



Alexander Keese. *Living with Ambiguity: Integrating an African Elite in French and Portuguese Africa, 1930-61.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007. 344 pp. \$74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-09032-2.



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Integrating the Differences in French and Portuguese Native Policies in Tropical Africa

As its title suggests, *Living with Ambiguity: Integrating an African Elite in French and Portuguese Africa, 1930-61* offers a comparative analysis of aspects of French and Portuguese native policies in the colonies of the respective countries in tropical Africa beginning in the inter-war period when colonialism was increasingly subject to international criticism. The author chose Portugal and France for comparison because as "Latin" and Roman Catholic countries, their approaches to their subject populations were, at least in theory, similar in that the ultimate outcome of colonial rule was to be their complete assimilation to the metropole.

Dr. Keese, a lecturer in history at the University of Bern, does more than simply describe how two major colonial powers worked within and around the constraints of similar colonial ideologies. He devotes the first half of his study to an extended interpretive analysis of selected problems and structures of colonial rule in the colonies of both countries. He provides an extensive analysis of historiography, particularly that dealing with the late colonial period and the accession to politi-

cal independence of the former colonies. He also brings to bear an exhaustive consultation of official archives in France, Portugal, Senegal, and Angola: some ten separate collections, as listed in his bibliography—even if in his introduction he only mentions the "unexplored material of eight archives" (p. 39).

Evoking comparative historiography, Keese proceeds through his first four chapters, which in addition to a detailed introduction include chapters titled "Comparative Perspectives and Mutual Influences in Historical Research on Colonial Black Africa," "Authority," and "Challenges." His aim is to identify points of comparison regarding elite integration between the French and Portuguese African empires, including evocations of British and Belgian colonial practice.

Keese begins by examining the ways in which the colonial powers viewed their empires over time and were more or less committed to them. He comments on their varying approaches to *mise en valeur*, including their growing condemnation of forced labor. Then, under the

heading of "Authority," he examines such matters as the roles of traditional African rulers vis-à-vis colonial authority structures and the growing numbers of Westernized (presumably detribalized) Africans. Among the points that Keese raises is that the dichotomy of the traditional ruler—often viewed in French Africa as increasingly irrelevant after 1946—and the "Westernized" political leader is false. In the French colonies and to some extent in the Portuguese as well, different leaders could move back and forth between traditional and modern structures. He cites cases whereby imposed chiefs and headmen might slowly acquire legitimacy in the eyes of their African subjects such that when a chieftaincy became vacant, the local people would press the given colonial officials to fill it with a quasi-acceptable successor. Thus, party politics of the post-1946 period in French Africa frequently masked tribal politics. As for French Guinea, where traditional chiefs were eliminated during the *loi cadre* period that preceded independence, Dr. Keese attributes this anomaly to the fact that a very charismatic leader, Sékou Touré, was in the process of making himself Guinea's paramount chief (p. 290).

Also, as Keese points out, despite the rhetoric of assimilation, both the French and the Portuguese authorities engaged in de facto indirect rule in remote areas of their colonies as well as in frontier zones. In particular, he describes situations prevailing in the border zone between the Senegalese Casamance region and northwestern Guinea-Bissau. In these areas, the powers of the two European countries more or less cancelled each other out, allowing traditional patterns of rule and conflict resolution to prevail on both sides of the border, often with the blessing of the colonial rulers.

Under the heading of "Authority," Keese begins an analysis of the ways in which France and Portugal viewed their Westernized African subjects, the *volus/citoyens* of the French, and the *assimilados* of the Portuguese. Both groups were more or less distrusted by their respective European administrators and fellow-citizens even if the metropole, in the case of France, was prepared to grant full political rights and did so via the first Lamine Guéye Law of May 1946. Keese suggests that because Portugal had been a quasi-fascist dictatorship since 1926 (the dictator, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar proclaiming the *Estado Novo* in 1933), the *assimilados* in the Portuguese territories (who were not very numerous) may, at times, have had more relative freedom vis-à-vis white colonials than was the case for African *volus* in the French colonies, particularly prior to 1946, because in the Portuguese territories the whites too were subject

to dictatorial rule.

