems a pity that so many English and Scotch names are now being substituted when they have no meaning out there and do not commemorate any special deed... [75].

59 Also in this context. Helen Caddick indicated her regret at the passing of traditional African ways and crafts as a result of European education emphasizing the superiority of Western industries. She found African crafts and architecture lovely, functional, and tasteful, whereas the manufactures of Europe sold to Africans are "shoddy and shabby"[76].

60 While not a critic of colonialism, Caddick had several biting observations of Europeans in and out of the colonies or settlements. The wanton shooting of the native fauna for "sport", leaving a great number of animals wounded in great pain, can only make Africans aware of contradictions in the "civilizing" aspect of European practices[77]. The destruction of the African flora went hand-in-hand with the destruction of the fauna. An environmentalist before her time, she criticized the hypocrisy of Europeans chiding Africans for their wasteful cutting of timber while "nothing is ever said about the immense amount of timber we have felled for burning our own steamers"[78]. And she added an observation that is an essential trait of the colonial mentality:

> In Africa we always appear to consider the country ours and the natives the intruders[79].

61 She also expressed her disgust at staging in England public shows depicting "savage Africa" – and the one she had in mind must have been similar to those of Buffalo Bill's "Wild West" shows; she railed against the degradation of Africans being employed as entertainers to depict incidents showing how "savage" were the Africans, how heroic the Europeans[80].

62 One last set of observations of her travel journey we wish to mention concerns the health of Europeans in Africa. The myth of the brutality of the African climate for Europeans was an extremely prevalent one; it was a very convenient explanation for a great many aspects of European behavior: for his physical shortcomings surely, but also, on occasion, for his social and moral ones. Helen Caddick did not comment on this directly, but she did refute the stereotype of the fatality of the climate. She mentioned that during her entire stay in British Central Africa she was never ill once. While others were in fact ill with fever, "they do things that would make them ill in any country, and they put it down to the climate"[81]. One of the major factors in giving ill health to the Europeans is the consumption of whisky:

> Everyone knows what an immense amount of harm if does and how much fever it causes, yet nothing is done to stop it; while endless trouble and expense is incurred to find out other causes of fever[82].

63 Very similar observations are to be found in the account of Mary Gaunt, a young Australian widow, who, to sustain a livelihood, first went to England, then undertook an extensive travel to Africa's West Coast shortly before World War I[83]. Much of her observations echo themes we have previously discussed. Thus she noted how going to Africa for a woman was considered so venture some as to border on the reckless:

> Why, I know not, but English women are regarded as heroines and martyrs who go out to West Africa with their husbands. Possibly it is because I am an Australian and have had a harder bringing-up that I resent very much the supposition that a woman cannot go where a man can... Yet here in the Gambia and all along the Coast was the same eternal cry wherever there was a woman, 'How long can she stay,[84].

64 When a young District Commissioner tells her he would not bring his wife to the Gambia from England because "she has such a delicate complexion that she has to wash her face

always in distilled water", Mary Gaunt notes in her book that the lady in question was "buying her complexion at a very heavy cost is she was going to allow it to deprive her of the joy of seeing new countries"[85].

65 On Christmas eve she went to Government House in Bathurst at Government House, where all the English gathered for the festivities. She noted how the colonists seemed to consider themselves as living the life of exiles, and this drew her ire:

> "After all, the English make this life in West Africa far harder than they need... if England is to hold her pride of place as a colonising nation with the French and Germans, she must make less of this exile theory and more of a home in these outlands"[86].

66 Similar to Mary Kingsley, she noted an aversion for missionaries and wished they would "tend to the submerged folks of their own nations" rather than seek to civilising Africans. And similar to Helen Caddick she felt the alleged fatality of the climate could be mitigated by some simple preventives:

> I cannot help thinking that a sane and sober life in the open air day and night would be a more certain preventive against fever than all the quinine and mosquito-proof rooms that were ever dreamt of[87].

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67 These brief extracts from the rich accounts of these and other women travelers in Africa provide important and even unique materials about the colonial situation. The women who went to Africa as observers before World War I were not motivated to either uphold or expose colonialism. As marginals in European society, they were in perhaps a better situation to observe and report on features of colonial society, myths as well as reality, that are not found in other accounts.

NOTES

1. Georges BALANDIER, "La Notion de 'Situation coloniale'," in Balandier, *Sociologie Actuelle de l'Afrique Noire,* pp. 3-38, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963). English translation: "The 'Colonial Situatin' Concept", in *The Sociology of Black Africa,* pp. 21-56 (New York: Praeger, 1970).

2. An important exception is the excellent study of Yvonne KNIBEHLER and Régine GOUTALIER, *La Femme au Temps des Colonies,* (Paris: Stock 1985).

3. The classic study of the European imagery of Africa on the eve of the modern colonial period is Philip D. CURTIN, *The Image of Africa. British Ideas and Action 1780-1850,* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964.

4. The analogy with blacks can be extended further. The superiority of Western civilization in relation to African society was in part buttressed by the argument that Africa had not produced a high civilization, that Africans had not produced any inventions, any technological developments; women, on their part, had not produced any significant contributions to

mathematics, philosophy, political science, music, etc. The "mind" of the two functioned in an a logical way, irrational, infantile.

