

Alternatives to Empire: France and Africa after World War II

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Empires have come and gone over most of human history. The two decades after World War II witnessed not only the unraveling of the British and French colonial empires, but the extinction of the very category of empire from the repertoire of legitimate state forms. Power would be exercised across distance, but it would call itself by other names and take other forms. Even the evocation of the empire word in recent debates on international interventions is more metaphorical than substantive: no-one is advocating the incorporation of Iraq or Afghanistan as subordinate units within an American polity. Indeed, the last years of European empires in Africa offer an object lesson in how attempts to use imperial structures to engineer transformation of subordinated societies leads to an escalation of claim-making that makes the logic of empire costly and unstable.¹

With hindsight, the end of empire after World War II seems inevitable, if not overdue. But that is to read back the generalization of the nation-state as the normative unit of world politics into a grand narrative stripped of the debates over political alternatives that emerged at crucial moments. In the years after the war, neither the leaders of France nor the leading political activists of French West Africa saw the breakup of empire into nation-states as either likely or desirable. Both categories of actors were thinking of remaking empire, not breaking it up.²

Citizen and Subject in the French Empire

If we start with the premise that empires are large, expansionist polities that maintain the

differentiation of the people they incorporate, the French state has a long history of acting within an empire framework. Within that framework, national conceptions of what the polity should be arose, but the French nation remained part of a more complex state, including colonies and protectorates, not to mention certain "old colonies" in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean that were incorporated in 1946 into the departmental organization of European France. During France's First Empire under Napoleon, a variety of organizational forms were used to rule conquered territory in Europe. The Second Empire codified the distinction between French nationals, who had been incorporated forcefully or otherwise into French territory, and French citizens, who had civil and political rights. If the Republics were reluctant to call themselves empires, they maintained such distinctions, and Vichy—and for a time the Free French—went back to references to the French Empire.

Struggle over what principles applied to the space of empire were old.³ Such struggle emerged almost immediately within the French Revolution, with a debate in 1789 over whether the domain of application of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was bounded by national, European France or extended to imperial, transoceanic France. In the plantation colony of Saint Domingue, French planters, then the *gens-de-couleur*, property owning people of mixed origins, and finally the slaves evoked citizenship discourse in order to claim their part in a revolutionary society. If one puts the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 alongside the French one of 1789, then one sees that the space to which citizenship applied was in question from the start. The freeing of slaves in Saint Domingue in 1793 and in Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1794 reflected both an imperial perspective on ideology and the state's need for new categories of citizens to defend the Revolution against reaction and the invasion of other

imperial powers; Napoleon's reinstatement of slavery reversed this dynamic of principle and pragmatism, while his failure to reconquer Haiti maintained a France with a non-citizen, non-free population only at the expense of giving up its most valuable colony.⁴ The conquest of Algeria led to sharp distinction against a majority Muslim population, while non-French Europeans were recruited to French citizenship. In 1848, the definitive abolition of slavery in French colonies brought an entire category of people into the realm of citizenship—rather than creating an intermediary category—but the Second Empire of Napoleon III solidified the juridical basis of the distinction between subject and citizen in Algeria. The late nineteenth-century conquest of Africa and parts of Asia expanded the domain of subjects, but the Third Republic reconciled itself to the questionable place of colonization within republican doctrine by positing for itself a civilizing mission—citizenship would open up to subjects as they became assimilated to French culture. Few did, but meanwhile, in the Quatre Communes of Senegal, the original inhabitants of these old enclave colonies hung onto their claims to French citizenship, and in World War I they turned France's need for soldiers into reinforcement of their citizenship rights.⁵

Empire space defined a realm that was French and open to struggle over just what that meant. It was a moral as well as an administrative space, hence all the arguments about whether slavery, forced labor, discriminatory systems of justice, and denial of political voice were legitimate within Overseas France. The idea of France as an "imperial community" was evoked—at varying times from the 1780s to the 1950s—by those who wished to preserve colonial domination and by those who wished to assert the rights of French subjects to equality within the space of empire.⁶

Redefining Empire

General Charles de Gaulle, speaking in Normandy on June 16, 1946, asserted that after the nightmare of defeat "on the soil of the ancestors the State reappeared." De Gaulle sought a strong state with a strong executive, but not a unitary state. The French state would now reestablish "national unity and imperial unity." This dualism of nation and empire recurred throughout the speech: The state would unite "all the Empire and all of France." De Gaulle distinguished "the metropole" from "the overseas territories attached to the French Union by very diverse ties" while evoking the "future of 110 million men and women who live under our flag and in an organization of federal form." The majority of these French people did not live in European France.⁷

The French state, to de Gaulle, was not the French nation, and the nation was not the state. The state, ruled by its president, parliament, and ministers, was the Empire. What de Gaulle variously called the Republic, the nation, or *la patrie* was part of a complex entity with non-equivalent components, including overseas colonies, overseas departments, protectorates, and the special case of Algeria, whose territory was part of the Republic but not all of whose citizens had full political rights. France, in 1946, was not a nation-state, but an empire-state.

It was within the framework of an empire-state that a spectrum of French opinion, from de Gaulle leftward, faced the problem of rethinking the place of colonies in the post-war world. That French Equatorial Africa had refused allegiance to Vichy and that North African colonies had become a base for the reconquest of European France—with the participation of many colonial troops—gave rise to a myth of France being saved by the loyalty of its imperial subjects. Free French leaders agreed that France had to demonstrate to the world and its own people—in the

wake of a war fought against conquest and racism--that its rule was just and progressive. Clearly, *évolués*, western educated Africans, would have to be given a voice in their affairs; forced labor and confiscatory levels of taxation in rural areas would have to be eliminated; and standard of living, educational and health services, and possibilities for peasant production improved. Some suggested that the term "colony" was now obsolete, and by 1945 the "Empire," was being called the "French Union."⁸