Under the heading of "Challenges," Keese first takes on the question of nationalism in the French and Portuguese colonies, arguing that French Africa was not on the verge of a general rebellion after 1957. Indeed, most of the members of the political class who had been perceived as radical had achieved a modus vivendi with France following Félix Houphouët-Boigny's 1950 decision to remove the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) from the orbit of the French Communist Party and to affiliate it with François Mitterrand's Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance. The disaffection of the Cameroonian section of the RDA, the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), and the ensuing armed rebellion in southern Cameroon was the principal exception to this generalization. Likewise, Portuguese Africa, with the possible exception of Guinea-Bissau, was not particularly ripe for armed rebellion, even in 1961 when the Angolan War of Independence broke out. But, as Keese explains, the struggle that began in the northern part of the territory owed much to a disputed succession involving the Kongo paramount chieftancy.

As Keese further explains, both the French and the Portuguese rulers had to contend with widely believed rumors and gossip that predicted the end of colonial rule as well as French and Portuguese intentions to engage in atrocities before giving up the struggle. Such rumors and gossip took on a political strength of their own, as did a generalized fear among the French and Portuguese of communist infiltration of their colonies in Africa.

Many French officials working in Africa believed that the political reforms of 1946 directed from Paris had opened the floodgates of communist infiltration. Even demands for very moderate reforms made by Africans could be interpreted by reluctant French officials as communist-inspired. For the Portuguese, the communist danger was initially perceived as an outside threat coming from other countries and their colonies. The *Estado Novo*, it was believed, had stamped out all communist activity in Portugal and was sufficiently powerful to prevent any communist infiltration from Portugal into its Overseas Provinces (its colonies officially designated such as of 1951).

For the colonial establishments of France and Portugal, the accession of Ghana to independence in 1957 was alarming. Officials in both countries considered Kwame Nkrumah's brand of African nationalism to be very dangerous. For French officials in Paris, it served to under-

line the provisional nature of the *loi cadre* reforms of the previous year. Portuguese administrators believed that although Ghanaian independence set a dangerous precedent, it could be contained by enhancing reforms, paternalistic though they might be, evolving from the *Acto Colonial* of 1951 and the *Lei Orgânica do Ultramar* of 1953.

Also under 'Challenges,' Keese discusses the French and Portuguese attitudes towards African labor. In the case of France, postwar French politicians and colonial administrators understood that the reform currents generated by the anti-Nazi struggle and the 1944 Brazzaville Conference required the ending of the summary justice system known as the *indigénat* and the system of forced labor it enabled. Indeed, among the earliest actions of Houphouët-Boigny in the French parliament was his sponsorship in 1946 of legislation to end both. Future legislation forced the French authorities to deal with African demands for parity of salary and working conditions in French Africa. Equality, it turned out, would be expensive.

The Portuguese, following World War II, did not immediately curtail forced military conscription and labor recruitment in Angola and Mozambique nor the exploitive practices of the various concessionary companies, including some foreign-owned like DIAMANG in Angola, that operated in both colonies. Yet individual Portuguese officials, governors, district commissioners, and inspectors began to press for labor reform and human development, often very difficult tasks given the lack of resources characterizing the *Estado Novo* as well as its hardly attenuated demands that the colonies produce as much wealth as possible.

Here Keese's use of the Portuguese archives reveals a liberal side to the Portuguese development effort that previous scholars have ignored. He cites cases of colonial inspectors and other officials who, while working within the political and economic constraints of the *Estado Novo*, could be very critical of abuses and demand reforms. In particular, Keese evokes the shocked reactions of a medical inspector, Dr. Santa Rita Vieira, at conditions he observed on a visit to cocoa plantations on São Tomé and Príncipe in 1945. The usual reaction of scholars dealing with Portuguese Africa has been to emphasize the unchanging repressiveness and backwardness of Portuguese colonialism.

In chapter 5—'Affinities'—the study turns to what is supposed to be the main thrust of the book, an examination of how the Portuguese and the French learned from

and influenced each other in matters of colonial policy, particularly the integration of their respective African elites. First, Keese sketches the framework for mutual information-gathering. The French gleaned much of their information about Portuguese Africa through consuls and their informants in principal Portuguese colonial capitals: Luanda, Lourenço Marques, and Bissau, as well as occasional visits of high-ranking French officials. The Portuguese too relied on consuls but their consular network was considerably less developed than that of the French, being composed mostly of honorary consuls. Occasionally Portuguese officials visited the French colonies.