5. I do not deal here with sex ratios of the African population, which have their own peculiarities. For various demographic materials in the late phase of colonial society and early phase of post-colonial society, see K.M. BARBOUR and R.M. PROTHERO, *Essays on African Population* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961) and William BRASS et al., *The Demography of Tropical Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

6. *La colonisation scientifique,* pp. 46-54.

7. Paris: E. Flammarion, 1902.

8. *Ibid.,* p. 328.

9. *Loc.cit.*

10. *Ibid,* p. 329.

11. *Loc.cit.*

12. *Ibid.,* p. 331.

13. *Loc.cit.* The mulatto as a marginal person in African colonial society has received scant attention; excepting the "Cape Coloureds" in South Africa, and perhaps in the "old" colonial society of Senegal, notably that of Saint-Louis, mulattos were, numerically, not a significant element of the colonial population.

For a brief but insightful discussion of the difficult situation of the mulatto in Congolese society, see Z. J. M'POYO KASA-VUBU, "L'Evolution de la femme congolaise sous le régime colonial belge", in Pierre SALMON, ed., "Histoire et Sociologie Africaine", special issue of *Civilisations,* 37, n° 1 (1987): 159-90.

14. Published in the pamphlet, *L'Emigration des Femmes aux Colonies.* Paris, Armand Colin, 1897.

15. *Ibid.,* p. 4. The situation bears a striking parallel with labor legislations in Central and South Africa.

16. *Op.cit.,* p. 6.

17. *Ibid.,* p. 7. Undoubtedly, this reflects major occupational sources of employment open to women at the time: schoolteachers, wireless operators, and telephone operators.

18. In Fance the 1901 census showed 492 males for 1,000 inhabitants, or 103 females per 100 males. Source: *Album Géographique de la Statistique Générale de la France,* Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1907, p. 19. The number of unmarried women per age group is not given.

19. CHAILLEY-BERT, *op.cif.,* p. 21f.

20. A few weeks later, before a different audience, having many elements of the radical left which frequently interrupted him, Chailley-Bert also argued that the colonies were a place for upward mobility for those "fils de la démocratie" (hard-working from humble ranks) who were getting blocked from rising in the business world. CHAILLEZ-BERT, *Le Rôle Social de la Colonisation,* Paris, Comité de Défense et de Progrès Social, 1987, p. 11f.

21. *L'Emigration des Femmes aux Colonies,* p. 35f.

22. Paris, Librairie Larose, 1926.

23. *Ibid.,* p. 38.

24. *Ibid.,* p. 39.

25. *Loc.cit.*

26. *Loc. cit.*

27. *Loc.cit.*

28. *Loc.cit.,* The character of Marie Hasluck in Joyce Cary's novel *An American Visitor* (London: Michael Joseph, 1933) is a good literary approximation of this type (as well as being a vivid representation of the maternal anthropologist seeking to protect the natives from the evils of civilization).

29. *Loc.cit.,* Ferdinan Oyono, in his bitter satires of colonial society has painted vivid portraits of this type. See in particular *Vie de Boy* (Paris, Presses Pocket, 1970).

30. *Ibid.,* p. 40.

31. Robert ROTBERG in his study of Central Africa mentions the ire of W.K. Sikalumbi of the Northern Rhodesian Congress in his boycott campaign against the "hatch" system: "No Africains could enter the 'holy place'–the shop where Europeans bought their meat. Buying 'pig in a poke', Africans had to buy the rotten and bony meat which was unsuitable even for the dogs of Europeans..."Cited in ROTBERG, *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 265.

32. O. MANNONI, *Prospero and Caliban,* tr. from the French by Pamela Powesland, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1956, p. 116.

33. *Loc.cit.,* Mannoni's discussion of the obscure psychological motives playing in the European female's comportment toward African servants and others is in line with his general psychologizing of the colonial situation. His study generated a good deal of controversy, but it remains a landmark in suggesting depth layers of the "colonial situation".

34. As a personal observation, this writer in the course of earlier visits to Africa observed how tyrannical women shopkeepers can be toward Africans. On the other hand, after seeing on several occasions how female store owners in France can be equally tyrannical toward their female employees, I think that racism is not the sole factor operative.

35. This section was prepared in advance of a recent work which explores this topic: Sara MILLS, *Discourses of difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism,* (London and New York: Routledge 1991). Although there is some substantive overlap, the author approaches the materials from a perspective of feminist textual theory, influenced by yet critical of the writings of Michel Foucault and Edward Said.

36. J.E. FLINT, introduction to *Travels in West Africa,* 3rd ed. London: Frank Cass & Co., 1965, p. xviif.

37. *Travels in West Africa,* p. 435.

38. Although it is beside the point to discuss the literary merits of her writings, it might be inserted here that few have surpassed her ability to describe the settings she found herself in, for example, her climb of Mount Cameroun, her visit with "German society" at Buea ("German society" being one solitary off icier), or her swatting of crocodiles on the head with her umbrella while canoeing on rivers.