Within such a framework the idea of a federal France had wide appeal. De Gaulle's assertion that France would unite in "federal form" its metropole and colonies drew on arguments for a transition from colonial empire to federation enunciated earlier by colonial specialists within the Gaullist camp. Henri Laurentie, for example, claimed in 1944 that Free French policy toward overseas France was "the exact application of the principle of equality, that is for the suppression of the colonial concept, properly speaking." The French Union was to be "a more or less federal ensemble in which each French country, morally equal to each other, including the metropole, will be capable of following its distinct vocation, while sharing in the rights and obligations of the same human society." The federal idea—at least as far as I can see in my research so far—did not grow out of a profound engagement with theories of federalism, but out of empire itself, as a united but differentiated political entity. West Africans had experienced imperial federalism in a specific form, the administrative unit of French West Africa that combined nine colonial territories, each with its Governor and later territorial assembly, into an overarching political unit with its powerful Governor General and later its Grand Council. The key to transforming the imperial version of federation was to strip away the invidious distinction of colonizer and colonized, while still insisting that the resulting polity remained French.⁹

But progressive colonialism had its limits, especially because officials were so steeped in their essentialist view of backward Africans that they could not imagine all but the most "assimilated" of them acting like citizens in the political arena or as rational actors in markets. Officials, in 1944 and 1945, were thinking of modestly enlarging the space of citizenship by allowing more Africans with high levels of education and service to the state to "accede" to the "qualities of the French citizen" and perhaps by creating an intermediary category, sometimes called "local citizenship," whose bearers had more limited political rights than citizens of the Republic. The principle of treating Africans as economic or social equals ran up against their supposed lack of proclivity to work for wages, which made some officials think that development projects for the public good required some form of administrative compulsion which could be eliminated only after some development had been accomplished.¹⁰

Just how contested the meaning of equality would be emerged from a conflict that took place in Senegal in 1944 and early 1945. When the right to vote was at long last extended to French women, officials in West Africa decided that the law should not be applied to the women of the Quatre Communes—who were citizens—because they were alleged to be backward. And so ensued a protest movement. Lamine Guèye, the leading *originnaire* politician, protested vehemently against the deviation from the principle that "all French citizens (men and women) should benefit from the same electoral rights as in the Metropole," and he warned of "troubles" if the French backslid on such an issue. Indeed, protests began, and the Governor General feared "a certain degree of violence." The violence was mainly symbolic, but women and men were speaking at large public meetings. "We categorically refuse this injustice," said one woman speaker at a rally; "we will vote or we will prevent European women from voting." As protests

continued, the Governor General began to think that it would be better to give way before violence occurred than making concessions afterward. In April 1945, he suggested to the Ministry in Paris that they should let the new law be promulgated in Senegal as well as the rest of Overseas France.¹¹ And that is how the female citizens of Senegal got the vote.

This was politics. In Vietnam, France was facing revolution and in North Africa a cycle of escalating protests and escalating repression by the army and settlers. French leaders were well aware that if the French Union were to mean anything to Africans, they had to be represented within it—if not as equals. In 1945, officials were pondering just how many colonial representatives would be seated in the Assemblée Nationale Constituante, the body that would write a new constitution for the Fourth Republic and meanwhile act as a legislature. In the end, numbers were kept down, but some ten Africans took their seats among other colonial deputies, a small minority of the total but with far more interest in colonial questions than anyone else possessed. They were elected in separate colleges for citizens and subjects; voter rolls included all citizens but only those subjects who had acquired a certain level of primary education, served in the military, worked for the state or a French company, or met similarly restrictive criteria.¹²

Officials probably didn't realize how difficult it would be to contain the meanings of citizenship. Discriminatory as the electoral process was, Africans entered it with vigor in the fall of 1945, and immediately tried to widen the crack in the door of citizenship. The slogans "Citizenship for all" and "equality of rights and duties" were prominent in the campaign manifestos, as were calls to build a French community "without distinction of race or religion" and to do away with the separate judicial regime—the *indigénat*--and forced labor.¹³

In the Assemblée Nationale Constituante throughout the winter and spring of 1945-46,

deputies such as Lamine Guèye and Léopold Senghor from Senegal, Félix Houphouët-Boigny from Côte d'Ivoire, and Aimé Césaire from Martinique played active roles in writing provisions of the constitution dealing with the French Union, and while they didn't necessarily get their way, the Assembly was divided enough that their votes counted and most deputies realized that if provisions on Overseas France did not get at least the acquiescence of deputies from those areas, the constitution would have no legitimacy.¹⁴

The constitution writers accepted at the beginning that inhabitants of overseas territories had "the same rights as inhabitants of the metropole. That is the essential claim. It is necessary to dispense with a conscious or unconscious racism; it is necessary to create a new climate so that people from these territories no longer can have the sentiment that they are considered our inferiors." The early draft contained the provision that "all members of the Union have the quality of citizen and enjoy the totality of rights attached to that status." One deputy even invoked the precedent of the Roman empire's extension of citizenship to its free subjects in 212 AD to point out that citizenship did not make "local civilizations" disappear.¹⁵ Just what that would mean would be the subject of long debate.

Muslim Algerian deputies—long frustrated by settlers' ability to use French institutions to exclude them from political and social equality—pushed for recognition of an Algerian nationality and for a high degree of autonomy, but still within a federal French structure. West African deputies were less concerned with national self-expression and more with issues of equality within France, for they were well aware of how much they needed resources from a more affluent political unit. Deputies from European France at times made compromises on colonial issues in order to get their way on something about which they cared more, but the basic division

among them was between those for whom federalism implied a strong center presiding over diverse and subordinate components and those who wished to devolve more power to those components as part of a project of French-led liberation.

The constitutional text which emerged from the Assemblée Nationale Constituante in April reflected the important role of African deputies in writing the sections on the French Union.¹⁶ It put forth the historically misleading but ideologically compelling view of the Union as a voluntary assemblage of different peoples, all of whom were now considered to be French citizens enjoying the same rights. Governing institutions reflected compromises and left deliberately unclear key rules about elections. That was in some ways its most important feature: it created a framework for claim-making, defining a space for political action.¹⁷

But the proposed constitution was voted down in a referendum in which only people who were citizens under the previous constitution had the right to vote—leaving out most Africans. The defeat was more a consequence of domestic conflicts than differences over colonies, but its consequences were serious in the colonies, for it led to new elections and a more conservative Constituante. Over the summer, defenders of old-style colonialism mobilized, and while their explicitly racist views did not convince most of the Gaullist center-right, the bargaining zone shifted to the right and the institutional arrangements moved toward restricting both the autonomy of overseas territories and the terms by which their citizens participated in the center.