In the period following World War II, the Portuguese resident of the tiny trading fortress of São João Baptista at Whydah in Dahomey (now Benin) became a particularly important informant. Because the fortress was a tiny enclave within Dahomey, its resident was charged with reporting about events in Dahomey, Togo, and Ghana, particularly after the accession of the latter to independence. The resident at that time, Saraiva Borges, managed, with French help, to smuggle himself into the 1958 Accra Conference of Independent African states and to obtain information about Holden Robert, the leader of the União das Populações de Angola (UPA), who was participating.

Also, the respective embassies of the two countries in Paris and Lisbon reported on each other's colonial activities through contacts in the respective ministries. Because the consuls, particularly the French ones, rarely left the colonial capital cities and in general information on colonial matters was filtered through the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, what the interested colonial officials eventually learned might be late, incorrect, incomplete, or irrelevant. Notably, Portuguese diplomatic officials reported very little that they learned about the independence of Tunisia and Morocco and the Algerian War of Independence to their colonial counterparts. They considered these questions, which for them referred to Arab nationalism, to be irrelevant to the situation of 'black' Africa.

While French diplomats and colonial officials might deplore the economic backwardness of the Portuguese colonies as well as the perceived brutality of the Portuguese colonial system, particularly in rural areas where forced labor prevailed and reliance on concessionary companies continued, they agreed with the aims of Portuguese paternalism and, at least before the Brazzaville Conference of 1944, with the racial justification for colo-

nialism linked to the obligation to âcivilizeâ so-called backward races.

From time to time, French and Portuguese governors and other ranking colonial officials might hold face-to-face meetings. In 1930, for instance, the governors-general of Angola and French Equatorial Africa met to issue a common rejoinder to Italian and German claims for African colonies and to anti-colonial criticism coming from the League of Nations. The mutual sympathies that arose as a result of this meeting would continue, with ups and downs, until the end of French rule in sub-Saharan Africa.

During World War II, Franco-Portuguese cooperation involved the Free French authorities far more than those of the Vichy regime. After initial doubts as to which of the French regimes to deal with, the government-general of Angola established contacts with the Free French authorities in Brazzaville in part because the Portuguese authorities realized that the Free French, who were firmly in alliance with Great Britain, posed no threat to the Portuguese colonies and also because the Salazar government—though officially neutral, sympathetic to fascism, and even maintaining diplomatic relations with the Vichy regime—became an unofficial ally of Great Britain and then of the United States, allowing American and British forces to use Terceira Island in the Azores as a military base.

Contacts continued and became stronger after World War II. Various French officials came to admire two aspects of Portuguese colonial policy: the way the Portuguese managed their *assimilados*, granting them legal equality with whites but restricting their political activities and excluding them from ranking policymaking posts in the colonial governments; and Portuguese efforts to create a modernized African peasantry to be settled in model agricultural villages in the interior, particularly at Duque de Bragança and Longuri in Angola and Inharrim in Mozambique. In 1953, a Portuguese professor working in Mozambique proposed the creation of a status for Portuguese African subjects situated somewhere between that of *assimilado* and *indigena* to include technically skilled and capitalistically inclined peasants who in the countryside might still feel allegiance to a traditional ruler. Such a group of peasants, to whom would be applied the French term *âvoluâ*, would be exempt from forced labor recruitment (p. 241). H. Bogaers, the French consul in Lourenço Marques at the time, found the idea attractive.

For certain French officials who felt that France

was conferring political rights on African subjects too rapidly, Portuguese methods, despite their harshness, seemed to be more realistic. A perception that Portuguese go-slow paternalism created a bulwark against African radicalism came increasingly to characterize French colonial officials after 1946 both in Paris and in the colonies. Even such French officials as Robert Delavignette and Pierre Henri Teitgen, known for their liberalism as they accepted and institutionalized the proposed reforms of the Brazzaville Conference of 1944, the constitutional reforms of 1946, and then prepared for the *loi cadre* reforms of 1956, expressed tacit praise for Portuguese methods. This praise increased as the *loi cadre* reforms dovetailed with the setting up of the French Community following General Charles de Gaulle's return to power in June 1958 and Guinea's vote of September of that year, the latter action sounding the death knell of the community as de Gaulle had conceived of it. It seemed to these Frenchmen that the Portuguese, by quietly initiating reforms that increased the number of *assimilados*, educating them, and integrating them into low- and mid-level positions in the Portuguese colonial administrative structures, had kept the Portuguese empire intact by not generating, much less giving into, demands for independence by radicalized Africans.