The inspiration for Katherine Hepburn's unforgettable role in "The African Queen", Mary Kingsley has also been recently likened to Scarlett O'Hara by Jean Chalon in his *Figaro Review* (March 18, 1992) of the recent French translation of *West African Travels* (*Une Odyssée Africaine,* Paris, Phebus, 1992).

39. *Travels in West Africa,* p. 653.

40. *Loc.cit.*

41. *Ibid.,* p. 439. 42.

42. *Ibid.,* p. 670.

43. *Ibid.,* p. 660f.

44. *Ibid.,* p. 659.

45. *Ibid.,* p. 663.

46. Lucien LEVY-BRUHL, *La Mentalité Primitive* (1922), Paris, Retz-CEPL, 1976), pref. by L.-V. Thomas.

47. Mary H. KINGSLEY, *West African Studies,* London & New York, Macmillan, 1899, p. 124. It might be worth pointing out that increasingly since the end of World War II, Western industrial-technological civilization – and not just its military technology either – has come to be seen by its own sons as something demonic, which must be resisted by all means available, including magic and exorcism. I refer here to various "hexing" episodes in the 1960s (of the Pentagon, or Wall Street, etc.).

48. *Une Française au Soudan,* Paris, Librairie-Imprimeries Réunies, 1894.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 7. this is one of the many invidious comparisons of the French by a French person comparing the situation with how the English do things in a comparable situation.
51. This was P. VIGNE d'OCTON, *Terre de Mort* (Paris, 1892), typical of the early colonial literature we have discussed previously which presented Africa in darkest terms.
52. *Une Française au Soudan,* p. 12f.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 20f.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
55. It should be kept in mind that at the turn of the century, the working class and the lower middle class, at least in France, had for the most part to go to bath houses (établissements de bain) since bathtubs and showers were luxury plumbing fixtures of the home.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 27
57. *Ibid.*, p. 13f.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 38f.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 204. As it turned out, Archinard's military "exploits" the year that Madame Bonnetain was in the Sudan had to take a backseat to Colonel Dodds' more headline-making feats in Dahomey, so that it was the latter who received at the time the coveted general's appointment (p. 366f).
61. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
65. From Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time,* one can derive the proposition that the separation of objectification of time away from one's self-conception is a fundamental characteristic of the fallenness of existence from the authentic to the inauthentic plane. The feeling of wasting time or marking time in the colony – a situational instance of the wasting of one's self as a set of possibilities – reflects the inauthenticity of life. Although this is not the occaison, an important dimension of the colonial situation in its different phases is that of temporality, of the temporal horizon of actions and projects of actors involved.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 77. Madame Bonnetain does not mention that French soldiers, a minority of colonial troops, themselves kept captured slave women. This was an important "fringe benefit" of colonial service.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 180. Italics hers.
71. Helen CADDICK, *A White Woman in Central African,* London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1900, p. v.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 72
75. *Ibid.*, p. 39. It is a small but symbolically significant aspect of cultural colonization to change the names of places; this functions to oblitlerate the cultural consciousness and hence identity of the colonized. And equally symbolically important is the work of decolonization in replacing colonial names (both of individuals and places) with "traditional" names.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-58.
77. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15. Just as Helen Caddick was horrified at Europeans on the steamship shooting indiscriminately at birds, so had Raymonde Bonnetain observed on her train voyage from Dakar to St. Louis European passengers shooting at practically anything in sight on four legs. The same

entertainment must have taken place with equal frequency among railroad passengers travelling in the Great Plains Region of the United States a century ago.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 20f.

79. *Loc.cit.*

80. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

83. Mary GAUNT, *Alone in West Africa,* (London, T. Werner Laurie 1912). She also wrote a number of novels.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 390.

ABSTRACTS

La littérature concernant l'histoire coloniale de l'Afrique est abondante et comprend bons nombres d'analyses sociologiques dont celle relative à la « situation coloniale », initiée par Balandier. Cependant, l'image et le rôle de la femme dans la construction et l'évolution de l'Afrique coloniale moderne a peu retenu l'attention pour diverses raisons d'ordre culturel et social. Au travers des écrits de Mary Kingsley, Raymonde Bonnetain et Helen Caddick, qui toutes trois ont parcouru l'Afrique à la fin du siècle précédent, on se rend compte de ce que leur perception de la situation coloniale était des plus pénétrantes. L'analyse des récits de ces femmes fournit un matériel exceptionnel et souvent unique concernant la situation coloniale. Ces femmes qui ont abordé l'Afrique au cours du 19e siècle n'avait pas pour motivation de soutenir le colonialisme. Considérées comme des marginales par la société européenne, elles étaient dans une situation exceptionnelle pour observer et comprendre les traits caractéristiques de cette société coloniale – aussi bien mythiques que réels – que l'on ne trouve pas dans d'autres types de récits. Ce regard particulier sur l'Afrique coloniale permet donc de mieux comprendre à la fois les fondements de ces sociétés et l'image de la femme occidentale au sein de celles-ci.

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