The most revealing exchange occurred in August when an advocate of a strong republican France, Edouard Herriot, cut to the heart of the contradiction between a colonizing state and a federation of peoples, warning that if one took literally the notion of all citizens participating equally in electoral institutions and if one looked at population figures, then France

could become "the colony of its former colonies." At this, Senghor jumped up to reply, "This is racism!"¹⁸ The exchange revealed the limits of equivalence within the idea of imperial citizenship: power was not going to be distributed evenly.

African deputies had to threaten to walk out to get the government ministers to keep the citizenship provisions intact and it was all they could do to prevent separate voter roles for former subjects and former citizens from being enshrined in the constitution, although they were preserved for a few more years by legislative enactment.¹⁹ The possibility of a territory taking itself out of the Union disappeared and with it the fiction of federation as voluntarily and equal. The Constitution maintained the *Assemblée Nationale* as the ultimate legislative authority and allowed for relatively weak territorial assemblies, while the assembly devoted to issues in the overseas territories (half of whose members were from those territories) was consultative only.

But the African deputies, disappointed as they were, backed the constitution that emerged from the debates over the summer of 1946, for their bottom line demand was fulfilled: the generalization of citizenship to all former subjects was given constitutional sanction and did not depend on would-citizens renouncing their status under Islamic or "customary" law.²⁰ All were to have the same civil rights, and while the vote would only be extended to all citizens gradually (taking ten years to reach universal suffrage), the recognition given to the equivalence of all citizens and the presence of African voices in all branches of the legislature would provide a basis for making further claims. The one-time subjects of France were now citizens of an empire, still under the administrative rule of an imperial center—but they were citizens nonetheless.

The constitutional debates were explicit in recognizing that the relationship of ex-

colonies and the metropole was in flux, and constitutional principles had to adapt to politics as they actually played out.²¹ The process of using the institutions and discourses of post-war France for claim-making in the colonies was already launched while the constitution was being debated, for the Assemblée Nationale Constituante had the power to legislate. Once colonial deputies were in a position to propose action, the most hated features of French colonial rule could not stand the light of day. Between December 1945 and April 1946, the Assembly passed legislation to dismantle the *indigénat*.²² In March, it acceded to a campaign waged by Aimé Césaire for Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana, and Réunion to become French departments, equivalent to those of the metropole. In April, the Assembly, voting unanimously on a bill submitted by Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Côte d'Ivoire, made forced labor for public or private purpose illegal. Finally, in May, in a bill submitted by the Senegalese deputy Lamine Guèye, the assembly anticipated the constitutional text by abolishing by legislative enactment the distinction between subject and citizen, proclaiming that all people in all parts of the empire now had the qualities of French citizens. The law reflected the consensus achieved in the constitutional committee that people were citizens regardless of their civil status, and their personal and private affairs could be regulated under Islamic or other "local" codes.²³

One can understand both the underlying continuity of 1946—the insistence that all components of the empire remain under French sovereignty—and the willingness to erase long-lasting distinctions within greater France by keeping in mind the imperial perspective of the French state. Ruling an empire was about conjugating incorporation and difference. The modalities of that combination were subject to change to maintain the imperial nature of the polity. The Lamine Guèye law was in some ways the most far reaching, but also the most

elusive, of the breakthrough legislation of early 1946. It was passed unanimously and with no debate, an indication that something more complex was going on, especially when the colonial establishment in 1944 and 1945 was not planning to generalize citizenship. But by the time the Constitutional Committee received the proposals of the Committee on Overseas France for articles concerning the French Union, the constitution writers agreed that France must become an empire of citizens. The second Constituante backslid on many issues but could not do so on citizenship—the resulting constitution would have had no legitimacy overseas. Because the bottom line of reaffirming French sovereignty over the empire as a whole was so important, deputies across most of the political spectrum were willing to make large gestures toward inclusivity and concentrate their debate on the details of how institutions would be organized.

The citizenship law was an expression of the consensus, while the institutions were compromises. Colonial populations would be represented in Paris, but not proportionally to their population. All would be citizens, but—just as it took from 1788 until 1944 for the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen to turn itself into votes for women in European France—that would not imply universal suffrage until a later date. All such points became the object of struggle in subsequent years.

Most important, the debate over the structure of the French Union was not stuck in a dichotomy of self-determining nation-state vs. colonial empire. How much the French Union would be centralized and tutelary and how much it would be an association of relatively autonomous states or states in the making was highly contested. How principles of equality—of civil rights, of political voice, and of economic well-being—would conjugate with notions of difference—be they distinctions between advanced and backward or recognition of different

cultural and religious forms—was also highly contested, but most participants in the constitutional debates believed they would have to be reconciled in some way.

Using Citizenship

What most French leaders did not realize is that Africans would not see citizenship simply in terms of a quest for civil and political rights, but would from the start lay claims to social citizenship. They should have realized the radical implications of the language of equivalence, for claims to equality were being made on the streets of Dakar at the same time as they were being heard in the Constituante in Paris. The slogan "equal pay for equal work" emerged in the general strike movement in Senegal which began in December 1945 and reached its peak in late January, simultaneous with the Constitutional Commission debates in Paris. Lasting two months overall, including a two-week shut down of the major port and administrative center of French West Africa, spreading to other major towns in Senegal, the strike was a turning point in both political and social struggle in French Africa. A range of workers, from civil servants, many *originaires* of Dakar and hence citizens, and manual workers, mostly subjects who had migrated to the city, were involved. The strike, with its daily mass meetings, took on the tone of a mass, urban movement as much as an industrial action. Demands were overlapping rather than homogeneous, from recalculation of minimum wages without distinction between "African" and "European" standards of living for the lowest paid workers to payment to civil servants of all ranks of family allowances on the same basis as to workers from European France.