For their part, Portuguese officials were at times perplexed, frightened, and then reassured by French actions up until the independence of Guinea. For the Portuguese, up until that point, the real European enemies of colonial stability, at least in West Africa, were the British, for openly preparing Ghana and Nigeria for self-rule and then not preventing Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana from becoming a hotbed of anti-colonialism, pan-Africanism, and, as they believed, communism. But as the political integration of the elite proceeded in the French colonies through the *loi cadre* reforms, certain Portuguese observers persuaded themselves that the French were simply making superficial concessions so as to remain in overall control of the situation, though some observers also concluded that the French authorities were making a tragic error in not moving against Sékou Touré. At the same time, Keese makes clear that independence in French Africa represented a clear break among Paris politicians, such as Gaston Defferre and François Mitterrand, who were committed early on to African independence, and many members of the colonial bureaucracy who, although they have been credited for having envisaged and planned for decolonization well in advance, were not in favor of full independence so soon. For them, what finally transpired was a mad rush forward to pre-

mature independence and possible anarchy.

Keese views the neocolonialism that characterized the fifteen- to twenty-year period following the independence of Francophone Africa as an attempt on the part of these doubters to compensate for what they saw as the precipitous abandonment of French Africa, in which they had unwillingly participated by creating means for the maintenance of indirect control. Their attitudes were influenced by the Portuguese experience, even though the Portuguese colonies began to break into open rebellion in 1961.

This book is much more a study of bilateral interactions and mutual influences between 1930 and 1961 of French and Portuguese bureaucrats and politicians concerned with colonial questions than a study of how the native elites in both cases were integrated into their respective colonial states and metropolises. The differences between the French and Portuguese approaches to elite integration—probably smaller than one might think—only appear larger because, as Dr. Keese regularly reminds the reader, Portugal was impoverished as compared to France and in the grip of Salazar's quasi-fascist *Estado Novo*, while France was a republic that expounded republican, democratic ideology.

One wonders, however, if, from the point of view of native Africans (except, in both cases, for a small educated elite), these differences were really all that apparent. Prior to World War II, France had been strongly committed, at least in her tropical African possessions, to the idea that the colonies should not only be self-sufficient but should also turn a profit for the metropole, however much ideas of *mise en valeur* were bandied about. The period of massive investment from the metropolitan budget would not come until after World War II. So, from 1930 until 1946, the non-citizen inhabitants of the French colonies—the vast majority—were as much subject to exploitation (through forced crop production, forced labor on public works projects, and military conscription) as were the Portuguese *indigenas*. The existence of the Four Communes in Senegal, as enclaves of republican liberalism in a despotic milieu, was the exception that confirmed the rule. As for French republican ideology as compared to the authoritarian ideology of the *Estado Novo*, one might ask how much this difference filtered down to the non-elite majority. From the point of this large group, did French republicanism and Portuguese fascism seem very different prior to 1946 and even prior to 1957, given that the suppression of the Dakar-Niger railway strike and the Malagasy Rebellion, both occur-

ring in 1947, as well as other such episodes, were Fourth Republic phenomena?

There is also the question of white settlers in Angola and Mozambique. Keese does not say to what extent they were any freer than *mestiço* and black Angolans and Mozambicans. Being white, they were clearly exempt from forced labor and racism, but what political freedoms, if any, did the *Estado Novo* offer them? Except for quoting French sources blaming the racism prevailing in Mozambique on the influence of South Africa, Keese does not further discuss this matter.

The strength of this study is that it is largely based on French and Portuguese archival materials that have only recently become available to academic researchers. Dr. Keese is very critical of many of the studies that have come before his own because they lack much of an archival input. He fails, however, to mention that until very recently many of the archives that he has consulted, particularly Portuguese archives, were not readily available to the public. A note informing the reader when these collections became available to researchers and what requirements must be met to consult sensitive collections such as the archives of the *Polícia Internacional da Defesa do Estado* (PIDE) in Lisbon and even the Fonds Jacques Foccart of the National Archives in Paris would have been very helpful.