Officials in Paris realized the implications of this: the idea of the "tribal," backward

African offered no help in figuring out what was going on and how to contain the movement. Instead, French officials turned to their metropolitan models of settling industrial disputes, and they negotiated with the unions, giving each major category of worker concessions until the general strike peeled back, layer by layer. The fiction that African workers were like any other worker, and could be handled as workers were in France, proved far more useful than the fiction of unbridgeable otherness. While African workers did not gain full equality, they did transport the African worker from the realm of difference into the realm of equivalence: the rules of contestation and the forms of labor agreements would be the same for all French people. Further strikes—including the railway strike that engulfed all of French West Africa for five months in 1947-48--would widen this opening.²⁴

Between 1946 and 1952, the labor movement concentrated its efforts on obtaining a labor code that covered all the overseas territories without distinction of race, religion, or origins. The six-year struggle of African parliamentarians and trade unionists culminated in a French West Africa-wide general strike on the eve of the final debate in Paris over the code. Colonial deputies had to keep insisting that equality meant equality, and that arguments, for example, that the 40-hour week was inappropriate in Africa because Africans didn't work as hard as Europeans were unacceptable. In the end, the threat that African abstention from the vote would deprive the code—and with it the entire claim to be building a union of citizens—of legitimacy was strong enough that a quite universalistic code was passed. The principle of equal pay and equal benefits for equal work was accepted; the 40-hour week and paid vacations were guaranteed to all wage workers; all workers had the right to unionize and strike. The passage of the code in 1952 set the stage for a new set of labor demands and strikes, now done in the name of implementing the

letter and spirit of the code and culminating in a successful campaign—again under the threat of protests and strikes—for the extension of family allowances from the civil service to the private sector, a goal achieved in 1956.²⁵

But by 1956, the escalating demands of labor—and other sectors of society—were so great that French officials were seeking away out of the logic of universality and equivalence that they had promoted after the war. A French minister in 1956 put it bluntly: citizenship had come to mean "equality in wages, equality in labor legislation, in social security benefits, equality in family allowances, in brief, equality in standard of living."²⁶ In that year, the legislature voted in the *loi cadre*, giving a high degree of political autonomy to each overseas territory, putting effective power in the hands of territorial leaders elected under universal suffrage. The French government hoped that devolving budgetary authority to these leaders, elected by taxpayers of the territory, would make the resources of the territory, rather than those of France a whole, into the object of claims. The Government General of French West Africa—which had served to aggregate the needs and demands of the individual territories—was stripped of most of its power, whereas some African leaders had wanted to see it get more legislative and executive authority. Trade unionists and politicians realized that social claims would be harder to make and that territorialization could lead to fragmentation, but the power that was being devolved was real—and tempting.²⁷

Toward a Federation of Equals?

Let me focus here on the case of Senegal, and particularly on Senegal's leading political figure in the 1950s, Léopold Senghor, and his close collaborator Mamadou Dia. What is striking

throughout the decade is how their efforts at political emancipation focused not on shaping a Senegalese nation and not on separating such a nation from France, but rather on building a layered notion of sovereignty, one which recognized both the particularity and complementarity of different people and cultures. Senghor's starting premise, put to the Constitutional Committee in 1946, was that "Senegalese accept the French Union. But if they are politically French, they are not culturally French."²⁸ Until the very end of empire, Senghor and Dia favored a variation of federalism, a "Franco-African Community," that would allow both for expression of an African—but not Senegalese—nationality and for continued political affiliation with European France and the rest of the former French empire.

Under the Constitution of 1946, French people from the metropole or the overseas departments were citizens of France and French nationals—they were also part of the French Republic. People from the overseas territories (formerly colonies) were citizens and French nationals (their "ethnic" or territorial roots not having national status), and while the constitution was clear that they had the same qualities as citizens in the Republic it was not clear that they *were* citizens of the Republic.²⁹ Moroccans, Vietnamese, or others from Associated States (formerly protectorates) were citizens and part of the French Union, but they had Moroccan or Vietnamese nationality; they, unlike people in the Overseas territories, did not elect members of the Assemblée Nationale. There was a special body for considering affairs that applied to the Associated States, the Haut Conseil de l'Union Française.³⁰ People from the mandated territories were treated in most respects like those from the Overseas Territories, but were not French nationals, since France was acting on behalf of the United Nations (as successor to the League of Nations) in administering these territories en route to autonomy or independence. They did vote

for deputies to the Assemblée, but that was considered a concession intended to bring them closer to their neighbors in French West or Equatorial Africa.³¹

The temptation is to oppose nation and empire, and to see political activism in a colony as a struggle to get out of the latter and create the former. Nationalism was certainly part of the politics of the post-war French Union. Even in Algeria it was not the only form of political mobilization against the French government, and in West Africa, national sentiment was as often focused on a more ambiguous concept of affinity—as in the call for "African unity"—than territorial nationalism, and its importance in the 1950s emerged as part of the ups and downs of attempts at remaking the French Union itself.³² But the imperial form of the French state, particularly for Senegalese, was a basis not simply of accommodation but of trying to make empire into something else.³³

It was the hope of turning empire into federation—and the temptation of exercising power within its component territories--that made African deputies go along with the territorializing *loi cadre* of 1956. But Senghor and Dia understood its cost and regarded the form the law took as a defeat. Dia expressed his "profound and sad conviction of committing one of those major historical errors that can inflect the destiny of a people.... In spite of us, West Africa was balkanized, cut into fragments." Dia and Senghor persisted and when the Constitution of 1958 reconstituted the French Union as the French Community, they sought to turn it into the "Franco-African Community."³⁴

What is striking in reading some of their political writing from the 1950s is both the insistence that a distinct kind of national community could be built within rather than in opposition to the French Community, and their belief that the "nation" in question was African or

West African rather than Senegalese. Senghor insisted that his movement was not "tainted by Senegality." Dia asserted that "Senegalese democracy will not be viable except in the context of a larger African proletarian democracy, integrating itself at a higher level."³⁵ Others kept trying to push the supra-territorial structures of French West Africa, undermined by the French government's territorialization policy, into the nucleus of a "federal parliament" and a "federal executive" for West Africa as a whole, within the Franco-African Community. A group of deputies, the Indépendants d'Outre-Mer, stressed that their goals were consistent with the French constitution of 1946 and rejected the "temptation of narrow nationalisms representing a grave danger in a world in which independence risks being an illusion." They sought a "vertical solidarity" between France and Africa, as well as interaction among African territories.³⁶

For Senghor, from the late 1940s through the late 1950s, the desire for a layered sovereignty--territorial, pan-African, and Franco-African--was in part practical: the territories were too small and too poor to be the instruments of human progress; interdependence was a necessity. And it was part cultural, focused on people whom he termed the "négro-africains de l'Union Française." To the extent that unity required a record of common experience, it focused particularly on the territories that had been part of French West Africa.³⁷ Dia proclaimed, "It is necessary in the final analysis that the imperialist conception of the nation-state give way to the modern conception of the multinational state."³⁸ When Senegal did become, in 1957, a partly self-governing territory within the French Union, Senghor claimed, "I mean by the 'Senegalese people' men of all races, classes and religions who live in Senegal.... The 'Franco-African Community' is not, for us, a slogan; it is a great humanistic idea which should be turned into reality. Senegal has for a long time transcended prejudices of race, caste, territory, and

religion."³⁹

And in the trying circumstances after territorialization, in the shadow of the Algerian war and the discredit it brought on France, and within the ambiguities of the constitution of the Fifth Republic, Senghor and Dia did try to make federation concrete. They did not persuade their West African compatriots—who were becoming more entrenched in their territorial positions and dependent on their territorial constituents. These leaders were on their path to territorial autonomy and eventually independence, sometimes engaged in arguments over the benefits of continued cooperation with France versus the desire—especially strong among students and some segments of the trade union movement—for a more radical break. Meanwhile, leaders of the French Republic found it hard to grasp that a true federation would make European France an equal partner of the other components. Many of them preferred one-to-one relations between France and its now internally self-governing territories, a more hierarchical view of post-imperial connection than Senghorian federalism. In the end, only a truncated federalism became a reality, the union of Senegal and its inland neighbor, the French Sudan, which founded the Mali Federation in 1959.⁴⁰

The history of the Mali Federation is most often written backwards, as if its failure were inevitable before the inevitable triumph of territorial nationalism. The archives of the Federation government give a richer picture of the effort to make it work. Formally, France, following the Constitution of 1958, ceded certain "competences" to Senegal and the Sudan—both of which were considered "states"—and they in turn ceded them to Mali.⁴¹ The practical problems of the relationship of France, Mali, Senegal, and Sudan were legion, but at the regular meetings of the Council of Ministers, Dia, Modibo Keita of the Sudan, and the heads of the different departments

worked out different jurisdictions.

What did nationality and citizenship mean in an entity like Mali, situated between one kind of state—Senegal and Sudan—and another, France? Malian leaders thought they had a pretty good idea about citizenship: the French constitution specified "there only exists one citizenship of the Community." Once it was established that one was a national anywhere within the Community, then everyone had equivalent rights everywhere: "No member of the Community enjoys a privileged situation."⁴²

The more difficult question was nationality. Some French officials thought that nationality was singular: "within the Community, there exists only one nationality which is the nationality of the French Republic and of the Community."⁴³ But that "and" was ambiguous—for the Republic was distinguished from other "Etats Membres" of the Community, and for some African leaders, being limited to a French "nationality" was a denial of recognition of the dignity of each member state, whereas French *citizenship* was a claim to equal dignity with France.⁴⁴ But if member states had nationality, presumably they would determine the conditions for deciding who was a national—whether by filiation or naturalization. A decision by, say, Senegal to confer nationality on someone meant that the French Republic (European France) would be obliged to recognize that such a person had citizenship rights within France.⁴⁵ And if Senegal and Sudan had nationality by virtue of their status as member states in the French Community, then the Mali Federation had to create its own nationality. But nationality was not simply a matter of proclaiming oneself to be a nation; it was part of a system of nations and demanded recognition. In short, the nation should have an international personality, and Malian leaders eagerly sought such recognition, even if it could seem inconsistent with the agreement that the

Community would have jurisdiction over foreign affairs.⁴⁶ Such assertiveness did not sit all that well with leaders of the French Republic.⁴⁷

Mamadou Dia claimed that the Community gave its members a space and context for "national construction." Such a nation would be—and he used the Senghorian expression—"Negro-African"—and it would reflect common political, economic, and cultural experience, much of which came from shared participation in French West Africa. Such a nation still required much work, and he warned about "pseudo-nations" that were economic and political satellites. Dia's focus was continually on forging a large unit of national inclusiveness: "That is how Mali will build itself, and how we can best demonstrate our consciousness, or Malian national will; I do not say Senegalese or Sudanese, because there cannot be a nation at the level of our states—I say our Malian will, and we have the steady conviction that the cause which we serve is the Malian cause, and through it the cause of Africa."⁴⁸

Modibo Keita, assuming the presidency of Mali, was also trying to assert the compatibility of seemingly contradictory visions: a notion of African independence and unity with continued participation in a Franco-African Community, which would provide concrete benefits, concrete guarantees, and specific derogations of functions associated with sovereign states. At a meeting in France, Keita told Charles de Gaulle of "a mystique of independence and a mystique of unity which animates our peoples." It is not clear whether he had in mind a famous phrase of Senghor's, spoken in 1952, that Africans have "a mystique of equality." Senghor had spoken in a debate over the labor code, insisting that Africans would not accept anything other than immediate and full equality in this and other domains with the citizens of the metropole.⁴⁹ By 1956, the mystique of equality was giving way to the mystiques of unity and

independence, for in accepting territorial authority over the budget African governments were accepting that territorial resources and the votes of territorial taxpayers would determine what civil servants would be paid and the levels public services would attain, subject to the assistance which France. Keita, like most of his colleagues, accepted the need for a relationship with France, while trying to obtain the maximum of autonomy and the possibility of unity—and an expression of collective, African identification--within that relationship.