The fact that Dr. Keese, a German national, chose to write and to have his study published in English by Franz Steiner Verlag, a German academic press, is illustrative of a new trend in German academic writing (also reflected in teaching in certain German higher education institutions), that of using languages other than German, particularly English. Consequently, while one can only praise Dr. Keese for his multilingualism (his curriculum vitae lists publications in German, English, French, and Portuguese), this book, Keese's revised University of Freiburg doctoral dissertation, would have benefited from a careful pre-publication editing and linguistic check by a native speaker of English. There are frequent errors of grammar and syntax, nothing really serious, but they make the reading difficult and may lead, in some cases, to confusion.

Also, certain strange factual anomalies that appear in the text may be the result of linguistic misunderstanding. For instance, references to correspondence with Portuguese ambassadors and other embassy personnel stationed in Paris designate the actual diplomatic representation as a *legação*, (legation), not an *embaixada* (embassy). But Keese always refers to the chief of mission as

an ambassador, not a minister plenipotentiary, the usual head of a legation. By the end of World War II, if not before, diplomatic relations between France and Portugal were conducted at embassy and ambassadorial level.

Then there is confusion about the name of the tiny fortress at Whydah in Dahomey that remained in Portuguese hands until seized by the Dahomeyan authorities in 1961. A former slave-trading post, the fortress was named São João Baptista de Ajuda, not Santo Antonio de Ajuda as Keese insists on calling it, even though the archival materials that he cites (p. 273, note 36) refer to São João Baptista de Ajuda.

Other such errors suggest that the text was not rigorously checked for inconsistencies before publication. For instance, referring to Saraiva Borges, the resident of São João Baptista de Ajuda, Keese states that by paying his staff according to the French labor standards introduced into Dahomey after the *loi cadre* reforms, Borges was one of those Portuguese officials who were ready to follow the French example (p. 296). However, earlier in the book, Keese claims that Saraiva Borges gave in to the demands of the local Dahomeyan labor inspectors—the extra-territoriality of the fortress notwithstanding—even paying the required salary increases from his own pocket (pp. 271-273).

One learns a great deal in this book about the interactions of French and Portuguese officials at all levels of the colonial endeavor from which mutual influences did occur. Certainly Dr. Keese's critique of the many scholars who preceded him is valuable, as is his display of the offerings of the French and Portuguese archives that have only recently been opened to use by scholars. But how original are his ideas about the mutual influences of French and Portuguese colonialism? The two systems have frequently been recognized as being similar, with many of the striking differences between the two being attributed to the relative poverty and lack of resources of Portugal rather than differences in basic principles.

As for Keese's suggestion that a significant number of French colonial officials had doubts about the rapid decolonization that followed the *loi cadre* reforms that they nevertheless purported to support, he is not the first

to make such a suggestion. In particular, the colonial official-turned-historian Robert Cornevin could refer, in his 1964 *Histoire de l'Afrique des origines à nos jours* to the "colonisation autoritaire" of many of the Francophone African states, suggesting that they were cast out of the French Union/Community by the French government as much as they chose to leave it and that persons like Cornevin did not approve. And we must not forget both the current of *Cartierisme* that arose in the 1950s that helped to push the French authorities in the direction of decolonization and the annoyance among French parliamentarians that African deputies could influence the outcome of voting on strictly domestic issues, as John D. Hargreaves reminds us in *West Africa: The Former French States*.^[1]

As for Portuguese decolonization, Keese hints that as a result of the liberalization of Portuguese rule (which may or may not have been shaped in part by French influence), large portions of the populations of Angola and Mozambique remained loyal to Portugal to the end. The actual Portuguese decision to grant independence to their African Overseas Provinces is so much intertwined with the ending of the Salazarist dictatorship in 1968 and the Carnation Revolution of 1974, ending the *Estado Novo*, that one cannot really judge the extent to which the local nationalists, except perhaps in Guinea-Bissau, can rightfully claim a true victory.

This reviewer hopes that Dr. Keese will consider this book as a first report of research in progress, revising, extending, and deepening it when the French and Portuguese archives have been opened so as to cover the whole decade of the 1970s. Keese will then be able to assess both the impact of Franco-Portuguese relations on the course of the independence wars in Portuguese Africa and the independence of the Lusophone countries in Africa the way he has assessed the achievement of independence in Francophone Africa in light of the opinions of Portuguese colonial observers.

Note

[1]. Hargreaves, *West Africa: The Former French States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 155.

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