Malian leaders in an unfinished attempt in 1960 to write a nationalities law, tried to leave room for citizens of other states of the Franco-African Community—plus Guinea, which had voted against joining the Community in 1958—to obtain Malian citizenship.⁵⁰ There are some hints of less inclusive attitudes in the records of Mali—concern among ministers about Guineans or Dahomeans who had been civil servants for the government of French West Africa and continued to live in Senegal or Sudan without necessarily indicating loyalty to them.⁵¹ But the commonality of Africans, especially those who had experienced the French Empire, Union, and Community, remained central to discussions of nationality.

Nationality issues were not why the Mali Federation failed. Suffice it to say that Senghor and Dia on the one hand and Keita on the other were both colleagues in government and political rivals, both fearing that—having built up strong political bases in their respective territories—they were at risk in a federation of having the rival undermine the political base. The populations of Senegal and the Sudan were sufficiently overlapping and interacting and political affiliations sufficiently uncertain that fears of cross-member state poaching were realistic. Senghor later portrayed Keita as a dogmatic socialist, willing to use totalitarian methods and threatening to outflank Senghor in Senegal from the left, while Keita may have thought Senghor too cozy with

French leaders and a threat to use resources from that connection to coopt Sudanese. The roots of this conflict lie in the history of territorialization and in the definition of political fields. Politicians in other states in former French West Africa had already shown their fear that larger or wealthier units might overwhelm them or that poorer units would claim a share of the resources of the more affluent.⁵²

Senegalese and Sudanese had for a time struggled to overcome these structural obstacles to federalism, and the fact of the effort should be remembered along with failure. It points not just to the importance to someone like Senghor of ideals, romanticized perhaps, of a unified Africa, but also to the importance and ambiguous history of incorporation into an empire—a space in which Africans had once shared subjugation and in which they now claimed equality within a large, differentiated, and potentially dynamic federation.

From Community to Nation-States

After rejecting the notion of "Senegality," Senghor, Dia, and other leaders from Senegal ended up with just that. They embraced it forcefully and sought to define what nationality meant juridically and practically with a lot more clarity than the French government had been able to do. Within half a year of the collapse of Mali, Senegal had passed a nationality act and created an *état-civil* by which the state took note of the birth and life course of its citizens. The nationality law defined how one was attributed, acquired, and lost Senegalese nationality. Its central provision, as in much of the world, was filiation and birth (a mix of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*): one became Senegalese by being born there or having a father or mother who was born there. The law went the extra yard in opening nationality to people from neighboring territories

who were contributing to the Senegalese economy and who had revealed their attachment to Senegal by residing there—it was a door with an expiration date that would leave in place a line between Senegalese and other Africans, but it contained a gesture of identification with Africa generally. The establishment of the *état-civil* marked Senegal's desire to have a record of the birth, marriages, and death of its citizens, to recognize the different personal statuses they had among Senegal's diverse people, and to eliminate the vestiges of invidious distinction between some who were more representative of the nation than others. People could, for example, marry under different regimes and those marriages would be accepted as valid, but they were obliged to register those marriages. Both the nationality law and the establishment of a compulsory *état-civil* were portrayed as expressions of Senegal's desire to place itself as a full and equal member of the community of nations.⁵³

The politics of the bounded nation-states were to become important in independent Africa, sometimes carried to xenophobic levels. Its most recent and extreme manifestation is in the Côte d'Ivoire, where the government has deployed the concept of "ivoirité" to distinguish what it regards as true nationals from people from elsewhere, mainly from countries to the north. To do so requires the occlusion of much history, for the economic success of Côte d'Ivoire depended very much on wider trade networks and on the labor of people from the north, many of whom became closely integrated into ivoirien institutions and communities. Senegal and other states of Africa have not been immune from erecting barriers that deny history as much as entry.

European France also became more national. From an empire-state trying to keep diverse people within a political unit, it became a nation-state worried about keeping people out, including the descendants of the same people it had tried to keep in. Although many people in

France are trying to redefine what it means to be French in a way that takes account of a complex history and diverse relationships to France, others have staked their political future on an exclusionary vision of France. One cannot understand the politics of the Front National simply as an imperial hangover; it emerges out of a *national* reconfiguration of French politics.

Conclusion

It is all too easy to tell the story of the post-war decades as a tale of the French state, with its own sense of national destiny, trying at first to avoid by any means necessary the inevitable rise of nationalism throughout its empire, only to give way at the end. That is to assume the predominance of national concepts both within European France and its African colonies rather than to examine the historical emergence of national frameworks. One cannot deny the importance of national sentiments within the politics of European France or of its colonies. But projecting backwards in time the nation-state as the normal form of political structure misses the way in which certain frameworks emerged out of alternatives.⁵⁴

The French Union of 1946 and the French Community of 1958 were more than last-gasp attempts by French leaders to preserve an old empire by renaming it. Union and Community had deep roots in imperial formations in French and European history. The concepts were supple enough to give cover to settlers in Algeria who manipulated the institutions of Union or Community to keep Muslim Algerians as an exploitable underclass, and they were supple enough for West African leaders to see in them the possibility of making French citizenship meaningful to their constituents, through the assertion of civic, political, social and economic equivalence to the citizens of European France. For a relatively wide spectrum of French opinion, turning empire into some form of federation seemed to offer a chance for France to

enhance its position in the world while offering resources, skills, and relationships to former colonies that would be otherwise unattainable. The mixture of desires, illusions, and cynicism followed a disastrous course in Algeria, but for a time seemed to offer more opportunities in West Africa for people seeking a way out of colonial oppression, poverty, and fragmentation.

In the politics of citizenship in French West Africa, it was the metropole that blinked first. Leaders had not understood the power of citizenship when turned—by a militant labor movement and well-placed politicians—into a claim for economic and social equivalence. The French government in the mid-1950s came up with the idea of "territorialization" to escape from the consequences of a political strategy that had initially sought to minimize territorial autonomy and emphasize greater France as the ultimate unit of political aspiration. To be sure, many Africans and the leaders who represented them saw the French presence as inherently oppressive and humiliating, and the claim that integration would take place on French terms was the ultimate insult. That was an argument *within* a broader spectrum of West African activism—just as the view of a national France exploiting or civilizing its colonies was an argument within the idea of France as an empire-state. For other African leaders, the French connection provided a lever to obtain resources to combat poverty and to lay the foundations for Africans to reveal to themselves and the rest of the world the place of Africa in world civilizations.

The failure of the federation idea at the end of the 1950s should not obscure the seriousness with which it was taken, in African as well as European France. The range of alternatives to empire that existed in 1945 was plausible because empire itself—an incorporative, differentiated, hierarchical polity—was still part of the political repertoire. Senghor and Dia thought that the promise of federation could confront and overcome the history of colonization;

other African activists thought that only the separation of Africa from Europe could overcome that history. Senghor lost his federation, but his fear of balkanization proved all too realistic. For French leaders, the promise of federation lost its appeal not simply because of the costs of countering nationalist, secession movements but because of the costs of seeing the logic of citizenship, once stripped of the naturalized hierarchy of colonialism, lead to demands for social and economic equivalence. Looking back on the failure of varying attempts to turn empire into some sort of federation, one should not forget that the success of nationalist movements in turning the nation-state into a vehicle for advancing the welfare and self-respect of the people they claimed to represent has been decidedly relative and that the creation of a world of sovereign nation-states has not ended hierarchy, within or among nations. Perhaps recapturing the varied forms of political imagination that emerged at different moments of the past will help us keep in mind the importance of thinking imaginatively about alternatives for the future.

Notes

1. This is a theme developed in Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin Moore, eds., Lessons of Empire (New York: New Press, forthcoming).
2. One should remember that one of the most powerful anticolonial texts of the 1950s was written not as a call for secession but for revolutionary change in France and the world as a whole and that its author, Aimé Césaire, continued to serve as a deputy in the French legislature and as mayor of the main city in the French department, located in the Caribbean, of Martinique. See Discours sur le colonialisme (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955).
3. The sixteenth-century attack on practices within the Spanish empire--but not on the existence of that empire--by Bartolomé de las Casas is the most famous such intervention.
4. Laurent Dubois, A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
5. Alice Conklin, A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Mamadou Diouf, "The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation and the Civility of the Originaires of the Four Communes (Senegal): A Nineteenth Century Globalization Project," Development and Change 29 (1998): 671-96.
6. For the concept of an imperial community, see Robert Lemaigen, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Prince Sisonath Youtévong, La communauté impériale française (Paris: Alsatia, 1945).

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7. Speech at Bayeux, June 16, 1946, reprinted in Comité National chargé de la publication des travaux préparatoires des institutions de la Ve République, Documents pour servir à l'élaboration de la constitution du 4 octobre 1958 (Paris: Documentation Française, 1987), 1: 3-7.
 8. François Borella, L'évolution politique et juridique de l'Union Française depuis 1946 (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1958), 33.
 9. Henri Laurentie, "Pour ou contre le colonialism? Les colonies françaises devant le monde nouveau," Renaissances October 1945, 10. See also the contributions of P.-O. Lapie, Paul Emile Viard, and René Pléven to the same issue of Renaissances and Robert Delavignette, "Union Française, à l'échelle du monde, à la mesure de l'homme," Esprit 112 (July 1945): 230.
 10. Skepticism in these regards is clear in "Programme Général de la Conférence de Brazzaville (Janvier 1944)," 17G 186 and Governor General to Minister, Jan. 11 1946 (telegram), 17G 146, and March 3, 1946, 17G 139, Archives du Sénégal (AS).
 11. Lamine Guèye to M. le Délégué (of Parti Socialiste Sénégalais), Jan. 17, 1945; Lamine Guèye to Governor General, March 20, 1945; police report of a public meeting in Saint Louis, March 8, 1945; Governor General to Commissaire des Colonies, telegrams, March 7, 10, April 12, 1945; and Colonies to Governor General, telegrams, March 11, April 17, 1945, 20G 25, AS.
 12. Ministère des Colonies, Paris, Note au sujet de la représentation des TOM à l'Assemblée Constituante, July 18, 1945, F60/1030, France, Archives Nationales (AN).

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13. The manifestos are summarized by security officials in 20G 24, AS.
 14. Borella, L'évolution politique et juridique de l'Union Française and Bruce Marshall, The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).
 15. Commission de la Constitution, Assemblée Nationale Constituante, Comptes Rendus Analytiques: statement of Marius Moutet, head of committee on overseas territories, 25 January 1946; presentation by Gabriel d'Arboussier of draft of Article 1 by committee on overseas territories, 25 January 1946; intervention of M. Boisdon, 5 February 1946, pp. 259, 261, 328.
 16. Of the 42 members of the Commission on Overseas France, charged with writing the articles on the French Union, 22 were from the colonies. Its chair was the former Popular Front Colonial Minister (Moutet), regarded as a progressive, who was succeeded by the Senegalese Lamine Guèye, and the reporter was also African, Gabriel d'Arboussier. Marshall, 164.
 17. Marshall.
 18. Assemblée Nationale Constituante, Débats, 27 August 1946, 3334.
 19. Lamine Guèye, Itinéraire africaine (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1966), 161-62. See also Marshall, 286-89.
 20. Guèye, 164.
 21. See for example Paul Viard's idea that the distinction between a "citoyen de l'Union" and a

"citoyen français" should be left imprecise to allow for evolution or M. Valentino's desire to keep the relationship of local assemblies to the French Parliament simple for the same reason.

Commission de la Constitution, 5 February 1946, 330, 347. Guèye, Itinéraire, made a similar point, 144-45.

22. See decrees of 23 December 1945, 20 February 1946, and 30 April 1946 on the suppressing of the indigénat, copies in 17G 52, AS.

23. See Borella for a summary of the debates and the legislation. Lamine Guèye introduced the bill because he feared that the constitution might be defeated, and he wanted to make the generalization part of law even while its constitutional status was uncertain.

24. Frederick Cooper, "The Senegalese General Strike of 1946 and the Labor Question in Post-War French Africa," Canadian Journal of African Studies 24 (1990): 165-215; idem, "'Our Strike': Equality, Anticolonial Politics, and the French West African Railway Strike of 1947-48," Journal of African History 37 (1996): 81-118.

25. Frederick Cooper, Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

26. Pierre-Henri Teitgen, Assemblée Nationale, Débats, 20 March 1956, 1072-73.

27. Cooper, Decolonization and African Society, chapters 7 and 11; William Foltz, From French West Africa to the Mali Federation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 75, 82.

28. Senghor, Constitutional Commission, 12 February 1946, 443.

29. The Minister of Overseas France tried to correct the High Commissioner in French West Africa, who had distinguished a "French citizen" from a "citizen of the French Union." Only the former term had any significance, he insisted. "No ambiguity should remain in this regard," he insisted, "neither in spirits nor in the terms used on official documents given to the people concerned." But this insistence on ending ambiguity was a sign about how much ambiguity there was. Minister to High Commissioner, April 26, 1957, France, Centre d'Archives Contemporaines (CAC) 950236/1.

30. Gérard Peureux, Le Haut-Conseil de l'Union Française (Paris: Librairie de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1960).

31. Note of Directeur des Affaires Politiques, March 1952 on "qualité juridique des autochtones des pays placés sous tutelle française et à leur naturalisation," and Minister to Garde des Sceaux, April 14, 1951, CAC 950236/1.

32. See in particular Ruth Schachter Morgenthau, Politics Parties in French-Speaking West Africa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

33. The Senegalese newspaper La Condition Humaine (11 February 1948) declared itself in favor of "autonomy, not independence." Senghor, on behalf of the Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais, criticized "indigenous nationalism" as an old hunting rifle" and spoke instead for a "Federation of free people," insisting that the Constitution of 1946 helped Africans "with the experience and resources of France to develop at the same time and with our economic potential,

our own Negro-African personality." Ibid., 26 April 1949.

34. Discours d'ouverture du President Mamadou Dia au premier seminaire national d'études pour les responsables politiques, parlementaires, gouvernementaux, 26 Oct. 1959, "sur la construction nationale," VP 93, AS.

35. La Condition Humaine, November 29, 1951, May 31, 1956.

36. Assane Seck, "Le Grand Conseil de l'AOF et les décrets d'application de la loi-cadre," L'Unité, No. 5. December 29, 1956; La Condition Humaine, February 25, 1953; Guèye, Itinéraire africaine, 188.

37. Senghor, "Rapport sur le méthode du Parti," in report on congress of the Bloc Démocratique Sénégalais, La Condition Humaine, April 26, 1949.

38. Mamadou Dia, "L'Afrique Noire devant la nouveau destin de l'Union Française," La Condition Humaine, August 29, 1955.

39. Léopold Senghor, "Le Peuple Sénégalais uni autour de son Gouvernement," L'Unité, 10 (May 25, 1957).

40. In Guinea, rejection of federation took the form of a radical claim for a truly African state fully independent of France, but in the Côte d'Ivoire it took the form of a conservative vision of a state cooperating with France, neither sharing its relatively substantial resources with poorer African territories nor cooperating with those territories in a specifically African cause. For a time, Dahomey and Upper Volta seemed ready to join the Sudan and Senegal in a federation, but

that failed. See Foltz, From French West Africa to the Mali Federation.

41. See the decrees of transfer from April 1959 in FM 136, AS.

42. Paper prepared on behalf of the President of the Council of Senegal (Dia) for Haut Commissaire de la Communauté, Dakar, January 5, 1959, and dossier prepared for meeting of Conseil Executif de la Communauté, February 2, 1959, VP 133, AS.

43. Minister of Overseas France to Governor, Côte Français des Somalis, telegram, March 26, 1959, CAC 940167/25.

44. The outgoing High Commissioner in West Africa noted that for Africans expressions of nationality were "a question of dignity." Pierre Messmer to President de la République, January 12, 1959, CAC 940167/14.

45. Paper prepared on behalf of the President of the Council of Senegal (Dia) for Haut Commissaire de la Communauté, Dakar, January 5, 1959, VP 133, AS.

46. Such complications—and many more of them—are discussed in Roger Decottignies, "Nationalité et citoyenneté 1959 en Afrique noire," Annales Africaines 1959 (Paris; Guillemot et Lamothe, 1959).

47. See the testy exchange between Dia and the High Commissioner of the Community in Dakar: Lami to Dia, January 26, 1959, and Dia to Lami, January 30, 1959, VP 136, AS.

48. Opening and closing speeches of Mamadou Dia to first national study seminar for political,

parliamentary, and government leaders, "on national construction," October 26, 1959, VP 93, AS.

49. Modibo Keita reporting to Conseil des Ministres of Mali, 22 May 1959, on his meeting with de Gaulle, FM 37, AS. Senghor referred to the mystique of equality in Assemblée Nationale, Débats, 22 November 1952, 5502-5, and later in print, Marchés Coloniaux 375 (17 January 1953): 124.

50. Ministre de la Justice (Boubakar Guèye) to President of Government of Mali, June, 10, 1960, submitting report on the activities of the ministry, FM 159, AS.

51. Minute of Council of Ministers, October 22, November 19, 1959, FM 37, AS.

52. Foltz, From French West Africa to the Mali Federation.

53. Law No. 61-10 of March 7, 1960, "déterminant la nationalité sénégalaise," reprinted in Roger Decottignies and Marc de Biéville, Les nationalités africaines (Paris: Pedone, 1963) 300-06. See the discussion of the act by the Minister of Justice to Radio Sénégal, December 19, 1961, VP 226, AS, and reports on the rationale and contents of this law and the law establishing an état-civil in ibid. 226 and VP 121, AS.

54. For more on the relationship of studying colonial history to issues in contemporary politics, see Frederick Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).